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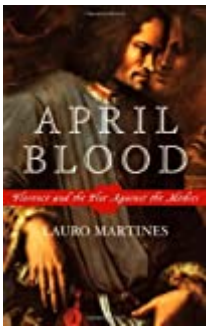


**Lauro Martines.** *April Blood: Florence and the Plot Against the Medici.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. xviii + 302 pp. $26.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-515295-1.

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## Storm over the Medici

In Florence, on Sunday, April 26, 1478, there unfolded, and unraveled, a plot to assassinate the city's de facto ruler, Lorenzo de' Medici, and his handsome younger brother, Giuliano. Â Forever linked with the Pazzi, the family whose men formed the core of the conspirators and who were vitally backed by the pope, among others, the events of that day and subsequent acts of revenge (not to mention outright war pitting Florence against the pope and the king of Naples) have long deserved close study. Surprisingly, aside from a handful of essays over the years and the requisite coverage in books on the Medici, the Congiura dei Pazzi had not received book-length treatment until the appearance of Lauro Martines's *April Blood* in April 2003. Â Emeritus professor of history at UCLA and well known for his incisive studies of the interplay and links between politics and culture in the Renaissance (including the Medici), Martines is eminently capable of telling the story behind the events of 1478 and placing them in a broad historical context.

Martines rises to the occasion, far more successfully than the Pazzi conspirators, who had to change their plans at the last minute and managed to kill Giuliano, but not the key figure, Lorenzo. Â Martines's account is not solely a narrative; he does not get to the events of April 26 until chapter 7, the middle of the book. Â For that reason, it seems, some of the readers volunteering reviews on Amazon.com expressed disappointment (rather unjustly) with Martines's handling of the story. Â His intent, however, is to do much more than tell a story. Â His desire is to lay out carefully–almost lovingly for one so versed in every nuance of Florentine political life–the intense, dynamic, and highly charged personal politics of a Renaissance city-state. Â As he states near the outset, "in the bulk of recent historical work on Renaissance Florence, politics has been much played down or even ignored, as if there were something so nasty and ignoble about it, or just plain grey, that the less said about it the better. Â 'Base and dirty' it may have been, but never grey, and we push it aside at the risk of missing the key point of departure for understanding the history of Italian Renaissance cities. Â Small, packed, observant, industrious, and sharply circumscribed by city walls (Venice by water), each of them was an arena for politics: Â a space in which the power of the state was omnipresent" (p.

4). Â His trenchant analysis, sparkling prose vignettes, and three chapters dedicated to profiling other Florentines caught up in the events and the web of Florentine politics, all evoke that politics at its deepest and most turbid. Â The humanists and statesmen, who both profited from Medici patronage and ran afoul of them, included Giannozzo Manetti; Tommaso Soderini, a Medici partisan; and Alamanno Rinuccini, a Pazzi partisan exiled in 1479, who penned an anti-Medici *Dialogue on Liberty*. Â The entire book bears out Martines's sense that "contrary to popular belief, the genius of Renaissance Italy was not all spent in art and literature. Â Quite as much went into politics" (p. 51).

Martines brings to his project an engaging and lively style. Â This is no dull monograph. Â His publishers in the United Kingdom and the United States certainly did not treat this as just another history book. Â Press releases, prominent reviews, a publicity tour, History Book Club selection–all speak to the impact of *April Blood*. Â This book puts a good story in front of a wide audience, but with accuracy and without sacrificing the nuances and complexities of real personages and situations.

By 1478, the Medici–first in the person of the patriarch, Cosimo (1389-1464), then his sickly son Piero (d. 1469), and finally the grandson Lorenzo–had become the most powerful and wealthiest single family in Florence, de facto rulers from offstage, as it were, working through a dense web of associates from among other prominent Florentine families and from among relative newcomers to wealth and power. Â One of the more prominent families was the Pazzi, a distinguished lineage that numbered knights and crusaders among its distant forebearers, but is perhaps best known for the Brunelleschi designed chapel that bears the family name. The Pazzi had risen to great wealth through the commercial and banking talents of Andrea di Guglielmino de' Pazzi (1371-1445). Â The Pazzi and Medici banks became rivals for the lucrative papal business, and Martines wrings various details from correspondence and financial records to show how this rivalry intensified, leading up to the events of April 26, 1478. Sixtus IV's dismissal of the Medici and substitution of the Pazzi as the papacy's principal bankers in 1474 set Lorenzo on a path to block Pazzi men from access to high office in Florence and even to use legislation to prevent their reception of a large inheritance.

Medici rule had already been tested in overt political confrontations in 1458 and 1466. Â On both occasions, even though some of their supporters had defected and challenged them (suffering exile for their pains), the Medici had withstood the test and even gained strength. Â The Pazzi challenge took a different, violent form. Â They sought not to wrest power from Lorenzo, but his life. Â They had recent examples which were encouraging in some measure, namely Stefano Porcari's botched attempt to seize the pope and declare Rome a republic in early 1453, and the assassination in Milan of Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza, Lorenzo's ally, in December 1476. Â The Pazzi also had powerful allies outside Florence–along with the pope and the king of Naples, were the duke of Urbino Federigo da Montefeltro and the Count of Imola Girolamo Riario, the pope's nephew. Closer to home, the conspirators included the archbishop of Pisa, Francesco Salviati, and his kin; Bernardo Baroncelli; and the Count of Montesecco, who was in Florence with armed men, ostensibly as escorts to the young cardinal, Raffaele Sansoni Riario, another papal relative. However, the fact that the elderly Pazzi patriarch, messer Jacopo, or his nephew, Francesco d'Antonio, would actually set the plot in motion seemed to require something more. Â Martines says, "I suspect that the Pazzi had long nourished a secret modicum of envy," even as they had cooperated with the Medici over the years, to the point that Guglielmo Pazzi had married Lorenzo's older sister (p. 107). Â Calculated self-interest (by all parties, for as Martines finely demonstrates, the pope and the others all had their own agendas), revenge, honor, and envy created a complicated stew of causal and motive factors. Â They do not make for a "clean" plot line, but, *pace* the Amazon reviews, they surely make for interesting reading.

Aware of these complexities, Martines steers clear of a progressive narrative and starts his story near the end, with Lorenzo's rejoicing in 1488 on receiving word that the last living conspirator, Girolamo Riario, had been assassinated in ForlÃ¬. Â The assassination serves not only as a fitting end and entry point for the Pazzi plot but as the occasion to analyze the other assassinations and conspiracies of the era. Â From there, Martines turns to very different sets of negotiations, marriages, and bank contracts, to trace the Medici path to power in Florence and the attempted *coups* of 1458 and 1466. The subsequent profile of Manetti presents a nice coda to the events in which personal and familial fortunes were reversed.

Chapter 4 may be the most important in the book, for it brings in the Pazzi. Â Following the profile of Soderini, another complicated Medicean who, at times, was able openly to defy Lorenzo without suffering too much for it, we get a close examination of Lorenzo himself and his growing animosity toward the Pazzi. Â Only then are we

ready, in Martines's estimation, for the cascade of events: Â Giuliano dead in a pool of blood on the cathedral floor; Lorenzo barricaded in the north sacristy; pandemonium in the streets; and Salviati's failure to seize the government palace, so that Jacopo Pazzi and his mercenaries were unable to raise the rebellion they had hoped for. Â Waiting troops outside the city retreated at the sound of the alarm bells, even as Lorenzo wrote his Sforza ally in Milan to send troops to help him. Â By nightfall revenge had been exacted in spectacular fashion. Â The official ruling body, the Lord Priors, kept control of the Palazzo Vecchio and festooned it with the hanged bodies of conspirators, including Francesco de' Pazzi and the archbishop Salviati. Blood flowed over the ensuing days as well. Â Jacopo Pazzi had been captured and hauled to Florence for immediate hanging. Â His body was exhumed a few days later at the demand of a throng, who attributed bad weather to his well known penchant for blasphemy, and dragged by the still-affixed noose around the city before being dumped into the river. As Martines carefully shows, the revenge was also legal, as Pazzi men were exiled and a draconian (and illegal by canon law) measure threatened anyone who married a Pazzi woman.

The eighth chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the rituals of execution and punishment to make sense of the more bizarre episodes in the aftermath of the assassination attempt. Â The ninth chapter probes, in a dialogic structure, the written record of the confession of the Count of Montesecco, the most detailed view of the inner workings of the conspiracy. Â Next Martines examines the war that erupted immediately after the failed conspiracy and how it was a genuine threat to the Medici ascendancy. Lorenzo's master stroke of 1480, to travel secretly to Naples to negotiate directly with one adversary, saved the day. Â Meanwhile, as chapter 11 reveals, Lorenzo moved relentlessly to erase the Pazzi from public record and the rolls of Florentine property holders. Â He took a personal interest in the liquidation of Pazzi holdings. Â Against this backdrop, Martines inserts the profile of Rinuccini and his dialogue, which he labels "over-the-top … both in idealising the pre-Medicean republic and in its harsh accusations" (p. 220).

Martines concludes, as have others, that "the April Plot became a boon for Lorenzo" (p. 224). Â Chapter 13 explores his use of power and patronage, his increasingly naked grasp of power in Florence, and his "lordly trajectory," as traced in the cardinal's hats purchased for his son Giovanni (later Leo X) and Giuliano's illegitimate Giulio (later Clement VII), and the marriage of his daughter Maddalena to Franceschetto Cibo, illegitimate son of Innocent VIII. Â Still, the Medici were chased from Florence in 1492, after Lorenzo's death, and the Pazzi were welcomed back to the city and exonerated by the Savonarolan government in 1495. Â They then moved quickly, through legal means, to retrieve their fortune and properties, availing themselves of the interesting legal argument that a tyrant such as Lorenzo was merely a private citizen, so the attempted plot to kill him could not be termed treason, as it had. Â Osvaldo Cavallar has pursued the research on these cases.[1] As he comes to the end of his labors, Martines lays bare the pro-Pazzi leanings that seemed obviously to structure his approach: Â "Since the historical record has always been stacked against the Pazzi, with events being seen in the light of the supposed brilliance of the Medici, it seemed to me proper and almost obligatory to try to restore a balance, all the more so in a time like ours, when 'acts of terrorism,' such as explosive political murders, are likely to abort rational argument" (p. 254). Â He finds some form of reason in the fact that, although "the differences between them may seem trifling," book review and "each side remained committed, really, to a form of oligarchy," the Pazzi looked to a more inclusive republic than the princely Lorenzo (p. 256). Â Had they succeeded, they would have needed the support of others to maintain power, and thus "would have been swept into a powerful current of republican reforms, leading to the swift expansion of the political class" (p. 261). Â This is the judgment with which Tim Parks, in his generally laudatory review in *The New York Review of Books*, parts company with Martines.[2] I confess to having some doubts on this score too, although I find Martines's judgment more plausible than does Parks, if only because a republic is what did and had to supplant the Medici in 1494 and again, though briefly, in 1527.

Perhaps an answer to this counterfactual question can be found, or approximated, by further redressing the imbalance Martines can only begin to tilt. Â The Pazzi will always come off as losers in comparison to the Medici. Â How can their one eponymous chapel stand up to the weight of the Medici palace, San Lorenzo, and its sacristy, the Badia Fiesolana; countless paintings and statues; and the writings of numerous humanists, including Lorenzo himself? Â How can we, perhaps, catch a glimpse of the Pazzi past through the celebrations of Medici patronage and taste? Â One thinks here of the enormous erudition brought to bear on Lorenzo's grandfather, Cosimo, by Dale Kent, for example.[3] More immediately, and somewhat ironically, in the wake of Martines's book, there has now appeared an examination of

Lorenzo, as cultural arbiter and patron, by one of the foremost students of him, F. W. Kent.[4] Kent's book is not about politics, rivalries, and conspiracies; it is about art and literature. The growing industry of Medici scholarship will not and should not go away. If anything, it should receive a boost from a critical appraisal such as Martines's. Â What we need now is a book on the Pazzi, a book that goes beyond the context of the conspiracy of 1478; an examination into their past and especially into their post-1478 existence; an examination that casts them not as noble republicans nor as rapacious aristocrats, but as complex family members, bankers, citizens, and churchgoers bent on surviving and even flourishing in a city where, as Martines has amply displayed, "the need and demand to talk politics, to plunge into political debate, and to take group and community decisions persisted" (p. 255).

Notes

[1]. Osvaldo Cavallar, "I consulenti e il caso dei Pazzi: *Consilia* ai margini della *in integrum restitutio*," in *Legal Consulting in the Civil Law Tradition*, eds. Mario Ascheri, Ingrid BaumgÃ¤rtner, and Julius Kirshner (Berkeley: Robbins Collection, 1999), pp. 319-362; and "Il tiranno, i *dubia* del giudice, e i *consilia* dei giuristi," *Archivio storico italiano* 155 (1979): pp. 265-345.

[2]. Tim Parks, "Mad at the Medici," *The New York Review of Books*, May 1, 2003, pp. 36-38.

[3]. Dale Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici and the Florentine Renaissance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000).

[4]. F. W. Kent, *Lorenzo de' Medici and the Art of Magnificence* (Baltimore:Â Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

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