

and children. In 1489, her daughter Isabella (b. 1470) marries the young duke of Milan, her cousin Giangaleazzo Maria Sforza. After 1494, a series of deaths changes the political landscape. King Ferrante dies on 25 January 1494, and Ippolita's husband Alfonso succeeds to the Crown. But Alfonso soon abdicates the throne to his and Ippolita Maria's firstborn, Ferrandino (Ferrante II, b. 1467), and flees to Aragonese Sicily. One year later, on 24 February 1495, King Charles VIII of France enters Naples in triumph.

Wood's fascinating biography of Ippolita Maria Sforza does not stand alone. Notable here is the rich work of Veronica Mele (2011, 2012), who has published hundreds of additional letters by the duchess as well as documents relating to her life from a number of Italian state archives beyond those in Milan, Florence, and Naples. And the field continues to grow. Wood's book, then, takes its place in expanding scholarship on women as political actors in Il Regno and, more generally, on women and humanism in Southern Italy.

Diana Robin, *University of New Mexico*
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Piero di Lorenzo de' Medici and the Crisis of Renaissance Italy. Alison Brown.
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Piero di Lorenzo de' Medici has traditionally been presented as a failure. This poses a problem for Alison Brown's goal of offering a more balanced biography of Piero. For even with its rich documentation, careful research, and clear exposition, this biography details his failure across the board as a leader, diplomat, scholar, and even as a lover. A tragic tale of Piero's failures would have been obvious, but Brown has opted for the difficult task of writing a biography of this last of the republican Medici as a pivotal figure emblematic of the "crisis of Renaissance Italy."

Although overused, in this case "crisis" serves well: in Brown's account it transforms Piero's failure into a close examination from a Florentine perspective of the end of the early Rinascimento Italian city-states' independence and the start of a half-century of war that left Italy largely ruled by foreign powers. Relying heavily on the rich collection of Medici letters in the Florentine archives, many of which are now online, she reconstructs his life as a diplomat and politician, with brief excursions on his learning, private affairs, and fascination with sports and hunting as private pleasures and public display. Her Piero, thus, remains a failure, but a complex one: "Piero emerges as a diffident or unwilling political ruler, happy to assume the trappings of power without involving himself too deeply in the political process . . . [but] he lacked the confidence at moments of crisis and failed to strengthen his position when the opportunity arose" (302–03).

Piero's early years are presented as the most positive. With his close but troubled relationship with his tutor Poliziano, he mastered Latin and a command of Greek at an early age, impressing contemporaries with his quick wit and learning. It was also a period when he was heavily influenced by the women around him, an aspect of life that traditional biographies often overlook. Brown wisely warns that the letters she relies heavily upon must be used with care, as most are from family, friends, and fawning Medici supporters; thus even these largely positive early years must be viewed with caution.

And although his father tried to initiate him in his mid-teens to the complex world of dynastic intrigue, Florentine internal politics, and diplomacy, he was still by the standards of the day a mere adolescent when he came to power at twenty, and remained one when driven from Florence two years later and, indeed, virtually until his death at thirty-one. And therein, perhaps, lay the underlying key to his failure. Yet from the first Brown sees larger, new political realities trapping Piero: Milan and Lodovico il Moro; the French and Charles VIII; the papacy and the Borgia pope, Alexander VI; and the rulers of Naples all created a situation where he could no longer play one off against the other as his father had done and ultimately had to choose, too late and from weakness. Thus, after essentially surrendering Florence to the French and losing most of his support in the city, he fled into exile where he spent the rest of his life trying to employ what Brown sees as the new ruthless diplomacy of the age: trying to secure allies to retake the city and failing largely because of his own indecision, insecurity, and, at times, lack of interest and drive. With poetic justice Brown ends his tale of woes with one final failure: at thirty-one, fighting with the French in the south of Italy, he drowned attempting to ford a river and even his body was lost.

Not light reading for those fascinated by the mythic Quattrocento Medici, this study is a detailed account of Florentine politics and diplomacy from an archival perspective in the mold of Nicolai Rubinstein, Gene Brucker, and John Najemy. Careful detailing of supporters and factions provides a cast of characters and complex dealings that makes reading that is often heavy going. And, suggestively, it sometimes leaves one wondering if Piero was actually more the front man for the rule of a few powerful old men, who, although changing over time, had long ruled behind Medici idols. Still, this close examination of Florentine politics in action provides a classic account of a little-studied Medici while presenting a rich vision of the Rinascimento in the crucial years at the turn of the sixteenth century.

Guido Ruggiero, *University of Miami*
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