

**Renaissance and Reformation**  
**Renaissance et Réforme**



**Jones, Pamela M., Barbara Wisch, and Simon Ditchfield, eds. A  
Companion to Early Modern Rome, 1492–1692**

Jennifer Mara Desilva

Volume 43, numéro 1, hiver 2020

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1070203ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i1.34123>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Desilva, J. (2020). Compte rendu de [Jones, Pamela M., Barbara Wisch, and Simon Ditchfield, eds. *A Companion to Early Modern Rome, 1492–1692*]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 43(1), 248–251.  
<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i1.34123>

**Jones, Pamela M., Barbara Wisch, and Simon Ditchfield, eds.**

***A Companion to Early Modern Rome, 1492–1692.***

Leiden: Brill, 2019. Pp. xxiii, 629 + 119 ill. ISBN 978-0-0439-1956 (hardcover) \$206.

Like other volumes in Brill's Companion series, this book is monumental. Several years in the making, running to over six hundred pages, and comprising thirty chapters, its editors have conceptualized this work as "an up-to-date overview and analysis" of early modern Rome that puts interdisciplinarity at its core in order to assist projects that cross traditional boundaries (15). While the editors frame this work as revisionist, most readers will likely find its chief attraction to be a state-of-the-field reflection, rather than a radical repositioning. Likewise, it is true that contributors seek to replace the traditional "narratives of splendor, decline and fall" with "a polyvocal ensemble of different perspectives," yet this has increasingly been the thrust of most investigations for the last decade (15). Balancing this openness to known, suppressed, and conflicting voices with a delineation of recent historiographical trends that point in the direction of necessary research is challenging. However, this volume brings together a host of experts on early modern Roman life whose combined knowledge is offered to readers for the better understanding and expansion of our shared fields.

Notably, this volume spotlights the period of 1492 to 1692 in order to explore the Eternal City at its height, rather than during its early regeneration after the papacy's return in 1420. While this seems to be a lost opportunity for scholars who work prior to 1492, the editors argue that the pontificates of Alexander VI and Alexander VIII bookend a period of growth that was underpinned both financially and culturally by "the concept of princely papal power and papal government" (3). As 1692 marks Innocent XII's decree against papal nepotism, this periodization oddly highlights an abuse as a motivating force, rather than the more widespread ideas of clientelism or networking.

Divided into four parts, the volume's first part is entitled "'Urbi et Orbi': Governing the City and International Politics." Part 1 begins with Eleonora Canepari and Laurie Nussdorfer's exploration of the Roman civic identity, the SPQR (*Senatus Popolusque Romanus*), its office-holders and spaces, and how the civic government interacted with the papacy. Miles Pattenden's account of how the Roman Curia changed over the period 1492 to 1692 follows, investigating its structure of offices, office-holders, and processes. Moving

outwards, Toby Osborne describes Roman diplomatic culture and the city's reputation as a Theatre of the World, where rulers waged proxy wars through ambassadors and foreign clients, using ceremonial roles and precedence to project power. Margaret A. Kuntz continues the discussion of public ritual's power, but explores how sixteenth- and seventeenth-century popes enlarged feast day liturgies to position the public within papal spaces and devotional cults, while deflecting Protestant criticism. John M. Hunt discusses the flip side of this intent to control, citing the violence of the Vacant See as an opportunity to understand Roman liberty and the citizenry's ambiguous relationship with the pope. Elizabeth S. and Thomas V. Cohen reveal the intricacies of Roman law courts, and offer caveats about criminal procedures and extant documents. Simon Ditchfield changes course to show how the words *romanus* and *catholicus* became associated in the universalizing period after the Council of Trent (1545–63) when standardizing religious texts travelled from Roman presses across the globe. Pamela M. Jones continues this theme in a chapter devoted to showing how the new period of saint-making (from 1588) facilitated the expansion of new religious orders and their missionizing work in the Americas and Asia.

The volume's second part is entitled "When in Rome, Do as the Romans Do: Living in the City and Campagna." Irene Fosi commences with a discussion of Rome's foreign communities (*nazioni*), their varied statuses, and their negotiation of space and identity. Refreshingly, and contrary to long-held stereotypes, using census and population surveys, Renata Ago depicts the city's economic character as vibrant, not in decline, and comparable to Florence through this period. Anna Esposito explores Rome's network of hospitals and (formal and informal) assistance programs that developed to deal with an increasing number of social ills. Many of these programs were financed or administered by confraternities, which Barbara Wisch describes in the following chapter, taking care to situate their proliferation within an environment that emphasized gender norms, rank, and papal control. Katherine Aron-Beller shifts the focus from social cooperation to marginalization, arguing that from 1555 ghettoization diminished the Jews economically but failed to spur widespread conversion. Notably even papal efforts to enclose and impoverish the Jewish community did not prevent their participation in portions of Rome's festive life. Minou Schraven catalogues the way that festivals, both annual and extraordinary, shaped the city physically and politically, while offering

opportunities for asserting status and constructing identity. Finally, Daniele V. Filippi closes part 2 with a discussion of “sonic display” that embraced both public and private venues.

This volume’s third part is entitled “‘Rome Wasn’t Built in a Day’: Mapping, Planning, Building, and Display.” Jessica Maier begins this section with a comparison of four maps that reveal both Rome’s physical transformation and how city imagery can influence public perception and urban identity. Carla Keyvanian moves from the printed city to the built infrastructure, exploring how papal networks and urban interventions secured the provision of food and water. Katherine W. Rinne’s chapter nicely complements Keyvanian’s work, by delineating how the restoration of aqueducts, particularly the Aqua Felice and Aqua Paola, impacted the lives of Romans. Stephanie C. Leone shifts the focus from control over the water supply to control over space via palace-building, in a further effort to show how the city developed in accordance with patronal needs and new infrastructure. Many of these chapters maintain a wide net, revealing how Romans at all social levels experienced these urban changes. Denis Ribouillault moves from the city centre to its outskirts, discussing how the villa acts as a nexus for issues of architecture and decoration inflected by centuries of garden living and culture. Lisa Beaven’s contribution complements this discussion with an overview of collecting practices among Roman elites, who built palaces and villas, from 1492 to 1712. Patrizia Cavazzini expands this view from elites to the middle class, using inventories to show that art ownership did not descend exclusively from commissions and famous artists. Turning to ecclesiastical architecture, John Beldon Scott presents a trajectory of Roman church facades that encourages investigation of patronage, rivalry, and the construction archives preserved at individual churches. Finally, Arnold A. Witte takes readers inside to explore how interior decoration altered course after the Council of Trent, embracing plans that conceptualized the church as a single spatial unit that facilitated the beholder’s immediate response to depicted narratives and liturgical events.

This volume’s fourth part is entitled “‘Ars longa, vita brevis’: Intellectual Life in the Eternal City.” Christopher Carlsmith opens with a chapter that situates education amid geographic, topical, and organizational choices, and in comparison to other Italian models. Kenneth Gouwens moves to the post-curricular level with a discussion of Rome’s learned culture as seen in its academies and patrons. Following this, Elisa Andretta and Federica Favino

explore the development of the “black legend” of Roman science, arguing that Rome’s polycentrism offered opportunities for research and discussion that have not been sufficiently valued. Giuseppe Antonio Guazzelli complements these chapters with a call for critical editions of foundational texts, to help us better understand the development of early modern antiquarian scholarship and Christian archaeology. Evelyn Lincoln shifts gears slightly to survey the Roman printing industry, arguing that it was vibrant in its production and service to diverse constituencies, but cautioning that it does not fit the common stereotype of the print shop-cum-academy. Jeffrey Collins closes the volume by presenting Rome as visitors experienced it, extending the chronology back before 1492 and into the nineteenth century through an examination of written city guides.

A few minor criticisms: there is too much cross-referencing within chapters. At times, readers are encouraged to see the same chapter for different discussions in two successive footnotes. The referencing system—abbreviated versus unabbreviated sources—should be explained. Finally, the suggestions for further research are unbalanced across the volume, with some contributors mostly praising recent publications, others offering broad directives, and few naming specific archives, *fondi*, and questions that need investigation. To maximally impact the field, established scholars should provide as much direction as possible in order to open up the city and its history to new and energetic researchers. Yet, a common thread running through these chapters is the need for further investigation. While readers may marvel at researchers’ tremendous work, the field needs more comparative studies that will test current models and contribute new examples and approaches. As both editors and contributors argue, the network effects of this useful volume have already been impressive, but its impact on future readers and researchers will be even greater.

JENNIFER MARA DESILVA

Ball State University