

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Baker, Nicolas Scott and Brian Jeffrey Maxson, eds. *After Civic Humanism: Learning and Politics in Renaissance Italy*

Ronald G. Witt

Volume 39, Number 2, Spring 2016

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1086552ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v39i2.26862>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Witt, R. (2016). Review of [Baker, Nicolas Scott and Brian Jeffrey Maxson, eds. *After Civic Humanism: Learning and Politics in Renaissance Italy*]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 39(2), 177–180.  
<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v39i2.26862>

© Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2016

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

which appear to be designed for entertainments. In addition, Astarita's introduction and essay in chapter 9 treat the rich and poor as monolithic in terms of a predilection (among the rich) for fresh pasta and an inability (among the poor) to regularly consume fresh pasta. These are minor problems, to be sure, but a greater narrative possibility for exceptions would have strengthened these aspects of the work considerably.

Astarita did well to include commentary on many different aspects of Latini's text, though one aspect seems left mostly unpacked: Latini's intended audience. Astarita did include brief speculation on the presumed audience, but many questions about intended readership arise from the format of the text, from the pains Latini took in providing highly detailed explanations, and from the refinement present in his prose. One gets the sense that Latini was writing for other household administrators; for some literate servants (but likely not for workers like cooks or wine servers); for nobles interested in discussions of better-organized households mixed with references to classical literature; for the interested public. Unpacking the importance of Latini's work to these and other groups would have offered a greater foundation for contextualizing Latini's discussions.

Overall, Astarita has produced a fine new translation of Latini and an insightful collection of comments about the themes that appear. Notwithstanding a few minor criticisms, Astarita deserves much praise for the careful, well-contextualized translation that he has produced, and for the well-balanced research and commentary supporting the translation.

RYAN WHIBBS

Chef School, George Brown College

**Baker, Nicolas Scott and Brian Jeffrey Maxson, eds.**

*After Civic Humanism: Learning and Politics in Renaissance Italy.*

Essays and Studies 35. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2015. Pp. 297. ISBN 978-0-7727-2177-8 (paperback) \$34.95.

According to the editors, this collection of thirteen essays intends to take the interplay between learning and politics beyond Hans Baron's focus on Florentine civic humanism. Each essay bears this out.

While Oren J. Margolis, in “After Baron, Back to Burckhardt,” acknowledges (with Baron) Burckhardt’s tendency to undervalue classical studies in the genesis of the modern world, he emphasizes Burckhardt’s more general conception of humanism as a cultural code distinguishing conduct among the elite. He links the precocious rise of regular diplomacy in Italy to the network of communication initially established between humanist-educated elites. Christopher S. Celenza, in “Why Florence? Pocock, Civic Humanism, and the Debate over the Latin Language,” emphasizes I. G. A. Pocock’s comments in *The Machiavellian Moment* on the instability of republics and the growing realization since Machiavelli that human government is subject to fortune and change. As another example of the widespread process of secularization, Celenza discusses the fifteenth-century debate about Latin as unchanging over time or subject to usage.

In “Albertino Mussato and Defence of Empire,” Alexander Lee identifies Baron’s intellectual heirs as sharing Baron’s identification of tyranny with monarchy. On the contrary, correcting the misconception was among my recommended changes in Baron’s *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* prior to the Italian translation (1970). Although Baron accepted none of my suggestions, I made the distinction between them clear in my article “The *De tyranno* and Coluccio Salutati’s View of Roman History and Politics,” *Nuova Rivista Storica* 53 (1969): 434–76. To my knowledge, no specialist shares his view. However, in the second half of the essay, Lee’s study of Mussato’s reasons for endorsing monarchy—while advocating communal government—offers a penetrating analysis of the humanist’s political thinking and his relationship to Paduan politics.

Lorenza Tromboni’s essay, “Looking for Peace in Fourteenth-Century Florence: The *Difenditore della Pacie* in Context,” provides an interesting comparison between the influence of Marsilio of Padua’s *Defensor pacis* in fourteenth-century Florence and Paris. Both the Tuscan translation of the work in 1363, *Difenditore della Pacie*, and the *Songe du Vergier*, a dialogue written at the court of Charles V in 1376, focus on Marsilio’s second *dictio* questioning the primacy of Rome and its relationship both to other churches and to the empire. Brian Maxson’s “Humanism and the Ritual of Command in Fifteenth-Century Florence” offers us a fascinating parallel between the casting of magic spells and the orations given by Florentine orators offering command of the Republic’s army to a foreign general. The humanist orator’s eloquence was designed to

capture celestial powers in the symbols—that is, the flag, baton, and helmet—that were to be transferred to the general, and to emphasize their efficaciousness when employed by a loyal general. In her article “Civility and Secularism in the Ambit of the Papal Court,” Elizabeth Cahill broadens Baron’s definition of civic humanism beyond a commitment of the citizen to republican ideals to include an emphasis on active participation in civic life more generally. Her examination of Guarino’s and Poggio’s debate regarding the merits of Caesar and Alberti’s *Pontifex* on the practical and spiritual roles of the bishop clearly demonstrates the humanist belief that both lay person and cleric have civic responsibilities.

Gary Ianziti’s incisive essay, “Pier Candido Decembrio and the Beginnings of Humanist Historiography in Visconti Milan,” locates the origins of humanist historiography in Milan in the early work of Candido Decembrio. The first to adopt the Brunian style of historiographical writing to Milanese events, Decembrio differs from the Florentine humanist in that he wrote about contemporary events. In her “The Learned Consort: Learning, Piety, and Female Political Authority in Northern Courts,” Jennifer A. Cavalli analyzes the use of piety and learning by Eleonora of Aragona and her daughter Isabella d’Este in their political role as wives of Italian *signori*. Cavalli makes the important point that the prayers of convents and religious women patronized by the two women afforded spiritual and political protection to rulers.

Isabella Lazzarini’s “A ‘New’ Narrative: Historical Writing, Chancellors and Public Records in Renaissance Italy (Milan, Ferrara and Mantua), ca. 1450–1520” discusses the character of history writing represented by diaries and texts composed over a lifetime by average government officials especially in the chancery in three seigniorial courts. Humanist histories share with vernacular chronicles and diaries an interest in documentary research and an urgent need to control an increasing flood of information. John Gagné’s “Crisis Redux: The Views from Milan, 1499” places the discussion of civic liberty in the political languages of Italian urban communities themselves. It focuses on the vision of civic autonomy contained in documents such as the *capitoli* drawn up by the leading patricians and the people of Milan as a condition of their surrender to the French army following the flight of Ludovico Moro in 1499.

In opposition to Baron’s view that the tone of Machiavelli’s *Florentine Histories* (1525) is pessimistic and resigned, Mark Jurdjevic maintains in his “Writing History in a Ruined World: Machiavelli, Guicciardini, and Vettori on

History and Republicanism” that Machiavelli throughout his career believed that only a government in which all citizens feel they have a role enjoys stability. In contrast, Guicciardini and Vettori were historians who denied significant moral differences between republics and monarchies and willingly worked with the Medici. In his “The Remembrance of Politics Past: Memory and Melancholia in Jacopo Nardi’s *Istorie della città di Firenze*,” Nicholas Baker describes the role of selective memory in the work of Jacopo Nardi. Illustrating the extent to which forgetting the past is as crucial as remembering, in the writing of the *Istorie* Baker diagnoses Nardi’s construction of the past as deeply affected by his emotional remembering following his exile from Florence. Edward Muir’s “Perilous Legacy of Civic Humanism in Seventeenth-Century Venice” traces the effect of the challenge of the papal interdict of 1606–07 to the autonomy of the Venetian church and liberty of the city on subsequent political thought. Muir analyzes the writings of Paolo Sarpi, Francesco Loredan, and Ferrante Pallavicino to show the extent to which the Venetian state allowed publication of unconventional religious speculation and violent anti-papal polemics.

Baker and Maxson have produced an excellent collection of essays replete with new approaches to learning and politics in the Renaissance.

RONALD G. WITT

Duke University

**Benadusi, Giovanna and Judith C. Brown, eds.**

***Medici Women: The Making of a Dynasty in Grand Ducal Tuscany.***

Essays and Studies 36. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2015. Pp. 380 + 9 ill. ISBN 978-0-7727-2180-8 (paperback) \$45.95.

History has not been kind to the women of the Medici family and court. A long succession of historians (all male, of course), stretching from the eighteenth through the twentieth century, gave these women short shrift, actively maligning or, perhaps worse, dismissing them as irrelevant. This collection of essays restores the Medici women to their rightful place in history, and in doing so is an exercise in recuperative history. Yet it offers much more. This is no assembly of women worthies. Rather, the Medici women are placed in the context of court and family, scrutinized critically in light of their individual strengths and