

A Companion to Late Medieval and Early Modern Milan: The Distinctive Features of an Italian State. Andrea Gamberini, ed.

Brill's Companions to European History 7. Leiden: Brill, 2015. xiv + 548 pp. \$241.

Editing a companion volume can be a thankless task. Contributors are often too busy to contribute; those who do agree don't deliver on time or to the brief that they have been set. At the same time, the press imposes editorial rules, such as strict limits on the pages that can be devoted to each chapter and the strict rationing of illustrations. In theory, the result should be a brilliant synthesis of the most up-to-date approaches and ideas that have been rendered accessible to a nonspecialist audience. For example, Brill describes how this series of Companions to European History was designed: "volumes are constructed on broadly the same pattern: a small number of narrative chapters to introduce and update the recent historiography and a larger number of thematic chapters. . . . Handbooks are normally multi-author volumes, tightly orchestrated with an initial editorial plan down to chapter level."

The "tightly orchestrated" book under review here is volume 7 in this series and focuses on late medieval and early modern Milan. It joins others that explore medieval Palermo, Venetian history from 1400 to 1797, early modern Naples, as well as one devoted to the Holy Roman Empire, 1495–1806. Despite the promise of similar structures, they vary enormously, and the companion to Milan is among the most extensive of them all. With twenty chapters covering politics, religion, art and culture, economics, manufacturing, and the law (to name but a few thematic areas), it stands at 547 pages and retails at €186 or \$241. So it is lengthy and expensive but does it deliver on its promise to provide an educated, nonspecialist reader with an intelligent but accessible guide to the subject?

Inevitably, the answer is mixed. It is hard not to both admire and feel some sympathy for the distinguished editor Andrea Gamberini as he tries to shoehorn a very diverse range of

essays, often translated, into a single volume. On the positive side, almost half of the authors are from the main universities in Milan itself and have been working in the court and civic archives for many years. This means that the chapters draw on the latest research by those who know their topics with an enviable thoroughness. The footnotes are a mine of information on the finely detailed, comprehensive, and complex studies they have produced over the past decades. This is particularly true for the work on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that challenges the notion of Lombardy's decay and decline. Thus chapters by Stefano d'Amico, Giovanna Tonelli, and Alessandro Moradotti cover politics, the economy, and the arts under Spanish rule. They collectively demonstrate a continued sophistication that is often overlooked by scholars who usually turn to Rome and Venice when they come to this later period. They are joined by scholars such as Christine Gertz, who writes on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century music in Milan, revealing a wealth of new material that demonstrates how post-Tridentine reform regenerated rather than suppressed innovative sounds and religious experiences within the city.

What emerges from the book as a whole is the fluidity with which Milan defined and redefined itself in terms of its internal and external loyalties. The city had a tense and often-conflicted relationship with its immediate territories under the Visconti and the Sforza (who controlled the city in very different ways but never allowed Milan to rule the rest of their dominion); under Spanish dominion, there was, paradoxically, greater urban centralization but, in the main, patronage shifted from Milan itself to Madrid and Toledo. Throughout the almost 300 years under consideration, however, one aspect did remain constant. Milanese men and women of all social groups knew how to create wealth and how to spend it. The ease with which they replaced and updated palaces, chapels, and altars testifies to the city's continued vitality but also makes it hard to find early modern Milan on the city streets today without a guiding hand. If this is a companion to that journey it is not always the easiest one; but it is certainly useful for those seeking a good starting point for further research on a fascinating city and its surroundings.

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