

Remo L. Guidi. *Frați e Umanisti nel Quattrocento*.

Contribute e Proposte 82. Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2013. 624 pp. €50. ISBN: 978-88-6274-461-4.

Remo Guidi has never been a writer of books one might call short and sweet. This text hearkens back to his *Il dibattito sull'uomo nel Quattrocento* (1999) in its length, its ample erudition (the bibliography lists nine pages of manuscripts and incunabula), and its theme: the tense, often-combative relationship between representatives of an ascendant humanism and the mendicant orders, particularly the Franciscans, who had long dominated the intellectual life of Europe. In its refusal to reduce complex source material into an overly simple thesis, this book also recalls Guidi's more recent *L'inquietudine del Quattrocento* (2007). It is comprised of fourteen chapters, of which all but the last are versions of pieces published elsewhere over the last decade or so. The first five chapters of the book, and the new concluding chapter, are concerned with Guidi's overall sense of the relationship between humanists and friars. The other eight are case studies of particular thinkers, debates, or intellectual environments: Bessarion, Antonio da Rho, Giovanni da Capestrano, Poggio Bracciolini and Alberto da Sarteano, Lorenzo Valla, Bernardino da Siena, and the Jews of Ferrara. There is also a short chapter on hagiography. The subject treated here is large and Guidi's telling nuanced and complex.

Over the course of his relentless demonstration of this complexity, Guidi makes several salutary observations. Attacks leveled against the friars by even the most severe of their humanist critics were no harsher than the attacks they faced from within their own order, torn as they were by the debates between mainstream and reforming factions, and often differed little in their rhetoric. Indeed, proponents of humanism within the order found no inherent difficulty in speaking as both friar and humanist. Humanists, in turn, were not secularist caricatures, and eschewed neither the pulpit nor the religiously framed reforming mission that had long characterized the mendicant orders. Again and again, Guidi shows us a harsh humanist critic, such as Poggio or Valla, whose relationship with Christianity, the clergy, and the institutional Church was never purely adversarial. Again and again, we find Franciscan intellectuals embracing humanist study of ancient texts in an effort to reinvent their order. In its densely layered evidence,

this book showcases Guidi's extensive knowledge of the relevant sources, and any scholar who works on the intellectual history of this period, on the Franciscan order, or on any of the several prominent figures discussed will benefit from exploring it.

This book is an undeniably valuable contribution, but a few criticisms do bear mentioning. Throughout this meditation on the complexity of the relationship between humanists and Franciscans, similarly careful students of this question may at times find themselves frustrated that Guidi often seems content to demonstrate a complexity that they readily acknowledge. When he does venture to draw more specific conclusions about this relationship, his claims are sometimes unsatisfying. We are repeatedly told that humanist thinkers had greater "mental autonomy" or "mental liberty" than their mendicant interlocutors, an intellectual superiority that Guidi identifies as most evident in Pico. It is not at all clear what this means, since the mendicant intellectual world was hardly characterized by theoretical homogeneity. Another problem is Guidi's tendency to blur the line between humanist intellectuals and the broader lay population, often referring to the former simply as the laity. It should be noted that although these problems do recur frequently, Guidi seems to recognize them as problems and hedges them densely with qualifying statements. He notes, for example, that humanists enjoyed great mental liberty but their love of rhetoric could actually damage their efficacy in certain fields, like history. Ultimately, however, one gets the sense that this sometimes-confusing range of often-contrary claims is simply a result of Guidi's refusal to reduce a complex historical moment to a single claim. We are reminded that this book is the work of a venerable master of the field, long engaged with these many thinkers, their ideas, and their personal and professional relationships with one another. Its complexity is a sign of his uncompromising refusal to oversimplify and if its findings sometimes leave us wanting more, that is because the question of the relationship between humanism and religion is one that remains unresolved.

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