

history of women and of gender relations has sometimes appeared static, lending credence to those who would argue that women have no history. The chapters in this volume seek to address the issue of change over time. What was new about gender relations in the Renaissance compared to earlier periods? How did notions about gender-appropriate behaviour change in Renaissance Italy and in response to the currents of religious reform that emanated from northern Europe in the sixteenth century? Finally, many of these authors are attentive to issues of class and ask in what ways the changes observed in the relations between men and women of the elite differ from those of the lower classes?

Part One of this volume focuses on some of these questions with regard to urban geography and ritual life. As Robert Davis shows, urban spaces were gendered. Newly constituted Renaissance governments made them so through the passage and implementation of laws that reinforced notions of public spaces as male and private spaces as female. Most public rituals involving the installation of governments or the celebration of public events brought out processions of councillors, guildsmen, noblemen and rulers who were invariably male. Their ritual walks through the city proclaimed the theoretical masculinity of public spaces and of the law. Yet other forces were also at work to undermine this partnership between government and gendered geography. Class figured prominently in this. The gender of public space was not a constant, but was tested frequently and required repeated reaffirmation. Throughout the cities of the Italian peninsula, lower-class youths, often in defiance of government orders, though sometimes in tacit connivance with government officials, engaged in contests to prove their physical prowess through bullchasing, wars of the fists, stone-throwing contests, etc. These masculinized public space in ways that disrupted public order. Of necessity, working-class women ventured out more often into this dangerous public sphere than did their elite sisters. Prostitutes in particular tested the restrictions imposed by governments on the use of the streets and courtesans sometimes controlled entire neighbourhoods. Yet at the same time the transgressions of these last two groups reinforced the notion that the streets were for those women with less honour or those whose honour had been depleted altogether. Elite women ventured out less frequently, and when they did so, they often walked on enormously high platform shoes that made it impossible for them to move about unaided by a large corps of female servants. Such visible, accompanied displays would have left no doubt that the honour of these women was

unavailable and also that, at least fleetingly, they were reclaiming the streets, as passersby tried futilely to get around these slow-moving retinues.

According to Sharon Strocchia, women of the middling and upper classes had once been more visible in the streets of late medieval and early Renaissance Italy. The rituals of marriage and corporate groups had allowed women greater participation in public life. Yet as the fifteenth century wore on, nuptial rites increasingly highlighted the honour and public recognition of grooms and their families. Corporate groups also developed rites that made it more difficult for women to partake in common public ceremonies. Strocchia argues, for example, that as the flagellant movement made inroads in religious confraternities, females were increasingly excluded. The issue was not flagellation *per se*, which women and men had practised in solitude for centuries; it was not even the unseemly exposure of the bleeding bare backs of anonymous confraternal members; rather, the problem was the inversion of gender roles by self-abasing men. The patriarchal ideal placed the confident male at the top of the social hierarchy. The spectacle of men flagellating themselves would have undermined the confidence of women in the social pyramid that placed them towards the bottom.

Yet the self-same forces that served to masculinize public life, in the end worked to feminize it as well. Strocchia speaks about the 'civilizing' efforts of the state. As Renaissance governments tried to tame the disruptive behaviour of male youths and nobles, they spread the ethos of restraint and polite behaviour. In the course of the sixteenth century, in most places in Italy, loud public insults and vendettas gave way to courtly manners and duels. Males may have had greater access to public places but the new codes of behaviour to which they were expected to adhere were, by earlier standards, distinctly 'feminine'.

The importance of the state in gender relations, evident in the work of Davis and Strocchia, becomes one of the primary themes in Part Two of this volume, which focuses on the state, the law, and the economy. Stanley Chojnacki advances a new interpretation of the centrality of gender for the formation of the Renaissance state. As elites throughout the Italian peninsula tried to set themselves apart and to establish themselves above the rest of society, the state developed as an instrument for the consolidation and regulation of oligarchic hegemony. The state both represented and disciplined their efforts, and in so doing, extended its regulatory tentacles into areas of social life that had previously been the province of the