

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Lodone, Michele. I segni della fine. Storia di un predicatore nell'Italia del Rinascimento

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Volume 45, Number 4, Fall 2022

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1105515ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v45i4.41406>

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Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Soranzo, M. (2022). Review of [Lodone, Michele. I segni della fine. Storia di un predicatore nell'Italia del Rinascimento]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 45(4), 273–275. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v45i4.41406>

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Lodone, Michele.

I segni della fine. Storia di un predicatore nell'Italia del Rinascimento.

I libri di Viella 390. Rome: Viella, 2021. Pp. 282 + 4 b/w ill. ISBN 978-88-3313-814-5 (paperback) €29.

When thinking of an apocalyptic preacher thundering from the pulpits of Florence at the turn of the sixteenth century, most Renaissance scholars would remember Girolamo Savonarola. The Dominican friar, his fearful sermons, and the gruesome end of his life are a consolidated, dark counterpoint to the grand narrative staging the Italian Renaissance as the luminous bedrock of secularization and modernity. Hidden in the shadows of conventional historiography, however, one finds lesser-known figures like Francesco da Montepulciano, the protagonist of Lodone's monographic study. This book is a microhistory in the style of Carlo Ginzburg. Following a variety of elusive traces and clues scattered through archival documents, Late Medieval treatises, early modern manuscripts, and ecclesiastical proceedings, Lodone sheds light on this Franciscan Conventual and reappraises his doomsday visions, which in 1513 left Florentines, including Nicolò Machiavelli, awe-struck and frightened. At the same time, the book also offers a stimulating reflection on historical research itself, pondering upon the scope and limits of this craft in a dialogue with disciplines such as anthropology, textual scholarship, and religious studies.

The book comprises three main parts of three, four, and three chapters, respectively, followed by a scholarly edition of one of Francesco da Montepulciano's sermons. Starting from Machiavelli's passing mention of the preacher in a letter sent to Francesco Vettori in 1513, the first part (*Voci*) offers a broad overview of Florence at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Chronicles, diaries, letters, and ecclesiastical documents, Lodone explains, give evidence of a horizon of expectations profoundly shaped by the memory of Savonarola but prone to misunderstand the actual nature of Francesco da Montepulciano's sermons—a tendency these sources have transmitted to modern-day historiography. Hence the need to return to Francesco da Montepulciano's sermons, of which the second part (*Lecture*) investigates manuscript and printed transmission, main themes, textual sources, and position in the context of Franciscan spirituality. Based on the latest trends in the study of manuscript miscellanies

and anthologies combined with an impressive knowledge of Late Medieval apocalyptic literature, this section persuasively ascribes Francesco da Montepulciano's preaching to a dissident sector of Franciscan spirituality. At the same time, it shows how the few scribes who transmitted Francesco da Montepulciano's sermons were increasingly indifferent to the apocalyptic fervour of Angelo Clareno, John of Rupescissa, Telesforo da Cosenza, and other representatives of the waning tradition that resonates throughout them. Thanks to this philological tour de force, in other words, Lodone not only reconstructs the actual context of the preacher's sermons but also brings back to life a voice that standard histories of early modern prophetism have irremediably silenced. The third section (*Tracce*) attempts to retrieve an echo of this voice from the effects it had on contemporary listeners and posthumous admirers. Extraordinary evidence, in this respect, is an archival document penned by a notary from Assisi who recorded the delivery of a sermon and the citizens' frenzied response to it (147–52). In a carefully orchestrated ceremony centred on theatrical gestures and intermittent exchanges with the crowd, Lodone demonstrates, Francesco da Montepulciano adapted the apocalyptic repertoire of dissident Franciscans for the people of Assisi, a city fraught with family rivalries and violence. Faint echoes of the preacher's voice also emerge from posthumous documents. Capuchins' sources, Lodone explains, posthumously reinterpreted Francesco da Montepulciano as a precursor of their own reform of the Franciscan order. Building on the mistaken identification of the preacher with a member of the Cervini family, moreover, the eighteenth-century proceedings of a trial for the beatification of the Franciscan friar give evidence of the fading memory of his life and deeds.

Perhaps too modestly, Lodone describes the critical text of one of Francesco da Montepulciano's sermons appended to the monograph as an "edizione di servizio" (213). Indeed, sermons are first and foremost live performances whose written versions are notorious for their limited reliability and unstable transmission. However, the appendix does include the first complete *recensio* of the fifteen manuscripts and six printed editions that transmit Francesco da Montepulciano's text. Also, Lodone's editorial decisions are carefully recorded in a consistent apparatus. If not strictly speaking a critical edition, the appendix is nevertheless a useful complement to the monograph itself. Together, they will certainly allow scholars to rediscover the Franciscan preacher and

explore the features of his tormented spirituality unjustly forgotten and often misunderstood by standard histories of Renaissance Italian culture.

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<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v45i4.41406>