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## Main content

Article Preview :

FASHION AND MASCULINITY IN RENAISSANCE FLORENCE, ELIZABETH CURRIE (2016)

London and New York: Bloomsbury, xvi + 202 pp., 40 b&w illustrations, ISBN: 9781474249768, h/bk, [pounds sterling]85.00

Reviewed by Graham H. Roberts, Paris Nanterre University

Recent years have seen a welcome, and steady growth in scholarly interest not only in masculinity as a sociocultural construct but also in the different ways in which men perform masculinity through the clothes they wear. Eloquent testimony to this trend is provided by journals such as *Critical Studies in Men's Fashion*, of course, as well as by a number of book-length studies on menswear. A significant number of the latter, however, have focused on specifically Anglo-Saxon cultures. This applies not just to those monographs that look at contemporary society (see e.g. Nixon 1996; Edwards 1997; Cole 2000) but also to those that take a more historical approach (such as Beward 1999; Jobling 2005). As Bordo points out, however, in her classic study of men's bodies, 'there are dangers in drawing broad conclusions on the basis of only those worlds with which one is familiar' (1999: 201). Published at the beginning of the current decade, Shaun Cole's now classic study of the history of men's underwear, which covers Japan, Australia and France alongside Britain and North America, might well have been written with Bordo's caveat in mind (Cole 2010). Another monograph that takes us refreshingly beyond worlds 'familiar' to us in its exploration of men, masculinity and fashion is Elizabeth Currie's study of Renaissance Florence.

Like Cole, Currie has a background as a curator, having worked at the Furniture, Textiles and Fashion department of the V&A in London. She also shares with Cole a historian's sensibility, that remarkable ability to draw the reader's attention to the most specific detail, while never losing sight of the broader picture. The particular picture of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Florence, which she paints in this impressive book, is absolutely fascinating. It is one in which clothes were absolutely central to the ways in which, as she puts it, 'Florentine men expressed their social, sexual, political, and professional identities' (2). Currie's analysis of the many different forms this expression took in Florence from the reign of Cosimo I (1537-74) through to Cosimo II (1609-21) is based not just on first-class historiography but also on the work of contemporary theorists of dress, body and gender, such as Judith Butler, Tim Edwards, Frank Mort and Sean Nixon. At no time, however, does the author let the theory dominate her account. The result is a deftly written and highly readable analysis of the power dressing engaged in by men at one of the crucial moments in the history of a city that even today, thanks to the biannual Pitti Uomo, is synonymous with men's fashion.

The book is divided into three sections, and contains seven chapters in all. The first section, 'Fashioning the Medici Court', contains two chapters. In the first of these, 'The court on show', Currie demonstrates how the Medici used the regulation...

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Elizabeth Currie studies Italian Renaissance Art, Fashion, Art, History, and Fashion. My research focuses on clothing, fashion, gender and the body in early modern Italy. I'm currently working on a book about everyday people and their clothing in. My monograph 'Fashion and Masculinity in Renaissance Florence' (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016) examined the ways that clothing expressed ideals of manhood at the Medici court. I have developed various themes relating to this this, including the connections between military fashions, violence, and the performance of gender, as relayed through sporting events and carnival processions. edit. Currie, Elizabeth. Fashion and Masculinity in Renaissance Florence. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1000616867>. Davenport, Millia. The Book of Costume. Recent blog posts. We Were There: Harlie Des Roches on the Black Presence in Renaissance Europe. In 16th century, BIPOC, blog. Hymn to Apollo: The Ancient World and the Ballets Russes.