

Chronicling History: Chroniclers and Historians in Medieval and Renaissance Italy, ed. Sharon Dale, Alison Williams Lewin and Duane J. Osheim (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State U.P., 2007; pp. xx + 332. \$25).

Those accustomed to the centralised and semi-official histories produced by the monks of St Denis and St Albans understandably find Italy's urban chronicles to be the epitome of navel-gazing. For centuries the secular historiography of northern Italy endured mostly within the boundaries of a given city and its hinterland and in proud isolation from the outside world. Even the seminal labours of L.A. Muratori (1672–1750), who assembled Italian sources written between 500 and 1500 into his monumental *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, only served to reinforce the original narrowness of scope. Italians call this brand of local patriotism *campanilismo*, that is, adhering to one's *campanile*, or church-bell, the location of which dictates one's orientation and the ringing of which defines one's community. Such attitudes still thrive, both in Italy and beyond. Yet gradually, and especially thanks to the idolisation (by Jacob Burckhardt and his followers) of all things Florentine, Italian annals, chronicles and histories came to be seen as a depository of those sparks of genius that ignited modern historiography.

The editors of *Chronicling History*, then, inaccurately claim that Italian medieval historical writing is a 'largely unappreciated historical resource'. On the other hand, scholarship on the topic has certainly been skewed toward the greater Renaissance city-republics such as Milan, Florence and Venice, and has engaged in a teleological quest for humanists and their heralds. In this sense, the studies which constitute this volume are a very welcome contribution for two main reasons. First, in their treatment of some acclaimed texts and authors, they expose the genre's methodological *unoriginality*, partisanship, and provincialism, without in any way detracting from its accomplishments. Secondly, by offering equal space for lesser-known works, the collection introduces non-specialists to the wealth of literary sources that have been unnecessarily marginalised in influential narratives of the Italian Renaissance.

The volume purports to serve as both an introductory survey and a basic reader of historical works produced mainly in central and northern Italy. (The gesture toward current-day southern Italy appears in the shape of G.A. Loud's learned study of several Sicilian texts; its relevance to the general framework, however, is assumed rather than explained.) The eleven chapters comprising the book range chronologically, from the eleventh to the fifteenth century, as well as in scope, from contributions focusing on individual authors, to those treating a sequence of chronicles pertaining to one city, to comparisons of two or more contemporaneous writers. Each essay concludes with a selection of passages from the work/s discussed, some of which are original translations, and others reproductions of previously published translations.

The book's chapters vary widely in scope and method as well as in quality. The essays by P. Clarke on the Villani chronicles, J. Melville-Jones on Venetian historians, G. Ianziti on Leonardo Bruni, and N. Pellegrino on Flavio Biondo are very satisfying indeed: they argue clear theses that are situated within their respective sub-fields, offer just enough context, and address the related issues of patronage, motivations, audience, language, and sources. Jointly these studies situate their subjects as 'products of their times and places' rather than early forerunners of Rankean empiricism and rationality.

If the familiar image of early humanist historiography is largely undermined by the aforementioned essays, others broaden the scope of the debate altogether by examining works that hitherto have remained relatively obscure. J. Dotson's introduction to the unique Genoese annals, D.J. Osheim's study of Giovanni Sercambi's chronicle of Lucca, and B.G. Kohl's comparative essay on two Carrarese annals amply illustrate the rewards of taking the road (so far) less travelled. Ample testimony to the appeal of these sources, but also to the consequences of their undue neglect, is provided by the fact that economists such as Avner Greif have used them to establish patterns of institutional development and economic growth, albeit without a sufficiently nuanced understanding of their linguistic conventions and political context. In any case, the process of de-marginalising such writings is a valuable one and should only accelerate with the appearance of the eagerly anticipated *Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle*. Meanwhile, the contributors should be congratulated for filling a historiographical lacuna, especially outside of Italian scholarship.

Since the mid-twentieth century, historians of all periods and regions have had to address the implications of the so-called linguistic turn. While the volume's editors acknowledge the significance of this shift and even map major responses to it in their preface, they neither impose the task on the individual contributors nor pursue the topic themselves with a concluding synthetic essay. This is unfortunate, and contributes to a general lack of cohesion in the volume as a whole. The absence of thematic cross-referencing among authors is moreover surprising, given that the essays originated in a series of conference panels, where such matters were presumably aired and debated. Consequently, this reader was often left with an impression of flickering insights regarding individual works or authors, such as E. Coleman's observation on the inherently collaborative nature of the early Lombard annals and the particular appeal of notaries as truthful chroniclers—points also evident from Dotson's chapter on Genoa. What could otherwise have been a seminal and much-needed English-language companion to late-medieval Italian historiography adds up to no more than the sum of its parts; and the book will be more useful to scholars interested in individual works or authors, than as a point of departure for the historiography of a particular city or the region as a whole.

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