Ronald Musto's Apocalypse in Rome--the story of Cola di Rienzo and his 1347 revolution to revive the ancient Roman republic and infuse it with medieval Christian spirituality--deserves and rewards careful study. It is at once a challenge and pleasure to read, for Musto has compiled a comprehensive history of the life of an intriguing man who with his words and deeds captured the imagination not only of the Romans in his day, but also of popes and kings, a Holy Roman emperor, and above all one of Italy's finest poets. As an orator and statesman, Cola di Rienzo embodied the spirit of an age--a "new age" of politics, pursuing justice and peace, shot-through with aspirations and limitations; and his story truly makes for "an endlessly fascinating tale" (21).

PROLOGUE

With a few notable exceptions, Apocalypse in Rome constitutes the best new full-length manuscript (in English) in almost a century devoted to a serious historical study of the life and times of Cola di Rienzo. [2] It is, according to Musto's claim, based on "all the available sources" associated with "Rienzo, his Rome and its dealings with [the papacy in] Avignon" (xiv). In addition, this book draws heavily upon recent studies of the spiritual and intellectual currents, social hopes and turmoil, and factious politics of medieval Rome and the Italian principalities in the mid-1300s. [3] Its aim is, "to understand Cola di Rienzo in his own time and place and in the terms that he and his contemporaries saw him and his work for the revival of Rome" (20-21).

Apocalypse in Rome, according to Musto, is a "contextual biography" (xiv) of Cola and his revolution, as well as Trecento Rome and the Avignon Papacy. This biography reverses the de-contextualization that has so distorted the legacy of Cola di Rienzo, firmly situating it instead within its proper milieu, that is, "the context of a physical, cultural, and social world that is decidedly not our own" (21). Rienzo still dominates the story, but the book as a whole "is a history of Rome in the fourteenth century, and of the life and hopes of its people for the dawning of a new age of peace, liberty, and enlightenment" (1).

This re-contextualization owes much to the author's efforts "to examine and fully synthesize many of the current trends in the study of Roman and Italian urban culture in the fourteenth century" (xiv, 351, n.8). For example, one of the many scholarly trends Musto incorporates into his work is the study of the visionary religious movements and apocalyptic fervor in Cola's time, particularly among the Poor Hermits of Pope Celestine V, the Franciscan Spirituals or Fraticelli of Fra Angelo Clareno, and the unorthodox admirers of the Cistercian abbot Joachim da Fiore, whose own influence may be traced as much in the spirited poetry of Dante and Petrarch as in Cola's political and visual rhetoric (118-126, 248-259, 273-287). [4] In making use of this research, Musto is able "to shed some light on the ideologies and the reform movements that shaped medieval Rome, and to help explain the deeply religious currents of the time and place that formed Cola's and his age's ideals of government, peace, justice, and rebirth" (2).

Before going further, a word or two should be said about Musto's predecessor in this endeavor to revive the historical Cola di Rienzo.

Musto acknowledges in his Preface his gratitude to the American Academy in Rome (especially one of its former directors, to whom the book is dedicated) for his fellowship there in 1978, and his debt to Mario E. Cosenza's pioneering work, Francesco Petrarca and the Revolution of Cola di Rienzo, which articulates the friendship of the Poet Laureate and the Roman Tribune in their Republic of Letters. Whereas the former inspired in Musto a devotion to Rome, it is the latter which seems responsible for instilling in him--over the last two decades [5]--an enduring fascination with Cola's Rome (xiv-xv), so much so that Cosenza's translations and interpretations are referenced in every chapter of Apocalypse in Rome. Indeed, in his Introduction to his edition of Cosenza's work, Musto has even anticipated the title and topic of his present book: "Cola's revolution then attempted to restore the greatness of the city, revive the ancient Roman Republic, and usher in a new age of liberty and peace" (CRCR xiii).

More importantly, we read in Musto's present Introduction that the work of Cosenza was one of the rare "serious studies" of Cola in North America, a study which Musto himself as an editor and publisher has worked to preserve and to which he has now turned his full efforts as an historian and medievalist. But it was Cosenza who, prompted by his attachment to his fatherland and his enthusiasm for Italian unity, "brought together for the first time all of the available sources for Petrarch's relationship with Rienzo, including papal and private correspondence and translated excerpts from [the 1890 Italian] edition of Cola's letters" (11-12; CRCR xi-xii, xiv-xv). In his present book, however, Musto has walked farther along the path first trodden by Cosenza.

To return to the problem of contextualization and Musto's methodology: Unlike previous portraits of Cola di Rienzo (not including Cosenza's) which have, in the seven centuries since his death, ranged wildly from romantic and nationalist to wagnerian and fascist, and...
Musto's depiction of Cola--of the self-titled "Nicholas the severe and the clement, tribune of liberty, peace, and justice ... the illustrious liberator of the sacred Roman Republic" (141, 162)--shuns flights of fancy and adheres closely to the facts. But whence come "the facts?"

Musto has accumulated a wealth of information on the life and times of Cola drawn from diverse sources, only a few of which are in English, but the textual basis for any serious biography of the Tribune must be derived from his near-contemporary chronicler, an "Anonymous Roman" (hereafter: AR) who wrote in the Trecento dialect of Rome. Accordingly, each chapter of Apocalypse in Rome, with the exception of the first and central ones, begins with an apposite quotation from the AR's Vita di Cola di Rienzo, newly translated by Musto. Around this narrative framework, the present author then weaves his own story, fleshing out in vivid detail the historical and psychological profile of Cola that the AR sketches in bold strokes.

While the text of the AR serves as his beginning point and guide, Musto's reconstruction and interpretation of Cola's life transcends it through a perceptive sifting and application of all the evidence gleaned from the now available sources. This leads to provocative and appropriate corrections or reinterpretations of the sometimes (though rarely) distorted or narrow view of the AR [7]--not to mention Cola's later, much less serious biographers.

Musto's Introduction drives home this point. For the legacy of Cola in literature and in drama passed down through the ages has almost always missed the mark when it comes to understanding and portraying the true character of the man and the nature of his times. Given his inconstant portraits, we must ask, "Who was Cola di Rienzo?" Musto answers: "Every age has created its image of the Roman tribune" (2; see CRCR xv; cf. GTE 2, 4). With time, elaborate hyperbole and fictions, curious embellishments, and ideological cant have become affixed to the legend of Cola.

The misrepresentation of Rienzo has continued even in recent scholarship. In a section of the Introduction titled "After Ideology," Musto catalogs the derisive insults hurled at Cola by historians over the last three decades. For them, the Roman Tribune is nothing more than a "fat little lawyer" who lacked nerve, or a beguiling demagogue and cowardly autocrat with a "limitless faculty for fancy and self-delusion" (17-18). Musto's task, therefore, is to revive and rehabilitate the historical Cola di Rienzo--and especially to free him from his most recent depiction as a quixotic fool verging on madness. [8]

This is hardly the man whose work to restore Rome to its ancient form Machiavelli noted in his Florentine Histories and thought to be (in Musto's words) a "good example of the constant tension between Virt and the wheel of Fortuna, a tension that pits the resources of the individual against the accumulated weight of circumstances and structure" (4). Machiavelli, like Petrarcha before him, had glimpsed in Cola di Rienzo the genius of a man of grand proportions, cut down by Fortune in the first beginnings of "so noble, so glorious an enterprise!" (76) [9] Musto dispels the romantic distortions, "anachronistic perspectives," and "inappropriate historiographical categorization" that have haunted Cola's legacy from the very start (e.g., 248-249; cf. GTE 11).

What follows is a summary of the main lines of argument in the thirteen chapters of Musto's study of Cola and his revolution, followed by a few concluding reflections.

REVIEW

Apocalypse in Rome "is the story of Cola di Rienzo, of his rise to power, his coronation as tribune, his startling victories over the barons of Rome, his unexpected fall, his years of wandering among the apocalyptic heretics of Italy's Abruzzi mountains, his sudden appearance at the court of Emperor Charles IV in Prague, and his return, under arrest, to Avignon, there to stand trial as a heretic . . . and his unexpected return to power in Rome and his death on the Capitoline near where the statue of him now stands" (1).

Once the Introduction has charted the course of Cola's metamorphoses, [10] the first three chapters begin to fashion the history of a man whose life before 1342 we cannot know directly from primary sources, apart from his own letters. This circumstance foregrounds Musto's methodology, since "where the documents are missing, the historian may be able to piece together from the context of Cola's time and place, and with a reasonable chance of accuracy and success, [for example] the kind of school he most likely attended, the subjects that he took, and how he obtained the elements of his profession and trade, even perhaps the books he read" (34).

In the absence of documentary evidence about the young Cola, Musto supplies the defect by extrapolating from research culled in related fields of study, thus articulating the context in which Rienzo was born, educated, employed, and inspired. Though brief (together only 35 pp.), these chapters tell the story of his Roman parents and neighborhood ("Birth, Youth, and Society"); his childhood in Anagni and his career as a Roman notary ("Education, Profession, and Family"); and his cultivated interest in the history and ruins of ancient Rome ("Reviving Antiquity").

To do so, Musto draws on a wide array of historical data associated with Trecento Rome: demographic studies and population comparisons; the communal life, hospitality and economic prospects of inns and taverns in a city flush with travelers and pilgrims; divisions of the medieval Roman city into zones dominated by barricades and fortresses erected by noble families, etc. (27-32). With respect to the advent of the notarial profession in the fourteenth century, Musto appeals to the combination of skills required for proper record-keeping and a certain formality and eloquence in legal writing, as a means of highlighting aspects of Cola's education that must have prepared him for success. (37-41; with a nod to Paul Oskar Kristeller and Ronald Witt at 19, 349n4, 352nn1 and 4) [11]

As with Petrarcha, the education Cola most likely received would have steeped him in the medieval curriculum and classical Roman and Christian authors of the arts grammatica and arts dictaminis (34-36). What emerges, then, from this early portrait of Cola is an intelligent and talented young man schooled in the history and rhetoric of ancient Rome, imbued with an appreciation for Roman culture--Republican, imperial, pagan, Christian. No doubt he was also inspired by the proud display of Roman ruins and Latin inscriptions all around him in his neighborhood of Sant' Angelo in Pescheria alongside Tiber island and the ancient Forum Boarium (47, 50). As a
Rienzo shared this dream with Petrarca whose Coronation as Poet Laureate in Rome on the Capitoline Hill, Easter Sunday 1341, reawakened for all to see the ancient honor and ceremonial triumph which had lain dormant since antiquity (56-56). An ambitious man like Cola, living and working within a few minutes of the Capitoline, could not have been unimpressed by this spectacle (56). Less than two years later, an embassy of Romans arrived in Avignon (Trecento home of the Papacy and, nearby, of Petrarca) to announce to their lord, the absent pope, the creation of a new popular government in the city of Rome. Cola had the honor of being selected by his fellow citizens as a member of this embassy, thus preparing the way for his opening act on the world-stage. This diplomatic mission "was entrusted to one who had already established himself as the leading advocate of Rome's revival within the city: the twenty-nine year old Cola di Rienzo...and there, on the banks of the Rhone river, Cola di Rienzo emerged fully into history for the first time" (57).

In the three chapters which follow, Musto makes use of an abundance of private letters and papal documents associated with Cola's rise to power. The fourth chapter ("The Popes at Avignon"), with its brief history of the Church in exile, focuses on the formation of Trecento Avignon under Clement VI as a permanent residence for the Papal Curia, the epicenter of a nascent renaissance diplomacy, at the crossroads of European politics. Though perhaps more "medieval polymath" than "early humanist Pope," Clement favored the new style of Simone Martini and the classical learning of Petrarca in the sophisticated court and culture of his new papal city (60-66). The future of the Curia was becoming rooted in Avignon, and Clement was unmoved by the Roman embassy's pleas for the papacy to return to the city of Peter and Paul. Thus, the fiery rhetoric of Rienzo—who was "regarded even then as the best orator in Rome"—fell on deaf ears (70-75).

After the collapse within a few months of the new Roman government that the legation had been sent to herald, Cola himself was left vulnerable to the political intrigues of the papal court. Yet he was soon chosen by the prudent Clement, in 1344, perhaps on the recommendation of his friend Petrarca, to serve as papal Notary of the Camera Urbis, in which capacity he would be a representative of the pope in Rome and a counter-balance to the increasingly dominant influence of the Orsini and Colonna, the two Roman families who had the most to gain from distant papal rule (80-82). Musto concludes this chapter with the claim that Cola's keen desire to revive Rome—evident in his correspondence from Avignon to the Roman people, and praised by Petrarca (73-74, 76)—was consistent with "the papacy's agenda" (82; cf. 207).

This is something of an exaggeration and would be misleading, were it not that Musto has previously clarified what Cola most desires: the reformation of Rome "in deeply apocalyptic terms"—preferably but not necessarily with papal sanction—which translates, in Cola's language, to the restoration of the buono stato or "good state" (74, 77). This polyvalent concept, according to Musto, is the key to understanding the full meaning and intention of Cola's revolution in Rome, and therewith its inherent threat to the pragmatic designs of Clement VI (66-67, 71-72, 77, 81-82).

This concept receives its best treatment in the eighth chapter ("The Buono Stato") where we learn that Cola's vision for a "new age" of politics in Rome was promulgated through a reformed constitution and political institutions which were to be governed by his new "Ordinances of the buono stato"—the "first fruit" of his successful revolution on May 20, Pentecost 1347 (143). This proclamation set forth "broad principles of government" which sought to restore civic life in Rome in three areas: the administration of legal and economic justice (including the reform of the taxation system), the reorganization of the city's urban and sub-urban defense (with the creation of a citizen militia funded by public levies), and financial and moral support for the charitable "role of civil government in ensuring the life of Christian virtue and works of mercy, [i.e.] what modern historians have termed 'civic religion'" (143-147; cf. 115-116).

But in terms of his rhetoric, Cola envisioned an even more radical re-founding of Rome: "neither papal political writing, dependent on a long tradition of imperial and church theory and ancient Roman law, nor the relatively new discourse of the Italian communes [in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries] had ever used the phrase 'buono stato' in Cola's sense" (147). For it is only with Machiavelli's coinage of the Italian term stato in his Prince and Discourses that (modern) political theory began to reference in such terms, not the modes and orders of governance, but government itself (148).

Musto argues persuasively that Cola's use of this phrase in his speeches and letters to describe the government formed by his bloodless, Pentecostal revolution (e.g. 103, 130) is an inspired synthesis, deriving its origins from his "classical reading" of the ancient Roman historians, such as Cicero and Valerius Maximus, but combined with the more recent precedent in medieval apocalyptic thought established by the Joachite writers of his day who used the buono stato and of the well-worn Roman tradition of an imperial renovatio—a Golden Age of sacred reform, peace, justice and reconciliation (150; 137-138, 142, 211, 285-287, 323). Rome under the divine inspiration and guiding hand of Cola di Rienzo was to become the New Jerusalem of the Apocalypse (73-74, 159-160, 170, 227, 287). And it was to the whole of Italy and of Christendom that the revolutionary Tribune—thinking of Rome as caput mundi and of the well-worn Roman tradition of an imperial renovatio—announced his intentions, during the elaborate and highly symbolic knighting and coronation ceremonies of his Roman synod in August of 1347, just a few months into the "new age" of his buono stato. These events, especially the scandal they aroused in Avignon and beyond, and the grave political fallout which Cola suffered as a result—not so much of his success in overthrowing baronial rule in Rome, but rather of his actions and speeches afterwards—are the topics of Musto's ninth chapter ("Cola and the World") and the first half of his eleventh chapter ("Abdication..."
Still, the immediate obstacle to the realization of Cola di Rienzo's buono stato was closer to home: factionalism, violence and anarchy fomented by the Roman barons. Musto opens his fifth chapter ("Cola and the Barons") with a telling passage from one of Cola's contemporaries, Bartolo da Sassoferrato (1314-1357), the most famous jurist of the medieval renaissance. In this passage, taken from his treatise De regimen civilitatis, Bartolo judges the state of civil government in Trecento Rome to be of the worst sort, one which Aristotle had refused to classify: a weak communal government whose virtue is overrun by the vice of tyrants and their greedy adherents. This regime is "something monstrous" says Bartolo, who, in Musto's words, rightly denounces baronial factionalism in Rome as "the root cause of civil strife" (83-84). The AR's text corroborates this judgment, decreeing the injustice and violence that plagued Rome and destroyed its civil life under the barons, leaving the citizens bereft of any hope for unity, peace and prosperity (84; cf. 323).

In order to establish "the basis of a just society, the buono stato" (129), Rienzo's chief task as the liberator of Rome and the Tribune of peace and justice had to be taming the barons (82, 206-207). Bringing the well-armed and entrenched Roman barons to heel, as well as subduing the lesser tyrants of the cities around Rome, literally by taking the field in battle against them with his new civic militia, is the subject of Musto's lengthy (37 pp.), topographically informed (xiv), and enthralling tenth chapter ("War with the Barons").

To place in high relief the extreme contrast between the reality in Rome and Cola's ideal, we are treated (in the seventh and central chapter: "Pentecost") to an insightful analysis and interpretation of a masterwork of Trecento public visual art— to which Musto returns at key points in the second half of the book. Through a close reading of the allegorical frescoes of "Good and Bad Government" by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the Palazzo Pubblico of Siena (1338-1340), Musto augments his discussion of Cola's political and apocalyptic rhetoric of the buono stato and the obstacles posed by the tyrant-barons (130-134, figs. 15-17). [12] And in doing so, Musto once again fulfills his promise to incorporate into his work on Cola the most recent and relevant studies on late medieval Rome and Italy.

Rienzo's struggle to liberate Rome and its environs from the barons' grip, and consolidate his political and military victories through a Christian policy of reconciliation for the sake of the buono stato (207-212), met in the span of only six short months with both incredible successes and--at the pinnacle of his success--devastating disappointments (cf. 212-215, 217-225; with 215-217, 225-226, 231, 247-251). With the excommunication of Cola, and with the Romans paralyzed by the pope's threat to rescind his blessing for a 1350 Jubilee, crucial to the city's economic recovery, Rome had no choice but to abandon its Tribune and Liberator (241-243). True to his devotion to peace and concord in Rome, Cola di Rienzo did not hesitate. Rather than risk a bloody civil war, contrary to the aims of his buono stato and the common good, in a battle that would pit Romans against Romans and a Catholic militia against a papal legate's mercenaries, he acquiesced without a fight; but he was not defeated (243-251, esp. the powerful allusion to the Gospel of John 14:27 in the Tribune's last surviving letter from Rome under his rule; but cf. 231).

The story of Cola di Rienzo, however, does not end with his voluntary abdication of power and descent into exile, despite the impression his legend seems to leave. Between the time of his departure from Rome in December 1347 and his death there in October 1354, Musto employs a wealth of historical material to reconstruct Cola's travels from Rome to Naples and Prague, then to Avignon and finally back to Rome (cf. GTE 20n11: In general, historians "have spent much less time considering the vicissitudes of Cola's life between the end of his Tribunate and his death, after a second period in power, on October 8, 1354. [Even less again, on the seven years between Petrarch's coronation on the Capitol in 1341 and Cola's in the Lateran in 1347."]

The plot thickens, as we discover in the denouement of Musto's book. The last three chapters chronicle in detail (119 pp.) the rest of the story. In chapter eleven, Musto reveals the circumstances that impel Cola's abdication, exile, and monastic seclusion in central Italy with the Fraticelli, hounded at every step as a criminal and excommunicate by the papal legates and inquisitors of Pope Clement VI. In chapter twelve ("Last World Emperor and Angel Pope"), we read of Cola's sudden arrival at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, where his apocalyptic language in the presence of the "sermonizing monarch" Charles IV (273) quickly pushes heretical limits and lands him in an imperial prison under the authority of the Archbishop of the city.

Finally, in the last and longest chapter of the book ("Apocalypse in Rome"), we witness Cola's penitent pilgrimage to Avignon in 1352 to defend himself against charges of heresy, where he is soon reconciled with the new Pope Innocent VI and then sent out from Avignon in 1353 to assist the Spanish warrior-priest and Cardinal Gil ("Egidio") Albornoz with the task of pacifying by force of mercenary arms the Papal States and Rome as the precondition for the papacy's return to Italy. Eventually, in the fall of 1354, he is invested with papal authority over the city as a Roman Senator—the last office Cola di Rienzo would hold in his beloved Rome before his murder a few weeks later at the hands of a Roman mob incited by the baronial Colonna family seeking vengeance for past offenses (cf. Machiavelli's Prince, vii [last 2 sentences]).

EPILOGUE

To conclude, three reflections. First of all, when viewed in its proper historical context, Musto demonstrates that the dramatic trajectory of Cola di Rienzo's career must be seen as a consequence of his radical yet harmonious synthesis of past, present, and future—that is, a seminal blending of rebirth, reformation, and expectation; of classical Roman republican and imperial glory, medieval communal good government, and Christian apocalyptic symbolism and thought (141-142, 175, 180, 186-187, 323; cf. GTE 11). And in his dreams for a "new age" of politics in Rome and the unification of Italy, Rienzo was not alone (xiii, 286; cf. 4, 52-56, 76; CRCR xi, 33n33, 79n13, 81n15, 83n19). But in other ways, perhaps most of all in his desire to revive ancient virtue, he was a man ahead of his times; his rhetorical and imaginative fusion would inspire posterity for centuries in its fascination with and semipaternal longing for Rome's revival.

Second, the collapse of Cola's buono stato in Rome was not due to his cowardice or vice; far from it. Perhaps the most compelling aspect of Musto's definitive study of Cola and his times is the role of the papacy in the Tribune's demise. The revelation of a conspiracy between the Roman barons and the cardinal-legate Bertrand de Deaux under orders from Pope Clement VI to destabilize the
Once this conspiracy emerges from the shadows of history, it is clear that Cola’s efforts at “taming” the Roman barons, for the sake of founding the buono stato, was at odds with the papal “agenda” that had as its highest priority merely the pacification of Rome, the true fount of the spiritual and temporal authority of the Church. Clement had no intention of leaving French Avignon, or of wasting his political and financial capital on a costly effort to restore real peace and prosperity to Romans. He wanted to do only what was necessary to bridge the barons and insure their loyalty so as to use them to dominate Rome from afar. Thus, although it was Clement who first provided him with his occasion, the triumph of Cola di Rienzo and of his buono stato—despite his emphatically Christian policy of peace and reconciliation—represented an undeniable challenge and serious threat to supreme papal authority over Rome.

Third, Clement’s clandestine campaign to unseat the Roman Tribune could not possibly have been known by the AR whose chronicle of Cola’s swift rise to power and sudden overthrow depended largely upon his keen observations as a “public witness” to the momentous events surrounding the revolution of 1347 (2-3). As such, and without access to private correspondence, the AR’s text failed to grasp the full complexity of the times. Musto explains why in his Introduction (8-13): the most important collections of primary sources and commentary, which now serve as the basis for the study of Cola di Rienzo, came to light only in the wake of the modern expulsion of the Papacy from political power in the Papal States and Rome between the 1830s and 1860s, and the subsequent opening of papal archives to scholars outside the Vatican.

Confronted with a relative dearth of information, the AR turned instead to specious reflections about Rienzo’s apparently questionable character and psychological flaws as the cause of his downfall. Following the AR’s lead, the after-life of Cola di Rienzo has been suffocated by tenuous accusations that he collapsed under the weight of his own vice. What we have in Musto, to the contrary, is the portrait of a man who had greatness thrust upon him by virtue of his own (primarily rhetorical) arms, only to be undone at the very beginning of his glorious enterprise by a conspiracy which he was powerless to prevent. And while it once was necessary to imagine Rienzo as a “haughty” and hollow tyrant who destroyed himself through his own excess, the discerning reader need no longer be burdened with that conclusion (cf. CRCR 98). Thus does Musto surpass his predecessor, to whom he is nevertheless nobly obliged. For we learn from his Cola that human beings are governed as much by the prudence of others (or by their thoughtfulness for others and not themselves) as by Fortune (see, in context, CRCR 32n27; Petrarca’s Spirito gentil, final stanza [line 3 penososi d’altrui che di se stessi); Machiavelli’s Prince, xxv).

Musto’s Apocalypse in Rome masterfully points the way to a more profound interpretation of Cola di Rienzo and the cause of his ultimate ruin, one which seeks to understand the historical circumstance and political strategy of the Roman Tribune and the limitations of his new modes and orders by going behind appearances to the effectual truth of his enterprise, rather than to the imagination thereof. [[13]] Future scholars and students of Cola di Rienzo, Trecento Rome, and the Avignon Papacy in the time of Pope Clement VI will surely be indebted to Musto for his work.

MISCELLANY

Apocalypse in Rome is handsomely published, with helpful Illustrations (24 b/w figures; color plates would have been preferable in relation to the author’s close analysis of Lorenzetti’s frescoes); 2 Maps (of Rome and of the Papal States in the fourteenth century); 2 Tables (stemma for the Colonna family of Palestrina and the Angevin dynasty of Naples and Hungary; a third for the Orsini of Rome and Marino would have avoided confusion over namesakes); and, thankfully, a detailed and thorough Index, exhaustive Bibliography, and compacted Notes, rich with references, but judiciously honed and limited in number so as not to burden the reader at every turn of the page.

ERRATA


NOTES


While this is indeed a welcome addition to the study of Cola, it does not rival Musto's work in depth or breadth. I refer hereafter to this work with the abbreviation GTE.

In support of his claim to have consulted all available documents related to Cola, Musto's bibliography includes primary and secondary sources in Italian, German, English, and French on medieval Rome, the Avignon papacy, apocalyptic literature and spirituality, Italian politics and society in the Trecento, including studies on education, tavern life, taxes and the notarial profession, as well as appropriate studies related to the artistic style of the Italian Trecento in painting and fresco, the imperial court of Charles IV in Prague, the poetry and political thought of Dante and Petrarcha, and the political reforms imposed on the Italian cities of the Papal States after the fall of Cola's regime.

Musto's contributions include his 1977 Ph.D. dissertation from Columbia University, in which he edited The Letters of Angelo Clareno (in 2 volumes); his edition of Catholic Peacemakers: A Documentary History (2 vols. in 3), published by Garland Press, 1993-1996; and various articles, essays and chapters on the influence of Franciscan Joachimism at the court of Queen Sancia of Naples.

A second edition of Cosenza's authoritative work in English (originally published by the University of Chicago Press in 1913) was revised by Musto and printed in 1986 as the inaugural publication of Musto's own Italica Press; in 1996, a newly revised third edition (again by Musto) of Cosenza's work—with updated Notes and an expanded Bibliography reflecting the past decade of scholarly research—was published by Italica Press to celebrate its tenth anniversary. For a review of this work, see note 11. I refer hereafter to the third revised edition of Cosenza's work with the same abbreviation Musto employs in his book: CRCR.

A 1733 French translation of Cola's "Life" was among Napoleon's personal belongings, hastily abandoned after his retreat from Moscow in 1812 (4; cf. GTE 5). Edward Gibbon praised Cola as a "modern Brutus" in his 1776-88 epic of Rome (5) and Lord Byron included Cola in his elegy of 1812-18, Childre Harold's Pilgrimage (6). Mary Mitford's 1828 popular stage drama and Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 1835-42 purple-prose melodrama were both immensely popular (7; cf. GTE 1-2). Richard Wagner invoked an uber-Cola, for his 1842 premier of the tragedy, Rienzi, already composed in 1838 (7). Nationalist sympathies resurrected the name and image of this revolutionary pre-hero, commemorating Cola in the urban landscape of the once and future capital of united Italy. The highest honor awarded to the Tribune by modern Romans comes in the form of a poignant bronze statue erected on the slope of the Capitol hill, in 1887, to mark the spot where Cola was killed (8-11, frontispiece). Mussolini's rise and fall as il Duce warrants comparison with the career of Cola (13-14), as does Hitler's (14-15). See notes 2 and 9.

This account was finished (but never published) in 1358-59, as a substantial portion of a Chronicle focusing on Rome and its district from 1327 to 1358. The interpretive nature of the AR's text is critiqued at various points by Musto: see, e.g., 177, 207, 209, 217-219, 292-293. Nevertheless, the AR established for posterity the "basic interpretation" of Cola di Rienzo as a "plebeian skilled in oratory, imbued with classical learning, and devoted to the rebirth and reform of the city of Rome" (2-3). See note 11.

Burckhardt, in his magisterial Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (1860), set the tone by describing Cola and his revolution—in terms familiar to readers of Cervantes' chivalric knight—as "some extravagant comedy" orchestrated by a man who "seems no better than a poor deluded fool" (l.i.2 and l.iii.1). More recently, and perhaps most tellingly given the indisputable erudition of the scholar, Cola's memory suffered the grave insult of virtual irrelevance in Krautheimer's Rome: Profile of a City, 312-1308 (1980): "We no longer see in Cola di Rienzo the great historical figure who fired the imagination of nineteenth-century liberals—Gregorovius allotted him close to one hundred and fifty pages—nor the hero, for different reasons, of Italian fascists in this century. His rhetorical ramblings had no basis in reality and no impact on or relation to the politics of the time, and his dream of a rebirth of Rome collapsed as it was bound to after a few years. He does not compare, it seems to me, with his great forerunner, Arnold of Brescia, an intellectual with clear concepts of a new relationship to be established between the city of Rome and the papacy" (228: on Cola's comparison to Arnold of Brescia, cf. Musto 155, 345-347; on Gregorovius' depiction of Cola as a hero of Italian unity and freedom, see Musto 8-9). Also worthy of note is E. Cheney's assessment in his study of the rise of modern Europe, The Dawn of a New Era: 1250-1453 (1936): "Rienzi was the most declamatory but least understood of all the leaders of revolution in the fourteenth century." See notes 2 and 9.

Machiavelli's Prince, xxvi [end]; Florentine Histories, I.31 and VI.29. See also, Petrarcha's Spirito gentil, Variae 48, and Fifth Eclogue. For the full text in translation of Petrarcha's Sine nomine 7 (arguably addressed to Cola di Rienzo), see CRCR 4-6; see as well, Familiaris 13.6, translated in CRCR 130-134. Regarding the "glorious enterprise" (which Petrarcha defines and Machiavelli interprets), consider CRCR 42n4. See note 13 and context.

Collins presents in her own Introduction a similar, but more superficial survey of Cola's Nachleben or "afterlife," that is, his "extravagation over the centuries from his "proper historical environment" and the "tendencies" of poets, novelists and dramatists to embroider his ambiguous image "beyond reason and recognition" (GTE 5, 7).

Here we note, in his passing reference to the Florentine Chancellors Coluccio Salutati and Leonardo Bruni, one of Musto's rare glances forward in the body of his study towards the political and cultural milieu of late Trecento and Quattrocento Italy; a reference which provocatively links Cola as an orator, secretary and important political figure to his later, more famous successors in Tuscany (41; references to Machiavelli and civic humanism occur at 148, 208, 323). With respect to the humanist education and virtues of Cola di Rienzo, see the review of Musto's second edition of CRCR by Robert E. Proctor, in Speculum 82 (1988) 254-257. Proctor provocatively rounds out his useful review by pointing to what is timeless about the story of Petrarcha's relationship to Cola, something discernible throughout all of the poet's writings: namely, "the indissoluble bond between his classical studies and his life." Of course, the reference here is to Petrarcha, who (Proctor notes) never held public office, yet he considered his writing to be "a way of fulfilling his duties as a Roman citizen" (which citizenship he had been awarded to him at the time of his Coronation in Rome).
This is, as Proctor argues, "the educational ideal of the Renaissance: studia humanitatis : that the study and emulation of ancient virtue, especially Roman virtue, can perfect a person's moral character and restore the life of the community." However, the conclusion which Proctor reaches as to "what went wrong" in the case of Cola—that either Fortune overcame him in his enterprise (following Petrarca's own suggestion in his Sine nomine; 4, later confirmed by Machiavelli in his Florentine Histories), or he was felled by "the defects of his own character" (following Cosenza's judgment, which is assumed also by most modern commentators)—must be revised in light of evidence now provided by Musto as to what or who is really to blame for the failure of Cola's revolution. See the Epilogue to this review.

[[12]] It is clear from Musto's presentation that Cola di Rienzo's own tantalizing and under-studied visual rhetoric-- which is to say, his persuasive works of visual art, specifically commissioned and executed in prophetic style to prepare for and promote the buono stato--must be properly understood in context (49, 104-112, 114, 124-126, 153-159, 175, 178, 272-275; cf. 253). Although it seems petty at this point to comment on sins of omission which (given the vast quantity and excellent quality of what is included in this book) surely ought to be forgiven, one wonders nevertheless why Musto fails to offer more of an extended reading and interpretation of what must have been the earliest and, it is likely, most profound work of visual art to have influenced Cola as a youth in Anagni: namely, the remarkably decorated crypt of the cathedral--where "one of the most important cycles of medieval Italian fresco presents scenes of ancient pagan figures and Old Testament history, along with a nearly complete depiction of the unfolding visions of the Apocalypse (fig 4)" (32-33; cf. Musto's important, but merely passing references to the crypt at 107, 112, 127).

[[13]] Consider the case of Cola's actions at 159, 207-212, and 250, in light of criticisms in Petrarca's Sine nomine 2 (in CRCR 69-83; esp. 75, commentary at 88) and Familiares VII.7 (CRCR 99-104)--criticisms that anticipate Machiavelli's Prince, vii-viii and xviii. Consider also, the quotation with which this review begins. Most interpreters of this obscure sentence blithely assume it to be a reference to none other than Cesare Borgia; some, however, read it as an ironic but apt self-reference pointing to Machiavelli's own demise under "a great and continuous malignity of fortune" (Prince, Epistle Dedicatory; cf. vii). To my knowledge, there has been no suggestion in print that when Machiavelli penned this line he may have had Cola di Rienzo in mind (cf. de Alvarez's edition of The Prince, the note at 156-158 and his epigram to the work as a whole).

Given that Machiavelli concludes his Prince by citing Petrarca's Canzoniere 128, lines 93-96; and that his only use of the word "spirit" in that work (la virtu di uno spirito italiano) occurs at the beginning of the last chapter, just before the sentence here in question, we are no doubt justified in wondering what exactly we may learn about the "glorious enterprise" of Cola di Rienzo (and that enterprise that is implied in Machiavelli's final chapter: Exhortatio ad Capessendam Italiam in Libertatemque a Barbaris Vindicandum) from a careful consideration of Petrarca's Spirto gentil--the final stanza of which Machiavelli himself invokes in his Florentine Histories VI.29 (see also, I.39 in light of I.31) to comment upon the failure of those who, lacking prudence, have insufficiently thought of executing such undertakings before:

Astride the Tarpeian mount, O song, you will see A knight whom all Italy honors with admiration More thoughtful is he of others than of himself."