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### Fletcher, Catherine. The Black Prince of Florence: The Spectacular Life and Treacherous World of Alessandro de' Medici

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renseignements inédits sur le rôle des inquisiteurs et des détails inestimables sur les commissaires, les plaidoiries, la pratique de la torture et l'organisation des exécutions complètent ce très riche tableau. Ce sont en fait les tensions religieuses qui règnent en ce temps de bouleversements religieux qu'est la première moitié du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle que décrivent brillamment ces ouvrages.

Reste à souligner la réussite formelle de ces deux volumes, puisque tous ces documents sont présentés de manière parfaitement chronologique (sauf ceux placés en annexe), sont précisément numérotés et bénéficient, pour chacun d'eux, de quelques lignes d'introduction pour aider le lecteur à les situer dans le contexte bouleversé du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Les notes de bas de page fourmillent d'explications complémentaires et donnent les variantes lorsque cela est nécessaire. Très bien armé, le lecteur peut ainsi aisément circuler dans l'ensemble des deux volumes, tandis que le très riche appareil critique lui permet de poursuivre les recherches s'il le souhaite. Farge propose en effet à son lecteur une bibliographie détaillée, trois index successifs (index des personnes, des lieux et des thématiques), le tout complété par des documents supplémentaires placés en annexe. Pour résumer, ces deux beaux volumes sont un magnifique cadeau qu'offre James K. Farge aux spécialistes du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle : souhaitons que ces derniers, en les parcourant, arborent le même franc et joyeux sourire que celui de l'auteur dont la photographie orne les jaquettes de cette œuvre !

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**Fletcher, Catherine.**

***The Black Prince of Florence: The Spectacular Life and Treacherous World of Alessandro de' Medici.***

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. xxvii, 308. ISBN 978-0-19-061272-6 (hardcover) US\$29.95.

Alessandro de' Medici, an illegitimate son of Lorenzo de' Medici, born of a dark-skinned maid, became the first duke of Florence in 1532 and ruled during one of the turbulent and dangerous eras of the Medici's reign in Florence. Supported by contemporary accounts of his life, and plentiful secretarial and diplomatic correspondence, in this first-ever full biography of Alessandro,

Fletcher challenges the scarce but existing narratives of the life of this forgotten Medici prince. Alessandro has periodically appeared in scattered pages of history as a tyrant, savage, and failed ruler who was unable to successfully establish the Medici's rule in Florence. With meticulous attention to detail, in *The Black Prince of Florence* Catherine Fletcher eloquently sets the life of Alessandro against the backdrop of papal power and crisis of dynastic legitimacy, in a politically fragile Florence that challenged the stability of the Medici's rule throughout the sixteenth century.

Fletcher organizes this book into five chapters, "The Prologue," "The Bastard Son," "The Obedient Nephew," "The Prince Alone," and "Alessandro's Ethnicity." While the prologue begins with Alessandro's ruthless assassination and Fletcher's aim to tackle the question of his race and ethnicity, the rest of the chapters move in a chronological order of his life. Within the narrative of Alessandro's life, Fletcher opens a window to a dangerous world of familial rivalry, treachery, and adultery, where Pope Clement VII's ambitious aims to keep the Medici in power shaped the politics of Florence and by extension Alessandro's future as the duke. Despite his illegitimacy and skin colour, with political ambitions and an obedient attitude toward the pope, he succeeded to his position and married Margaret of Austria, daughter of Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire. Unfortunately, in the process, he gained his cousin Ippolito's hatred, and, like many of the other Medici princes, many enemies. He ruled Florence for six years until his brutal assassination by another deceitful cousin, Lorenzino, in 1537. In this vivid tale of treachery, betrayal, and murder, Fletcher also reveals the typical grandeur of the Medici's wealth and courtly splendour, decorated with exotic luxuries and magnificent ceremonial entries in the company of famous poets, artists, and political figures. With fragmented and scattered sources on hand, written mostly by his contemporary opponents and those who wished to dismiss his rule, Fletcher skilfully presents a balanced account of his life.

Unlike other Medici rulers, Alessandro has not been the subject of any major biographical work or serious historical scholarship until the twenty-first century (260). Here, Fletcher makes two critical observations to explain his absence: first, that it was politically convenient for the Medici family after Alessandro's assassination "that [he take] the blame for the brutal first years of their rule as princes of Florence" (5). Then Fletcher problematizes the notions of race, ethnicity, and class in Florence, which had played to some degree an

important role in Alessandro's fading figure in the modern scholarship of the Renaissance period. Consulting print and visual sources, Fletcher traces the manner in which Alessandro's rule and his murder have been recounted and accepted over the years. While the political instability of the Medici family in Florence shaped the contemporary accounts of his life, trans-Atlantic slavery brought his racial identity into focus. Such narratives justified his murder by portraying him as a savage and a tyrant. Others saw him as the first coloured ruler in the Western World. Fletcher cautions us that the contemporaries of Alessandro did not share these modern notions of race and class. While Alessandro's social class mattered because of his mother, affiliation with the pope overshadowed his colour and enabled him to triumph in his illegitimacy (954). Here, Fletcher points to Alessandro's appointment to Penne well before Florence, his presence in Charles's coronation and accompaniment during his travels, and, finally, his politically strategic marriage alliance to Margaret.

Fletcher's work breaks the myth of Alessandro's supposed "tyrannical" rule and racial identity. Her research would be an informative read for the scholars of Renaissance Italy, the Medici, and those who are interested in the concepts of race, ethnicity, and class in sixteenth-century Florence. She demonstrates that while contemporary narratives were shaped by the Medici's political position, the Atlantic slave trade placed Alessandro in the lens of race and ethnicity as more scientific theories of race and class surfaced in the later decades after his death. As Fletcher pens, "it was the misfortune of Alessandro de' Medici to be assassinated twice: first with a sword, then with a pen" (5). But as Fletcher shows, his life was an exceptional one because he did not embody all the princely virtues known of the Medici and, as such, he has remained a less-known figure among the Medici rulers of his time, until now.

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