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**NEW TITLES**


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*History*
**GIOVANNI AND  
LUSANNA: Love  
and Marriage in  
Renaissance Florence**

by Gene Brucker  
Univ. of Calif., 1986  
121 pp. \$13.95



It sounds like tabloid material: A young, well-to-do bachelor of a prominent Florentine family is lured into a secret marriage by an older, socially inferior woman, a widow of still-considerable charms. Twelve years later (in 1455), when Giovanni della Casa decides to take a second, more suitable wife, Lusanna, his first spouse, petitions the Vatican to sanction her wedding and to dissolve Giovanni's second union.

The inquiry proceedings, dutifully recorded by a notary, were discovered by Brucker, a University of California, Berkeley, historian, while working in the official Florentine archives in 1980.

In a readable "microhistory," Brucker tells how Lusanna triumphed in the Florentine ecclesiastical court, even though the judgment was later overturned in Rome. Litigators, one learns, used the same tactics then as now: They variously challenged procedure, authenticity of documents, admissibility of evidence and witnesses (the priest who presided at Lusanna's marriage provided the crucial testimony). Brucker's account also illuminates stern contemporary views of love, extramarital sex, and social class. Lusanna's immodesty (she reputedly looked men straight in the eye on the street) and her lower social standing nearly cost her the verdict in Florence. "Even Lusanna's stepmother expressed her reservations about the marriage," says Brucker, "because Giovanni was so much wealthier." The judges in Rome apparently ruled against Lusanna on similar grounds.

**THE DECLINE OF  
POPULAR POLITICS  
The American North,  
1865-1928**

by Michael E. McGerr  
Oxford, 1986  
307 pp. \$24.95

Low voter turnout, the declining importance of parties, an emphasis on candidates' media packaging—such are the much-lamented ills of modern American politics. But are such ailments really so recent? McGerr, a historian at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, says not.

Party newspapers and campaign hoopla made politics a popular affair for most of the 19th century. Political parties clarified issues and identified the candidates. Citizens, in turn, viewed partisan voting as a natural extension of civic duty.

After the Civil War, things began to change. Voter turnout remained high (roughly 77 percent) for the last quarter of the century, but liberal reformers in the North began to blame partisanship for a host of ills, including greenback currency and corruption. Dismissed at first as "namby-pamby" and defeated in their attempts to limit suffrage to property owners, the "Mugwumps" and other reformers adopted a new line—urging people to remain independent. Their success forced Democrats and Republicans by the 1890s to replace torchlight parades with an "intellectual canvass of pamphlets and documents." Party papers, which "made politics seem important," lost ground to serious (and decreasingly partisan) newspapers, which made politics "complicated and unexciting." To the common man, politics began to lose its appeal.

Advertising strategists, first employed in the 1896 election, tried vainly to rekindle mass participation. Candidates vied with one another (and with "human interest" stories) for newspaper coverage and worked to win votes with "personal appeal." Voters were unimpressed: When Republican Warren G. Harding beat Democrat James Cox in 1920, a mere 49 percent of those eligible to vote showed up at the polls—even worse than the 1984 turnout of 54.5 percent.

**TRADE AND  
CIVILISATION  
IN THE INDIAN  
OCEAN: An Economic  
History from the Rise  
of Islam to 1750**  
by K. N. Chaudhuri  
Cambridge, 1985  
269 pp. \$16.95

Roughly 800 years before the European Age of Exploration, a vast trading network grew up among the Asian civilizations arrayed around the Indian Ocean basin. From about 650 to 1750, long-distance overland caravans and sea-going vessels—*booms*, *jalboats*, and *pattamars*—linked the markets of what are now the Persian Gulf states, India, Indonesia, and south China.

Chaudhuri, a London University historian, admittedly works in the shadow of France's Fernand Braudel (*The Mediterranean*, 1972). His aim here is to explain why the Indian Ocean trade ultimately failed to foster the same degree of "unity and coherence" that bound those peoples who lived and traded around the Mediterranean during the 16th-century reign of Philip II of Spain.

Indian Ocean commerce did manage to break down some barriers of taste and custom,