

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Raggio, Osvaldo. Feuds and State Formation, 1550–1700: The Backcountry of the Republic of Genoa

Nilab Ferozan

Volume 43, Number 1, Winter 2020

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1070211ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i1.34131>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Ferozan, N. (2020). Review of [Raggio, Osvaldo. Feuds and State Formation, 1550–1700: The Backcountry of the Republic of Genoa]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 43(1), 269–271.
<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i1.34131>

Pfefferkorn distorted his image. Posset analyzes Pfefferkorn's writings (texts and illustrations of Pfefferkorn's works of 1507–1508), which aimed at converting the Jews, and argues that the notorious convert was a well-educated and media-savvy, devoted, and knowledgeable Christian who translated Christian prayers into Hebrew and was anything but a “banausic butcher” (255), as Reuchlin defined him. Interestingly, here Posset does not side with Reuchlin.

NATHAN RON

The University of Haifa

Raggio, Osvaldo.

Feuds and State Formation, 1550–1700: The Backcountry of the Republic of Genoa.

Early Modern History: Society and Culture. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Pp. xxv, 316 + 16 ill., 13 tables. ISBN 978-3-319-94642-9 (hardcover) US\$99.99.

Feuds and State Formation, 1550–1700: The Backcountry of the Republic of Genoa by Osvaldo Raggio is part of the series Early Modern History: Society and Culture which explores European topics in the area of social, political, and cultural history from 1400 to 1800. By focusing on the interaction between the Republic of Genoa and a number of local communities in the mountainous backcountry of Eastern Liguria, Raggio offers a different perspective on the role of local agency and relationships between the centre and the periphery. His re-examination provides a new standpoint on the political, social, and cultural history of state formation. Through a micro-historical approach, he re-evaluates the two main elements that Charles Tilly and other scholars have characterized as the foundation for the construction of the modern state: judicial administration and fiscal extraction. Raggio takes apart the notion of measuring state formation by a steady growth of the institutions and functions of central power and by the formation of bureaucracy. He points out that the traditional historiography from an elitist point of view ignores the cultural and economic exchanges between the centre and the localities.

Raggio examines political treatises, memoirs, letters, and other municipal records to demonstrate that the relationship between Genoa and Liguria

was based on agreements and privileges. He states that although the local communities consisted of factions, they were all part of the local cultural system that shared names, symbols, emblems, and colours. The nobility had links with the centre as well as the periphery. Raggio sets out to dismantle the assumption that because of these “faction like kinship groups” it was often stated that Genoa did not have a “state government” because it lacked a hierarchical political organization of prince, corporate bodies, and subjects. Raggio claims that one of the most unique aspects of the Republic of Genoa’s relationship with the local communities was the practice of pacification and administration of justice. Peaceful compromise in disputes and feuds was encouraged, and in some cases coerced, which almost always resulted in compensation and the satisfaction of both parties. This practice turned judicial practices into a tool of governance and legitimation. Raggio claims that, historically, the relationship between Genoa and local communities could be described as progressive reciprocity, but that microscopic observations reveal not a world of authority that imposes criteria on subjects and their cultures, but one of cultural exchange.

The book begins with a preface where Raggio explains the cultural climate of the 1980s, when new scholarly approaches to research such as microhistory were taking shape, including his own contributions to microhistory in Italian scholarship. The book is divided into ten detailed chapters. Raggio uses an empirical approach and examines archival documents such as matrimonial exchanges, notarial records, land ownerships, trial transcripts, witness testimonies, and judicial records to demonstrate how criminal policies and pacification were used to legitimize oligarchic power. Through micro studies of municipal records, he describes the political system, special dimensions, and territorial asymmetries; the interweaving of formal and informal powers, and the role of kinship groups in the local communities. To re-evaluate the fiscal extractions, Raggio focuses on commercial exchanges between the centre and periphery as well as in the wider society.

This book is a great addition to the Early Modern History series as well as to the growing body of micro-historical scholarship. Raggio, through a close study of the backcountry of the Republic of Genoa, offers a new perspective on how state formation is studied. He shows that in Genoa, at the microscopic level, politics grew from below—at the community level, and around kin group alliances—thus creating a peculiar form of territorial organization through a process of continual communication between the centre and the periphery.

This book offers a rich contextualization of material life, family relationships, economic activities, and power struggles in a corner of the Mediterranean world that was extremely important, but about which very little has been published in English. This study is beneficial to those readers interested in the study of early modern cultural and social history, state formation, and local politics.

NILAB FEROZAN

McMaster University

Rampton, Martha, ed.

European Magic and Witchcraft: A Reader.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. Pp. xv, 416. ISBN 978-1-4426-3420-6 (paperback) \$49.95.

For several decades now, magic and witchcraft have been the focus of scholarly attention, and Martha Rampton's reader—a collection of primary texts that prepares the topic in all its breadth for use in the classroom—is a welcome addition. University of Toronto Press has to be thanked for providing teachers, students, and scholars alike with a rich and voluminous source-book, albeit less affordable than one might have hoped. *European Magic and Witchcraft* presents carefully selected texts, eighty-six examples from very different genres, from biblical times to the early modern period in chronological order. Some of these texts are famous and have had an enormous cultural impact, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or Augustine's *City of God*, while others are quite rare, such as Alferic of Eynsham (ca. 955–1010) or court records of the use of torture in early modern witchcraft trials (377–86). Rampton explains that magic and witchcraft thus unfold as a series of topics, where “the legal and the literary, the playful and the polemic exist side-by-side and often each delivers quite a different take on the magic of the time” (xiv). Yet Rampton also emphasizes the continuity of motifs surrounding her topic, namely “the association of women with the moon, [...] the domain of Diana, consternation over astrology, dependence on love magic; the phenomenon of the werewolf” (xv). Some historians might be less at ease with the mingling of texts describing “real” practices with imaginative literature; Rampton explains that she is “looking for cultural conceptions of magic and witchcraft that are manifest in