

**Ricciardelli, F., and Zorzi A., eds., *Emotions, Passions, and Power in Renaissance Italy. Proceedings of the International Conference Georgetown University at Villa Le Balze, 5-8 May 2012* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press), 2015. ISBN: 9789089647368**

“The Italian Renaissance continues to hold an important place in historians' periodization of Western history. Yet Renaissance Italy plays an oddly small role in most histories of emotions” (p. 15): so Barbara Rosenwein, one of the most influential practitioners of the history of emotions, and the founder of the emotional communities research line, opens her essay *The place of Renaissance Italy in the History of Emotions*, the first of the volume. The conference *Emotions, Passion, and Power in Renaissance Italy* and the publishing of its proceedings were aimed, in fact, at (partially, of course) filling the gap. Almost then years later, this volume still stands as one of the most remarkable attempts to do so, for the clarity of vision about the surprising scholarly negligence of the Italian Renaissance in the otherwise quite advanced field of the history of emotions (not yet fully gotten over), for the scientific quality of each contribution, and for the strong link to forward-looking methodological issues established by the case-studies, none of which falls into the trap of self-referentiality.

The scope of the conference was to retrace “every possible passion bound to the use and exercise of power”, “in Italian urban societies between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries” (p. 7). The nexus between emotions and power – that cannot but recall Reddy's emotional regimes – and the contextualization in specific communities operated by most contributions, set two of the major study traditions in history of emotions to work together, with appreciable results.

Ricciardelli, Lazzarini, Ferente, Gamberini, Ferrante (contributions no 2, 5, 6, 10, 11) deal with the most classical meaning of *power*: the political one. Ricciardelli, pointing out that in late medieval Italy violent repression of political dissidents was generally justified as a means to reach governability, shows how a metaphorical language resorting to emotions was used as a political weapon, creating an interesting example of how the study of emotions can result in a better understanding of the general political configuration of a historical period. Lazzarini and Gamberini analyse the diplomatic correspondences of Lorenzo de' Medici and the Visconti chancery, retracing rhetoric schemes built on emotions that help us understand the self-fashioning strategy of the former and the self-legitimization policy of the latter. Ferente studies the marriage metaphor as a way to raise emotions in political language, Ferrante the emotional strategies, complying with the established power, of lay companies that comforted the sentenced to death.

Lansing and Smail (4, 7) highlight specific economic and social factors that contribute to the affirmation of power on lower classes. Lansing, by analysing the emotional dimensions in three denunciations of rape to the florentine authority (mainly regarding rage, anger, and humiliation) surveys rape as a power strategy of the dominating class. Smail argues that the debt recovery practices in fourteenth-century Lucca and Marseille were systematically used to deliver constant stress and humiliation to lower rank people, in order to ensure governability, much more than the criminal justice, which involved a greatly inferior number of victims.

Cohn, Soltes and Milner (8, 9, 12) focus on scientific progress, architectonic symbolism and rhetoric. Cohn conveys that pandemic do not cause hate rise against minorities as automatically as commonly thought. In fact, in the many cases he analyses through countries and eras, the scape-goat mechanism appears not to be directly proportional to the scientific development, as it would seem reasonable. Finally, Soltres examines the emotive power of the symbol of the dome in various cultures, times, and religious contexts, while Milner analyses the persuasive power of the rhetoric in the context of the communal life as the most used means to manage affects and emotions.

I wish to conclude with two essays located at the beginning of the volume, Zorzi's and Rosenwein's (3 and 1), as the first offers a useful template of an interdisciplinary study capable of creating an exhaustive fresco of the general emotional atmosphere of a period, and the latter's strong call to action is still fully valid and needed today. In Zorzi's paper, the shift to seigniorial asset of the 1330s – a classic of the traditional historiography – is re-read through the lenses of the history of emotions, applied to a textual source, the *Chronicle* by Giovanni Villani, and two figurative ones, *The Triumph of Death* by Buonamico Buffalmacco, and Ambrogio Lorenzetti's allegories of the good and the bad government. The result is a fascinating reconstruction of the sense of turmoil and anxiety, accompanied by a nostalgic idealization of the recent past, that overwhelmed cities and citizens facing an ineluctable rise of tyranny. As for Rosenwein's call to actions, in order to restore Renaissance Italy's “rightful place among the many other communities of Western Europe” (p. 26), suggests a clear and solid methodological path, *i.e.* considering together past emotional theories and practices: “Rather than take modern emotion terms and and look for their equivalents in the past, we should find the emotions of the past from its own vocabulary, [...] because terms that have emotional resonance for us today did not always have affective valence, while words that expressed emotions in the past do not always continue to do so today” (p. 25).