

Philip Jones and the Medieval Italian City-State*

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Author of articles on Italian local history as well as a political study of the Malatesta and the papal states, Professor Jones has here presented the first volume of a proposed two-volume work on the city republics of medieval and Renaissance Italy. His already distinguished investigations of economic history are the roots of this work. These were a chapter called "Italy" in the *Cambridge Economic History* of 1971 (a 91 page essay), his "La storia economica: dalla caduta dell'impero romano al secolo XIV", an essay of about 340 pages published in the second volume of the Einaudi *Storia d'Italia* of 1974, and lastly his *Economia e Società nell'Italia medievale* of 1980. As is easy to see, Mr Jones' work is all of a piece and truly monumental.

What shall be done here is sketch the outline of the present work accenting not its really vast and fascinating wealth of information about this history, but instead its basic ideological lineaments. That task is not as easy as it sounds because of the way Mr. Jones writes. The hundreds of articles and books cited in his footnotes, together with the fact that not a few important secondary authors are not to be found in the general bibliography (I think of Marx, for example, but there are many others), make it difficult to find one's way. Besides, although always clear on second reading, the prose is vaguely reminiscent of the great novelist William Faulkner because sentences

* Philip Jones, *The Italian City-State from Commune to Signoria*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997), pp. X-702

are often a page and half of small and closely set print. At any rate, here is the sketch.

A principal theme of Mr Jones' book is the distinction between classical and medieval urbanism. In antiquity, land was the chief source of wealth, the main object of investment, and, in spite of some factory production, "industry and trade were of little account". Save for rare Eastern or maritime exceptions, the ancient city was not commercial or known for manufactures. Its cities' central squares were devoted only to government and cult and business and industry were not represented there. Although wealth was much praised, productive investment was "rigidly restricted" and, lacking real credit institutions, all but limited to money lending. Business activities were wholly subordinated to the "Machtpolitik" of government, and ambitious individuals busied themselves only as soldiers or as investors in colonization and tax farming. "Even when voiced in class terms", political divisions mainly arose "not from social but from aristocratic rivalries and feuds", and hence the term "popular" denoted "not the 'people' or democratic reform", but instead the policies of "demagogic notables, "class traitors" seeking to gain dictatorship or command. Education and thought were hostile to the market place and dominated by "aristocratic values" of leisure, literature and philosophy. Paid labour, productive enterprise and practical knowledge were denigrated, and classical culture and education constituted an immense material and psychological block to effective economic growth.

During and after the third century crisis, Rome's government undertook to stimulate and regulate the economy. This effort was still-born because it served only to saddle society with a political elite of a new and "partly parvenu" aristocracy of service, one that obliterated urban self-government with "bureaucratic commissars". Even the attempt to enliven productive capacities, especially regarding transportation and military procurement, failed to do more than create wholly passive guilds of entrepreneurs and technicians, the "state-controlled" collegia. This limited and restrictive "corporatism" in no way arrested the decline of the empire's urban centres or eradicated the growing power of its backward rural classes. The result was that

“social pre-eminence passed from town to country” and “the countryside became ‘the locus of history’”.

Paced by Italy, European urban life revived during the tenth and eleventh centuries. Often located around old castles or monasteries, new commercial centres inhabited by “professional” merchants grew apace. “Not primarily political or social...” these new communities “grew and lived by trade” and “incorporated not landed but economic classes”. “Trade and industry began to rival land (and money-lending) as an object and source of investment, [and] mechanical inventions ... were declared things of daily experience and expectation”. Accompanying this were the mechanisms of “partnership, accounting, banking and insurance, [as well as] state finance and debt”. “Excepting possibly Paris, all major cities now were mercantile or manufacturing [centres]”. “Medieval unlike Roman roads were largely maintained, even managed, by commercial not military interests”. In short, “true to the medieval mutation, cities were not parasitic refuges like ancient Rome for an excess population of idle, half-starved rustics, but were generative, productive, tools for the manipulation of economic forces”. Characterized by “*Stadtluft macht frei*”, these “free towns or communes [were] emancipated from the whole world of aristocracy”. Their “*burgenses*” or “*mercatores*” (the words mean the same) were “wild for gain”. Merchants were not interested in the crusade *per se* but only in making money out of it. Theirs “was the authentic voice of capitalism. Unrefined and not yet disguised by economic ‘science’, [mercantile] theory came over unperverted as ‘flat materialism’, an undiluted doctrine of economic individualism”.

This renewal took place in the medieval context of political decentralization and urban life spread well beyond the regions touched during antiquity. The author distinguishes three zones: Mediterranean “*romanitas*”, a northern German zone and an Atlantic one between the two. He also notes that, however great the expansion of Italy’s economy was, Italian merchants were never engaged in the wine trade from the continent to England nor did they penetrate the region of the Baltic Sea. Mediterranean “*romanitas*” was also quite unlike the northern and essentially German urbanism described above. Italian

townsfolk were "cives" (inhabitants, that is, of one-time Roman "civitates", not "burgenses", and had no merchant settlements spreading out from an original castle or nucleus as did those in northern Europe. A result was that Italian town liberties were not like those of the north but instead "resembled the feudal more than the low-caste, commercially biased, urban privileges of Northern Europe".

The medieval epoch, in short, was "an age of revolution, ... a negation of antiquity. And the focus of the contrast was 'unmedieval', city-state, Italy". During the Dark Ages, Italy acquired "a new vocation, the un-Roman vocation of trade.... And for the first time for centuries (or possibly ever) an increasing number of 'mercatores', instead of [being] Orientals (or Jews), were freeborn Italians". This people were the "progenitors ... of Western capitalism, individualism and democracy ... the first bourgeois civilization, ... one both 'capitalist' and 'bourgeois.'" The Italian town therefore stands for a "revolution" leading mankind "from feudal aristocratic to mercantile and popular rule, from landowner to merchant domination". More, it also rejected clerical obscurantism. The "whole spirit" of the Italian "leaders of commercial capitalism ... was non-ascetic, tolerant of all classes, infidel, Jew, and (if profitable) heretic". It was untouched by the clerical prohibition of usury, especially in commercial towns like Venice and Genoa where businessmen never or rarely made restitution of what ecclesiastical rigourists called their "illgotten" gains.

Although Italy led this commercial revolution, the peninsula was also Rome's heir. Its townsfolk retained a secular judicial and notarial tradition even in the darkest Carolingian period and its clergy and citizens traditionally elected their bishops. The town was never cut off from the surrounding countryside because the nobility also played a role in town, thereby expressing a desire, instinct with ancient predilection, to remain in or sometimes rejoin the traditional centres of social and political life, enfranchisement and power. Although a certain Lombard or Germanic tradition was apparent here, even the urban towers inhabited by this class showed that the nobility was wedded to city life. In spite of the unity of city and countryside, Italy's social geography was nevertheless essentially un-Roman: the country

“... was a member of the body of the city ... but not, as in antiquity, as ‘one with the city’”. This is clearly shown by the town’s early domination of the landed elite and the so-called conquest of its surrounding area or *contado*, an aggression really reflecting an attempt to expedite trade and ease transportation. Another result of the power of urban commerce was that “everywhere by 1300 the elements were emerging in Italy, long before the rest of Europe, of a new, capitalistic agrarian regime, of landlord-entrepreneurs and wage-tenants and labourers, a landless ... proletariat of cultivators and professionalized workers”.

Wonderful though it was, political life in the Italian commune was anything but harmonious. Churchmen fought town governments over the claim by the clergy of exemption from taxes and over benefit of clergy in regard to the courts and family inheritances. Although the popes were generally allies of the republics until after 1250, because of the battle with the Empire, imperialist (Ghibelline) Pisa suffered about thirty years of excommunication in the mid-thirteenth century. A capital of heretical thought, Milan, the popes’ greatest Lombard ally, suffered a brief but ineffective crusade in 1224. As or more significant were the struggles between commoners and nobles. Although power was usually shared by these classes by about 1100, frictions over the nobles’ right to handle their own litigation and their reluctance to submit to community taxation persisted almost everywhere until after 1250. Again, the rise of the communes involved them in a great battle with the Empire that bedevilled the peninsula from about 1050 to 1250. At the end of the struggle, to use a formulation made in the next century, not a few cities conceived that “sufficient to themselves, they were their own princes and recognized no superior”. By defeating the Empire, they had in fact gained “*imperia in imperium*”.

As these urban regions evolved into effectively independent states, they developed governmental and financial mechanisms. They built medieval Europe’s first systematic tax system, one based on both sales taxes (“*gabella*”) and wealth or income taxes calculated according to taxpayers’ means (tallage based on public and published “*extimum*”). Wartime and other needs also prompted their administrations to

borrow money, and thus began the evolution of something analogous to a funded debt, a system that later replaced almost all direct taxation. At Pisa, for example, shares in the town debt began to be traded in 1179 and between 1240 to 1300 those of Milan's debt were assigned to creditors who traded them. In 1262 Venice consolidated all obligations into a fund paying five percent annually, and at Florence in 1315 citizens were obliged to invest on the basis of their estimated wealth.

Increasing freedom and its heavy fiscal responsibilities were paralleled by the emergence of new magistracies. Seen early in the history of these towns, elected consuls were replaced or subordinated by "potestates", heads of state imported from outside the community, elected for terms of a half-year or year. Starting in the 1200s, the rise of popular parties made government double or even triple-headed. Called Captains of the People, Banner-bearers of Justice, etc., officers heading and protecting the popular party were everywhere seen. All such magistrates brought with them retinues of legal functionaries and military assistants. At the very top were sometimes placed Priors or Ancients ("anziani") chosen for terms as brief as three months. With the exception of the last-named officers who were citizens, all officers were professional and some, such as the "potestates", were knightly foreigners. Added to these higher posts, hundreds, even thousands, of lesser officers extended down to street cleaners, of which group not a few were professional. At least in theory, citizen assemblies ruled and elected these officers, confirmed their judicial decisions and judged their actions at the end of their terms ("sindicatio"). Although all citizens were summoned to hear the customs read, and applaud important elections and declarations of war, etc., smaller elected and appointed councils conducted the real business of the state. The numbers involved in such councils were sometimes huge. At the height of the popular party's rule in Bologna, just before 1300 when the population was about 50,000, around 4000 members sat in the major councils. The author is therefore correct when he reports that Italy's republics had for a time "a more extended franchise, broader democratic base, and wider range of participation, political action,

and education than any known regime before the French Revolution”.

Social harmony was the desired objective of Italy's republics and hence a frequently repeated Bolognese statute of 1282 began with the phrase: “Wishing that rapacious wolves and gentle lambs walk together...”. High objectives aside, the “magnati” and the rich associated with them fought the rise of the “popolo” because it cost them their traditional leadership. Although weak in numbers, also, they had powerful allies. If the mendicants often helped the people, bishops and the older orders usually favoured the rich and noble. Excluding notaries (solicitors), barristers and judges preferred the upper classes, from whose ranks, indeed, they were largely recruited. Besides, the rich had clients and armed retinues and also constituted the mounted arm of a town militia. A result was that upper-class opposition was often able to suppress or stifle laws favouring or protecting the middle and lower classes. To handle this stubborn opposition, popular legislation fostered a revolution in judicial investigation (introducing the inquisitorial procedure together with judicial torture) and published laws that led to a “passion for state intervention, civic paternalism, or totalitarianism” in every conceivable sphere from criminal law to town planning and civic architecture. Along with this went an attempt to exclude from political office all citizens other than those registered in craft and trade organizations. Here, the final step was the outright expulsion of opponents: an early example at Bologna in 1282-84 saw the exile of about two hundred families of the landed and urban nobility.

Parties active in this age of internal social conflict sought to perpetuate their rule and monopolize government. They lacked any “idea of a multiparty system, of institutional opposition ... and even less, except in passing, of power or office-sharing”. Republics both multiplied investigative offices to weaken defeated parties or created extraordinary magistrates empowered with ever-lengthening terms in office (evolving from a half-year term to lifetime ones) and endowed with increasingly broader areas of competence. Such were the constitutional origins of the eventually hereditary lordship or “signoria”. The decline of the mixed popular and oligarchic governments of the

republican era was general, but took place earlier in some communities like Milan and only later on elsewhere. Some places, like Venice, avoided both popular rule and monarchy by building a durable oligarchic constitution that lasted from about 1300 until the French Revolution. Some long avoided permanent "signoria" and, although suffering a full measure of violent popular republicanism, others - Bologna, Florence and Lucca, for example - held on to oligarchic republicanism for a century or more before succumbing to the principate in Renaissance times.

Reasons advanced to explain the change from republicanism to monarchy or tyranny are and were various. Some emphasized the role of external power, the Angevin French invasion, for example, the popes or the Empire. The author doubts this and remarks about two of them that "in no case was the patronage of empire or papacy the prime or original source of despotic domination". Some believed that the appearance of magnate "condottieri", the Monferrat and Pallavicino of the mid-1200s, for example, signalled the course of the future, but these were "few and their domination short-lived". Most contemporaries were convinced that constant internecine fighting weakened the republics, a Paduan chronicle in 1260 asserting that "discord of the cities ('discordia civitatum') is the joy and security of tyrants". And it seems that, unlike Northern European experience, federations of towns were rarely formed.

A version of the Paduan text cited above read "discord of the citizens" ("discordia civium"). The ancients used to say that domestic discord usually caused both civil sedition and foreign war. Mr Jones, however, prefers to believe that governmental mechanisms were primitive. He notes that many basic services were assigned to private, particularly guild, management", and that there was a "predilection throughout society for extrajudicial settlement, official or private arbitration" to handle disputes, criminal or civil. Corruption in public office was universal and the councillors of the popular party were notoriously incompetent. At the height of the republican period, officers held office for such short terms that public business became incoherent, and this confusion was multiplied by the constant

gangsterism afflicting towns and countryside. This unhappy condition leads the author to conclude that "the popular movement" had proved unable to serve "as a safeguard against ... faction and dictatorship".

Although some of the tyrants or proto-princes derived from commoner backgrounds, most were noble and/or rich. The essential problem is therefore to discover what classes supported the assumption of power. The early tyrant Ezzolino da Romano appears to have attacked the rich and powerful with the aid of the people. But no! According to the author, it is not "a contradiction, rather a confirmation, of the upper-class sympathies of 'signorie' that the most active opposition to tyrants ... originated among magnates". This exception-that-proves-the-rule is confirmed by the fact that the few movements against "tyranny as a system" were mounted by the "popolo" and targeted both the "magnates and despots". In short, "the failure of 'libertas' in the Lombard communes owed more to the strength of the nobility ... than to any weakness ... of the merchant class".

Early observers of the rise of the Italian city republics "did not see the possibility of another, opposite conclusion, aristocratic, conservative, reactionary; [namely] that the class that made the commune (and unmade monarchy) would also ... unmake the commune (and re-establish monarchy)". However apparently integrated, the nobility remained a "reluctant population, privileged, separate, and averse from the bourgeoisie", and its participation "in trade, even big business, remained in most areas limited". Besides land almost everywhere "retained predominant influence", and, if trade spelt democracy, land [spelt] aristocracy". And hence at the height of commercialization, city after city in anti-feudal Italy began surrendering liberty again for lordship, for government by 'domini' or 'tyrants' preponderantly feudal, not merchant but landed magnates, barons, nobles, prelates. The land of merchant republics [was becoming] a land of despots". And this "'sellout' by urban élites to the territorial dominion (and aristocratic culture) of monarchy, despotism and principality [was] an abdication of town to country of political in exchange for economic power". The unchallenged prestige of land

and the obsequious pursuit of landowning status by burghers and *nouveaux riches* [had led to] the 'feudalization' or 'class treason' of the bourgeoisie". In brief, "incapable of uniting their power and unwilling to share it with others", the well-to-do classes "turned — or turned back — to monarchy".

To oversimplify the author's complex picture, all of this has to do with the mistreatment of the poor by the rich. The invasion of the countryside by urban capitalism made "feudalism" seem "preferable to republicanism. And not without good cause". In the countryside "capitalism ... was as much parasitic as productive" and urban usurers plundered the farmers. Even the fact that farming folk did much of the spinning of wool and cotton is cited as evidence of exploitation. The small agricultural surplus that could have financed the development of techniques for handling overpopulation and the needs of the poor was instead surrendered to "the hands of an extortionate upper class (and in Italy also business) élite, nourished in habits (and the related profits) of conspicuous consumption and get-rich-quick investment". The unhealthy alliance of landed "and merchant-capitalist interests" had no incentive to develop techniques of use to the many, transcend the family industrial workshop, introduce sophisticated "mercantilist-style action", overcome reactionary practices such as monopoly, and introduce limited liability. Their inventiveness was devoted only to the luxury trade.

In town, up to ninety percent of the population was "formally or effectively unenfranchised, excluded from public affairs, from government office, political and related associations, even at the limit full civic rights or citizenship". Besides, the incidence of taxation shows that a real middle class was lacking, and that, because the rich escaped taxation, most citizens were very poor. Especially in large-scale industry such as cloth, the craft guilds were in the hands of rich entrepreneurs, thus reducing many small masters to the status of mere labourers. In such circumstances, "big business in form and substance colonized the urban economy". So depressed were the labouring classes that, "compared with other parts of Europe, there is almost no hint of revolutionary class doctrine or even, before 1350, expression of

working-class sentiment". One is therefore not surprised that the importation of domestic slaves to Italy's greater cities in the 1400s evoked no opposition. This fundamental social disenfranchisement explains why the humble did not really care about political liberty. The many, says the author, "were not hostile to hierarchy. They were stirred to action only by threats to their "[persons], peace, security, and assured subsistence", and hence, although not necessarily apolitical, alienated, or apathetic ... they acted not on their own but at the bidding of their betters as mob or clientele, for purposes not always democratic.... Liberty was prized and exploited ... by the privileged few who ... desired freedom not for surety but to 'command'" the others.

This fundamental defeat of the Italian city republic was nevertheless accompanied by a wonderful cultural invention, the Renaissance. Mr Jones loves Ernest Renan's grandiose assertion that Italy had no Middle Ages but instead went directly from Rome to the Renaissance. And this cultural invention owed little or nothing to northern Europe. Its artistic invention was perhaps preceded by the literary and non-utilitarian humanism of the twelfth century [and] the High Gothic naturalism of the thirteenth", but these trends "were checked or overborne by other, uncongenial [ones], towards scholastic or practical sciences, to mannerism in art". Again, although the middle ages had "some awareness" of "antiqui" and "moderni", of dark ages and "renovatio" and the humanist sense of the past was long mixed with antiquity's cyclical theories, "none of this ... makes [the Renaissance] any the less effectively the source of a new vision of history". Still more significant was the new spirit of individualism. "After a thousand portraitless years", the realism or naturalism of Cimabue and other artists was enhanced "by a new or rediscovered spatial illusionism, pictorial light and perspective, modelling and three-dimensionality". And thus there came about a rebirth of culture following (in Vasari's words) 'a deluge of disasters'".

This teaching about the inventiveness of the Renaissance seems mildly confused. On one hand, its classicizing ideology was hostile to the "rationalist [and] materialist world of trade", the world, in short

of true "capitalism". Nor were its ideas of "individualism, empiricism, the renovation of physical and human science ... demonstrably mercantile". On the other, it had nevertheless taken place in what the author describes as the mercantile centre of western Europe. That the advancement of the educational and social ideals of the Renaissance also coincided with the restoration of the power of the landed aristocracy and its imitators described in previous paragraphs is undoubted in this reconstruction of events. But this group favoured a "code and rationale of 'noble living', status and prerogative, embodied in ideals of 'honour' and military virtue ... liberality, unconcern with riches, and a general disdain, extending now from husbandry to learning and letters, for all unmartial enterprise, labour and gain". Perhaps mankind had returned in more than one way to the anti-practical and anti-mercantile spirit of antiquity.

This vision of the Renaissance is probably obscure or cloudy because the defenders of the unreconstructed Burckhardtianism deployed here are largely North American: Eric Cochrane, for example, W. K. Ferguson, J. K. Gadol and D. R. Kelley (none cited in the bibliography). Not a few Americans also appear in other contexts, the most significant example being that the study's view of classical antiquity is largely based on, or supported by the works of the fine Marxist historian M. I. Finley. Elsewhere the ideology is expressly based on older authorities, Adam Smith, for example, François Guizot, Augustin Thierry, Karl Marx, Max Weber and Henri Pirenne. Reading a passage that medieval capitalism "was commercial, in no way altering (in Marxist terms) the 'feudal' mode of production", one sees that an earlier layer of this author's ideological instruction was Marxian. Still, both Marx and Weber are also questioned, if only mildly: "urbanization was not one with commercialization (a fact inconvenient to Marxist and Weberian theories of capitalist origins)". Again, a vulgar Marxian view is formally rejected in regard to the failure of Italian medieval republicanism when the author states that "economic determinism, however, is not by itself enough [to explain this history] Other forces collaborated..." In short, the book's ideology appears to have

returned somewhat to the Anglo-Scots not to speak of the Physiocrats and their predecessors, both insular and continental.

Vastly rewarding though this book is, an alert reader cannot but have questions. The picture of antiquity as basically non-economic given here seems to reflect little more than the poverty of the sources (save archeological) available today. What survived its wreck - and it was not much - was transmitted by teachers and jurists, both categories likely to be indifferent or even hostile to many aspects of ancient culture. Although they recorded some legal and philosophical monuments useful for the later revival of representative government, late Rome's jurists hardly talked about government at all and, when they did, usually spoke for monarchy. The other teachers, many of them monks in the early Middle Ages, were advocates of the Christian religion, and had little use for themes that did not support their beliefs. As a result, if our sources are innocently believed to express the full reality of this past, much of our history of antiquity will suffer from being based on arguments from silence. Besides, historians simply make mistakes. Late Rome was not uninventive. Perhaps military inventions do not count in the opinion of some, but everybody is impressed by engineering feats. Detest Christianity though one may, no one can doubt the wonder of late Roman basilicas or of Hagia Sophia, the world's grandest hall until modern times. Again, although it is true that, being Georgic in character, much ancient literature is related to rural life, the same was true of English poetics until around 1914. England's economy was dominated by wealthy land- and mine-owners until 1870 or later, and the poetry they favoured recorded little or nothing about industry or even commercial life. But that surely did not characterize all of the first century of the Industrial Revolution.

Observers, moreover, should surely not forget that prejudice among town-dwellers against countryfolk produced commonplaces in antiquity that helped structure the ideology of city-centred culture for ages to come. Vegetius, the late Roman writer, expressed the better side of this thought - although his views might drive an anthropologist mad - in the fourth book of his *Epitoma rei militaris*. "The building of cities", he opined, "first separated the life of man, still savage and

uncultivated in the earliest times, from the community of dumb animals or savage beasts". And the Italian Giles of Rome, principal intellectual and general of the Austin Friars, who spent much of his career in France but was also well informed about Italy's city republics, rang the changes on this theme in his *De regimine principum* of the 1290s. He there claimed that Aristotle believed that "the intelligent should naturally rule the stupid, and can wage just war against them if they refuse to be subject. According to the Philosopher, [city dwellers] among whom prudence and the intellect flourish can levy just war against rustics ... rude 'sylvestres' ... if they refuse to be subject".

His own anti-rural attitude leads Mr Jones to assert that the thirteenth century "Latinized Aristotle's" notion of the state ("regnum") dealt with the country and not with the "city-state", and that it advanced "an argument ... for forms of 'popular' liberty more country (or county) based than urban, more parliamentary than republican". To be "parliamentary", it seems, is not to be "republican". "Representative assemblies or estates in Italy" were promoted by "feudal not urban regimes" and "there as everywhere were ... socially selective". By thus urbanizing the republican idea, the author dismisses regional parliaments as being monarchic (feudal, that is) institutions unsuited to urban life. Again, true enough that Flemish urban militias were the representatives of a mercantile [industrial?] "insurgent social class" and routed a feudal host at Courtrai in 1302, "an enormity unthinkable in antiquity"! Perhaps true of antiquity, it is nevertheless not at all true of the Middle Ages. Rustics all, Scots defeated English chivalry at Bannockburn in 1313 and Swiss slew Austrian knights at Morgarten two years later.

One is also confused about the degree to which the people participated in the government of the Italian town. Relying on two excellent British scholars, Mr. Jones proposes that up to ninety percent of town-dwellers were effectively disenfranchised even in the age of the popular republic. He and the authorities he cites may be correct, but one wonders, as stated in this book, the number of counsellors at Bologna was anywhere from two to four thousand. Given the estimated population of 50,000, that makes one assemblyman to 12.5

or 25 persons even if, as is surely impossible, the total population estimated here included no children, ecclesiastics, foreigners and women. And when one adds to that the fact that assemblymen served for short terms, ones not soon to be repeated, the ninety-percent exclusion seems wholly fanciful. Perhaps one could argue (tongue in cheek) that a rate of effective political disenfranchisement scaling up to this exaggerated figure is more likely to be seen in today's United States of America than in Bologna at the time of the *Ordinamenti Sacratì et Sacratissime* in 1282-84.

Wise-cracks aside, Mr Jones is unusual among those of liberal left persuasion because he understands the different roles of the classes in oligarchic republics. Although without explaining why and although unnecessarily harsh in his judgments, he sometimes hits the nail on the head. The passage cited above about how the "many" were not hostile to hierarchy etc. is surely correct about both the plebeians and the well-to-do who ruled the republics. But I submit that it will not help to find out why that was so by using the tired moralizing about "sellouts" and "class traitors".

An oddity of this study is that two major manifestations of medieval life, Jews and the prohibition of usury, are little treated. The former, it might be said, are usually seen in parentheses. The longest reference to this group reads: "The Jews particularly by 1200 were quite eclipsed by Italians, even in their Egyptian stronghold; in Italy itself, although still numerous (notably in the South), they were being rapidly squeezed out of all foreign trade and business and relegated generally to money-lending". This passage also reminds one that lending money is usually described here only as a form of "consumer" credit by which the poor were exploited. To imply as this book does that the ecclesiastical prohibition of usury was marginal or easily avoided is to underestimate the role of the church, an institution that sets medieval society and economic thought apart from all others, ancient, modern, European and non-European. Lastly, these omissions (or indeed confusions) show readers how close Mr Jones is to the opinions of Henri Pirenne, another excellent historian who also eluded these topics.

This fact reminds one that, whatever the origin of the author's sentiments may be, the present ideology of the book is very close to the liberal economic thought of around 1900 of which Pirenne was a pre-eminent example. Where he differs from that son of an industrialist from Verviers, as he does from the quintessential German academic intellectual Max Weber, is seen in two respects. He sidesteps their claim that northern Europe created the bourgeoisie and bourgeois culture because in his opinion, somewhat indistinctly stated here, that invention was Italian. Another difference between these great liberals and this author is that, although he is mollified by the emergence of modernity in the Italian Renaissance, he is angered by the failure of the Italian city republics to realize their democratic potential (to use the language of the American press). Basically, however, rhetoric apart, his is a doctrine that would please Weber as much as the Belgian. Although directly contradicted by the anti-Marxian Nicola Ottokar's useful attack on the idea that northern European urbanism initially differed in a primal or essential way from that of Italy in his *Le città francesi nel medio evo* (a book not cited here), all of these authors assert that the differences between Italy's and northern Europe's urbanisms were truly qualitative. Even when wrong, as this reviewer thinks him (and them) to be, to be in such company is a testimonial to Mr Jones' authority.