mended for combining brilliance and beauty in this important and original contribution to architectural and urban studies.

Ronald G. Musto, *Italica Press*

The Black Prince of Florence: The Spectacular Life and Treacherous World of Alessandro de' Medici. Catherine Fletcher.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. xxvii + 308 pp. \$29.95.

Catherine Fletcher provides the first biography of Alessandro de' Medici since the eighteenth century, and the first in English. Based on familiar sources, the book offers new perspectives on Alessandro's life. Fletcher begins at the end of Alessandro's life. She relies on the sensational account of Benedetto Varchi, who claimed to have interviewed Alessandro's assassin. Varchi's account was begun years after the assassination and was left unfinished at his death. Other sources are also unreliable, being a mix of rumor, legend, and fact. Exactly how Alessandro was lured to his death will likely never be known.

Fletcher states: "Writing this book, I have sometimes felt that I have been making a compendium of stories. . . . In many cases I have only a single source, and cannot check the facts. In general, I have given a little more weight to the contemporary letters of secretaries and diplomats than to the historians writing with hindsight. I have trusted the keeper of the wardrobe a little more again" (5–6). Fletcher highlights the methodological problems of historical inquiry into Alessandro's life and world: sources cannot always be cross-referenced and, in certain respects, "historians writing with hindsight" have improperly influenced our understanding. With respect to Alessandro's "wardrobe," Fletcher notes that Alessandro was fond of dressing up in the Turkish costumes that were popular with royalty. Fletcher says that Alessandro drew attention to his own otherness with such willful performativity. The evidence for this claim is sketchy, and so it remains speculative.

In addition to politically infused masquerades, Fletcher analyzes violent football matches, lavish hunts, and rumored poisonings, which all featured in Alessandro's life. One can well understand how the Medici became the inspiration for revenge tragedies. Fletcher's narrative voice vacillates between sober reportage and sensationalism. In chapter 29, she drops a bombshell on the reader found in one of her sources—Alessandro's fourteen-year-old wife, Margaret of Austria, the daughter of Emperor Charles V, was found to be pregnant (230). This was "welcome news for Alessandro and his backers." Such a scoop deserves a lengthy quotation from the source, because not much is known of the six-month marriage between Alessandro and Margaret. But Fletcher is reticent. She quotes a single sentence, written to the Duke of Mantua: "It's believed that the Lady Duchess is pregnant . . . on account of certain signs that usually

come to women who find themselves in that position" (231). Fletcher notes that "some of Alessandro's contemporaries either did not know about, or did not tell of, Margaret's condition" (231). The authority of the source is questionable, because when agents and diplomats wrote their letters, they often included gossip and speculation. After a dynastic marriage, there was a veritable "bump-watch," much as there still is for celebrities and royals. Here we see the dangers implicit in having to rely on a single source.

Fletcher gleaned new information on Alessandro's life "from the correspondence of Imperio Ricordati, a member of Cardinal Cibo's household, with the marchioness and duke of Mantua. Ricordati has some of the best information about Alessandro's court that I have found" (264). Given the importance of Ricordati, Fletcher should have provided transcriptions of the letters. The records of Innocenzo Cibo are clearly important, but we never find out why Fletcher associates Ricordati with Cibo, rather than with Federico Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua.

In the afterword, Fletcher discusses the much-debated issue of Alessandro's "race." The intervening centuries of the colonization and exploitation of Africa and the Americas, the Atlantic slave trade, and the changing circumstances of nation states in Europe have left their mark on Alessandro's history, because they have influenced the way historians view his alleged racial ancestry. Fletcher attempts to excavate the original moment when Alessandro was deemed black, in 1564 (251). She makes the curious statement that "probably the only black person in the western popular imagination to exist before the seventeenth century is fictional. Shakespeare's Othello" (8). One wonders what exactly the "western popular imagination" is and whether all who shared in it had access to, or even knowledge of, Shakespeare's play.

Alessandro de' Medici's life in sixteenth-century Italy speaks volumes about the emerging category of race. In the time since his death, Alessandro has been accorded a dual identity: as the black tyrant who put a violent end to the republican liberty of Florence and as the first person of black African ancestry to rule a major city-state during the Renaissance. Both stories settle on race as definitive of Alessandro's historical significance, notwithstanding the fact that a clear definition of *race* cannot be had.

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Imagining the Americas in Medici Florence. Lia Markey.

University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016. xvii + 242 pp. \$79.95.

Though they played a negligible role in the conquest of the New World, the Medici grand dukes of Tuscany exhibited a sustained and highly informed interest in its cultural artifacts. In fact, the largest corpus of surviving objects from the Americas during the sixteenth century in Europe is the collection created at the Medici court, many of