

with some quotation plucked heedlessly from a familiar work of literature. This volume serves as a salutary reminder to social historians that, in the quest to understand the nature of gender relations in the early modern era, the same rigour and intensity that we bring to the study of parish registers and trial records must also be applied to the analysis of works of art or literary texts.

Christopher R. Friedrichs  
*University of British Columbia*

Joanne M. Ferraro — *Family and Public Life in Brescia, 1580–1650. The Foundations of Power in the Venetian State*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993. Cambridge Studies in Italian History and Culture. Pp. xvii, 232.

It is useful to have a book in English on Brescia. The largest and wealthiest city of the Venetian mainland dominion and, given its position on the Milanese frontier, one of enormous strategic importance to the capital, Brescia has largely escaped the interest of non-Italian historians, perhaps because it lacks the attractions of high culture (Padua), architecture (Vicenza), a glorious past (Verona), or proximity to a metropolitan centre. It is also useful to have a study concentrating on a single city of the *terraferma*. Angelo Ventura's *Nobiltà e popolo* (1964), which established the field, was based on rapid sketches of many cities and towns and could not offer a hard look at any one place. Furthermore, Gaetano Cozzi's studies of centre-periphery relations have tended to treat the *terraferma* as an undifferentiated whole and have left uncertain the degree to which those relations were tailored to fit local situations. As Varanini, Knapton, and others have demonstrated, Venetian governance was highly place-specific (nearby and more fractious cities were kept on a shorter leash, for example). Thus we need case studies before a synthesis is possible.

Following Ventura, Joanne Ferraro's interest is less with Venetian administration — though there are some telling comments along the way — and more with the structures and exercise of power on the local level. The overall theme of the book is the consolidation of the Brescian ruling group, defined as those with the right to hold seats on the municipal council. Building upon fifteenth-century legislation that allowed *de facto* resistance to outsiders and newcomers, councillors closed ranks and became an "exclusive, hereditary elite", a "hybrid class that employed an aristocratic scheme to identify itself" (p. 53). In Brescia, aristocratization had the usual consequences: an obsession with antiquity and lineage, class endogamy, a penchant for public displays of rank, and a turn from trade and manufacture to land and the learned professions (especially law) as the basis for wealth.

A signal contribution of this book is that Ferraro is not content simply to demonstrate the closure of the political class. Too many studies have regarded power as an end in itself. Ferraro, instead, wishes to look at the ends to which power is deployed: what were the rewards (and risks) of a monopoly on civic authority? The use of political office for private gain, despite Venetian efforts to make sure that institutions worked as they were supposed to, was the order of the day. Tax evasion, favoured

treatment by the judicial system, circumvention of controls on the grain trade, and the milking of the resources of charitable institutions (the Monte di Pietà and hospitals) demonstrate that the Brescian councillor regarded political predominance as a personal and class patrimony.

Staying on top was no simple matter, however. Given Brescia's system of partible inheritance, noble families had to adopt complex strategies for the preservation of their patrimonies: restricted marriage, imposition of a *fideicommissum* on property, limited emancipation, and large, complex households. In keeping with recent historical writing, Ferraro illustrates the central role played by large and growing dowries (and other forms of women's property) in the redistribution or preservation of wealth. Dowries were also a significant factor in the formation of alliances between elite families, as affinal ties complemented other patron-client mechanisms in the construction of "support networks" (p. 143) necessary for social, economic, and political survival.

The charmed circle of councillors was not without its internal divisions. Disparities in wealth were great, and a small number of families (usually older, wealthier, and more prolific) held a disproportionate share of high offices. Armed factions, organized by the leading families, brought mayhem to the streets of Brescia. Disputes over dowries and patrimonial transmission constantly threatened to rend the fragile solidarity of lineages. Venetian efforts at pacification and prosecution were largely ineffectual: having adopted a policy of collaboration with local elites and having declined to impose a centralized administration, the capital had little leverage when those elites got out of line. Indeed, when the political monopoly of the Brescian ruling group was challenged by second-tier protesters in 1644 and 1645, Venice (after initial sympathy) had little choice but to reaffirm its own aristocratic model and support the old guard.

There are few surprises. Ferraro has corroborated patterns noted for other cities rather than offered revisionist theses of her own. However, the current demand that every book offer a bold rethinking of its field has led to the proliferation of dead ends. We are here well served by the addition of a solid case study, concerned with a major and overlooked site, which meshes neatly with a rapidly growing literature. Future synthesizers will find much in this book to draw upon. Generalists will benefit as well, since the clear and well-supported conclusions provide a useful overview of the societies subsumed in the Venetian territorial state.

James S. Grubb  
*University of Maryland Baltimore County*

Gregory Hanlon — *Confession and Community in Seventeenth Century France: Catholic and Protestant Coexistence in Aquitaine*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993. Pp. 312.

The late twentieth century has witnessed the revival of religious strife on a grand scale, provoking cries of alarm among many commentators. A few voices offer