Guicciardini, Francesco (1483–1540)

Summary Article:
Guicciardini, Francesco

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Italian historian and statesman. His major work Storia d'Italia/History of Italy (1561) – covering events from the first French invasion to the death of Pope Clement VII (in other words 1494–1534)—represents an important advance in historical scholarship, especially in the scrupulously critical use of sources. Its psychological depth reflects his own very wide experience of Italian political life.

A member of one of the most distinguished Florentine families, Guicciardini became related to another (the Salviati) by his marriage in 1508. He received a classical education, studied law, and as ambassador to Spain in 1511 embarked on a long and active career that gave him an intimate knowledge of the political affairs of the period. After the return of the Medici to power in Florence in 1512, he was made a member of the signoria (the ruling body of Florence) in 1515, and under Pope Leo X was successively governor of Modena, Reggio, and Parma (1516–19), during which time he became a friend of Machiavelli.

Under Pope Clement VII, he became president of Romagna in 1524, represented the pope in Florence in 1530, and was governor of Bologna. After Clement’s death in 1534, he acted as adviser to Alessandro de’ Medici until his assassination in 1537, and then helped to secure the succession of Cosimo de’ Medici, who subsequently forced his retirement from politics.

None of Guicciardini’s works was published in his lifetime, a number were left unfinished. Only his Storia d'Italia/History of Italy (1561) appeared in the 16th century. It was translated into English in 1579.

Guicciardini’s other works include Storie fiorentine/History of Florence (written 1508–09, and published 1859), a history of Florence (1378–1509); Ricordi/Reflections; and Considerazioni sui discorsi del Machiavelli/Reflections on Machiavelli.
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