GENDER, HONOR, AND CHARITY IN LATE RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

This book examines the important social role of charitable institutions for women and children in late Renaissance Florence. Wars, social unrest, disease, and growing economic inequality on the Italian peninsula displaced hundreds of thousands of families during this period. To handle the social crises generated by war, competition for social position, and the abandonment of children, a series of private and public initiatives expanded existing charitable institutions and founded new ones. Philip Gavitt’s research reveals the important role played by lineage ideology among Florence’s elites in the use and manipulation of these charitable institutions in the often futile pursuit of economic and social stability. Considering families of all social levels, he argues that the pursuit of family wealth and prestige often worked at cross-purposes with the survival of the very families it was supposed to preserve.

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To Terry

✿
She was the youngest daughter of Prince – , a leading nobleman of Milan, who could count himself among the richest men of the city. But the high opinion he had of his title made him regard his resources as barely sufficient – actually inadequate, in fact – to support its dignity. His one thought was to preserve the family fortune at least at its present level, and to ensure that it would never be split up, as far as lay in his power. We are not told exactly how many children he had, but only that all the younger ones were destined to the religious life, so that his wealth could pass intact to the eldest son, whose fate it was to carry on the family name – in other words, to beget children, and then to torture them and himself in the same way that his father had done. The poor Signora was still hidden from view in her mother’s womb when her future status was irrevocably fixed.


“Gli italiani sono indisciplinati cronici, sembrano non comprendere che la libertà individuale si coniuga con quella collettiva, che le regole vanno rispettate.” Se il ministro dei Lavori pubblici, Enrico Micheli, reagisce con un laico rimprovero al weekend con 51 vittime, il teologo ammonisce: “Se il carabiniere non vede, Dio vi guarda. Violare il codice della strada è peccato.”

– *La Repubblica*, 21 July 1999
CONTENTS

Acknowledgments  ix

Introduction  1

1. Charity, Discipline, and State-Building in Cinquecento Florence  26

2. Gender, Lineage Ideology, and the Development of a Status Culture  67

3. Law and the Majesty of Practice  93

4. Innocence and Danger: Pedagogy, Discipline, and the Culture of Masculinity  122

5. From Putte to Puttane: Female Foundlings and Charitable Institutions in Florence  160

6. Unruly Nuns: Clausura and Confinement  196

Conclusion: The Honor of God, of the City, and of Their Own Houses  228

Bibliography  245
Index  265
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