

---

**Renaissance and Reformation**  
**Renaissance et Réforme**



**Blanshei, Sarah Rubin, ed. *A Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Bologna***

Jennifer Mara Desilva

---

Volume 41, Number 4, Fall 2018

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1061932ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1061932ar>

[See table of contents](#)

---

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

Cite this review

Desilva, J. M. (2018). Review of [Blanshei, Sarah Rubin, ed. *A Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Bologna*]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 41(4), 215–218. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1061932ar>

---

All Rights Reserved © Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance, Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society, Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium and Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2019

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/>

---

**é**rudit

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/>

**Blanshei, Sarah Rubin, ed.**

***A Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Bologna.***

Brill's Companions to Early Modern History 14. Leiden: Brill, 2018. Pp. xviii, 623 + 46 figures, 3 maps. ISBN 978-90-04-35348-0 (hardcover) US\$261.

In the introduction to this volume, Sarah Rubin Blanshei writes that its goal is “to show the distinctive and multifaceted character of Bologna’s medieval and Renaissance greatness as well as its weaknesses and limitations, and to explicate the transformations Bologna underwent as it developed from a medieval commune [...] to a major industrial city and cultural crossroads of the Renaissance” (1). Indeed, the six-hundred-page book offers a detailed course in the current scholarly consensus regarding the second city of the Papal States. Blanshei has coordinated a useful and monumental volume of contributions predominantly by Italian scholars translated into English. (Blanshei and fellow translator Theresa Federici are to be congratulated on their relatively smooth prose.) Anyone wishing to begin work on a project related to the political, cultural, religious, artistic, or literary history of the city should read this book, as it reveals the lay of the land as it is currently known.

After the introduction, the volume begins with an overview of extant archival sources provided by Diana Tura of the Archivio di Stato di Bologna. This chapter frames the discussions that follow and alerts the reader to the wealth of documents, many unexplored, that remain preserved in Bologna’s archives and libraries. In doing so, Tura signals the start of a clear campaign to encourage more work on the city’s history. Tura’s archival discussion is augmented by Rosa Smurra’s chapter, which explores extant fiscal sources, and in particular the *Estimi*. This was a system of direct taxation that was used in urban Bologna from 1235 until the late fourteenth century and in the Bolognese *contado* until the late eighteenth century. While Smurra’s discussion concentrates on thirteenth- and fourteenth-century *estimi*, this chapter lays the financial groundwork for understanding later chapters that tie political changes and social power to the accumulation of wealth. Massimo Giansante’s chapter follows this path, revealing how Bolognese bankers supported the thriving *studium*, collaborated with foreign banks, and used their clout to gain greater political authority. The Pepoli, Beccadelli, and Bianchi di Cosa all play important roles in this chapter, which concludes with a discussion of how Jewish bankers, the issue of usury, and the *Monte di Pietà* impacted early modern Bologna.

From financial and political concerns we move to financial and urban ones, with a series of chapters that bring the city to life in a more physical fashion. Francesca Bocchi's discussion of urban planning throughout the medieval and early modern periods provides an understanding and spatial orientation that highlight the origin of Bologna's best-known physical attributes: its porticoes and towers. Like the best contributions, this chapter brings together the often-changing city government, ambitious patrician families, proliferating religious communities, and the *studium* to reveal urban growth and its inherent tensions and enthusiasms. G. Geltner continues the reader's journey through the city with a fascinating discussion of public health, contemporary discourses on the topic, and the way that citizens and the *fango* (city health officer) worked together to reduce damage and maintain economic life. This combination of material, economic, and social themes continues in Antonella Campanini's interesting presentation of the meaning of "Bologna *la grassa*" ("fat," or prosperous), drawing together institutional growth and fraud, foodways and material culture, and sumptuary legislation. An exploration of Bologna's economy and demography from the medieval through the early modern period rounds out this important and wide-ranging section. As the contributors repeatedly note, there is plenty of room for new investigators across these topics, as the archival materials remain lightly explored.

Following these chapters, the volume turns definitively towards Bolognese political life, which was quite rocky through the late medieval period. Two essays by Giorgio Tamba on civic institutions and by Giuliano Milani on political conflict and change lucidly follow the rise and fall of various local, Roman, and regional actors who sought control of Bologna from the twelfth through the fifteenth century. This is no easy task, since factional make-up vied with Guelf-Ghibelline allegiance but could be overturned by individual advancement, economic pressure, or external threat. Tamba and Milani's work is joined by three valuable chapters authored by Tommaso Duranti, Angela De Benedictis, and Andrea Gardi respectively, who extend the discussion into the sixteenth century and situate it amid contemporary diplomatic strategies, struggles, and legal structures. Together these scholars reveal how Bologna could claim republicanism while living under papal rule and effectively operating as an oligarchy. Although these five chapters focus chiefly on political and legal issues, their discussions pave the way for the exploration of institutions that

were affected tangentially by the growth of the Bolognese patriciate through this period.

Sarah Rubin Blanshei and Sara Cucini explore changing juridical practices (accusation versus inquisition processes), chart historiographical commentary, and indicate how social control measures highlight the presence and marginalization of social groups. The latter issue resurfaces in Riccardo Parmeggiani's investigation of the suppression of heresy by Bolognese mendicant orders. While this chapter is chiefly concerned with cases of Catharism and the invocation of demons, it ably reveals the frequent interactions and interconnection between religious orders, the *studium*, and civic concerns. David Lines's work on the growth of the *studium* offers another opportunity to see how the city hosted communities that were at various times dependent, supportive, or competitive with one another. The integration of students and faculty in the extra-university community was unusual across Europe but characteristic of Bologna's environment and economy. Nicholas Terpstra's account of the place of confraternities and Gabriella Zarri's discussion of the Bolognese Catholic Church reveal further interactions between laity and clergy, city and church, that exemplify the social foment in the early modern period. These scholars take pains to show how Bologna changed over, while also identifying historiographical conflicts and areas that could benefit from new scholarship.

Finally, the volume closes with a series of four chapters that explore Bolognese literary and visual arts. Armando Antonelli and Vincenzo Cassi strive to up-end Bologna's "supporting role" in studies of late medieval Italian language and literature with a survey of Bolognese literary development from the Middle Ages to the sixteenth century. Both these scholars and Gian Mario Anselmi and Stefano Scioli, whose co-written chapter follows the former, emphasize the impact that Bologna had on the Tuscan literary giants, Dante Alighieri and Francesco Petrarca, while upholding jurist and poet Guido Guinizzelli and humanists Filippo Beroaldi, Antonio Urceo (Codro), and Achille Bocchi as worthy of greater study and esteem. Raffaella Pini's work on miniaturists, painters, and goldsmiths continues this campaign to contextualize Bolognese arts within the larger peninsular world. Her chapter also reveals how workshop and family were intertwined over several generations, returning to the theme of family status and contributions that repeatedly appears in this volume. Appropriately, David Drogin's study of Bolognese art and patronage

closes the volume, further developing discussions of how the physical city offered opportunities for status building. Religious communities, civic institutions, and families seized these opportunities enthusiastically, and through their patronage transformed the city into “a high-profile site of international events and related artistic activity” (592).

Not only does this volume present a thorough vision of Bologna as scholars currently see it, but under Blanshei’s guidance those scholars have opened the doors to new colleagues in a clear and encouraging way. Hopefully this volume will encourage more people to visit and explore the abundant resources and intriguing development of Bologna *la grassa*.

JENNIFER MARA DESILVA

Ball State University

**Cefalu, Paul.**

*The Johannine Renaissance in Early Modern English Literature and Theology.*

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. xiii, 352 + 7 ill. ISBN 978-0-19-880871-8 (hardcover) \$80.

In this, already his fifth monograph, Paul Cefalu returns to the seventeenth-century religious writing that he mined in his excellent first book, *Moral Identity in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2004). While *Moral Identity* explored the post-Reformation survival of prudential ethics and rational self-interest in practical behavioural contexts, *The Johannine Renaissance* dives deep into some of Christianity’s most abstract and challenging topics, including sacramental theology, Trinitarian theology, and the nature of *agape* love. Cefalu’s goal is to trace the influence of John’s evangelical writings—the Fourth Gospel and the First Epistle of John, but not Revelations—as well as of patristic commentaries on John (most importantly St. Augustine) on Reformation and post-Reformation theology and seventeenth-century devotional writing, especially poetry. His central claim is that recognized features of seventeenth-century theology and poetry follow from recognized features of Johannine theology. *The Johannine Renaissance*, then, is fundamentally a study of sources and influences.