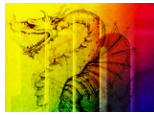


JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY HISTORY OF IDEAS



2024

Volume 13 Issue 25
Item 9

– Section 3: Reviews –

Book Reviews

L. Coccoli, V.M. Di Mino, E. Pasini



JIHI 2024

Volume 13 Issue 25

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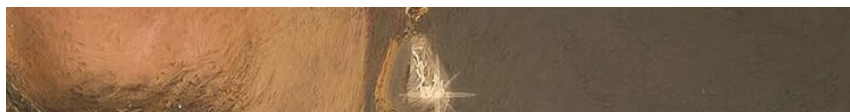
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Book Reviews

L. Coccoli, V.M. Di Mino, E. Pasini

Reviews of Alfani, As Gods Among Men: A History of the Rich in the West, Princeton UP, 2023; Borrelli, Repubblica, ragion di Stato, democrazia cristiana. Genealogie 2, Cronopio, 2023; Valleriani, Giannini, Giannetto eds., Scientific Visual Representations in History, Springer Nature, 2023.



1 GUIDO ALFANI, *As Gods Among Men: A History of the Rich in the West*. Princeton, Princeton UP, 2023, 440 pp., ISBN: 9780691215730, € 35.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.3876686>

Discussing the best ways to avoid rebellions and ensure the durability of the prince's rule, the former Jesuit Giovanni Botero begins the fourth book of his *The Reason of State* (1589) by listing the three groups of people that make up any political community: "the rich, the poor, and those in the middle between the two extremes of these three types". While "those in the middle" pose no particular problem to social order, their peaceful behaviour unshaken by ambition or need, "the extremes" are in fact equally, if differently, dangerous. The inclination to vice and the rebellious tendencies of the poor stem from their very condition of deprivation, for, "having nothing to lose, they are easily roused at the appearance of novelty, and they willingly embrace all the means at hand to raise themselves through the ruin of others".¹ Such charges were common currency

¹ Giovanni Botero, *The Reason of State*, edited by Robert Bireley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 89.

throughout the early modern period and beyond, and they come as no surprise. Perhaps more unexpected, however, are Botero's accusations against those at the other end of the social scale: like the poor, the rich are easily prone to evil, though not for lack of means but, on the contrary, because of their abundance, "on account of the opportunity that their riches supply them". Their wealth and power make them inordinately proud, unaccustomed to obey anyone's will but their own; they act violently and offend openly out of a sheer sense of superiority, and "do not know how to govern themselves because of their prosperity".¹ Some two hundred years earlier, the French theologian Nicole Oresme had already expressed something similar in a more vivid way: the rich, as he put it, seem to be among the rest of society "as God is among men" (213).

Both Botero and Oresme were explicitly arguing along Aristotelian lines and within the same reference to Aristotle's *Politics*, with its condemnation of social extremes and its praise of the 'golden mean' represented by those *mediocres* who are in fact the only solid anchor for the stability of the State.² However, Oresme's simile seems to contain some additional semantic layers. The image of the rich as gods among men conveys not only a sense of their disproportionate power, but also of the anxiety and unease their presence generates in society at large, which struggles to find them a well-defined place within its boundaries. After all—and this is Aristotle again—cities are made for humans: gods (and beasts) are supposed to live outside them. The new book by Guido Alfani, professor of economic history at Bocconi University in Milan, owes Oresme not only its title but also, in a sense, its main research problem: what is the place, role and function that different Western societies have assigned to the rich? And how have they changed over the course of Western history? Which, of course, is tantamount to asking: how, if at all, has it been possible to justify the very existence of (sometimes exorbitant) wealth inequalities?

Alfani's volume has many merits. The first, and perhaps not the least, is that it deliberately sets out to fill a very peculiar gap in historiography. As any social historian is well aware, an enormous amount of research has been devoted

¹ Botero, *Reason of State*, 80-1.

² On the prevalence of this tripartite paradigm in late medieval and early modern political thought, as opposed to the alternative binary model rooted in the work of Livy, cf. Gabriele Pedullà, *Machiavelli in Tumult. The Discourses on Livy and the Origins of Political Conflictualism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 126-34.

to clarifying the quantitative and qualitative dimensions, cultural and ideological representations, forms of life, and survival strategies of the poor throughout Western and non-Western history. The results of this collective endeavour, much of which has coalesced around the projects of microhistory and history from below, occupy rows upon rows of physical and digital library shelves. But as far as the rich as a distinct social group are concerned, and with a few notable exceptions¹, scholars have tended to be strangely silent. As Alfani himself says in the introduction, the idea for the book came from the “sudden realization that the rich as a specific category have rarely been the object of proper scientific study, especially for pre-industrial times” (2). There are probably many reasons for this, including the fact that, until recently, social and economic science has focused almost exclusively on income inequality, which has had the effect of obscuring issues of wealth distribution. The efforts made in recent decades by Branko Milanović, Thomas Piketty and others to bring the latter “to the centre of the conversation” (4), have thus contributed to the paradigmatic shift within which Alfani’s broad and in-depth exploration also takes its place. However, its relevance goes far beyond academia, as the ever-growing interest of public opinion and the mass media in the existences and behaviour of the better-off clearly demonstrates.

The project behind *As Gods Among Men* is admittedly an ambitious one, both in terms of the time span it covers and in its methodological scope. The author follows his subject across the Western world from around the Commercial Revolution in the 11th century to the present day, with occasional forays into the early Middle Ages and even Antiquity. Although the margins of this picture are largely dictated by the limitations of the available data, they are still wide enough to add the pre-industrial period to its overall account, again providing a missing piece to an existing literature that in most cases does not extend further than the beginning of the 19th century. But if the amount of information Alfani manages is impressive, the way in which he manages it is no less so. He achieves the feat of integrating almost seamlessly a solid quan-

¹ I am thinking, for example, of Peter Brown’s analyses of the changing meanings of wealth and the role of the rich in late antique Christianity; or Giacomo Todeschini’s work (which Alfani makes extensive use of) on the theological and religious justifications of Christian riches in the late Middle Ages.

titative approach with a qualitative attention to the key cultural and legal aspects of his topic, the high-level perspective of macroeconomic structures with a ‘microhistorical’ outlook on the life trajectories of specific rich individuals and families. Thus, figures showing long-term trends in wealth concentration over five centuries alternate with detailed discussions of theological and political ideas, analyses of cultural representations and institutional frameworks, and vignettes on the likes of Francesco di Marco Datini or Donald Trump, the Fuggers or the Rothschilds. These elements are not simply juxtaposed: they both complicate and complement each other, adding to the richness (pun intended) of the whole.

The book consists of eleven chapters divided into three parts. The first part defines its subject and gives a general overview of its dynamics over almost a millennium. Sources constantly talk about the rich, but who and what are they? Definitions are not univocal and change over time. In the pre-industrial period, wealth is clearly related to the control of resources, but not exclusively and not primarily of an economic nature. Botero, for example, applies the label only to people of prestige, authority and power: blood princes, feudal barons, military leaders who have distinguished themselves in wars. No merchant or rich bourgeois makes his list. On the contrary, Alfani decides to focus exclusively on “nonhuman capital”, i.e. wealth in its material dimension alone. The rich here are those who occupy the top percentiles of the distribution of wealth in a given society, say the top 5 per cent or, in the case of the super-rich, the top 1 or even 0.1 and 0.001 per cent; or, from a different angle, those who have ten times the median wealth (chapter 1). It is a wise (if bold) choice. It may sacrifice some complexity, but it shapes an object manageable enough to allow comparisons and to outline not only discontinuities but also long-term economic processes, cultural continuities and other “‘red threads in history’ which directly connect the past to the present” (226). One of these threads, perhaps the most spectacular, is the almost unbroken trend of increasing wealth concentration and inequality from at least the 11th to the 21st century. There are only two major exceptions: the Black Death in the mid-14th century and the ‘European Civil War’ in the 20th century. In the first case, the halving of Europe’s population, the breakdown of family property and the rise in wages had an equalising effect through a rel-

ative redistribution of wealth; the First World War and especially the Second World War had the same effect, but through sheer destruction (chapter 2).¹

If the first part of the book deals with who the rich are, the next part looks at how they get rich in the first place. Throughout history, Alfani argues, there have been three main “paths to affluence”. They have emerged at different times, one succeeding but not replacing the other, alternately bringing different figures “to the top” of the wealth pyramid (chapter 7). From the early Middle Ages until at least the beginning of the 19th century, belonging to the nobility—as a separate social group characterized by formal hereditary privileges—was virtually synonymous with wealth (think of Botero again). It was not just that the nobles held the largest share of wealth, sometimes by far. They were also seen as legitimately entitled to it: in Old Regime societies, inequalities are somehow naturalised and generally not perceived as a problem. Conflicts may arise over how each member of the social hierarchy plays his role, not over the hierarchy itself (apart, perhaps, from exceptional cases such as some egalitarian heresies or utopian writings). This is what distinguishes the old nobility from modern wealth aristocracies—e.g. the rich upper classes of Boston and New York in the Gilded Age, or today’s rising global elite—whose position and privileges have only *de facto*, not *de jure*, legitimacy (chapter 3). What they have in common, however, is that in both cases “the fact of being born into great wealth is no guarantee of possessing valuable personal qualities” (88).

This brings us to the question of merit, the main form that the ideological rationalisation of economic inequalities has taken since the Age of Revolutions ushered in the era of formal equality. Alfani returns to this issue many times in the book. The Commercial Revolution, the opening up of the Atlantic trade routes and, above all, the two Industrial Revolutions of mid-18th and mid-19th centuries paved a different way to enrichment, allowing skilful, inventive and sometimes unscrupulous merchants and entrepreneurs to accumulate immense wealth through the exercise of Schumpeterian ‘creative destruction’ (chapter 4). Banking and finance offered similar, if more problematic, opportunities, given the burden of suspicion that (Christian) condemnations of avarice and usury

¹ Alfani is building here on his previous works on the economic impact of major crises in early modern Italian States. See Guido Alfani, *Calamities and the Economy in Renaissance Italy: The Grand Tour of the Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

have placed on money-related activities from Thomas Aquinas to Occupy Wall Street—though the continuities here are perhaps less “clear” than Alfani claims (chapter 5). If one were to disregard the amount of violence and exploitation that has often accompanied the creation of immense fortunes—one should not, however, and Alfani very aptly exposes this dark side of wealth accumulation on several occasions—one might believe that their creators legitimately deserved them. But what about their descendants? The logic of merit seems at odds with the logic of succession, since it is hard to see how it can apply to those who have simply been lucky enough to be the recipients of a bounty hoarded by others. This is where the issue of inheritance comes fully to the fore: while the different “paths to affluence” can explain the production of inequalities *within* a generation, it is only when certain inheritance systems are in place that these inequalities can be passed on more or less unchanged *across* generations. Inheritance is, so to speak, the institutional infrastructure of the diachronicity of wealth. This means, of course, that it can also be the lever through which the concentration of wealth can be publicly regulated, since it is evident that “inheritability today does not depend so much on the nature of wealth, (...) but on the institutional framework and in particular on the way in which inheritances are taxed (if they are)” (197). It is no accident that, as Alfani shows, the new acceleration of wealth inequality in the West from around the 1980s onwards—after a period of relative decline in the first and second post-war decades—coincided, among other things, with the steady reduction in inheritance tax rates brought about by neoliberal policies, as part of a more general effort to dismantle the progressive fiscal systems created at the turn of the 19th century.

The issue of taxation touches on another central theme of the book. Legitimate or not, deserving or not, the rich and the super-rich have often been viewed with a certain unease by the rest of society, placing them in a kind of double bind. If they are thrifty and prone to hoarding, the rich can be accused of avarice and criticised for their miserliness (with a nod to Tolkien, Alfani calls this “the curse of Smaug”); if, on the other hand, they indulge in Veblenian “conspicuous consumption” and flaunt their wealth, they can be blamed for squandering their fortunes and even run the risk of being legally sanctioned, as happened with medieval and early modern sumptuary laws (chapter 6). The third and final part of the volume explores this social conundrum and the ways in which the rich have sought to escape it. Concerns about the dangers that ex-

cessive concentration of private wealth might pose to the stability and survival of public institutions have been repeatedly voiced throughout history, especially in democratic or proto-democratic contexts. And indeed, given the high degree of direct or indirect control over public life that their wealth can confer (chapter 10), these concerns do not seem entirely misplaced. To mitigate and counter them, a cultural tradition, the contours of which had been defined by the 15th century, would carve out a role for the rich as a reservoir of resources that communities could draw upon in times of need. It was not wealth itself that was objectionable, but its use in the exclusive interest of its owner rather than for the common good (chapter 8). Of course, this cultural representation also functioned as a way of taming the ‘gods’ and binding them to their duties towards ‘men’: if they wanted to be accepted, they had to give back some of what they had accumulated.

The problem then became: how? Should it to be through a voluntary and gracious gift, along the lines of ancient euergetism, Christian charity or 19th-century philanthropy? Or should it be through compulsory state taxation, which would make societies more independent of the benevolence of their better-off members and give the public the choice of how to spend the resources thus collected (chapter 9)? In the end, it all comes down to who gets to decide. Giving is here an inherently political act, one in which power is ultimately at stake. It is not surprising, then, that the willingness of the rich to contribute is inversely proportional to the strength of their grip on society: “as the social position of the rich became more assured, their participation in the ruling elite unchallenged (or almost) and their presence within the community unquestioned, they also felt less and less obliged to give part of their wealth back to society” (246). If this is true, it may also be the case that what Alfani identifies as the emerging tendency of the rich and super-rich to evade taxation and refrain from helping in times of public calamity—all too evident in the recent episodes of the Great Recession of 2008-9 and Covid-19 pandemic—together with the high degree of resilience their fortunes have shown compared to similar crises in the past, is a symptom of their rapidly growing power and the abandonment of their traditional social role as helpers of last resort (chapter 11).

Will this violation of “an enrooted cultural norm” prove, as Alfani suggests, to be a self-defeating move in the long run, making “the position of the ‘aloof rich’ socially untenable” (315)? Not necessarily. One of the many valuable contribu-

tions of *As Gods Among Men* is that it clearly shows that, once a *longue durée* perspective is adopted, ideals of social equality are anything but the exception. In the millennial history of the West, they represent, at best, a parenthesis of a few centuries. Regressive taxation, institutionalised inequalities, social privilege, and the idea that “political power should rest mostly in the hands of the wealthy” (274) have rather been the norm, so ingrained in the social fabric as to become a kind of second nature. Their ‘denaturalization’ has indeed required a long cultural process and sustained political effort—which is why, incidentally, the various modern socialist traditions and their challenge to the sacrality of private property might deserve a little more attention than the book gives them. Now that, after the neoliberal season, that process seems to be running in the opposite direction and that effort has all but disappeared, there is no guarantee that a new re-naturalization of inequality will not soon be on the horizon, if not already underway. Another element should be added, too. Alfani rightly insists on the hostility and suspicion that societies have historically harboured towards the rich, and the social concerns that these latter have repeatedly raised. But there is another side to this story, for those at the top have been objects not only of social scorn but also of fascination, admiration, identification and even devotion. This was the case under the Old Regime for those bourgeois who aspired to join the ranks of the nobility and emulated their lifestyle, and it is now the case for those of the lower classes who cheer on billionaires like Silvio Berlusconi and Donald Trump. After all, gods are not only there to be feared, but also to be worshipped. This is precisely why thorough, dispassionate and scientifically sound studies like Alfani’s are so important: they are crucial in bringing the gods back down to earth.

Lorenzo Coccoli



2 GIANFRANCO BORRELLI, *Repubblica, ragion di Stato, democrazia cristiana. Genealogie 2*. Napoli, Cronopio, 2023, pp. 528, ISBN: 9788898367634, € 28.

The concept of 'Raison d'Etat' is one of the most important operators in reading the political and social development of European modernity, especially with regard to the dynamics inherent in the emergence of the State, understood as the connection between the prerogatives of the sovereign, the agency of individuals and the structuring of administrative agencies. The analytical potential that deploys this concept, thus, serves as a key to interpreting the main dynamics that traversed and conditioned the history of the State, first and foremost the disharmonious development of the capitalist system of production and of a legislation designed to protect both economic and subjective needs that were emerging. In Foucauldian terms, the practices of the *Raison d'Etat* famously drew heavily on economic and actuarial sciences, such as statistics, to govern economic dynamics and better distribute the population, identified as the specific object of governmental performance. Moreover, these practices were joined by minute technologies to control the behavior of the population, through the construction of legislative codes that drew from legal tradition, and also through the forms of control typical of religious institutions. Complementing this epochal shift, economics and law were joined by the police sciences, which originated primarily as internal knowledge of the constituting state administrations (as Schiera points out in his very important study, the *Kameralwissenschaft* were in principle sciences devoted to the construction of a principle of order and order within the Prussian state) and, which, progressively, became part of the toolbox of liberalism, understood as a set of economic prescriptions and guiding principles of political order, capable of regulating the relations between Sovereignty and People. By breaking down, then, the principle of *Raison d'Etat*, it is possible to illuminate its main guidelines, the set of technologies of administration devoted to the containment of natural and social emergencies, through the choices of economic policy and the perimeter of the space of action of individuals. The development of civil society (understood in the Habermasian sense of public opinion, the Koselleckian sense of the space of dissent, or the Foucauldian sense as the agon of exchange between the different utilities of individuals), consequently, contributes to a further transformation within the liberal political field, which would later flow into the Enlightenment and the sixty-year revolutionary period that would set Europe ablaze, from the

French July of 1789 to the Peoples' Spring of 1848, to the extreme offshoots constituted by the explosion of the Paris Commune-the first show of strength of the labor movement-and the birth of the Wilhelminian Reich.

Starting from this summary historical framework, it is possible to present Gianfranco Borrelli's latest book *Repubblica, ragion di Stato, democrazia Cristiana. Genealogie 2* as a rich and articulate reading path, modeled on an historical-conceptual genealogy of the adventures of Reason of State in the process of Italy's formation. The shortcomings that today, in fact, are attributed to the Italian political scenario, through the filter of Borrelli's critical analysis, can be ascribed to the genetic dimension of the very process of national State-Building. In a nutshell, they are: the weakness of civil society, the overlapping of different powers and the slowing down of legislative processes and the development of the modern bureaucratic machine, the tendency to use emergency as a governmental technology to manage crises, the supremacy of partisan reason over common interests, the moralisation of public space. In short, what Borrelli studies and exposes in great detail is the inherently conservative dimension of the set of phenomena related to the Reason of State in Italy, aimed at blocking, from time to time, constitutive processes coming from below and ensuring the distribution of power among specific elites. In the remainder of this text, Borrelli's book, consisting of eight chapters, will be read through two analytical axes, which run through it in its entirety and can partially restore its conceptual richness and heuristic depth. The first axis will be concerned with pointing out the continuity of the conservative status of liberal discourses and the resulting governmental practices in the historical span from the 1700s to the late 1970s. Along the second axis, an attempt will be made to read through some authors cited in the text (Cuoco, Leopardi, Gramsci) the processes of antagonistic subjectification that have been given in the course of long-lasting historical processes, and the underlying problems that have prevented the development of extensive revolutionary processes capable of checkmating governmental technologies. The dream, or rather, the republican utopia, understood in this sense as a mature process capable of subjectivation based on the freedom of civil living, *ab origine* found as a barrier the presence and strength of an ethos of conservation.

Indeed, from the Enlightenment onwards, the reformist dimension of a progressive liberalization of institutions and public space had to reckon with the difficulties associated with the process of invention and construction of a na-

tional identity, and with those of an impossible hegemony of the Enlightenment beyond the educated elites. The denunciation of absolute baroque sovereignty, of Bourbon origin (Doria), matched the project of a civil police (*polizia civile*), in the sense of the formation of a civil society equal to the tasks of institutional transformation, both administratively and morally (Muratori) and the formation of a national economic space (Ortes). In these discourses, moderate reformism is wedded to the technologies of *polizia cristiana*, to the disciplinary control of the souls and bodies of the population; the Reason of State, in Vico's sense, becomes just when it succeeds in connecting particular needs with the more general historical progress of Reason (anticipating the Hegelian themes that would arise shortly thereafter). The accommodation of reformist ideas on the conservative horizon of government practices cuts, thus, the legs to any project of transformation, both on the pedagogical and political levels. The moderate and conservative dimension of the political technologies put in place, in fact, has as its own polemical target 'Machiavellianism', that is, that political residue marked by secrecy and cunning of absolutist matrix, created *ad hoc* during the Counter-Reformation era, that, instead, tended toward a more mature liberal turn, albeit in a context in which the pastoral force of Catholicism and the prudence of the first constitutional experiments were trying to transform society from above, within narrow circles of political-religious influence (Mancini, Ferrari). The absence of a strong civil society allows the moderate forces to build their own weak hegemony, constantly shaken by the power struggles between the different factions of the elites and dependent on the secular power of the Church, whose action over the centuries will be marked by petty changes, albeit in the wake of an 'enlightened' liberalism. The third and fourth chapters, in fact, are devoted to the discussion of authors who tried to connect the construction of a public Reason of State, aimed at producing institutional stability through the equitable distribution of power, with the principles of *vivere civile* derived from the Catholic religion. If thinkers such as Romagnosi, Gioberti and Rosmini tried to integrate the grammar of liberal constitutionalism with the Catholic process of subjectivation, remaining equidistant between the Reason of the Church and the Reason of the Prince, enforcing ecclesial precepts, on the contrary, D'Azeglio and Cavour paved the way instead for the process of liberal subjectivation of the institutions and fractions of the bourgeoisie more inclined to the constitution of the Unitary State. In countertendency, Mazzini

tried to link liberal subjectivation and instituting spirit by enforcing the republican project as a *mythopoietic* symbol, which, starting from the revolutions of 1848, was supposed to awaken the Italian people and guide them on the path to freedom (and make them immune, moreover, to the insurrectional allure of socialist ideas).

The Unitarian and liberal epoch opened by Piedmontese leaders thus unfolds the path of an *octroyé* constitutionalism (the Statute Albertine of 1848, which remained in force until the enactment of the Republican Constitution of 1948), of a paternalistic and conservative conception of subjective rights and prerogatives, crossed with a progressive liberalization of representative institutions and the extension of the national territory. The book's central chapters, the fifth, sixth and seventh, thus reconstruct the different developments of conservative practices within monarchical-constitutional governance. The conservative function of the Reason of State develops through what Borrelli calls "governmental modulations of the Reason of State", constituted by that system of prerogatives guaranteed to the figure of the Sovereign, the political executive and the prefectures as the seat of government of the territory, and by the normative use of the emergency as a system of government of both political (the emergence of the first workers' organizations) and social contradictions (the phenomena of banditry in the post-unification South). The work carried out by governments operates in the triangulation between population, the principle of unitary sovereignty, and the 'ragione di partito', that product of liberal subjectification by which different segments of the governing classes organize themselves. The liberal party reasons (with nuances ranging between authoritarianism and sensitivity to the social question), however, were counterbalanced by the emergence of a Catholic pole, the Christian democracy, theorized by Toniolo and Murri, capable of operating within the people and, at the same time, able to make itself the megaphone of the ecclesiastical hierarchies, which brought further complexity to the political scenario. The Italian scenario at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, consequently, is a useful litmus test to read further developments in Italian political history. First characteristic is the dialectic between a conservative pole, composed of liberal tendencies more inclined to authoritarianism and Christian democratic segments, and an aggregation of the left, with a gradation ranging from progressive Catholicism to social democracy, socialism to extreme wings. Second characteristic is the transformism of the hegemonic

parliamentary forces, which corresponds to a real deterrent Machiavellism, by which they try to govern the process of normative production of emergencies and absorb parliamentary dissent, without implementing their political proposals (Sonnino, Giolitti).

The attempt, made by Gaetano Mosca, to put forth a theory of the primacy of the political class, for Borrelli resolves itself into a justification of the power of an elitist minority, which, however, is not reflected in society and has a weak backing in civil society and business sectors. The chronic weakness of the elites, who always preferred party reasons to the reasons of governance, became a functional element for the violent assertion of 'monarchical Reason of State' in the resolution of the social and political crisis unleashed by the 'Red Biennium' of 1921-1922, that paved the way for the fascist regime. Borrelli, in fact, points out how the specificity of fascism lies in being a muscular continuation of the chronic pursuit of the emergence of Italian governmentality, that solved the chronic liberal inability of social governance through the verticalization of power, as much through the creation of ad hoc symbols and mythologies as through an increasingly pressing use of police apparatuses, aimed at repression and neutralization of political and social enemies. Fascism's intrinsic strength, as a movement and as a form of government specific to industrial modernity, was guaranteed as much by the support of the Crown (in which the principle of sovereignty formally resided) as by those sections of the entrepreneurial community who saw in it an element capable of guaranteeing the conditions for economic accumulation free from the demands of the workers, by patching up the lack of consensus through an exaggerated use of the mythologema 'Popolo' as an indistinct and imaginary unity, and of the Supreme Leader as the synthesis and overcoming of contradictions. The civil war of 1943-1945, by bringing the emergency back to the level of dialectics between opposing factions, revived a new phase of republican subjectification, structured from new sentiments of freedom, cooperation and national unity, and at least in an initial postwar phase marked by unity among different political forces. But, the return of the conservative logic of governmental reason takes place based on geopolitical divisions. The actor in charge of managing the balances and the slow and progressive modernization of the country, trying to keep the power relations between the different political actors unchanged, is the party of Democrazia Cristiana, the metahistorical landing point and connection

between Reason of State and Reason of Party. Acting as a shield and flywheel to the country's industrial economy through the nonchalant use of the state machine and public funding, generating vast clienteles of interest with the aim of neutralizing social criticalities especially in the southern areas of the country, Democrazia Cristiana is to be considered a true Party-State. The inability to govern, however, the two decades of social conflicts between the 1960s and the 1980s, characterized by a profound upheaval in Italian society dictated by workers, youth, and feminist struggles, and also in a creeping civil war between the organized and armed segments of social movements and the police apparatuses supported by the all-party state (*compromesso storico*), would mark the end of the attempt to govern through conservative moderatism. The tragic conclusion of the kidnapping of Aldo Moro, the politician who had spent more than anyone else in the practice of moderate and inclusive transformation of the Italian political spectrum, in addition to symbolically and materially marking the end of the First Republic, also marks the end, by the mouth of one of its main actors, through the fierce accusations made against his fellow party members and the coeval political class, of the governance structure based on consensus administered by the parties, on the direct relationship between the parties themselves, understood as the expression of popular consensus, and the administrative elites, deconstructed by the impact of armed conflicts, the accelerating dynamics of neoliberal globalization and the transformation of the material constitution in a technocratic sense.

The other analytical pole, in parallel, moves in search of the antagonistic processes of subjectification that have run through the history of Reason of State. Borrelli, in this case, recovers Machiavelli's revolutionary materialism, especially the positive and creative dimension of social conflicts and the collective nature of the Prince-Institution, in order to read the revolutionary and republican projects and processes as experiences of a constituent and molecular desire that has always moved in the shadow of constituted power, as much in the form of critical reflection of historical and philosophical matrix as in the concrete organization of social movements. A line that starts with Vincenzo Cuoco, crosses Enlightenment revolutionary fury with Leopardi, and flows into Antonio Gramsci's monumental reflection on the dynamics of Italian history. Moving in the wake of the Machiavellian legacy, these authors in fact highlight the potentialities and limits of Italian republican subjectivation, reading the causes

of the degeneration of collective participation in the political dimension in the constant and indefatigable search for the 'particolare' by representative political agencies, highlighted the constant use of the exception as the normality of power, and underlined the disintegration of revolutionary forces as an unresolved *vulnus*.

Cuoco, primarily, analyzes the vicissitudes of Reason of State from the perspective of the concept of 'rivoluzione passiva' (passive revolution) This concept is a fundamental device to illustrate theoretically and historically the failure and impossibility of revolutionary transformations in Italy, both in the Enlightenment and later periods. By highlighting how the passivity was due to the substantial separation of enlightened subjectivities and thus to a kind of idealization of the materiality of actual social conditions, Cuoco showed its substantial extraneousness and limited impact. In the specific history of the Neapolitan Revolution of 1799, he analyzed its failure precisely by demonstrating the weakness of the local elites, who substantially imported French ideas without succeeding in building a real hegemony, politically and pedagogically. The counter-revolutionary Reason of State, aligned on the notes of the clerical and monarchical Holy Alliance, had a good game in deconstructing the social protagonism by the force of its pastoral authority and, above all, by reinforcing the measures of Christian police and civil police. The triumph of this reactionary pedagogy, thus, can be charged to the failure of the Neapolitan Enlightenment's desire to match the Machiavellian analytics on the necessary attention that must be paid to the *appetiti popolari*, and the virtuous and dynamic productivity of the dialectic between popular conflicts and constituted institutions. On the missed encounter between revolutionary projects and analysis of social desires Leopardi focuses. Borrelli, in the wake of other authors (Luporini and Negri, for example) reads Leopardi's pessimism as an expression of a revolutionary desire that historical conditions cause to veer toward pessimism and 'impoliticity'. Borrelli, however, brings to light the Machiavellian roots of Leopardi's reflections, emphasizing the changing and dynamic nature of desire as an immanent movement in the dialectic between happiness and suffering. This dialectic between *contentezza* and *scontentezza*, in fact, reaches its acme within the transformations induced by post-revolutionary European modernization, which, by producing the citizen as the center of imputation of the effects of sovereignty, disengages them from the previous effective social relations. By

rooting, however, the force of desire and suffering to reach him to the power of Nature, he tries to disengage him from the process of corruption of customs that is inherent in the irrepressible force of modernization. The return to nature, thus, can be read as an antagonistic form of the '*ritorno ai principi*' of Machiavellian memory, that is, a constant search for ethical and republican *virtus* as a form of resistance to the barbarization of customs and civil life itself. Borrelli, thus, can speak of the project of Leopardi's subjectivation as an 'aesthetics of the self', capable of producing effects even within the political agon, opposing the virtuous composition of subjective appetites determined by *amour de soi* as a balanced form of collective life, to selfishness and the pursuit of self-interest.

Directly summarizing the insights of Cuoco and Leopardi (among many others), Gramsci makes an organic and comprehensive reading of the weakness of Italian Reason of State, in two respects. In the wake of Leopardi, in fact, the attention devoted by the Sardinian revolutionary to anthropological and pedagogical dynamics is undeniable, on the limits of liberal subjectivation based on the selfishness and pastoral (and ecclesiastical) leadership of the popular masses, subalterns because they were unable to have a voice to express their claims, which made the political and 'sentimental' connection between civil society and the people impossible. In the wake of Cuoco's concept of passive revolution, moreover, he reads the transformist nature of the liberal Reason of State, the construction of a weak hegemony of the progressive segments of the bourgeoisie precisely by virtue of their genetically elitist constitution, and the ability of the governmental forces themselves to operating with the force of exception against proletarian mobilizations. Reading Cuoco's theoretical operator with the Marxian concept of 'revolution from above', Gramsci studies the history of modernization as the history of the clash between the different fractions of the bourgeoisie, and Catholic hegemony as the only true form of popular power because it is capillary and diffuse, able to rule through the instruments of the Christian police and the less coercive one of the liberal police. Revolutionary subjectification, then, passes through the shift from 'war of movement' to 'war of position', through a process of educating the popular masses rooted within existing power relations, and the slow construction of the 'Prince' as a collective agent of enunciation, capable of binding the cultural and intellectual elites with popular desires. Gramscian reflection, famously, comes after the defeat of workers' mobilizations after World War I, which can be attributed to three

orders of factors. The first two, following Antonio Labriola's interpretive track revived by Borrelli, were the emergent structure of the state, the reason for the state on the tip of the bayonets of the gendarmes who previously repressed the Fasci Siciliani and the 'Red Week' demonstrations of 1914 with the proclamation of the state of siege, and the progressive 'statification' of the Socialist Party, the inability to affect the normative level and the progressive loss of consensus in the workers' base because of the wait-and-see choices and the spread of the antagonistic charge of revolutionary syndicalism. Criticism that would become topical again during the events of the Red Biennium, in which workers' antagonism failed to transform itself into a countervailing power pole on the level of late-liberal governmentality, due to the once again moderate choices of the socialist leadership and the numerical and organizational paucity of the structures of the Communist Party of Italy. In the wake of Lenin's teaching, Amadeo Bordiga, among the founders of the Italian Communist organization, was pushing to transform workers' self-governing structures into institutions of power capable of deconstructing the monarchical state machine, and into matrices of subjectification of a revolutionary form of life rooted in its own social context of belonging, capable of practicing revolution as daily transformation (something that, in a different form and with different ideological accents, will characterize the experience of Fiume and the Carnaro Regency). In Machiavellian terms, again, the failure of the revolution was due to the failure to transform antagonistic social force into political and organizational astuteness, and instead was the pretext for experimenting with an authoritarian technology of government.

The ghost of Machiavelli, negative myth of the cunning of power or thinker of republican desire, is, in conclusion, is the red thread that binds the different fragments of the history of Italy's weak liberal hegemony that Borrelli has reconstructed, and which is still useful for reading the present, in which party motives, liberal policing and the foot-stomping invocation of 'Patria' as the original matrix of political and social rights is becoming more and more pressing. The parliamentary and legislative validation of a new 'Decreto Sicurezza', which increasingly militarizes public space, thins out spaces for dissent and increases the powers of law-and-order control agencies, shows how much the historically entrenched idea of government in Italy is always dependent on the presence of the emergency as a causal apt to justify normalizing and conservative interventions. And, as the important Machiavelli scholar that the book's author is,

the legacy of this study brings the reader to thinking politics as a continuous dynamic made up of splits and re-compositions, to thinking social conflicts as inescapable elements of republican subjectivation, starting with the mutant and multiple material desire of the governed as degree zero of antagonistic reflection and practice. Beyond the limits of *raison d'état* and moderate conservation, in fact, there are the subjective power of antagonistic desire and constituent inventions that only in practice can find their principle of validation, just as only in legitimation from above have the different forms of Italic governmentality found the strength of their own weak hegemony.

Vincenzo Maria Di Mino



3 MATTEO VALLERIANI, GIULIA GIANNINI, ENRICO GIANNETTO EDs., *Scientific Visual Representations in History*. Cham, Springer Nature, 2023, 440 pp., ISBN: 9783031113161, CHF 100.50 (e-book CHF 80.00). <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-11317-8>

The theme of this volume is compelling, and the content is substantial. Naturally, its objective cannot be to exhaust the subject, a task that would necessitate a multi-volume endeavor. It is also obvious that one won't be allowed to simply title a book 'Some Scientific Visual Representations', etc.; however, all the presented examples are pertinent and insightful. In addition to the requisite subjects, such as Hooke's *Micrographia* (the Hypnerotomachia of scientific books), herbaria, and astronomical treatises, there are more unconventional subjects of investigation, including the utilization of photography in the inaugural oceanographic expedition, the development of MRI, and galactic tails, to mention some.

While some contributions focus on the role of printed diagrams in Early Modern textbooks of astronomy and cosmology, and the entire volume seems to put a broader emphasis on the printed page, a very interesting chapter expounds

on the incorporation of manual reproductions of such illustrations into students' personal notebooks. Unless I am mistaken we also find here, by the way, the only example of anatomical image, whereas the illustrations analyzed in the volume (and especially in the first part) are predominantly astronomical in nature. In particular an excellent chapter on automated analysis and grouping of corresponding illustrations in the innumerable editions of Sacrobosco's *Sphera*—as a means of networking the editions, the cutters and the printers—presents the readers with an intriguing progression that chronicles the evolution of the conventional demonstration of the Earth's spherical form through the experience of the raising horizon as perceived from the vantage point of a ship that moves away from the shore.

Here and in other chapters (e.g. the one on galactic tails and bridges), the focus is also on the techniques to produce and present visual information from data, that is, on second-degree visual representation, and on visual thinking in general. Indeed, this collection is characterized by its ability to showcase the multifaceted nature of the historical phenomenon it explores: for instance, the opposition of stability and modification (while astronomical diagrams are quite mutable, "Hero's diagrams are among the most stable of surviving technical images", p. 150); the production for institutional and unofficial use ("Sketches of experimental apparatus, drawings of experiments, tables and geometric representations—aiming to explain the experimental results—populate the unofficial papers of the [Cimento] Academy", 235); the difference in function, when illustrations are provided for scientific publication, for communication (as in the case of the Challenger expedition), or to stimulate R&D (the chapter on the narrative function of images in fostering MRI innovation). The collection is thus a welcome stimulus to further research.

Enrico Pasini



Cover illustration of Alfani, As Gods Among Men (Rembrandt, A Polish Nobleman, 1637, part.).