

The Intellectual World of Sixteenth-Century Florence: Humanists and Culture in the Age of Cosimo I. Ann E. Moyer.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. xiii + 386 pp. \$99.99.

“Great nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts—the book of their deeds, the book of their words, and the book of their art” (John Ruskin, *St. Mark’s Rest: The History of Venice* [1885], preface 1).

By the middle decades of the sixteenth century, when there were no more deeds to be done, Florentines found they still had the arts and letters to console them. In fact, enough of the old alacrity and ethos remained for Florence to be once again a place of intellectual and cultural achievement. “Florence in 1546,” Ann Moyer tells us, “was full of men of letters writing books” (241). And it is to that remarkable community of scholars that Ann Moyer devotes this superb volume. For so many officiants and acolytes of the cult of Florence, the curtain closes around 1537. We all are in Moyer’s debt for reminding us that Florence remained a cultural cynosure for good reason, not least because of the labors of her scholars and the support of her grand duke.

Security and internal stability came at a cost but did offer advantages. Keen to restore Florence’s prestige, Cosimo I took care to cultivate cultural and intellectual pursuits. When the prospective founders of the Accademia Fiorentina and later those of the Accademia Disgeno approached him, he offered financial support and the state imprimatur; thus, an elegant uniformity replaced the rambunctious guilds and confraternities. He recruited faculty, patronized scholars, and defended Paolo Giovio against Charles V. At the same time, Florence fulfilled its territorial vocation, and a growing interest in the collective Tuscan past opened an arena of study with valuable repercussions. A shared devotion to Florentine studies enabled scholars to draw connections between language and custom, the flowering of artistic and literary genius; Moyer helps us appreciate how limits sharpened vision and anchored the imagination.

At its heart, this exemplary book contains a series of close readings of primary texts selected to illustrate the methods, approaches, and obsessions of a bevy of eminences: Giovan Battista Gelli, professional hosier, respected poet, and lecturer at the Accademia Fiorentina; Benedetto Varchi, poet, humanist, historian; Vincenzo Borghini, all-around polymath; Pierfrancesco Giambullari, cleric and scholar of languages; and the most familiar to a wider audience, Giorgio Vasari. Many of them had studied with Piero Vettori, Florence’s most prominent humanist, who himself carried the mantle of Angelo Poliziano.

Chapter 2, for instance, is what one might have wished to read after Felix Gilbert’s *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*. Writing history was an enduring pastime for Florentines, many of whom inherited family *ricordanze*. Moyer ably describes the most popular genres and highlights Jacopo Nardi, exiled from Florence for republican sympathies, and Benedetto Varchi, funded by a Medici stipend yet respected for his neutrality. Both

writers remain respected sources for present-day historians. Varchi's methods were singularly sophisticated. He consulted archives and private collections, interviewed witnesses still living, and in a delightful anecdote took so many volumes of the state archives home with him that Filippo Nerli was unable to use them for his own history.

In a similar vein, Varchi once again, along with Mei and Borghini, applied the humanistic methods in classical textual analysis to the study of the Florentine vernacular. Many of the same names assisted Vasari in the research, writing, and proofreading of his monumental *Lives of the Artists*. The scrupulous study of both the 1550 and expanded 1568 editions of the *Lives* demonstrates both the extent to which it was a collaborative endeavor and the startling novelty of the enterprise. Vasari and Co. confidently departed from ancient and classical humanist precepts, both in the working assumption that artists were worthy of the highest encomia a city had to offer—a history—and in using that history to analyze artistic change over time.

Borghini, eager to deploy humanist tools to study Florentine language, custom, arts, and the city's social classes, may well be the hero of this movable feast. It was he who clearly identified the era's birth pangs in the tensions between emperors and popes and the rise of communal governments, marking the eleventh century as the critical moment when the remnants of Roman civilization became Italian. This was the *rinascimento* of priors, of Giotto and Dante, the definitive turning point that Burckhardt would render canonical, as Michelet would Vasari. Moyer posits that the Florentines' greatest achievement was the story of the Renaissance itself; it became so foundational that we have forgotten its origins. The efforts of that generation of Florentines certainly helped Florence take pride of place in the nineteenth century. As for the rest, as Ruskin reminds us, the only quite trustworthy source is the last.

This is a work of impeccable scholarship, perhaps best appreciated by specialists, but it is enjoyable enough for non-experts to relish and to find useful, especially those scholars seeking primary sources to explore.

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The Power of Cities: The Iberian Peninsula from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period. Sabine Pazram, ed.

The Medieval and Early Modern Iberian World 70. Leiden: Brill, 2019. xxvi + 382 pp. €143.

The purported aim of this essay collection is to examine the significant role some cities had in the history of the Iberian Peninsula from Roman times to the early modern period. However, it would be more accurate to say that this book is about the transformations (or lack thereof) that some Spanish cities experienced in their topography over