

William Caferro. *Petrarch's War: Florence and the Black Death in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 238 pp.

*Petrarch's War* by William Caferro explores Florence's economy, literature, and social life in 1349–1350 (the immediate wake of the Black Death) through the lens of warfare and with an eye to Petrarch's role as a leading intellectual, and to his friendship with Boccaccio. *Petrarch's War* was awarded the 2018 AAIS Book Prize in the field of Medieval Studies. The author is William Caferro, Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Professor of History, Classics, and Mediterranean Studies at Vanderbilt University. Drawing from Petrarch's own experience at the time of the armed conflict waged by Florence against the Ubaldini family, the author furthers his investigations in military history discussed in *Mercenary Companies and the Decline of Siena* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), along with perspectives in historiography from *Contesting the Renaissance* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

William Caferro's work is structured around what Petrarch called a "war" against the Ubaldini family. The principal characters are Petrarch, the Ubaldini clan, and Florentine officials. The author pays close attention to the social and economic environment in which military expeditions and troops' salaries are understood. Through the micro-historical approach proposed by Giovanni Levi, overlooked circumstances can emerge from archival sources documenting the work of employees whose lives are otherwise untold in historical accounts; in Caferro's words, "Numbers give the appearance of 'empirical' surety, but they are in fact open to interpretation like texts. The quality of conclusions depends on the quality of the evidence. It is necessary to sift carefully through sources to understand more completely what occurred" (14).

The book is divided into five chapters focusing on economic, social, and literary history relating to the conflict between Florence and the Ubaldini clan in the Apennines, and on important trade routes between Florence and the Romagna. The opening section, "Introduction: The Plague in Context: Florence 1349–1350," examines social unrest and two campaigns led by Florence against the Ubaldini in those years. On September 27, 1350, the conflict ended, at just about the same time as Boccaccio returned from his embassy to Dante's sister in Ravenna and Petrarch traveled to Florence, where he first met Boccaccio. The first chapter, "Petrarch's War," focuses on contradictions between Petrarch's letter to the Florentine priors (*Familiare* 8.10, dating back to June 1349), in which he demanded that the city go to war, and a poem entitled "Italia mia" in which he wished for peace in Italy (1344). The Ubaldini family of the upper Mugello was a rural clan who had attacked or killed several travelers, including two of Petrarch's closest friends. The city of Florence took the issue seriously, so the Ubaldini were declared outlaws and their lands and possessions were subject to confiscation. Chapter 2, "The Practice of War

and the Florentine Army,” discusses raids, counterraids, and two Florentine campaigns to fight the Ubaldini clan in the rough terrain of the Apennines. There, the author also investigates the military organization of the army around cavalymen, infantrymen, and personnel in charge of logistics and supplies. The next chapter, “Economy of War at a Time of Plague,” contrasts profits and losses from the Ubaldini conflict, while reconstructing public finances in terms of taxes and tolls. Chapter 4, “Plague, Soldiers’ Wages, and the Florentine Public Workforce,” details pay raises, wage patterns, and nominal wages for soldiers, captains, and employees in the Florentine state. The final chapter, “The Bell Ringer Travels to Avignon, The Cook to Hungary: Toward an Understanding of the Florentine Labor Force, 1349–1350,” is a comprehensive account of staff involved in diplomatic envoys as the result of a limited workforce in the aftermath of the plague.

In the book’s central chapters, the author discusses at length how mercenaries from other countries and the Florentine state were compensated for their work in those years, including the opportunities for tax exemptions and a bonus system or compensation through food and clothes. Given the complexities of wage data, there is no consensus on currency, be it silver or gold florins or silver coins, nominal wages, standards of living, and common goods. The author challenges how we see wage data from the distant past in the epilogue, “Why Two Years Matter (and the Short-Term Is Not Inconsistent with the Long-Term),” where he discusses wage data for a longer timespan (1354–1344) and conducts a thorough literature review documenting historiography on a small scale, including the main trends in historical studies of data.

Professor Caferro takes a stance both from the *Annales* school and the Cliometric economic school; at the same time, he is aware that unrecorded currency specifications and contractual agreements make a historian’s work challenging at the intersection of history and economics. The book is “unapologetically revisionist” (Preface, ix) since it avoids generalizations in long-term and short-term perspectives connected to using data in historical and economic fields of inquiry. Employment, currency, and military campaigns are outstanding themes discussed by the author from sets of data he collected in archives, where both paleography and statistics are important disciplines for historians to understand in the context of archival studies. The case of Florence is particularly well documented and, thus, a unique case in the history of statistical studies.

The work aims to highlight the benefits and limits of making claims in economic history in the broader context of data analysis from surviving records of the Florentine bureaucracy. The intended audience for this work is a specialized reader interested in medieval and literary history. Instructors will likely find the book useful as it presents an extensive literature review and relevant case studies for students learning to collect, analyze, and interpret historical data. Professor Caferro’s book aims to spark debate among medievalists through a fresh perspective on 14th-

century Florence. *Petrarch's War* will be of interest to medievalists who agree that short-termism, contradiction, anomaly, and historical models are research methods to be considered for micro-historical studies, including the conflict and historical consequences leading the city of Florence to attack the Ubaldini clan.

CATERINA AGOSTINI

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME