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Recent Books

Neil Harris

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Il libro d'ore in Italia tra confraternite e corti, 1275–1349. Lettori, artisti, immagini. By LAURA ALIDORI BATTAGLIA. (Biblioteca di bibliografia, 209.) Florence: Olschki. 2020. xvi + 411 pp., ill. €70. ISBN 978 88 222 6664 4.

Italian Books of Hours as a genre have been commanding critical attention of late. Following on from the substantial tome of Cristina Dondi in 2016 dedicated to Books of Hours printed in Italy in the fifteenth century (see Brian Richardson in *The Library*, VII, 19 (2018), 82–83), this densely packed volume explores the other end of the spectrum, concentrating on a corpus of seventeen surviving manuscripts from the end of the thirteenth to the middle of the fourteenth century (the cut-off date is provided by the only item with a date, written in Bologna in 1349; incidentally that is the year of the Black Death, which provided a watershed for other reasons). A Book of Hours was by definition intended for worship and its portability placed a limit on its size, especially if we consider that in many instances the owners were women and that parchment, together with a robust binding, is much heavier than paper. Most of the items in the corpus described here are 13–15 cm in height, a couple are taller and a few are smaller. As with the later printed versions, where calculations about survival rates are feasible, these books were for personal use and were not kept in libraries, and quite frequently they were the only book their owners possessed. If and when they have survived, it is due to their splendour as artistic objects and over the centuries their illumination, generally by some unknown, unidentified master, has been the subject of fruitful discussion, not to mention the extraordinarily high prices they command in auctions. This same artistic importance has also meant that in some unhappy cases the books have been chopped up and the illuminations only survive as single leaves in different collections (see no. 10 in the corpus). The traditional view has seen the development of Italian Books of Hours as indebted to French models from the fourteenth century, as primarily associated with the courts of Northern Italy, and as often made as wedding gifts for young women; the present work convincingly changes that perspective, arguing for an earlier genesis in central Italy, especially in Tuscany, and for the importance of the confraternities in cities such as Florence. One item (no. 4) is of particular interest, since it belonged to the Florentine contemporary of Dante, Francesco da Barberino (1264–1348), who waxed lyrical about it in the glosses to his *Documenti d'amore*; presumed lost, as was the fate of so many other medieval documents, it re-emerged in 2003, when it was sold

at Christie's in Rome, and is now in a private collection in Italy. Its contents include a final allegorical section relating to Francesco himself and show the extent to which such books could be personalized.