

*Brilliant Bodies: Fashioning Courtly Men in Early Renaissance Italy.*

Timothy McCall.

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Timothy McCall's book studies men's fashion in the Italian courts of the late medieval to the early modern period through surviving visual sources and written documents. The author clearly knows how to make use of different types of sources that intersect with one another and reveal the material culture that is fundamental for a full understanding of the phenomenon of fashion.

The principal theme of the book is how courtly men made an exhibition of their personal appearance and the methods they used to display luxury and magnificence as symbols of their power. As the historiography has already convincingly shown, garments and jewels, personal grooming, and, in the case of men, arms and armor, were the elements around which strategies of appearance developed at that time. The author investigates these strategies from the perspective of the masculine body and demonstrates how the quality and quantity of the items worn by men made these bodies shimmer, shine, and be brilliant in the eyes of the viewing public. From glistening fabrics decorated with gold and gilt silver thread, to jewels and armor made of gleaming, lustrous steel plate, to lightened hair whose color was obtained by use of tinting products, to skin that was with difficulty kept as pale as possible—these were all tools that noblemen used to create a body that was carefully modeled by the aesthetic canons of the period, as seen and described in iconographic sources, literature, and chronicles.

After introducing the subject, the first chapter, titled “Riddled with Gilt: Lords in Shining Armor and Shimmering Bodies,” proposes that the use of armor and arms was an important element in the history of fashion and the development of the ideal male silhouette as a trim, athletic body. That ideal was a cause for worry for someone like Galeazzo Maria Sforza, who gained so much weight that he was no longer able to wear the tight styles that were meant to emphasize the flanks and legs. The third chapter, “The Contours of Renaissance Fashion,” delves even further into the silhouette and contour of the male body, while the second chapter, ““Ornando d'oro e gemme”: Brilliant Male Bodies Adorned,” discusses not only the symbolic and political value but also the economic value of the garments and jewels that noblemen used for display, gifts, or in exchange for liquid assets. This is another theme that has already been taken up by a historiography that has lately been concerned with the economic aspect of fashion; scholars have investigated the multitiered system of values that fashion acquired from beyond the courtly environment.

Indeed, city centers were places where materials and products were purchased by the court, and where deft and determined agents worked on lords' commissions to source new objects and deal with merchants and artisans. Ambassadors and agents were court interlocutors who both procured luxury goods and worked for their lords' wives. These

women maintained the household wardrobes and had a certain amount of financial autonomy. While the subject of women's consumption is not the primary focus of McCall's work, he does prove that self-fashioning was not only a woman's prerogative. The fourth chapter, "Fair Princes: Blanched Beauty, Nobility, and Power," once again makes use of iconographic sources to create a dialogue with key terms for symbols of power drawn from secondary sources, with which the author is profoundly familiar. One of the book's strengths is the rich use of iconography shared in an abundant collection of images. The fifth and final chapter concludes with "Epilogue: Black is the New Gold," where McCall traces the trajectory in which vivid, fifteenth-century colors such as crimson (*cremisi*) give way to the use of black, a color that was just as shiny and even more costly. Contrary to what one might think, black did not transmit sobriety, but rather provided an even deeper and more luxurious background with which the male body could be adorned as usual.

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*Florence à l'écritoire: Écriture et mémoire dans l'Italie de la Renaissance.*  
Christiane Klapisch-Zuber.

Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2023. 254 pp. €12.

Not surprisingly, Didier Lett opens his beautiful preface (a veritable portrait, one may say, covering some thirty pages) with a reference to the monumental study of the Florentine tax system in the early fifteenth century that Christiane Klapisch-Zuber and David Herlihy published in 1978. That first edition was translated into English in 1985 and published by Yale University Press as *The Tuscans and Their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427*. In many respects, *Florence à l'écritoire* is a fitting continuation of that research and Klapisch-Zuber's many other studies on the Florentine Renaissance that came out in the following years. As Lett reminds us in his preface, the last part of *Les Toscans et leurs familles* (titled "Les images de la famille") focused on relationships among individuals, families, generations, genders, and social groups. In those pages, both Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber emphasized the importance of personal diaries, commonplace books, and family records as major sources of information to study all these types of relationships and much more.

The present collection of seven essays (five of which were unpublished until now) heavily relies on merchants' *ricordanze* to shed light on such topics and notions as ego-writing, personal reputation, women, wealth, and memory. All of these themes are addressed and assessed through the writings of—among others—the wealthy merchant Andrea di Messer Tommaso Minerbetti (1462/64–1551), his ancestor Andrea di Betto (who started writing his memoirs in 1309), their fellow Florentine