

NICOLAI RUBINSTEIN, *Studies in Italian History in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, 1: *Political Thought and the Language of Politics: Art and Politics*. Ed. Giovanni Ciappelli. (Storia e Letteratura, 216.) Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2004. Paper. Pp. xxv, 407 plus 20 black-and-white plates; 1 black-and-white figure. €52

The three volumes of Nicolai Rubinstein's collected essays, of which this is the first, will do much to bring his legacy and immense achievement into full view. Rubinstein, who died in August 2002 at the age of ninety-one, is perhaps best known for his classic study of Medici control of Florentine politics, *The Government of Florence under the Medici (1434 to 1494)* (Oxford, 1966; 2nd ed. 1997), and for his intellectual leadership, and preparation of two of the volumes, in the ongoing project of the publication of Lorenzo de' Medici's letters with richly detailed commentary and documentary apparatus. But the republication of Rubinstein's many and weighty essays now reminds us that his work extended to a vast range of topics in the intellectual, political, diplomatic, architectural, and art history of much of Italy, and not only of Florence, between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. The second and third volumes are subtitled, respectively, *Politics, Diplomacy, and the Constitution in Florence and Italy* and *Humanists, Machiavelli, and Guicciardini*. For thematic, chronological, and geographical scope, Nicolai Rubinstein has no peer among twentieth-century historians of late-medieval and Renaissance Italy.

As the editor Giovanni Ciappelli explains (pp. xxii-xxiv), Rubinstein himself arranged the essays into three volumes and, in the case of the first, introduced a few corrections and additions, mainly in the notes and contained within brackets. Prefaced by an illuminating introduction and *ricordo* of Rubinstein by Daniel Waley, this first volume includes, in the order of their initial publications between 1942 and 2001, Rubinstein's major essays on Italian political thought to the end of the fifteenth century. The only ones that reach beyond into the sixteenth century are a 1967 essay, "Vasari's Painting of the Foundation of Florence in the Palazzo Vecchio," which also deals with the long history of speculation concerning the city's origins, and two general surveys, "Le dottrine politiche nel Rinascimento" (1979) and "*Florentina libertas*" (1986). One paper appears in print here for the first time: "Dante and Nobility," a substantial analysis written in the early 1970s of both Dante's ideas on the subject and the problem of public order in Florence in his time. The volume opens with four essays that long ago became obligatory reading for any student of Italian political thought: the groundbreaking analysis of nascent political ideas in early Florentine chronicles ("The Beginnings of Political Thought in Florence," 1942); the exploration of ideas of history and historical change in the northern communes, especially in the writings of Albertino Mussato ("Some Ideas of Municipal Progress and Decline in the Italy of the Communes," 1957); the decoding of political paintings in Siena ("Political Ideas in Siense Art: The Frescoes of Ambrogio Lorenzetti and Taddeo di Bartolo in the Palazzo Pubblico," 1958); and (a favorite of mine) the demonstration of how deeply rooted the political theory of Marsilius of Padua was in contemporary political language and assumptions ("Marsilius of Padua and Italian Political Thought of His Time," 1965). These papers show Rubinstein's early immersion in the historiographical and political texts of the communal period and his emphasis on the decisive impact of Aristotelian concepts of the state, forms of government, citizenship, and the "common good" after the translation of the *Politics* into Latin in the 1260s.

The early essays laid the foundation of much of what followed in Rubinstein's oeuvre. Largely unchanged in subsequent work was his conviction, explicitly argued in the volume's last essay ("Le origini medievali del pensiero repubblicano del secolo XV," 2001), that the political thought of the Renaissance had its origins between the mid-thirteenth and the early fourteenth century: against the threat of both imperial domination and the rise of the *signori*, or "despots," writers including Brunetto Latini, Tolomeo of Lucca, Remigio de'

Girolami, Albertino Mussato, Marsilius, and many other chroniclers, poets, and preachers, most of whom built on Aquinas's understanding of Aristotle, defined and defended the "liberties" of communal and republican government. Rubinstein did not deny that the humanists, sporadically in the fourteenth and more systematically in the fifteenth century, brought new twists and emphases to this cluster of political ideas; and, as the last volume will make clear, he also underscored the original and even revolutionary aspects of early-sixteenth-century political thinking. But the basic issues and questions, the "language of politics" (as the book's subtitle puts it) of Renaissance Italy, first took shape in that decisive early period under the influence of both Aristotle and Roman moralists and historians. In this wide-ranging argument, Rubinstein quietly anticipated similar conclusions of more recent scholarship.

Rubinstein was as skilled at reconstructing the history of particular words (as in his 1971 "Notes on the Word *Stato* in Florence before Machiavelli" and "The History of the Word *Politicus* in Early Modern Europe" of 1987) and deciphering the political meaning of works of art (as in the aforementioned 1958 paper on the Sieneese frescoes and in his 1987 "Classical Themes in the Decoration of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence" and again in "Le allegorie di Ambrogio Lorenzetti nella Sala della Pace e il pensiero politico del suo tempo" of 1997) as he was in dealing with individual writers and the particular circumstances in which texts were produced (as in the two essays of 1985–86 on Bartolomeo Platina's reworking of the "De principe," dedicated to Ludovico Gonzaga of Mantua, into the "De optimo cive" dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici a few years later). The scope, erudition, and mastery of a huge corpus of classical as well as medieval and Renaissance texts that pervade Rubinstein's scholarship cannot fail to renew one's admiration, even upon second or third readings. Yet, if there is one area in which these essays may be found wanting, it lies for this reader in the curious absence of sustained, programmatic attention to political documents and practices as a source, or reflection, of political thought, especially in the communal period. The Italian city-states produced vast amounts of legislation, deliberations, legal opinions, guild records, and other kinds of documents, which constitute a veritable storehouse of precisely contextualized political ideas. Ironically, while Rubinstein occasionally made excellent use of such sources for the Medici period that he knew so well, he was apparently not tempted to do the same for the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The ways in which the neglect of such sources limits the possibilities of interpreting political thought are implicit throughout these papers, but particularly apparent in the volume's one semitheoretical essay, "Problems of Evidence in the History of Political Ideas," which poses, and leaves largely unanswered, the question of how to assess the "representative" quality of political texts. One obstacle may have been the reluctance to search, in the documents of political life itself, for the constituencies that embraced this or that political idea and to see the extent to which such ideas emerged from, and were instrumental in, conflicts for political power and control between social groups with quite different notions of public order, the common good, citizenship, and political participation. Ultimately, Rubinstein found it difficult to see political thought as reflecting more than the consensus of ruling classes. But, whatever one's judgment of such issues, the fact remains that no one did more than Nicolai Rubinstein to illuminate the long history of Italian political thought in these centuries.

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TEOFILO F. RUIZ, *From Heaven to Earth: The Reordering of Castilian Society, 1150–1350*. Princeton, N.J., and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004. Pp. xiii, 221; 11 black-and-white figures and tables. \$39.50.

In *From Heaven to Earth* Teofilo Ruiz postulates a shift in Castilian *mentalité* around the year 1200 from otherworldly concerns to more pragmatic ideas about property, salvation,