

**Clémence Revest**

## The Birth of the Humanist Movement at the Turn of the Fifteenth Century

This article provides an overview of how humanism evolved into a “cultural movement” in Italy during the pivotal years between 1400 and 1430. It examines the very notion of “movement” as a specific and challenging concept for intellectual history. It also identifies a significant threshold effect that resulted from related memorial, sociological, and literary processes. The emergence of a collective consciousness grounded in a reflexive relationship to history, the development of practices and references connected to the creation of a dynamic form of sociability, and the establishment of several distinctive markers of inclusive identity all converged to produce a powerfully symbolic “space of possibles” based on the paradigm of the “return to antiquity.” The development of an enduring cultural phenomenon was at work through the circulation and interaction of ideas, social practices, and elements emerging from the collective imagination. This phenomenon flourished well beyond the works of the period’s major authors and created a certain “topicality.”

**Filippo De Vivo**

## Heart of the State, Site of Tension: The Archival Turn Viewed from Venice, ca. 1400-1700

In recent years, a new historiographical trend has focused on archives not as mere repositories of sources, but as objects of inquiry in their own right. Particular attention has been paid to how their continually evolving organization and management reflect the political presuppositions of the institutions presiding over them. This article acknowledges this archival turn and provides an example drawn from the famous case study of the Venetian chancery between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, at a time of substantial developments in the management of archives. It proposes a more inclusive and socially contextualized approach in order to demonstrate that archives were not just tools of power but also sites of economic, social, and political conflict. A close reading of the very document that led to the institutional view of the Venetian archive as the “heart of the state” reveals that the patrician rulers worried about both the fragility of their archive and the reliability of the notaries in charge of it. This perspective helps to explain the exalted representation of the archive in the late Middle Ages and the early modern era—a representation that, taken at face value, continues to inspire historical analysis today—by illuminating the practical difficulties surrounding archival methods at the time. The history of archives emerges as a promising field of inquiry precisely because it can shed light on both the history of the state and the social context in which the state’s actions had to be negotiated.

**Eleonora Canepari**

Porters, Beggars, and Noblemen: The Social Construction of Political Power in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Rome

Employing Norbert Elias’s notion of figuration and referring to models based on the relational nature of power (patron-client, entrepreneur and big-man relationships), this article highlights how the relationship between the elite and the lower classes played a crucial role in the establishment of local power in Rome. The high degree of social mobility amongst the Roman elite made the neighborhood a politically open space: an official list of the aristocracy’s members was not available until the eighteenth century, and the Statute of Rome (1580) simply defined eligible candidates for local offices as “illustrious men of the neighborhood.” In this context, strong territorial connections were key when it came to gaining local power. An interconnected network of relationships linked the lower classes and noble families vertically. Through judicial sources, notarial records, and account books, this article presents the highly personalized nature of exchanges between the elite and the lower classes in addition to the complex web of economic transactions and social relations which was essential to creating a local network of clients.

**Francesco Benigno**

The Imaginary of a Sect: Literature, Politics, and the Nineteenth-Century Origins of the *Camorra*

This article reconsiders the so-called “dangerous classes” by focusing on the historical origins of the Neapolitan *camorra*, one of the world’s major criminal organizations. In the Bourbon Kingdom of Naples, the term *camorristi* referred to marginalized individuals and extortionists who operated in prisons, gambling halls, and brothels. During the turbulent period of Italian unification, such figures were increasingly seen as belonging to a legendary, omnipotent, and influential sect: the *camorra*, an organized secret society with its own hierarchy, customs, and jargon. This image eventually permeated Italian society. This article examines the reasons behind this evolution by focusing on the (mainly literary) texts and (essentially political) dynamics behind it, which reveal a process of criminalization and folklorization. Such a discursive transformation had a major impact on the Italian collective imagination, one that persists today.

**Riccardo Rosolino**

Tyrannical Vices: Resistance to Monopoly, Ideology, and the Market at the Dawn of Modernity

In early modern Catholic Europe, certain theologians imagined and legitimized the possibility that one monopoly could be fought by an equal and opposite monopoly. Market dynamics were thus described in terms of the theory of resistance derived from political thought. During the Old Regime, it was necessary to defend the market and its actors from monopoly, which was associated with hoarding and meant to create scarcity and higher prices. A monopolist could be either a single merchant or a group of them, and there was no distinction between buyers and sellers who behaved in such a way. Monopolistic behavior was usually referred to as a “conspiracy,” which carried obvious political connotations. It was both a crime and a sin in addition to being considered an act of violence and one of the primary

means of violating the principle of commutative justice. Nevertheless, many thought that it was morally acceptable to neutralize a monopolistic action with a similar one. This idea was not restricted to the field of theology and was also taken up by jurists. Thus, the market was no longer simply a place of rules and a forum where goods were valued, but also a space where it was possible to defend oneself against those who manipulated it by applying the very same criminal tactics.

### **Alain Guery**

#### The Unbearable Ambiguity of the Gift

In his book, *Pour une histoire naturelle du don*, François Athané questions the various anthropological, sociological, and philosophical discourses surrounding the fundamental social role of the gift. Taking as his point of departure the notion of the transfer of goods or services as a basic factor both in the exchange of gifts and of the gift itself, the author proceeds to deconstruct certain theories, beginning with Marcel Mauss's *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (first published in French in 1923, and later published in English in 1954). Since such an approach does not permit considering the “gift—receipt—counter-gift” triad as a whole, it does not take into account the obligation to reciprocate highlighted by Mauss and thus deprives the gift of its constitutive role as a social link. Athané thus proposes a new interpretation of the place the gift occupies in human perception and social behavior. He refers to the universalizing nature of the gift as an expression of parental altruism. However, while this establishes a connection between nature and culture (the gift being the cultural form of this natural parental altruism), Athané makes no reference to the social and biological studies that were previously challenged by the authors he cites. This reconsideration of nature, in which society and its rules are said to originate, should give rise to new debates.

### **Robert Descimon**

#### Detours and Contours of Inherited Wealth: The Perennial Structures of Transmission Between Generations

André Masson proposes replacing Gary Becker's “theory” of generational altruism with a structural explanation inspired by Marcel Mauss's famous essay *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (1923), which was rooted in indirect reciprocities between three generations. Masson thereby elaborates a gentle critique of the moral principles often lying beneath the analyses of liberal economists (such as the “demonstration effect,” disenfranchisement, or the theory of *homo reciprocans*). Accepting the ambitions of economic science, Masson nonetheless maintains a conception of the social sciences that is more competitive than cooperative and provides convincing analysis of the economic and social foundations of current intergenerational transfers. The argument developed in this critical note proposes both a historical reading of the ideology of intergenerational equity, which is only conceivable in the transition from the *Trente Glorieuses* to the *Trente Piteuses*, and a structural reading arguing that, for the wealthy classes during the European Old Regime, successful transfers of wealth between generations followed the same formal requirements as those in the twenty-first century.