

East Tennessee State University

From the Selected Works of Brian J. Maxson

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Review of *Studies in Renaissance Humanism and Politics: Florence and Arezzo*, by Robert Black.

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Robert Black. *Studies in Renaissance Humanism and Politics: Florence and Arezzo*.

Variorum Collected Studies Series CS969. Farnham: Ashgate Variorum, 2011. xiv + 338 pp. \$165. ISBN: 978-1-4094-0062-2.

For nearly four decades Robert Black has published important books and articles on humanism, politics, and education in Renaissance Tuscany. Black published his first monograph, *Benedetto Accolti and the Florentine Renaissance*, in 1985. Far more than a simple biography, the book is a treasure trove of information about Florence in the mid-Quattrocento. Since the 1980s Black's primary interest has shifted to the study of medieval and Renaissance education, with particular emphasis on Florence and Tuscany. This line of research has produced numerous articles and culminated in two recent book-length publications, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (2001) and *Education and Society in Florentine Tuscany* (2007). These books offer important contributions to the history of Renaissance education and are characterized by comprehensive archival research. The articles collected in the book under review here, *Studies in Renaissance Humanism and Politics: Florence and Arezzo*, contain the same hallmark precision and deep archival foundation found in Black's other major publications while focusing on topics, for the most part, other than Benedetto Accolti or Renaissance education.

The volume contains fifteen articles published between 1985 and 2006 divided into four major categories. Section one, "Humanism," offers five articles ranging from broad arguments about periodization to smaller points on individual manuscripts. For example, "The Donation of Constantine: A New Source for the Concept of the Renaissance?" offers the interesting argument that throughout the medieval period the Donation of Constantine was viewed as ending the classical period and beginning a new one. The implication, thus, is that Renaissance humanists — often credited with creating the classical, medieval, and Renaissance periodization scheme — further developed themes about periodization already present in European thought. Black's focus here on continuities between the Renaissance and earlier periods is characteristic of many of the articles in this collection, as well as Black's other major works. The book's second section, "Machiavelli," presents three articles primarily concerned with the social and political context in which Niccolò Machiavelli worked and lived. Black focuses each article on different ways that Machiavelli, whom Black acknowledges was an innovative figure, nevertheless embodied many aspects typical of members of the Florentine chancery during the Quattrocento. According to Black, Machiavelli had a similar educational, social, and political background to most previous Florentine chancellors. The third section of the book offers five articles on Arezzo during the fifteenth century, especially the changing relationship between that city, the Medici, and Florence. Black makes several strong and convincing arguments in these pieces, most notably his points about the significant changes in the relationship between Arezzo and Florence under Cosimo, Piero, and Lorenzo de' Medici. The book's

final section republishes two articles on republican thought in the Renaissance. Once again, each article is characterized by careful arguments informed by a deep knowledge of intellectual developments in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

As a whole this collection brings together numerous important contributions by one of the leading scholars of Tuscany, humanism, and Renaissance education over the last forty years. Books of collected essays cannot avoid omitting some important pieces from a scholar's oeuvre and some level of repetition. For example, given Black's focus on the history of education over the past three decades it is surprising to find so few articles on this topic in this book. Black points out that these particular articles were superseded by his larger publications; nevertheless, the inclusion of a few more of them may have given readers a more comprehensive picture of Black's scholarship over his career. Readers will find the section on Arezzo to be somewhat repetitious, with the same general argument presented in no less than four articles, often with sections nearly identical from one article to the next. That said, each of these articles also contains unique, important contributions to understanding the triangular relationship between Arezzo, Florence, and the Medici: it would be difficult to omit any of them without losing the whole picture. Regardless of these quibbles, readers of this book will be rewarded with over a dozen articles of quality scholarship from a top historian who is at his best when showing the strong continuities between the politics and thought of medieval and Renaissance Italy.

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