

## Reviews

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Dennis Romano. *Markets and Marketplaces in Medieval Italy, c. 1100 to c. 1400*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015. viii + 271 pp. ISBN 978-0-300-16907-2, \$65.00 (cloth).

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There is, by now, a substantial amount of literature arguing that pre-modern markets were much more than just neutral meeting places of supply and demand. One line of thought emphasizes the ways in which market exchange and market performance were affected by institutions: Douglass North's "rules of the game." Another strand of literature, represented by Martha C. Howell (*Commerce before Capitalism in Europe, 1300–1600*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) and James Davis (*Medieval Market Morality: Life, Law and Ethics in the English Marketplace, 1200–1500*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), among others, focuses on the cultural, moral, and ideological aspects of markets. Dennis Romano's monograph is best positioned in this second line of thought, although institutions (in the sense of market rules) are by no means neglected. The book, however, approaches the topic from specific angles: the interaction between market attitudes and market practices, on the one hand, and the spatial and physical characteristics of the marketplace—architecture, layout, embellishments—on the other.

Romano restricts his monograph to the markets and marketplaces of medieval Italy. The theoretical justification for the choice for Italy is perhaps not entirely convincing. It is based on the early rise of commercialization in Italy and on the struggle for power in the highly politicized Italian city-states, which became a struggle for control over the market. A study of markets, for instance, in the southern Low Countries, would also have brought out these two elements. The expertise of the author in the social and cultural histories of Renaissance Italy (and Venice, in particular) may have carried more weight, and there is every reason to rejoice that it did. The book discloses a wealth of research written in Italian, which will be very welcome to scholars who have not mastered that language. There is another reason to applaud the focus on Italy: the abundance of illustrations makes full use of the richness of that country's medieval and Renaissance art.

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The book is divided into three parts. The first part, titled "Space and Place," discusses marketplaces as civic symbols; the contests over markets among the church, elite regimes, and popular regimes; and the physical organization of markets. The second part, "Buying and Selling," deals with the infrastructure of the marketplace, the ritualized steps in the process of exchange, and the regulation of markets by town governments and guilds. The third part, "Marketplace Ethics," focuses on fraud and its counterpart trust. Along with secondary literature, Romano uses a diverse array of mostly published sources, which include rules and regulations, a grammar book for Italian merchants learning German, and literary and visual sources. This variety makes for vivid images and lively reading. Jurisdictional sources and administrative sources such as urban accounts are used only sparingly. While such sources might have shed more light on actual practices and how they deviated from prescriptions, the decision to refrain from the required extensive archival research is understandable in view of the scope of the book, which covers the entire peninsula.

In Romano's line of reasoning, three arguments can be distinguished. The first is that the commercial revolution of the high Middle Ages gave rise to the emergence of a market economy. This required trust, but trust was not easy to create in a market where lack of standardization and incomplete information provided plenty of opportunities for fraud. Romano claims that, as a result, medieval Italians were obsessed with fraud and the fear of falling victim to it. In an attempt to limit fraud, instill trust, and promote the reputation of their cities as trade centers, urban governments, especially those dominated by popular regimes, emphasized the notion of the common good as an important market value. This argument is well developed throughout the book and is, on the whole, convincing.

The second argument is that the need to assess the intentions and trustworthiness of a prospective buyer or seller gave rise to the development of individuality: a direct reference to Jacob Burckhardt's "selfhood" and its emergence in Renaissance Italy. This argument comes up only occasionally and is not nearly as well articulated as the first argument. It might have been better to develop this line of thought in more detail elsewhere; as it is, it rather detracts from the coherence of the book.

The third line of argument is the core issue of the book: market practices and the physical structure of markets interacted and were mutually reinforcing. Romano explains, for instance, how the location of markets in Italian towns was affected by differences in the balance of powers and by changes in that balance over time, how the authorities attempted to regulate the layout of the market in order to facilitate supervision and reduce fraud, and how they used murals and

sculptures in the marketplace to reinforce civic identity and impress the importance of honesty and fair dealings. It should be added that while the relationship between market society and marketplace is central to the professed aim of the book, it is not as consistent a guiding principle in the text as one might expect. The second part of the book sometimes reads as an extensive description of market attitudes, practices, and rules, with only occasional references to spatial and physical aspects. It is in these descriptive sections that it becomes apparent that the link with prominent academic debates on the role of institutions in market exchange is not strong. Romano does not engage with recent debates on issues such as the benefits and disadvantages of merchant guilds (see Sheilagh Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade: Merchant Guilds, 1000–1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) or the willingness of cities to adapt trade institutions in reaction to changes in trade networks and the requirements of traders (see Oscar Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce: The Institutional Foundations of International Trade in the Low Countries, 1250–1650*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

The author is at his best when he sticks to the core of his argument: the interaction between market attitudes and the layout and physical appearance of the marketplace. Here Romano is convincing, building up his argument by using poetry, architecture, paintings, and sculptures in various Italian cities. Scholars interested in the cultural and social aspects of medieval markets and their spatial manifestations will find his book well worth reading.

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Barbara Floyd is well known as an Ohio historian and university archivist, and her new book reflects that scholarship. The major corporate glass industry archives are under her guardianship at the University of Toledo, and she has been the designer of many public