RENAISSANCE HISTORY, ART AND CULTURE

Edited by Humfrey Butters and Gabriele Neher

Warfare and Politics

Cities and Government in Renaissance Tuscany and Venice

Amsterdam University Press

Warfare and Politics

Renaissance History, Art and Culture

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Cover illustration: Flaminio Vacca's Lion, 16th century, now located outside the Loggia dei Lanzi in Florence, Italy

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In memory of Michael Mallett

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In September 2019, Humfrey Butters himself passed away in the final stages of finishing this project *in memoriam* of his great friend and from 1973- 2008, colleague, Michael Mallett. His work on celebrating the legacy of Michael Mallett has now become Humfrey's final contribution to the field of study he loved.

Warfare and Politics, Cities and Government in Renaissance Tuscany and Venice

Editorial Introduction

Humfrey Butters and Gabriele Neher

After the death of Professor Michael Mallett in 2008 two academic events took place, both of which were devoted to honouring the memory of this distinguished Italian Renaissance historian. The first was a conference organized by the University of Warwick at its centre in Venice, the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava, in December 2009; the second was a session, held at the same address, of the Renaissance Society of America's annual conference, which also took place in Venice, in April 2010. Most of the essays of which this volume is composed saw the light originally as contributions to the former or to the latter. The scholarly interests revealed in his works were very broad, both in their subject matter – political and economic, military and diplomatic history – and in their geographical range, and the present collection both reflects these and in some respects goes beyond them, features of which Mallett would have greatly approved. The fact that the University of Warwick has a centre in Venice at all is largely due to him, since more than anyone else he was responsible for the establishment and successful running of the History department's course on Florentine and Venetian Renaissance history, which since 1967 has been taught on the spot in that city, and for assisting the History of Art department to set up its own course in Venice in the 1970's.

In the introductory essay Humfrey Butters provides a survey of the origins and development of the idea of the Renaissance state. In the fourteenth century writers in Italy began to speak of a recovery or revival after a period of darkness; for many of them this was a cultural phenomenon, but some, like Giovanni Villani and Bruni, spoke of a political revival as well. There was no

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attempt, however, to marry these two conceptions, which were based upon different chronologies; and no authors before Burckhardt made a sustained effort to produce an analysis that integrated them. In Burckhardt's great work, however, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, this integration was achieved, by maintaining that what distinguished Italy from other areas of Europe in the period, enabling it to produce the Renaissance, were the unusual political conditions that obtained in it. Northern and central Italy were not governed in the main by one ruler, but by a collection of fiercely competing city states. In this deeply competitive world it was talent and ruthlessness rather than social origins that ensured success, and in this secular and individualistic world the Renaissance *Signori* found natural allies in writers and artists keen to bolster the authority of generous patrons. Burckhardt did not deny the importance of the revival of classical literature and art, but argued that it was the marriage of this with the 'genius' of the Italian people which produced the civilization whose impact upon Western Europe he saw as revolutionary. For him it was Renaissance Italy's blend of realism, individualism and secular attitudes which made it the birthplace of the modern world.

The primary philosophical influence on Burckhardt is taken to be Schopenhauer rather than Gombrich's favoured candidate, Hegel. The afterlife of Burckhardt's notion of the Renaissance state is then traced through the works of modern authors such as Baron, Skinner, Pocock and Chabod. Their ideas are critically examined, and the extent of the divergencies of their views from Burckhardt's is examined. The vigorous and learned debate between Jones, who did not believe in a Renaissance state, and Chittolini, who does, is considered, as is a recent collection of essays that addresses the same theme. Butters draws attention to the significance of Chittolini's admission that Jones was right to maintain that medieval Italian governments were more creative and 'modern' than their Renaissance successors. Studies of the government of Florence's and Venice's regional states show that while in each case the central government was prepared to put heavy demands on the resources of its subject territories, it was also pragmatically aware of the need to respect, as far as possible, their existing constitutional rights and privileges. Nor have those accounts of the Tudor and Valois monarchies, sometimes known as 'Renaissance monarchies', which have seen them as standard-bearers of modernity, won general acceptance. Many recent investigations have been devoted to the study of Renaissance courts and ritual, a scholarly trend for which the work of Norbert Elias is partly responsible. Elias's debt to Burckhardt is discussed, as are the weaknesses both in his approach, and in the structuralism that inspires some of the literature on

the courts. The essay ends with a survey of the criticisms made of the use of anthropological methodology that is a distinguishing feature of most studies of ritual in Italian republics and principates.

In the first section, *Warfare: Politics and Battles, Fighters and Civilians, Narration and Analysis*, siege warfare, and in particular the decisive role played by artillery, is a principal theme of Reinhold Mueller's essay on the capture of Negroponte by the Ottomans in 1470, one of the heaviest blows suffered by Venice in the periodic wars that characterized her relationship with the Turks. A striking feature of this piece is that in addition to a lucid account of the fall of Negroponte and of the destruction of Aenos by the Venetians in the preceding year, for which the Turkish assault on the Venetian city was intended as a just revenge, Mueller addresses a neglected but undoubtedly interesting aspect of the topic: the fate of the women, some with children, who fell into Turkish hands, and were forced to watch the execution of their menfolk. Many of those who, by escaping their captors, or by being ransomed, managed to reach Venice were given financial assistance by the government. Two of them were among the founders of the Franciscan Observant convent of Santo Sepolcro and were subsequently beatified by Franciscan hagiographers, together with another co-founder and an early recruit to the convent. It was most unusual, as Mueller points out, for four *beate* to be associated with one convent; and it provides a telling illustration of the importance of the religious dimension to the conflicts between Venice and the Ottomans.

Simon Pepper considers a crucial aspect of another war involving Venice, her struggle against the League of Cambrai. This is the nature and extent of resistance that the workers and peasants of Venice's *Terraferma* dominions offered to her opponents. Serious difficulties confront an investigation of this sort: contemporary accounts, for example, were bound to be affected by vested interests, and the willingness of urban populations to surrender to the forces of the League cannot be taken as proof of affection for the French or its other members; for it might simply have reflected a keen desire to avoid the sack that military conventions allowed besiegers to inflict upon towns or cities they had been forced to storm. Pepper is well aware of the traps, and has assembled ample and convincing evidence of considerable loyalty to Venice of the lower orders of society, both rural and urban: a fact on which Machiavelli commented during a stay in Verona in late 1509. Pro-Venetian peasants and urban workers were to be found acting in a variety of roles: as scouts and messengers in territory occupied by Venice's enemies; as members of guerrilla bands quite prepared to attack regular troops; and as components of massed contingents numbering many thousands.

Venice's relationship with her subjects and with the enemies that she faced in the War of the League of Cambrai is also the subject of Krystina Stermole's essay, which through a searching examination of the woodcut images that accompanied the political pamphlets printed during the conflict seeks to cast light upon the opinions of those formally excluded from formal political life, whose views were certainly not ignored by the patriciate. The pamphlets were cheap and were often produced days after the events they recounted. The woodcuts that accompanied them were not mere ancillary items, but were clearly regarded as a form of expression in their own right, whose message could be quite independent of that of the written texts. Stermole is careful not to overplay her hand, and quite rightly remarks that in general it is frequently not clear whether the underlying messages conveyed by the pamphlets reflected the views of those who produced them, or represented, rather, the opinions that their producers thought were current among the general population. The importance of these texts and images is made clear by the fact that Venice's opponents made use of such instruments of persuasion themselves.

One keen contemporary observer of Venice's conduct of warfare in this period was Niccolò Machiavelli, who found her deployment of mercenaries thoroughly distasteful. John Najemy addresses a significant question that has for long puzzled Machiavelli scholars: why in the *Art of War* did he choose as a spokesman for his views on the disastrous consequences of relying upon the services of mercenaries, and the indispensability of a citizen militia, a noble condottiere, Fabrizio Colonna, whose career and ideas would seem to have suited him, rather, to be the object of a Machiavellian diatribe. A meticulous textual and historical analysis enables Najemy to reject two, conflicting, solutions to this problem: the first, that Machiavelli chose Fabrizio because the Colonna family was close to the Soderini, and so enemies of the Medici: the second, that Fabrizio was selected in order to provide an Italian, rather than narrowly Florentine, spokesman for Machiavelli's views, who had the additional advantage of being close to the Medici, whose patronage Machiavelli was anxious to gain. He concludes that the true role Fabrizio was intended to play in the dialogue was a dual one: on the one hand, to present a powerful statement of Machiavelli's own position, all the more telling for being delivered by a man whose career represented its polar opposite; on the other, to produce unconvincing and self-serving justifications of the yawning gulf between that career and the ideas that he was defending.

A sharp and illuminating contrast to Machiavelli's atrabilious views about the conduct of warfare in Italy is to be found in Maurizio Arfaioli's essay on Charles V's siege of Düren in 1543. The Italian and Florentine soldiers

lent to the Emperor on this occasion by Duke Cosimo de' Medici played a star part in that critical military encounter, thanks to whose successful outcome Charles V was able to crush the Duke of Cleves-Jülich's rebellion, and so administer a telling, though not decisive, blow to the formidable coalition that faced him, composed of the French, some German princes and the Ottomans, and also ward off a pressing threat to the Netherlands. In another respect, however, this contribution illustrates a thoroughly Machiavellian theme: the interweaving of politics and warfare. Thanks to the military assistance Cosimo provided, together with substantial financial aid, he was able to obtain from the Emperor the restitution of the citadels of Florence and Livorno, a crucial stage in the growth of ducal power and independence. The siege itself is also noteworthy from a military point of view, since it reveals the weakness of the architectural solution adopted not merely at Düren, but elsewhere in Germany, and in parts of England, in order to face the growing menace of heavy artillery, which involved reinforcing the existing walls with great masses of earth, surrounding them with deep ditches, and protecting the city gates with semi-circular bastions. This proved itself to be decidedly inferior to the *trace italienne* increasingly favoured by Italian military architects and their employers.

The second part of the volume, *Political Language and Careers, Urban Identity and Transformation, the Physical Environment*, opens with Fabrizio Ricciardelli's essay on Italian and, in particular, Florentine political conflict and the ways in which it shaped political imagery. The popular government that established itself in 1282 had recourse to a binary metaphorical opposition between wolves and lambs, which had classical and Christian roots, to describe the relationship between the magnates and the *popolo*. These powerful verbal images were deployed as one of the justifications for the anti-magnatial legislation that, in Florence and elsewhere, was promulgated in the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries. As Ricciardelli percipiently observes, these categories could also be deployed to characterize other sorts of political conflict, as they were by Dante, and to justify by their very starkness the executions and political proscriptions suffered by the losers in these struggles.

Richard Goy's insightful study is also concerned with political values, and with a particular form of expression of them, that is, their petrification. He is concerned to bring to light the relationship between the architectural qualities exhibited by the palaces of Venetian nobles and the virtues for which Venetian government and society were meant to stand. Values such as magnificence, stability, endurance, symmetry and order, for example, could, without excessive strain, be seen as characteristics both of Venetian

palaces and of the Venetian state. In this way architecture could contribute to the myth of Venice. Goy also shows how great was the stylistic influence of the Palazzo Ducale, that unique example of Venetian *Staatssymbolik*: its traceried colonnades, for example, were widely copied in the design of Venetian palaces in the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries; and so were the figures of lions, symbolizing strength and fortitude, that inhabit the external facades of the seat of government. Patrician palaces, therefore, made clear for all to see the standing and prestige of the families that built them; but, at the same time, they served as visually powerful reminders of how closely those clans were to be identified with the government of the state.

In Gaby Neher's contribution another salient feature of Venetian government is addressed: the relationship of Venice with one of her most important subject cities, Brescia. Her main source for this enquiry is Marin Sanudo's *Diaries*. In her treatment of this fundamental work she makes interesting use of the suggestive comparison, drawn by Patricia Fortini Brown, between Venetian historians' manner of recording events, with a minimum of commentary, and that employed in Venetian narrative painting. Neher's point is that one has to read Sanudo's descriptions carefully, in order to penetrate the true meaning of the occurrences he relates. The case study that she analyses to illustrate these themes is the visit to Brescia of Caterina Cornaro, former Queen of Cyprus, in 1497. The ostensible reason for the visit was the impending confinement of her sister-in-law Elisabetta, who was married to Caterina's brother Giorgio, *podestà* of Brescia; but from the point of view of the Venetian government, since Caterina's arrival in Brescia coincided with a series of important meetings between Milanese and Venetian military representatives, it could be used to boost Venetian prestige during these negotiations, since she could be seen as its quasi-regal representative. Even though she was not authorized to participate in these discussions, her visit provided the occasion for jousts and tournaments in which Venetian and Milanese commanders and their soldiers participated, and it attracted the attention of prominent figures in neighbouring courts, such as Isabella and Beatrice d'Este. It also served to project a glorious image of Brescia, and this, as Neher rightly observes, indirectly contributed to the fame and reputation of the city to which Brescia was subject.

The nature of Venice's relationship with her *terraferma* dominions is also considered in Jane Stevens Crawshaw's enterprising essay, which investigates the problems of infection and pollution that confronted the city and its territories, and the measures taken to address them. A long-standing feature of writings dedicated to celebrating the signal and singular qualities of the Venetian Republic had been the intimate connection their authors perceived

between those attributes and the unique physical environment of the city; but it was also true that infection and pollution could be seen as divine punishments for moral or governmental failings. Some of these discussions are to be found in medical works, since in the early modern period medical theory placed great weight upon the role of the environment in causing or combating disease, but they were certainly not confined to them, and one reason for this is that in Venice corporeal metaphors, a standard feature of medieval political thought, could be used both to describe the state and to characterize its physical setting. Cristoforo Sabbadino, for example, used parts of the body to characterize the functions of the various elements of which the Venetian lagoon was composed. The city itself he saw as the heart. All of these elements had to be kept in good working order to preserve the health of the whole. Not all commentators on infection and pollution in the Venetian state who had recourse to the metaphor of a body were uncritical of Venice itself: the nuncio Marcantonio Corfino, for example, spoke of the Venetian *dominio* as a mystical body, but then proceeded to attack the trade ban imposed upon Verona during the plague of 1575-1577, claiming that it would have negative effects on that entire body. On the whole, however, Venetian public health policies were distinguished by a pragmatic awareness that Venice's interests were indissolubly bound up with those of her subject cities, so that remedies were rarely adopted that benefited the capital city regardless of their impact upon the rest of the state.

Venice was not the only city to survive the Italian wars with its republican constitution intact, Lucca did so too. Christine Shaw's essay investigates its often strained relationship with the ruler of Spain and the Holy Roman Empire. What Charles V wanted from Lucca was loyalty and cash. What the city government wanted was protection and the confirmation of Lucca's privileges, which it claimed in view of its status as an imperial city, but it found less agreeable the onerous demands of the Emperor and his representatives for protection money, destined to fund the operations of the Spanish and imperial armies. These requests were based on a wholly exaggerated view of Lucca's ability to pay, which was itself the product of a failure to distinguish between the limited financial resources of the government and the economic prosperity of Lucchese merchants. Shaw provides a lucid and perceptive guide to the course of negotiations between Lucca's rulers and Charles's representatives, and shows that although Lucca often had to pay out more than she wanted, she often succeeded in securing a reduction in her contributions, sometimes by direct appeals to the Emperor himself, who was capable of showing himself less exigent than his agents. She concludes

that this evidence, at least, shows that Charles was not prejudiced against republics as a matter of principle.

One great city whose republican constitution did not survive in this period was Florence. Until 1530 those who were victorious in Florence's political conflicts were normally content to enjoy their success within a republican context; Suzy Butters's study considers a family, the Medici, which drastically departed from that precedent, even though duke Cosimo de' Medici I (r.1537-1574) liked to represent his government as a continuation of the republic. Exploiting a hitherto unstudied ancestral connection between Cosimo and the reviled Walter de Brienne, Duke of Athens, Florence's tyrannical *signore a vita* (r.1342-1343), which was brought to Cosimo's attention in 1567, she compares the steps taken by the two autocrats to consolidate their authority and military hold on the city, examining why the parallels existed, and asking whether Cosimo sought to publicise or to mask them. Both rulers, for example, would reside in the seat of republican government, the *Palazzo dei Priori*, extend the space around it, attend to controlling the Mercato Nuovo, and transform the defences of Florence's Oltrarno, Walter by adding towers to the walls, fortifying its gates, and building a new street up the Costa San Giorgio hill, on whose summit he planned to build a citadel. Cosimo's important military constructions on the hill's slopes and summit in the 1540's, whose complex and poorly understood history this essay reconstructs in depth, were far more ambitious, not least because they methodically but stealthily prepared the way for the family's better known projects on the hill from 1550 onwards: the Medici acquisition and development of the Pitti property; the 1568 construction of the Belvedere; and, in 1590, the erection of a fortress below it, on the site where the Duke of Athens had envisaged his citadel. Some of Cosimo's works were intended to protect the city against external threats, but in most cases their primary objective was to protect the Medici dukes and dynasty against internal menaces; significantly, in some cases, their true purpose could be partially masked, by the involvement of Eleonora di Toledo, Cosimo's wife, and by defining their goals as aesthetic rather than authoritarian. Whatever Cosimo really thought of Walter of Brienne, he would have been ill advised to praise him too openly, given the unpopularity of his government and the ignominious fashion in which it was brought to an end. Butters rightly points out, however, that Walter's title had other, more politically and socially prestigious associations for the Medici, as did a potential family link with the irresistible attractions of Athens's cultural history. These other associations, Butters persuasively suggests, help to explain why Cosimo felt able to commission a portrait of Walter to add to his collection of copies of the portraits of famous men and

women housed in Giovio's *museo* in Como, and to publicly display it in his own *museo*, in the ducal palace.

In the Epilogue Stella Fletcher provides a lively and informative account of how the surviving architectural monuments of the world analysed in this volume were viewed by an architect of the last century who, like Michael Mallett, resided in Warwickshire. Edwin Reynolds's unpublished diary of his tour of Italy in 1902, which Mallett had read, not merely contains the opinions of a highly competent observer, nourished on the views of Ruskin, about the buildings he visited in Rome and Florence, Venice and Milan; but it also records in exhaustive detail the places where he stayed and the sums of money that he spent. It casts considerable light, therefore, on the nature of educated, middle-class tourism in the period before the Great War. After the Epilogue we have included a bibliography of Michael Mallett's publications.

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