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## Review Essay: Ruth Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice, 1550-1650*

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## BOOK REVIEWS

de Henri II," for it was his son's destiny, if not achievement, to open the route to the great civil wars that almost destroyed the kingdom and precipitated the collapse of the cultural and political greatness of Renaissance France. Heir to the Italian ambitions and Habsburg enmities of his ancestors, Henry II quickly learned his responsibilities by serving several years of his childhood as hostage for his father in Spain. After an active apprenticeship in arms and governance, Henry assumed the throne in 1547 at the age of twenty-eight. The next twelve years were years of steady bureaucratic modernization and intermittent victory and defeat as the focus of the Habsburg-Valois Wars shifted northward. Henry recovered Calais and acquired Metz before concluding the unfavorable treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559. His absurd death of a tournament wound that year precluded his addressing the domestic problems of religious and aristocratic factionalism that had reached crisis proportions during his reign, and his successors' failures have left the impression of a disastrous legacy.

At first glance, Henry II has much to answer for in his stewardship of the Valois kingdom, and Baumgartner offers a plausible if not altogether persuasive *apologia* for his hero. Traditional in approach, the study offers a lucid narrative and well-informed analysis. As an expert on ecclesiastical history, Baumgartner provides a good treatment of religious policy, though his discussion of the medieval origins of Gallicanism is too cryptic. Renaissance monarchs are best understood when their policies are presented firmly in the context of precedent, and Baumgartner does a better job with his discussion of the fifteenth-century Burgundy-Orleans feuds, which formed the underpinnings of Valois diplomacy. The entire study is based on a firm command of the secondary literature, but the focus is narrowly political. The many socio-cultural studies of Natalie Davis are neglected, and the recent works of M. G. A. Vale and Maurice Keen on late medieval chivalry are disregarded, though they potentially offer much to a study of such a militaristic monarch.

The end result is a thoroughly competent, highly useful work. It succeeds admirably in describing the man and his reign. It will be read by all students of Renaissance France and repeatedly referred to thereafter. It may be another seventy-five years before anyone again feels the need for a new biography of Henry II.

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Ruth Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice, 1550-1650*, Basil Blackwell, 1989, 263 pp., ill., biblio., index, \$55.00.

Historical literature on European witch-hunting has made great strides in recent years by using court records to document the patterns and assumptions involved in witchcraft accusations and trials. Yet with the notable exception of Carlo Ginzburg's work on the Friulian *benandanti*, the Italian witchcraft experience remains less well studied than that of other western European countries. To some extent there is less to study, since Italy did not participate very energetically in the European "witch panic" of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The relevant historical question in this case turns out to be "Why was there no Italian witch panic?" or "What did the Italians do instead of hunting witches?"

Ruth Martin's book, based on a Ph.D. dissertation directed by Brian Pullan at Manchester University, addresses these questions through a study of Venetian Inquisition trials dealing with witchcraft and related magical crimes. The author uses the term *witchcraft* (*stregoneria*) in its broadest sense (indeed, almost as equivalent to *magic*) to include practices ranging from the learned ritual magic of both lay and clerical male treasure hunters to more humble forms of illiterate female divination and love magic. The classic model of European witchcraft, focused on night-flying to the Sabbath for collective devil worship and subsequent acts of *maleficium*, was conspicuously absent in the Venetian records, and only mild penalties were imposed for the magical crimes prosecuted.

This study is based on extended research in Venice, yet the organization of the book tends to subordinate its rich archival material to a sometimes overly general review of how the broad categories and concepts of European witch-hunting do and do not fit the Venetian experience. The best of these discussions concerns the way in which concepts of ritual magic dominated Inquisitorial manuals and trials, leading to a curious but characteristic institutional disinterest in the basic witchcraft category of *maleficium*. One of Martin's most intriguing discoveries about the peculiar magical landscape of this intensely political urban republic involves the widespread resort to divination in order to win at the *piria*, an unofficial Venetian gambling institution based on predicting the outcome of frequent elections to government offices. By being organized more closely around phenomena like this, which emerge directly from the documents, the material could have been presented in a more compelling manner, giving more prominence to its distinctively Venetian aspects. For example, urban/rural contrasts, such as the lack of popular concern about *maleficium*, and the extensive magical activities both of foreigners (Greeks, Slavs, Albanians, Cretans) and of non-Venetian Italians (especially Friulians) remain striking but not fully developed themes, although both are discussed in a final chapter.

The author underlines the value of Inquisitorial archives for a social history of Venice, yet her tendency to summarize rather than quote from specific cases

leaves unexploited much of the potential of verbatim trial records documenting ordinary conversations and "remarks made in passing by accused and witnesses" (234). Other problems include a labored but somewhat unleavened prose style, an overreliance on English secondary sources, and a corresponding neglect of Italian scholars like Andrea Del Col, who have produced important work on the Venetian Inquisition in recent years. (However, it should be noted that articles published in local Italian journals can be somewhat inaccessible to foreigners.) Despite these reservations, Ruth Martin's study represents a solid and important contribution to the scholarly literature on patterns of European witch trials.

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Philippa Berry, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen*, Routledge, 1989, 193 pp., xii, ill., biblio., index, \$35.00.

This dazzling study of the "literary" cult of Elizabeth the Virgin Queen sets out to revise both old and new orthodoxies. In the first two chapters Philippa Berry traces the genealogy of a female wisdom figure and the relationship of this figure to Petrarchan and Neoplatonic discourses of love, connecting these intellectual movements to the construction of an absolute state in which a male ruler governs a state that has been gendered female. These discussions serve as a context for her reexamination of the courtly cult of Elizabeth.

In chapter three Berry points out that modern interpretations of the courtly cult, deriving from Frances Yates, fail to take account of Elizabeth's gender. Likewise, recent criticism has depicted Elizabeth as a largely passive figure whose patrilineal descent alone establishes her authority. To offset the privileging of patriarchal views of Elizabeth, Berry dwells upon Elizabeth's ties to her mother and her bonds with female courtiers. In the next three chapters, Berry supplies a diachronic interpretation of the mythological imagery in entertainments, drama, and poetry as these metaphors changed between the 1570s and the 1590s. In these discussions, Berry focuses on the early courtly entertainments of the mid-1570s, the drama of John Lyly, and the poetry of George Chapman, William Shakespeare, and Edmund Spenser, although numerous other writers also receive commentary.

Highly influential studies by Louis Montrose and others of the complex power and gender relations in the Elizabethan court have stressed Elizabeth's lack of impact on her culture. Montrose, for example, comments that "because she was always uniquely herself, Elizabeth's rule was not intended to undermine the male hegemony of her culture. Indeed, the emphasis upon her *difference* from