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Mark Jurdjevic, *Guardians of Republicanism: The Valori Family in the Florentine Renaissance*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. ix & 199. £61. ISBN 978-0-19-920448-9 (Hbk).

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The history of the Valori, one of the most prominent families of the Florentine elite from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, has been left relatively unexplored by scholars of the Renaissance. This is despite their involvement in the political strife and dramatic change that characterised Florence during this era, and their patronage of famous figures including the Neoplatonist philosopher Marsilio Ficino, the reforming monk Girolamo Savonarola, and Niccolò Machiavelli. *Guardians of Republicanism* fills this void. It studies five generations of the family in order to assess the nature of republicanism in Florence and its relationship with the city's intellectual life. This is accomplished in a series of six stand-alone chapters detailing the Valoris' links with writers, scholars, rulers and politicians from the late 1400s to the early 1600s.

Chapter One, 'Francesco Valori and the Savonarolan Republic', takes as its focus Francesco Valori's role in the ousting of the Medici in 1494, and the nature of his support for the Dominican preacher and self-proclaimed prophet, Savonarola. Jurdjevic argues that previous studies of Francesco have been incorrect in attributing his actions to republicanism or to religion. Rather, the elite's increasing frustration with Piero de' Medici can be attributed to the unofficial ruler's slighting of the city's other powerful families. These families wanted to restore power to the oligarchy who had traditionally been responsible for the running of the republic. Francesco, in leading the popular rebellion against Piero, was therefore more concerned with personal prestige than the common good. He then turned Savonarola's mass appeal to his own advantage by

creating an alliance with the *frate*. Jurdjevic persuasively demonstrates that, although Francesco championed the monk's moral reforms and became the leader of his party, his political views remained independent, and his overall aim was to exploit Savonarola's popularity for his own purposes. As the most powerful man in Florence, Francesco used his position of privilege to destroy his pro-Medicean enemies, culminating in the 1497 execution of five of the city's most influential men.

Chapter Two, 'Marsilio Ficino and the Valori Family', turns its attention to the relationship between the Platonic philosopher and Francesco's nephews, Filippo and Niccolò. Ficino appears to have enjoyed a strong friendship with Filippo, who helped to finance the publication of his translations of Plato's work. Following Filippo's death in 1494, Niccolò maintained this close relationship. Jurdjevic's view is that Niccolò was able to patronise Ficino despite the family's support for Savonarola, who fiercely opposed Neoplatonism's syncretising of classical and Christian beliefs, as Ficino's teachings continued to appeal to 'the city's indigenous tradition of Florentine exceptionalism' (p. 53), i.e. the belief that a special destiny had been reserved for the city, whether religious, political or philosophical in nature. Ficino's insistence that the elite should involve themselves in the city's political life, setting aside differences in order to work for the common good, still spoke to the ruling classes. Evidence for Niccolò's belief in the political and social utility of Neoplatonism, and his desire to defend and commemorate his family's intellectual leanings, can be found in his *Vita* of Lorenzo de' Medici. Here, Lorenzo is depicted as being a virtuous citizen due to his knowledge of Platonic doctrine, an interpretation that allowed Niccolò, in the republican context of the 1490s, implicitly to assert that the family's previous support of the Medici was based upon mutual understanding of this philosophy. Through this effective combination of close literary analysis and detailed archival research, Jurdjevic therefore interprets the *Vita* as legitimising the elite's continued study of Neoplatonism, and as promoting the Valoris' role in its development.

Chapter Three, 'The Valori Family and Machiavelli's Portraits of Francesco *il vecchio*', takes as its subject Niccolò Valori's friendship with Niccolò Machiavelli, and its impact

upon the latter's two very different portrayals of Francesco Valori. The Niccolòs were friends and allies, both key figures in Piero Soderini's republican government. When the Medici returned to power in 1512, the Niccolòs were doomed to political exclusion due to their connections to Soderini and to Francesco Valori. They attempted to return to favour by writing or commissioning works that revised the political career of Francesco. Machiavelli's first portrayal of Francesco, in his *Discorsi* (1503) portrays him as an inciter of factional strife. In his later, post- 1512 *Nature di huomini fiorentini*, however, Francesco is depicted as a patriotic statesman working for the public good. There is no mention of Francesco's role in the 1494 coup and the 1497 executions, or of his alliance with Savonarola. Coming to the conclusion that the *Nature di huomini fiorentini* was intended to be part of the Medici-commissioned *Istorie fiorentine*, Jurdjevic convincingly interprets the work as a defence of the Medici enemies with whom Machiavelli was connected, created in order to prove his own blamelessness. His means of doing this, Jurdjevic argues, was to rewrite history, transforming Francesco into a patriot whose tendencies were conservative rather than radical.

Chapter Four, 'The Valori Family and Luca Della Robbia's *Vita di Bartolomeo*', examines how the Valori dealt with their Savonarolist traditions following the return of the Medici and, more specifically, their connections to Luca Della Robbia and his biography of Bartolomeo Valori. As Jurdjevic points out, the fact that Della Robbia had ties to both Neoplatonism and Savonarolism connected him to the Valori, and it is likely that Niccolò either commissioned or supported the work. Although superficially a simple biography of Bartolomeo, Jurdjevic persuasively argues that it is also intended subtly to defend Francesco, drawing parallels between him and Bartolomeo. Della Robbia employs Savonarolan imagery and language to describe early *Quattrocento* Florence, implying that the Valori were attuned to Savonarolan thinking even before the monk's rise to power. Bartolomeo is depicted as an ideal citizen, whose beliefs about freedom from tyranny coincide with those later expressed by the *frate*. Jurdjevic therefore asserts that Valori politics are presented as a continuum, and Savonarolan ideas as beneficial to Florence, thereby both commemorating and justifying the family's Savonarolism.

Chapter Five, 'The Valori Self-Portrait Under the Medici Grand Dukes', moves the focus to Baccio Valori's late sixteenth-century miscellany on the family's political history. His aim in writing was to commemorate the family's achievements, to make sense of their relationship with the Medici, and to maintain the Duke's favour. This was certainly ambitious, as Jurdjevic points out, given that both Baccio's father and uncle were executed by Duke Cosimo I following their rebellion and defeat in the battle at Montemurlo. His response was to demonstrate that the family's outlook had remained fundamentally unchanged between the republican and ducal eras, transforming its story into a grand narrative of political virtue. In this account of the family, for example, Francesco is an obedient republican patriot and supporter of Lorenzo de' Medici, coming to prominence only after Piero de' Medici had been declared a rebel. The family's connection with Ficino is stressed, emphasising the political utility of Neoplatonism and the Valoris' pride in their involvement with it. Overall, Jurdjevic argues compellingly that the Valori are portrayed by Baccio as interested in the common good with Medici rule, and as being without vested political ambition but happy to serve the city, in line with their Platonic traditions.

Chapter Six, 'The Last Portraits of the Valori Family', skips to the early seventeenth century, and the final two histories of the Valori, Scipione Ammirato's *Delle famiglie nobili fiorentine* and Don Silvano Razzi's *Vita di Francesco Valori il più Vecchio*. Both writers had the blessing and assistance of Baccio, and their accounts of the family are full of praise. However, they differ widely. Ammirato was Grand Duke Ferdinand's court historian and therefore a Medici client. This leads him to gloss over the family's conflicts with the Medici, taking an overview of Valori history and interpreting their republicanism within a wider narrative of support for the Medici. The main aim of the account is to demonstrate the benefits of political absolutism. Razzi, on the other hand, was a Dominican and Savonarolist. As such, he defends Francesco's career and opposition to the Medici. Both accounts, Jurdjevic argues, were of use to Baccio. One helped him to maintain the favour of the Medici and the other kept alive his family's Savonarolan and republican traditions.

Overall, this book presents a fascinating take on the nature of Florentine republicanism, its relationship with the intellectual movements of the day, and the ways in which families fought for survival and to maintain their traditions in the constantly changing political climate of Renaissance Florence. It is persuasively argued throughout, written with great clarity, and has evidently been meticulously researched. Its combined methodology, drawing on both exegetic and historical approaches, is particularly convincing. Its flaw, if any, is an occasional tendency to repeat itself. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that earlier versions of two of the chapters have been published in article form. This aside, *Guardians of Republicanism* is essential reading for students and scholars of Florentine politics and intellectual life.