The Italian Renaissance State

This magisterial study proposes a revised and innovative view of the political history of Renaissance Italy. Drawing on comparative examples from across the peninsula and the kingdoms of Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica, an international team of leading scholars highlights the complexity and variety of the Italian world from the fourteenth to the early sixteenth centuries, surveying the mosaic of kingdoms, principalities, signorie and republics against a backdrop of wider political themes common to all types of state in the period. The authors address the contentious problem of the apparent weakness of the Italian Renaissance political system. By repositioning the Renaissance as a political, rather than simply an artistic and cultural, phenomenon, they identify the period as a pivotal moment in the history of the state, in which political languages, practices and tools, together with political and governmental institutions, became vital to the evolution of a modern European political identity.

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The Italian Renaissance State

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# Contents

*Notes on the contributors*  page vii  
*Note on translations and usage*  xiii  
*Italy in 1454*  xiv  

**Introduction**  
**ANDREA GAMBERINI AND ISABELLA LAZZARINI**  

**Part I  The Italian states**  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. The kingdom of Sicily</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>FABRIZIO TITONE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. The kingdom of Naples</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>FRANCESCO SENATORE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The kingdom of Sardinia and Corsica</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>OLIVETTA SCHENA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The papal state</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>SANDRO CAROCCI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Tuscan states: Florence and Siena</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>LORENZO TANZINI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ferrara and Mantua</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>TREVOR DEAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Venice and the Terraferma</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>MICHAEL KNAPTON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Lombardy under the Visconti and the Sforza</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>FEDERICO DEL TREDICI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The feudal principalities: the west (Monferrato, Saluzzo, Savoy and Savoy-Acaia)</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>ALESSANDRO BARBERO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contents

10 The feudal principalities: the east (Trent, Bressanone/Brixen, Aquileia, Tyrol and Gorizia) 197
MARCO BELLABARBA

11 Genoa 220
CHRISTINE SHAW

Part II Themes and perspectives 237

12 The collapse of city-states and the role of urban centres in the new political geography of Renaissance Italy 239
FRANCESCO SOMAINI

13 The rural communities 261
MASSIMO DELLA MISERICORDIA

14 Lordships, fiefs and ‘small states’ 284
FEDERICA CENGARLE

15 Factions and parties: problems and perspectives 304
MARCO GENTILE

16 States, orders and social distinction 323
E. IGOR MINEO

17 Women and the state 345
SERENA FERENTE

18 Offices and officials 368
GUIDO CASTELNUOVO

19 Public written records 385
GIAN MARIA VARANINI

20 The language of politics and the process of state-building: approaches and interpretations 406
ANDREA GAMBERINI

21 Renaissance diplomacy 425
ISABELLA LAZZARINI

22 Regional states and economic development 444
FRANCO FRANCESCHI AND LUCA MOLÀ

23 The papacy and the Italian states 467
GIORGIO CHITTOLENI

24 Justice 490
ANDREA ZORZI

Bibliography 515
Index 600
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To avoid ambiguity, we adopt the terms ‘signoria’ and ‘signorile’ to refer to urban proto-princely regimes; the term ‘seigneurial’, in turn, refers mainly to rural lordships. In line with the most common Italian usage, in this book the term ‘modern age’ normally refers to the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries.