

R. Burr Litchfield. *Florence Ducal Capital, 1530-1630*. ACLS Humanities E-Book, 2008. Review by JUDITH C. BROWN, WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY.

This is an important book. It is the culmination of years of work by one of the leading historians of early modern Italy. Anyone interested in the culture and society of Renaissance Florence and of urban development in early modern European cities would benefit from reading it.

Before focusing on some of the specific topics it covers, I would like to turn to the book as an artifact because herein lies part of its significance. The book would not yield nearly as many riches as it does if it were not an electronic book. Its ability to lead the reader digitally to the cartographic, visual, and other sources on which the book's scaffolding is built make this a new kind of book—a book which could not have been envisioned before the digital revolution and which uncovers an enormous amount of valuable information and insight as one digs into its maps, census databases, footnotes, and other electronically available information.

As its title suggests, this book concentrates on what were once called the forgotten centuries of Florence. Yet the author also provides useful comparisons with what went on before and, occasionally, with what went on elsewhere, so as to set this moment of Florentine history in better perspective. He sets the scene by noting that in 1537, when Cosimo I de' Medici became duke, the city had already experienced 1500 years of urban development. Some of those periods, he claims, were more formative than others. He notes three in particular. The first was that of the Roman foundation, which established the city's site, north of the Arno river. The second was the Medieval and Early Renaissance period, when the city's development as an important mercantile republic was reflected in its rapid spread to ever expanding city walls, the building of imposing political and religious monuments, and the construction of patrician palaces for its merchant and banking elite. The third was the first century of the duchy, when the newly established Medici dukes made changes in the state's political structure that were reflected in the urban fabric of the city. After this period, the city remained basically unchanged until the middle of the nineteenth-century, when for a brief moment it became the capital

of Italy and yet again the site of major urban changes.

What then are some of the major transformations Litchfield observes in the social geography of the city in the period under central consideration? Changes in the fortification system began before the end of the republic in response to new military technology. But the first dukes added to them principally by building the Fortezza da Basso, aimed as much at protection against domestic enemies as against foreign ones. More important, Cosimo I began to implement his vision of a city as the capital of a more centralized state and the seat of a court that he hoped would be a player in the European court system. To this end, he acquired and enlarged the Pitti Palace—a project that together with the creation of the Boboli gardens also required the attention of his immediate successors. With the court installed there, a new axis of political power emerged, emanating from the Pitti Palace and running north along the Vasari corridor connecting it to the Uffizi, newly built to accommodate expanded governmental functions, and to the enlarged and redecorated Palazzo della Signoria (renamed Palazzo Ducale), where government offices were also located. In effect, there was now a new axis of political power, starting south of the river and running northwards. Members of the court, to be closer to the new source of power, social prestige, and economic possibilities, began to abandon their old neighborhoods, which had been the center of their political power and sociability, and moved into grander palaces also located primarily on a north-south axis—along Via Tornabuoni and across the river to Via Maggio and nearby streets (all visible in clickable maps). In less crowded areas and helped by new laws that facilitated the expropriation of small neighboring houses, patricians could now build themselves palaces (also clickable) fit for courtiers and top-level ducal bureaucrats, larger and more extravagant in style than those of the early Renaissance. All of this was more than a spatial change: it was a dismantling of the neighborhood-centered sociopolitical system that had existed in the republic.

As the patricians moved, leaving behind those neighborhoods that had greater concentrations of working-class people, the character of neighborhoods changed, becoming more differentiated by wealth and social standing. The most densely poor neighborhoods, often headed by women, clustered especially close to the northeast and southwest

edges of the city. Litchfield follows these changes through socio-economic information found in sixteenth and seventeenth century censuses and tax records, whose usefulness and lacunae he treats deftly both in methodological discussions and in maps that reflect the changing composition of neighborhoods. He notes that the building and redecorating that took place, the lifestyles of courtiers and patricians, and the manufacturing of some products for international markets supported a wide range of industries and economic activities whose vitality through most of the sixteenth century scholars have begun to emphasize only recently. A dense cluster of shops continued to dominate the center of the city; industrial occupations tended to be closer to the periphery; wool gave way to silk as the premier textile industry, which occasioned changes in the types and locations of related activities further out from the center and in the social and gender composition of those who worked in them. The wealth- and status-preserving strategies of the patricians, aided by the Catholic reformation, added to the number of people in religious institutions, especially women, who inhabited convents located largely at the edges of town.

Much more could be said about the findings of this book, which is in effect a study of how all aspects of its history are reflected in its urban fabric. Litchfield observes that in its heyday, Florence resembled the ideal city imagined by Leon Battista Alberti. But Alberti did not take account of the need to locate certain industrial activities at the periphery of town and that social stratification would place many of the poor in those locations. Thus, when in 1630, Florence was struck by a major plague epidemic that was making its way down the Italian peninsula, the poor were the first and the most grievously affected, partly because the plague entered literally through the town gates and partly because the poor were living in ever more crowded and difficult conditions due to the economic downturn of the previous decade. Litchfield follows the geographic advance of plague-related deaths in a fascinating chapter that uses the registers recording burials as well as the addresses of those transported to lazarettos. While precise mortality figures can only be estimated, one thing is clear: the city emerged a shell of its former self, having lost its former rank as one of the leading centers of European innovation. The book's last

map, showing the location of houses left empty by the plague, is a visual reminder of this loss of place and of past glories.

Todd Butler. *Imagination and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008. x + 200 + 5 illus. Price \$99.95. Review by MARGERY KINGSLEY, CAMERON UNIVERSITY.

*Imagination and Politics* proposes a tantalizing corrective to the increasingly voluminous body of scholarship on political rhetoric in seventeenth-century England: shift our focus from the spectacle of power to the imaginative faculties that produce and process that spectacle and we allow for a wider “range of relationships among political actors” than is generally currently available (5). Rather than studying either language or visual rhetoric in relative isolation, Butler urges, we must remember that for the seventeenth century the mere act of thinking constituted political action—as witnessed by arguments in the trial of the Caroline regicides. In grounding politics in the imagination, a faculty which both produces images and enables a corresponding belief in those images, we reject “a bipolar and fundamentally repressive model of subjectivity for a more interdependent relationship between a nation’s political actors” (12). Power, thus rightly conceived, does not inhere in control of a material infrastructure for image production and dissemination, but rather is negotiated between an authoring subjectivity that seeks to exert its political will by creating images of power and the corresponding imagination of an audience that can choose to invest in those images or create its own, alternative, political action. The fact that images are produced, that is, does not necessarily mean that they are believed, and it is the dynamics of that disjunction that Butler seeks to trace through four important seventeenth-century bodies of work: the writings of Francis Bacon, the masques of the Caroline court, the dramatic and political works of John Milton, and the historical and philosophical writings of Thomas Hobbes.

The volume’s revisionist claims to demonstrate that imagination and belief, rather than reason, are the keys to understanding political rhetoric in the seventeenth century may seem somewhat overstated