

at Columbus's encounter with the islands of the Caribbean, or, for that matter, European exploration of the western coasts of the Americas, imagining them as mere extensions of the eastern exploration initiated by the Venetians centuries earlier. Indeed, as Horodowich points out, as late as the 1700s the map rooms of the Doge's palace contained not only Venetian-produced maps of the world but depictions of the voyages of Venetian explorers, in particular Marco Polo. The images, Horodowich asserts, impressed upon visitors that "while the Spanish may have colonized the New World, the significance of these conquests paled in comparison to . . . the travels of Marco Polo, whose voyages had resulted in the first substantial knowledge of the East to which all western people continued to strive to gain access" (220).

Ultimately, Horodowich argues, even as Venice's position in the new world order was on the wane, through its print output it remained relevant. Its influential dissemination of images of a New World that bears an uncanny resemblance to Venice ensured that la Serenissima played a role in shaping the New World—if not in material space then at least in the imaginations of those Europeans who remained in the Old.

Horodowich is a careful and meticulous scholar whose work is well researched. The number of sources consulted, both primary and secondary, is extensive, and the book is superbly illustrated. Just as importantly, Horodowich has achieved something very difficult: without compromising the scholarly quality and impact of the research, she has asserted her own voice; even at its most erudite, the book has a wonderfully personal tone. While *The Venetian Discovery of America* represents top-notch historical research, Horodowich also branches out into the sociological and somewhat psychological aspects of her subject. The book will, therefore, appeal to historians as well as to scholars of cultural studies, and will, undoubtedly, become essential reading to those who study the age of encounters.

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Décapitées: Trois femmes dans l'Italie de la Renaissance. Élisabeth Crouzet-Pavan and Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur.

Paris: Albin Michel, 2018. 430 pp. €24.

Between 1391 and 1425, three women from prominent Northern Italian families—Agnese Visconti (1363–91), Beatrice Cane (ca. 1370–1418), and Parisina Malatesta (1404–25)—were decapitated on orders of their husbands. This intriguing fact-finding book sets out to explain why. None of these women are well known. They left no great cultural legacy, as, for instance, Eleonora of Aragon (1450–93), Duchess of Ferrara, nor did they exercise the artistic patronage of an Isabella d'Este (1474–1539), Marchioness of Mantua. This study attempts to reconstruct their lives and to understand what could

have legitimized their deaths by decapitation in a period when death on the scaffold for adultery in Italy was nonexistent.

The first three chapters trace the dramatic events that led to an accusation of adultery, unproven for Beatrice, followed by only one extant court case, for Agnese, and a summary execution for all three. The chapters detail the weddings of Agnese to the *condottiero* Francesco Gonzaga of Mantua, Beatrice to Filippo Maria Visconti of Milan, and Parisina to Niccolò III d'Este of Ferrara. Agnese was executed with her lover following a brief court case commandeered by her husband. Beatrice, twenty-two years older than her husband, appears to have been killed for reasons other than adultery, such as her difference in age, her inability to produce an heir, and her social ascension and power in retaining authority over the territories inherited from her second husband; her then current husband simply turned to a judge who easily expedited her death. Finally, Parisina was executed with her stepson, of the same age—Niccolò's favorite illegitimate son, Ugo d'Este—without a trial. The authors of this study make the case that the arbitrary power of their husbands was a consequence of the transition at the time from a communal to a signorial form of government in Italy's city-states, which granted increased political ascendancy to a few ruling lords and their families. The signorial versus the republican debate, particularly in relation to the Medici rule of Florence, has taken on new vigor recently, with Robert Black and John Law's edited collection *The Medici: Citizens and Masters* (2015) (see RQ 70.1 [2017]: 297–98). The system of checks and balances in fifteenth-century Florence lost ground in the aforementioned city-states.

The rest of *Décapitées* ably reconstitutes from archival sources the childhoods and young adulthoods of these women, before and during their marriages. It evokes the qualities and comforts of their parental homes; their conservative pedagogy and books guiding their preceptors, such as, for instance, Francesco da Barberino's *Reggimento e costumi di donna* (1320) and, notably for Parisina, the start of a humanist emphasis on the rudiments of Latin for girls; the marriage negotiations and the betrothal, which only the mature Beatrice could handle on her own terms; and the cohabitation and palatial environment of the newlyweds (Beatrice, again an exception, lived separately from her husband). The discovery of Parisina's expense accounts for the years 1422–24 allows for a substantive discussion of her household and personal purchases of books, jewels, works of art, and luxury items. These indicate a strikingly wide margin of financial independence. Did these women also exercise their agency politically? It seems that Beatrice's experience in ruling the cities and territories of her late husband led her to want to continue doing so. Both Agnese and Parisina had models of politically strong women in their birth families that enabled them to affirm their own personal desires and agency. This study thus argues that in the historical transition from communal to signorial government, women from ruling families who had been largely invisible by law and custom took on more and more visibility as they assumed the functions of the consort in a signorial—or, in other countries, monarchical—regime. Rather

than simply divorce them, their husbands, to symbolically reestablish their power and honor, resorted to what the authors call a “coup de souveraineté” (337) in executing them and publicizing their deaths. Deeply researched, *Décapitées* contributes richly to historical, familial, social, cultural, and gender studies of late Trecento and Quattrocento Italy.

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Machiavelli's Florentine Republic. Michelle T. Clarke.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. xii + 192 pp. \$99.99.

Machiavelli's Florentine Republic is concerned with Machiavelli's interpretation of the Florentine communal experience during the medieval period, as presented in his last major work, the *Florentine Histories* (*FH*).

In 1520, Machiavelli was commissioned to write a history of Florence, as previous humanist chancellors of the republic (including Leonardo Bruni) had done. At that time, the regime, born out of the 1512 coup, was still contested, and the government was supervised by Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, who became Pope Clement VII in 1523. The *Istorie Fiorentine*, published in 1532, stops at the death of Lorenzo the Magnificent, in 1492. However, enough evidence suggests that when Machiavelli presented his manuscript to Clement VII (in 1525), he considered continuing beyond that date, at least until the fall of the Medici regime, in late 1494. Clarke does not speculate on the reasons why Machiavelli did not continue the work, confining the analysis of “Machiavelli's Florentine Republic” to the chronological limits of the *FH*—thereby excluding the experience of the Great Council Republic (1494–1512). Her central contention is that “Machiavelli's republicanism is best understood as a critical response to the successes and failures of his own city's republican project” (5). According to Clarke, the republican project of Florence would be better defined through an understanding of the Ordinances of Justice against the magnates (1293). She holds that in 1434, with Cosimo de' Medici's recall from exile, “after a century of aggressive popular reforms, Florence had succumbed . . . to what was, in all but name, a form of princely rule.” And the “key objective” of her work is specifically to try to “make sense” of this “climactic event” from the point of view of the history of the Republican ideas (7).

Following an introduction, the book's second chapter compares *FH*'s book 2 with Bruni's *Panegyric of Florence* and his *History of the Florentine People*, emphasizing Machiavelli's critique of the ideological function of humanist discourse. The third aims at identifying a Machiavellian concept of modernity compatible with a neo-Augustinian view of history, according to which the corruption of modern times derives not from the advent of Christianity but from the Roman desire for worldly glory