



Chronicling History: Chroniclers and Historians in Medieval and Renaissance Italy

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Literally thousands of annals, chronicles, and histories were produced in Italy during the Middle Ages, ranging from fragments to polished humanist treatises. This book is composed of a set of case studies exploring the kinds of historical writing most characteristic of the period.

We might expect a typical medieval chronicler to be a monk or cleric, but the chroniclers of communal and Renaissance Italy were overwhelmingly secular. Many were jurists or notaries whose professions granted them access to political institutions and public debate. The mix of the anecdotal and the cosmic, of portents and politics, makes these writers engaging to read.

While chroniclers may have had different reasons to write and often very different points of view, they shared the belief that knowing the past might explain the present. Moreover, their audiences usually shared the worldview and civic identity of the historians, so these texts are glimpses into deeper cultural and intellectual contexts. Seen more broadly, chronicles are far more entertaining and informative than narratives. They become part of the very history they are describing.

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