The Myth of Republicanism in Renaissance Italy. Fabrizio Ricciardelli. Cursor Mundi 22. Turnhout: Brepols, 2015. 222 pp. €75.

Every generation of historians attempts to face the dilemma represented by the intellectual underpinnings and the historical consequences of late medieval and Renaissance republicanism in Italy. From time to time, a new interpretative framework emerges that seeks to challenge the characteristic lack of consensus in this field. Fabrizio Ricciardelli, in his *The Myth of Republicanism in Renaissance Italy*, aims to do precisely this. The central thesis of his work is that the concept of republicanism risks being misleading when applied to the history of the Italian city-states. This is the case because both republics and *signorie* underwent similar processes of territorialization and centralization while developing similar political languages and showing the same strategies to redefine space and power.

After a first narrative chapter that should be part of every reading list for undergraduate courses on Renaissance Italy, Ricciardelli's second chapter juxtaposes the political history of some cities in Central and Northern Italy with the intellectual history of the region, arguing that the sophisticated discussion on the best form of government that took place between the thirteenth and the fifteenth century cannot be reduced to a debate between republican writers and defenders of seigneurial rule. Some readers will find the third chapter, which begins with a theoretical section and then delves into the importance of civic spaces and the relationship between architecture, public ritual, and power, quite disjointed from the rest of the book. Yet this has more to do with Ricciardelli's writing style, which virtually never restates the main argument and therefore leaves to the reader the work of connecting the dots, than with any lack of substance. But the core of the book is found in chapters 4 and 5. Here Ricciardelli shows that the ideological foundations, the political objectives, and even the fate of both republics and *signorie* are actually indistinguishable. For instance, in chapter 4 we find a fascinating reflection on the relationship between justice, concord, and good government in the commune. Ricciardelli does not limit his analysis to contemporary writers, but rather draws connections with Sallust, Cicero, and Augustine, while constantly including among his sources civic paintings, which were "instruments of political struggle" (121) in both republican and seigneurial contexts. Chapter 5 is likewise well researched, and its narrative seems to convincingly bring together the experiences of territorial expansion and the strategies of subordination taking place within Tuscany. The pages dedicated to the concepts of *pax florentina* and *superioritas* will be particularly relevant for scholars interested in early modern ideas of sovereignty and legitimization.

Among the shortcomings of the work must be noted the teleological flavor of certain passages, especially in relation to the supposed unavoidability of the modern nation-state. At one point, Ricciardelli even claims that "the communal experience found its own natural evolution in the territorial states" (111). Another problem is the absence of Venice in chapter 5: here one would have expected what is arguably the most imperialist republic of the entire peninsula to take center stage, but this does not happen, and one is left baffled, as Ricciardelli limits his investigation to Florence, Lucca, and Siena. Finally, a third shortcoming is the little space given to Genoa throughout the book. This is not problematic per se, as ignoring the Ligurian republic has by now become a sort of long-established tradition in this field. Yet in the (few) paragraphs dedicated to Genoa and its system of government there is no discussion whatsoever of the Bank of St. George, an institution whose powers and history cannot be ignored if one wishes to assess the political culture and the peculiar history of the Genoese *civitas*. This seems all the stranger since Ricciardelli does use some of the most relevant literature on Genoa.

While Ricciardelli's Tuscan-centric choices in a work dedicated to republicanism in Italy will remain controversial, this book represents a solid contribution to the field. For some of the themes treated, such as the sacred nature of the social body, this is an intriguing development of the historiography on republicanism. On more traditional issues, such as the connection between the language of freedom and protoimperialist

propaganda, Ricciardelli proposes an original framework with which any future scholarship on Renaissance republicanism will have to engage.

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