



Political Meritocracy in Renaissance Italy: The Virtuous Republic of Francesco Patrizi of Siena. James Hankins.

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2023. 448 pp. \$55.

James Hankins begins his laudable book with the claim: “Most historians of political thought have never heard the name Francesco Patrizi of Siena” (1). This work aims to change that. The author, a Harvard University history professor and the general editor of the I Tatti Renaissance Library, establishes Patrizi as the “most substantial and influential voice of Italian humanist political thought” between Petrarch and Machiavelli.

Patrizi’s life (1413–93/94) was full and multifaceted: he was a father, professor of rhetoric in Siena, ambassador, supporter of a coup against Siena (for which he was arrested, tortured, and condemned to death), priest (after his wife died), bishop of Gaeta, close friend of Enea Silvio Piccolomini (Pope Pius II), governor of Foligno, author of several works on political theory, advocate for universal literacy and public education, thinker on urban planning, and poet.

The reader will find this book’s portrayal of Patrizi’s impressive life to be a rich resource on this Renaissance thinker. This review, however, focuses on Patrizi’s two prominent treatises generally and his perspective on architecture and urban planning specifically. Hankins recognizes that Patrizi’s works are “very long-winded” (8), but, as he jovially puts it, Quattrocento book lovers had the leisure “to luxuriate in banquets of erudition” (8)—one of the many well-written examples the author treats us to throughout the book. Patrizi wrote *De Republica* (How to found a republic, 1471) both because his friend Pope Pius II exhorted him to do it and because he wanted to advocate citizens’ involvement in government and meritocracy.

In *De Republica*, Patrizi emphasizes that a civic society should be based on leadership grounded in virtue and education, as opposed to leadership founded on wealth and heredity, a practice common at the time. In analyzing the best type of governments or constitutions, Patrizi weighs republics against monarchies. Although Patrizi in *De Republica* supports republics (a view he altered later), his analysis stresses the importance of cultivating leaders with virtues and citizens’ approval of governmental laws. For Patrizi, it is insufficient to select rulers based on their family, lineage, and wealth; these decisions should be based on virtue.

There is some question as to whether Patrizi altered his views on republics and monarchs between *De Republica* and *De Regno* (On kingship and the education of a king, 1483/84). Hankins’s conclusion is that Patrizi accepted a situation where a “free city comes under the aegis of monarch who allows it to preserve its best republican traditions” (275). Patrizi recognized that monarchy/kingship provided stability, whereas republics rarely lasted. Patrizi was influenced by Roman history and Caesar’s reign. Contrary to the American Revolution leaders who praised Brutus for opposing

Caesar's tyranny, Patrizi thought that Caesar's Ides of March assassination was an evil act.

Finally, Hankins characterizes Patrizi's significant impact on architecture and urban planning as one of his "most original contributions to political thought" (214). Patrizi believed that citizens sought a happy life in this world, as Renaissance humanists emphasized, and should not have to wait for their afterlife. As such, city planners should "provide an environment to civil tranquility" (216). He knew that architects and architecture were critical to achieving this, and Patrizi recommended that architects should learn not only the techniques of building but also history, philosophy, mathematics, and medicine. The author includes a copy of Patrizi's urban plan for cross streets leading to gates, broad piazzas, and private homes that would embellish the city. Patrizi also supported the city's need for public funding of education and a public library for the poor.

Hankins succeeds in demonstrating that Patrizi was "the greatest political philosopher of the humanist movement" (14). The book includes a helpful five-page "Timeline of Events in Patrizi's Life," an appendix on Patrizi's works, over forty pages of notes, and a seventeen-page bibliography. Today's thinkers can benefit from learning about Patrizi for "the priceless value of seeing ourselves and our times through the eyes of historical periods and places other than our own" (329).

Michael A. Vaccari, *Fordham University*
doi:10.1017/rqx.2023.533

The Trial of Giordano Bruno. Germano Maifreda.
New York: Routledge, 2022. 258 pp. \$136.

In this volume, Germano Maifreda elevates the analysis of the trial of Giordano Bruno da Nola, the most prolific and intriguing intellectual/philosopher and renegade friar of early modern Italy, to the next level of sophistication and rigor. Maifreda, a renowned scholar of the economics of the Italian Inquisition, presents a microhistorical study that was originally published in Italian in 2018 but here includes a new introduction. The study brings to light new interpretations extrapolated from inquisitorial account books and ledgers kept during the eighty months of Bruno's imprisonment in Venice from 1592 to 1593 and in Rome from 1593 to 1600. Maifreda's main discovery is the recurring hovering presence of a Capuchin friar, Giovan Antonio Arrigoni, alias Celestino da Verona, who gave testimony against Bruno on more than one occasion, and who happened to be in prison at the same time as Bruno in both Venice and Rome. Maifreda traces the political factions, alliances, and dynamics that might have caused this monk to be placed in the same prison as Bruno, enabling him to persuade the philosopher to choose death rather than recantation.