

## Book Reviews

**Marina Formica, *Roma, Romae. Una capitale in Età moderna*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 2019, pp. I-IX- 243.**

This book of Marina Formica's outlines the history of the city of Rome through the centuries. Put like this, *Roma, Romae. A capital in the modern age* would seem to be just the umpteenth volume on the Eternal City; actually, it is a surprising and complex work whose first element of novelty is precisely the reconstruction of an important history that stretches over such an enormous chronological span, combining (as the author herself says) "*histoire événementielle* with the most recent research developments, even though the myriad of innovative analyses of recent decades – excellent in many cases – has led to significant reversals of the established interpretations of the City and its population" (p. I).

There have been group discussions, some them quite recent, such as those organized by Andrea Giardina and André Vauchez, by Luigi Fiorani and Adriano Prosperi, by Giorgio Ciucci.<sup>1</sup> However, these have not been followed by effective comparative studies or efforts at overarching interpretation comparable to those of Mario Caravale and Alberto Caracciolo in relation to the history of the territories and institutions of the Papal States. Other volumes, such as those of Hans

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<sup>1</sup> A. Giardina, A. Vauchez, *Il mito di Roma. Da Carlo Magno a Mussolini*, Rome-Bari, Laterza 2000; L. Fiorani, A. Propseri (eds.), *Roma, la città del papa. Vita curiale e religiosa dal giubileo di Bonifacio VIII al giubileo di papa Wojtyła*, Turin, Einaudi, 2000; G. Ciucci (ed.), *Storia di Roma dall'antichità a oggi. Roma moderna*, Rome-Bari Laterza 2002.

Gross and Fiorella Bartoccini,<sup>2</sup> concentrate on a single century (the former on the eighteenth, the latter on the nineteenth). But Formica, with *Roma Romae*, offers an overall view of the development of the City that is one of a kind.

The reader is taken through five chapters reflecting four hundred years of history, the modern age, from the late fifteenth to the late nineteenth century (or to be exact, to 1870, when Rome became the capital of Italy). Rome is a unique city. The book's very title, *Roma, Romae*, underscores the need to decline its diverse aspects: Rome, capital of a State, with the typical traits of centralized monarchies; but also Rome as the universal center of the Catholic Christian world, devoted to the exaltation of its cosmopolitan and ecumenical mission and conditioned by the prestigious legacy of a polyvalent past, hence the planetary conception of the papacy – a two-sided nature, as evidenced by the pioneering works of Paolo Prodi and reiterated by Wolfgang Reinhardt.<sup>3</sup> Still, Rome is also just a normal city, with that complex network of cultural, political, economic, social, linguistic and anthropological relationships that makes any metropolis a dynamic and vital space. Fragility, immobility, the monad itself are only a few of the stereotypes that have been attached to this city during the centuries examined here. Marina Formica, in her careful examination of the historiography, definitively transcends them, highlighting instead the dynamism, innovations and peculiarities of a city that lends itself to serving as a laboratory-city.

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<sup>2</sup> H. Gross, *Roma nel Settecento*, Rome-Bari, Laterza 1990; F. Bartoccini, *Roma nell'Ottocento: il tramonto della città santa, nascita di una capitale*, Rome, Istituto Nazionale di Studi Romani, 1985.

<sup>3</sup> P. Prodi, *Il sovrano pontefice. Un corpo e due anime: la monarchia papale nella prima Età moderna*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1982, updated edition, 2003; W. Reinhardt, "Papal power and Family Strategy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", in R.G. Asch and A.M. Birke (eds.), *Princes, Patronage and the Nobility. The Court at the beginning of the Modern Age*, London, The German Historical Institute-Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991.

The networks of relationships, languages and knowledge of the international and cosmopolitan realities over the centuries offer not simple local history but a vision of global history.

Absolutism, contrasts and antagonisms; protections and bargaining: the complex dynamics that weave these different polarities, typical of all modern realities, together in Rome were always conditioned by the elective, non-dynastic nature of the papal monarchy. In contrast to most of the territories of the European continent, in the Papal State the families who took turns in power never managed to truly exploit the long-lasting personal relationships that underlie the bonds of loyalty between subjects and sovereign. And if on the one hand this explains the constant clashes between factions, court parties, during the conclaves and interregnums, on the other it helps to clarify how papal policies generally were of very brief duration. Often a pope would abrogate the measures of earlier popes in an evident attempt to impress his own personal mark on the government, in clear distinction from his predecessor.

The section titles within the chapters are a valuable guide, highlighting the area and the characteristics, the phenomena and transformations of the particular century recounted. The work also brings out Formica's absolute mastery of the literature.

This is a complex volume. However, "the common thread is [...] given by the desire to render some recent historiographical suggestions in a discursive way, so as not to discourage [...] the non-specialist reader: the bibliographical notes are intended to stimulate further reading and in-depth study" (p. VII). And the reader is in fact not discouraged but rather encouraged to learn more and more. "Because today more than ever, perhaps, Rome needs to rediscover the deeper reasons behind its nature as a cultural capital, a pluralistic Mediterranean city, devoted to the encounter with otherness: the traits that have always constituted its strength, grandeur, pride" (p. XI).

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