

*Niccolò Acciaiuoli, Boccaccio e la Certosa del Galluzzo*. Alessandro Andreini, Susanna Barsella, Elsa Filosa, Jason Houston and Sergio Tognetti, eds. Rome: Viella, 2020.

This edited book focuses on Niccolò Acciaiuoli and his broader contexts in the early- to mid-Trecento. The contributions are revised versions of papers originally delivered at a 2019 conference by the same name in Florence. Taken together, the essays present a compelling and accessible synthesis of the social, political, religious and economic world in which Acciaiuoli lived, worked and built the Certosa del Galluzzo. Cultural topics are also present, but the book primarily contextualizes literature and the visual arts instead of interpreting them directly. Scholars interested in most aspects of Italy during the first half of the fourteenth century will find much to enjoy in this book.

The premise for these essays — and the original conference — lies in new assessments of the powerful but enigmatic Florentine Niccolò Acciaiuoli. Acciaiuoli went to Naples in 1331 to begin work at his family's bank. While there he befriended Boccaccio and became a favorite of the ruling family, who were also close relatives of the King of France. Acciaiuoli's successes as a merchant and a landed noble led to more adventures. He participated in the conquests of lands in Greece, which he then added to his exceptional wealth and his lands in the Kingdom of Naples. Acciaiuoli's wealth and power led to tensions with his home city. He became a key intermediary for Florentine economic interests in southern Italy, even as Acciaiuoli demanded concessions from his home city in exchange for his help. Inspired by religious trends in the Kingdom of Naples, from the 1340s Acciaiuoli paid to construct a large monastery near Florence devoted to the Certosan order. In this wide-ranging collection of essays, trecento politics, society, economics, culture and biography take prominence, while the Certosa itself provides more of a background or starting point for each broader contextual study.

The book is arranged through thirteen chapters organized into five thematic sections. The first section focuses on Italian and European contexts. In chapter one, William Caferro uses an interdisciplinary approach to show the complex interconnections between war, economics and politics that underpinned both Acciaiuoli's ventures in Greece and his construction of the Certosa. Caferro's narrative challenges disciplinary and period assumptions. For example, the Black Death devastated a European economy supposedly split between older feudal and new mercantile societies. Yet, such distinctions make no sense when applied to an example like Niccolò Acciai-

uoli, who thrived as both a merchant and a landed noble. Nationalist narratives also struggle with a figure like Acciaiuoli, whose wars in Greece were inextricably tied to his projects on the Italian peninsula. In the post Black Death European economy, Acciaiuoli set his sights on building the magnificent Certosa. Broader narratives encased in traditional boundaries lose these sorts of significant connections and contextual complexities.

In the next chapter, Giovanni Leoncini reveals the origins of the Certosan order, its spread into Italy and its popularity among Acciaiuoli's contemporaries, especially in the Kingdom of Naples. The Certosans derive from their founder San Bruno in the late eleventh century. Bruno and his companions sought to imitate the piety of the desert fathers of late Antiquity. Thus, their initial rule emphasized silence and solitude. The architecture of their monasteries, in turn, reflect those key values, with its emphasis on individual cells for each monk to eat, sleep and pursue a spiritual life. Despite the development of reform movements among other orders during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Certosans seem to have maintained their austerity and commitment to their original emphasis upon individual piety. Leoncini traces this continued spirituality across several texts into the fourteenth century. Already by that point, Siena was home to the first Certosa in Tuscany. Acciaiuoli, thus, was inspired to build his Certosa by the pious reputation enjoyed by the order both in Tuscany and among Neapolitan nobles.

That second essay transitions the book into its next section on the religious life in Florence during the fourteenth century. Francesco Salvestrini discusses the revival of religious sentiments during this period. The various crises of the Trecento brought about profound revivals in religious sentiments in and outside of formal religious orders. For example, the revival of devotion to Saint Zenobius and the church of Orsanmichele date to the search for religious certainty in these decades, as do the diverse reforms within the Servites, the Augustinians, the Dominicans and the Franciscans. Benedictine Monks at the Florentine Badia grew to new importance in the city, while new orders took root. Salvestrini outlines these changes as the broader context in which an example like Niccolò Acciaiuoli's Certosa fits.

From religious sentiments Lorenzo Tanzini's contribution turns to the power enjoyed by bishops in Trecento Italy and especially their ties to the Acciaiuoli family. Tanzini provides background information about the political position of bishops and the unusual fact that Florence and nearby Fiesole each had a bishop, but their oldest families were prevented from holding those offices. Tanzini shows how, from the 1340s, the Acciaiuoli family was able to enjoy loyalists among the city's religious power structures and, through Niccolò's intervention, secure Angelo Acciaiuoli's appointment as

bishop of Florence. Angelo Acciaiuoli left the city in 1355 and an interlude followed until 1370 when once again key allies of the Acciaiuoli family occupied the episcopal seat. These bishops, in turn, became key intermediaries for Florence with the pope and with the Kingdom of Naples. Once again, in short, a contextual study reveals the power and influence wielded by Niccolò Acciaiuoli in the middle years of the 1300s.

The last two essays in section two try to recreate how Acciaiuoli himself may have viewed his construction of the Certosa. Laura De Angelis argues that Acciaiuoli was driven by the desire to be remembered and that he wished to construct a grand monastery near Florence that could house his tomb. Acciaiuoli was, thus, motivated to construct the Certosa by both his religious faith and more worldly desires. De Angelis also adds financial motivations to this picture by revealing the complicated financial schemes that underlay the building's patronage. She unpacks some of the means by which Niccolò Acciaiuoli used his expenses for the Certosa to hide the extent of his wealth from outside parties and to better keep his money in the family. Thus, economics, politics and religion once again intersected in the example of Niccolò Acciaiuoli. In the next chapter, Francesco Paolo Tocco takes a more abstract approach and tries to reconstruct Acciaiuoli's "personalità," at least to the extent possible for a fourteenth-century figure. Tocco also argues that Acciaiuoli's driving desire was to achieve immortal fame in military, literary and spiritual matters. Acciaiuoli's admiration for King Robert of Naples helped shape Acciaiuoli's particular blending of these motivations. It was, then, their interconnection that underlay the foundation and patronage of the Certosa.

Section three of the book turns to adding new details to the connections between Niccolò Acciaiuoli and Boccaccio. Jason Houston traces how Boccaccio treated the word and concept of "amicizia" across several letters with Acciaiuoli and another contemporary Zanobi da Strada. The first letter dates to 1339, and in it Boccaccio used unusual words and phrasings to show off his rhetorical abilities. A couple of years later the lives of Boccaccio and Acciaiuoli had taken different turns. Thus, the second letter reveals Boccaccio's attempt to turn his friendship into patronage. In the third letter analyzed, once again from a few years later, Boccaccio wrote to praise Zanobi da Strada. In that letter, the author more closely followed classical examples for his treatment of friendship than he had in his letter from 1339. The last letter analyzed dates from 1363 after Boccaccio and Acciaiuoli had fallen out. In that letter Boccaccio again makes use of a different literary style. In the end, Boccaccio varied his style to the context, circumstance and period of life in which he was writing.

Marco Corsi returns the book to Acciaiuoli himself, this time with an eye towards his specific cultural interests and learning. Corsi makes a detailed investigation of the physical characteristics of Acciaiuoli's extant autograph letters, the specific texts that he used and patronized and finally the surviving evidence for cultural interests in Acciaiuoli's two sisters. At least sixty-three letters, all in Italian, survive in Acciaiuoli's autograph merchant hand. There is evidence that he read the Bible, Cicero, Seneca, other classical works and Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Niccolò Acciaiuoli's two sisters also possessed literary interests, albeit to different degrees. Autograph letters survive from both women, Lapa and Andreina, and the hands of both, like that of their brother, suggest some degree of comfort with writing even as none of the three strove for the heights of literary cultivation. Like Niccolò, the two sisters possessed books and ties to books. Andreina, for example, was the dedicatee of Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*.

Parts Four and Five of the book contain contextual essays on the primary societies in which Niccolò Acciaiuoli lived and worked: Florence, Naples and Greece. Amedeo Feniello paints a portrait of the crises afflicting southern Italy during the first half of the Trecento. Previous writers have highlighted the problems of succession between King Robert and Queen Giovanna. Feniello adds numerous other problems that contributed to the chaotic situation in the Mezzogiorno. Demographic collapse led to the growth of uncultivated and little inhabited lands. Climate changes further afflicted the population. Violence erupted through the countryside as people fought for often isolated, poorly defended, but potentially wealthy lands. Governments were too weak to impose peace, while the multitude of crises continually cut off their revenues. Monarchs ruled in theory, but not in practice. It was this situation in which Niccolò Acciaiuoli rose to wealth and prominence in Naples.

From Naples Vieri Mazzoni writes on the context found in Florence during the trecento. Mazzoni traces the development of major institutions within the Florentine government as well as key changes to Florentine politics during the period. By the early Trecento Florence had settled into a government ordered by its Signoria and its Colleges. Men in power were Guelfs and committed to a form of republican government. However, Florence struggled to find an adequate solution to both making offices available to the city's citizens while appeasing the desires of its oldest families to monopolize political power. Tensions between the city's social groups led to the invitation to Walter of Brienne to take over the city, an experiment that other groups in the city resisted and brought to an end. Walter's fall led to a brief period where offices were opened to more people, but the oligarchic resistance changed the Florentine political situation yet again. For thirty

years an equilibrium of sorts developed between the city's *popolo* and its oligarchs. It was in this context that Niccolò Acciaiuoli enjoyed political success until 1359, following which he suffered a ban from office after 1360, prompted in no small part because of fear of his unusual degree of wealth and power after a conspiracy in 1360 shook the government.

Sergio Tognetti's examination of Acciaiuoli's broader context as a Florentine merchant rounds out this fourth section of the book. Although the Florentines were not the first to use innovative mercantile and banking tools in medieval Europe, they had perfected these practices and become a dominant economic force by the early fourteenth century. The basis for their success was the merchant company. Tognetti reveals the complicated structure and practice of these economic units during the peak of Florentine power. Then, the Black Death brought an unprecedented and long-lasting demographic collapse to the city. Although other cities like Venice and Milan managed to recover, by the sixteenth century the size of Florence was more similar to cities like Verona than a major political center. These demographic challenges brought broader alterations to the city's economic structures. Elite merchant-bankers replaced medieval corporations. These merchant-bankers formed a more insular system through changes to credit and a focus on other major geographical centers.

The book concludes with two chapters on the connections between Niccolò Acciaiuoli and Greece. Claudia Tripodi begins her essay with a brief narrative of the Acciaiuoli rulers in Greece from Niccolò to the family's departure in 1463. She argues that even in the fifteenth century historians were treating Acciaiuoli's actions in Greece as a tangent of sorts to his other accomplishments. One reason for that may be the disconnect between the republican tradition in both Florence and the historiography on the city versus Niccolò Acciaiuoli's fascination with chivalric culture and feudal structures. In his ambitions and contradictions, Acciaiuoli can be seen as a precursor for men like Cosimo de' Medici and Lorenzo the Magnificent during the Quattrocento. In the book's last essay, Thodoris Koutsogiannis shows how the medieval and early modern periods in Greece have not only failed to generate much scholarly interest, but for years those periods were viewed with disdain as centuries in which Greece endured foreign occupation. Piecing together the Greece of Niccolò Acciaiuoli and his descendants is challenging. Koutsogiannis shows how late medieval and Renaissance Italians tended to take more interest in other Greek cities than Athens. Thus, Cyriac of Ancona's notebooks have left the most detailed visual and written accounts of the fifteenth-century city. The article then matches Cyriac's accounts — at least what can be pieced together of them — with extant monuments in Athens today.

Taken together, the essays in *Niccolò Acciaiuoli, Boccaccio e la Certosa del Galluzzo* admirably bring together the many distinct but overlapping contexts in which Acciaiuoli lived, worked and built his Certosa. Many of the essays begin by outlining narratives that specialists may find familiar. However, the compilation of so many different contexts in one volume presents an unusually full panoramic of the mid-fourteenth-century Trecento. Additionally, each essay builds upon these foundations to present new interpretations, often based upon original research in new, unpublished sources. The book succeeds in taking the historiography closer to interpretations of fourteenth-century literature and a building like the Certosa past traditional silos and inherited historiographical assumptions. In its place, Niccolò Acciaiuoli in particular becomes a three-dimensional historical figure and his Certosa a reflection of a complicated man who defies period distinctions across so many sub-disciplines.

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