Review of La Sfortuna di Jacopo Piccinino: Storia dei Bracceschi in Italia 1423-1465

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Serena Ferente argues that the military and political leader Jacopo Piccinino was at the head of several groups who were on the outside of the Italian League after the mid-1450s. In this role, Jacopo Piccinino was the last condottiere both to command a base across Italy and to propagate the old filo-French allegiances of several groups in opposition to the hardening of the Italian state system. Ferente bases her claims on an impressive array of contemporary and early modern literary sources combined with a deep knowledge of fifteenth-century diplomatic documents. This monograph is a compelling and thought-provoking study that all students of Renaissance politics should read.

Ferente organizes her book around an introduction, nine chapters, conclusion, and appendix. The first chapter examines the rise in power of Jacopo’s predecessors, Braccio Fortebraccio and Jacopo’s father, Niccolò Piccinino. Chapter 2 turns to the years 1444–54, years important for the birth of the enmity between Francesco Sforza and Jacopo Piccinino. Ferente places the moment of break between the two men at the entrance of Sforza into Milan. Ferente argues that the antagonism following the break between Sforza and Piccinino was not simply a conflict between two military men; rather, as ruler of the Milanese state, Sforza became an integral part of the political alliances crossing the Italian peninsula. To fight against Sforza was to oppose not only Sforza himself or even his control of Milan, but also the burgeoning Italian state system with its territorial consolidation and interconnectedness.

The remaining chapters continue to track the ways in which Jacopo Piccinino was a leader for groups in opposition to this state system. Chapter 3 traces Piccinino’s invasion of Sienese territory, in which Piccinino was allied with Alfonso of Aragon. Ferente interprets this event as the last of its kind. She argues that the further integration of the five major Italian powers and, especially, Piccinino’s ally at this time, Naples, into an Italian league brought more territorial stability to Italy and did not allow, in practice, such expansionist aims. Chapter 4 looks at the beginning of the relationship between the French house of Anjou and Jacopo Piccinino and their other Italian allies. Chapter 5 examines both the selection of Piccinino to head the Angevin invasion force starting in 1459 and also the opposition groups in various Italian cities who supported the Angevin invasion against the Italian League. Ferente convincingly interprets this support as evidence of a filo-Angevin Guelfism, a term which she uses to describe a shift in groups formerly supportive of papal positions to a more pro-Angevin stance. This section includes an especially interesting discussion of the role that this Guelfism played in the opposition to the Medici in Florence in the 1450s and 60s. Chapters 7 and 8 present a clear narrative of the Angevin war, ending with the favorable conditions offered to Jacopo Piccinino in 1463 by both Francesco Sforza and King Ferrante in Naples. Chapter 8 relates the marriage of Piccinino to Sforza’s daughter and the capture and killing of Piccinino in Naples in the summer of 1465. The final chapter looks briefly at the identity and activities of the remnants of Piccinino’s followers, the Bracceschi, following Piccinino’s death. Ferente argues that their identity was composed largely by “antipapal interests” and an “anti-Sforza military tradition” (167). The significance of this group was that, for a time, they were “…the other face of the Italian League” (167). The book ends with a historiographical conclusion and an appendix that publishes a sixteenth-century life of Jacopo Piccinino by the bishop Giovan Girolamo Rossi.

This book is an impressively researched and finely written addition to the historiogra-

REVIEWED BY: David Elton Gay, Indiana University

As David Gentilcore says at the beginning of his Medical Charlatanism in Early Modern Italy, “we all know what a ‘charlatan’ is: ‘a pretender to medical skill...’” But, as he shows in this monograph, medical charlatans in early modern Italy were much more than fakes or frauds; the charlatan, though neither a folk practitioner nor an elite medical practitioner, in fact occupied an important place in the medical culture of the period.

Gentilcore’s book is divided into three parts: “Perspectives,” “Goods and Services,” and “Communications,” each looking in detail at the various aspects of the charlatan and his relationship to the social and medical world of early modern Italy. Gentilcore notes in his introduction that he “adopts an openly postmodern approach to introduce the subject” in part I of his book (5). What theory there is, however, is worn very lightly—he approaches his charlatans mostly in a straightforward historical manner throughout the book. This first part, “Perspectives,” consists of two chapters. The first, “Representations,” examines how the charlatan was depicted in literature and art. Although, as one might suspect, many of the depictions of charlatans are negative, a fair number are positive—as Gentilcore writes: “[the range of representations] is quite striking, by no means all expressions of contempt or derision, which suggests that it is time to rethink the whole phenomenon [of charlatanism]” (63). The second chapter moves to self-representations of the charlatans. Given the often negative attitudes toward the charlatans in the period by medical doctors, it is no surprise to find out that the charlatans themselves contested the negative representations. Though the charlatans lacked the prestige of the doctors, they nonetheless saw themselves as providing an essential part of medical treatment; as Gentilcore notes about the charlatan Martino Grimaldi, “far from denying his occupation, he was proud of it” (78). Indeed, charlatans do not seem to have been marginal in their society, but rather were seen as fully a part of the medical culture. As Gentilcore shows, the charlatans tended to be reasonably well-off financially, and often with some education, as were the two charlatans he profiles in his second chapter (64–90). Charlatanism was also something that stretched across generations, with families protecting their unique cures and medicines for considerable periods.

The second part of the book looks at “Goods and Services.” Here Gentilcore looks at