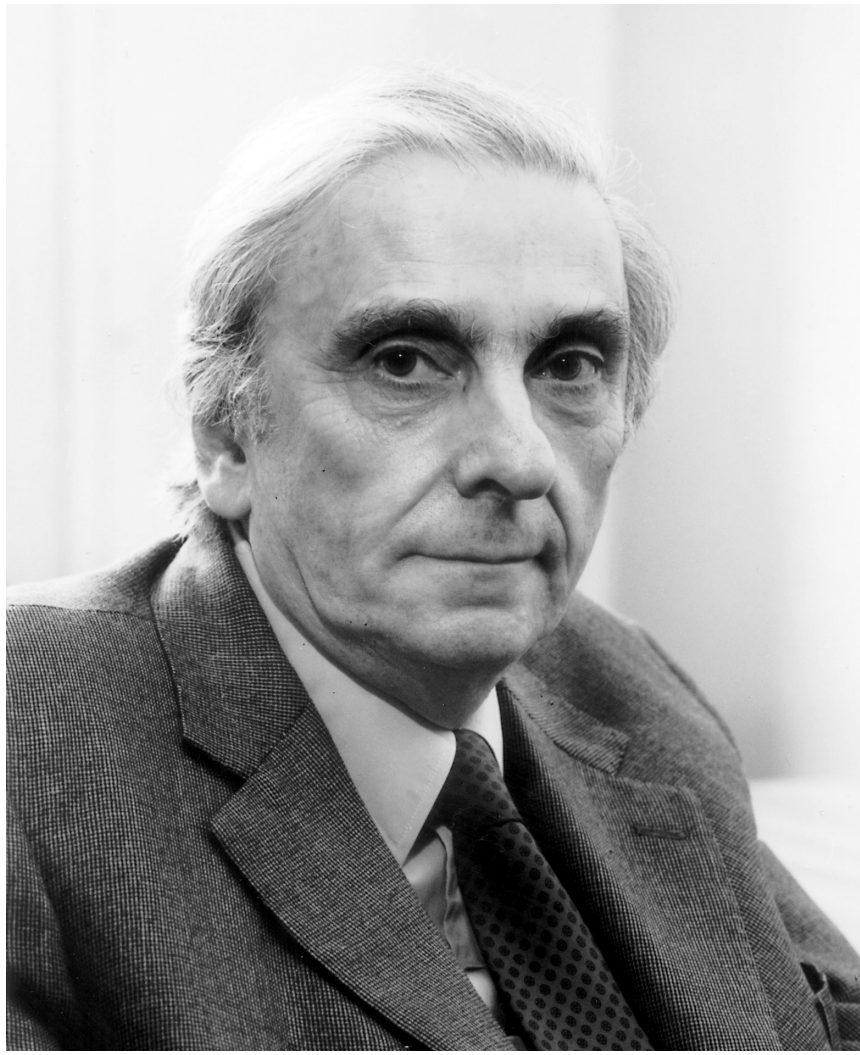

NICOLAI RUBINSTEIN *The Warburg Institute*

Nicolai Rubinstein
1911–2002

NICOLAI RUBINSTEIN was born in Berlin on 11 July 1911. His father was a publisher and his parents were Hungarian (i.e. initially Austro-Hungarian) subjects, though his father had come to Berlin from Riga and had taken Hungarian citizenship on the insistence of his future parents-in-law. Both parents were Jewish by descent. In Berlin he attended the Französische Gymnasium, but left at fourteen on account of health problems and spent two and a half years first in Switzerland and then in the Black Forest. He began his university studies in Berlin in 1930, his subjects (after a false start with political economy) being history and philosophy. An influential teacher whose seminar he attended was Erich Kaspar, historian of the early medieval papacy, but he also went to lectures by Friedrich Meinecke—an impressive link with the past!

At the end of 1933 Nicolai and his family emigrated when the Nazi regime came to power, his parents and sister to France, he to Italy. He registered as a student at the University of Florence, where he proceeded to the *laurea* in 1935, his principal teacher being Nicola Ottokar, Professor of Medieval History and of Russian. Ottokar, author of *Il comune di Firenze alla fine del Dugento*, was a big influence on the historical technique and outlook of Rubinstein, who became his *assistente*. At this stage he knew Robert Davidsohn, the great historian of medieval Florence, but gained the impression that in Davidsohn's view there was no room for further treatment of that field. In 1938 racial laws came to Italy, but Nicolai stayed on, courageously—and illegally, since Jewish refugees were now banned from Italy. It was around this time that he made a friendship

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which proved fateful for his survival and career. William Buchan (second son of John Buchan, first Lord Tweedsmuir, and now third baron) was staying at Casa Brewster on the slopes of Bellosguardo on Florence's southern outskirts. Buchan became friendly with a circle of German expatriates, mostly art history students, many of them Jewish. Among these was Nicolai, then living in an apartment in the village of Bellosguardo. He remembered Nicolai in the spring of 1938 for his warm welcome and his verses in German and French which 'had a special quality of freshness, economy and immediacy'.[1] When Buchan returned to England in 1938 he had invited Nicolai to come to stay with him as his guest for as long as he liked. He was probably unsurprised to receive a letter the following spring in which Nicolai (alleging the 'disagreeable weather' in Italy) asked whether he might accept the invitation. He reached London safely that summer and stayed with Buchan in Kensington, where 'it was a great pleasure to see Nicolai applying a formidable intelligence, a lively, amused interest in people and in social life in all its aspects, to comprehending the new world in which he was now to make his life'. Some of the shopping habits of the British aristocracy were to remain with him as a relic of that period.

Soon he moved to Oxford. By then he was in receipt of a grant from the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning. It was a condition of the grant that he had to teach and he was able to undertake some teaching (including teaching of Italian to pupils of Cecilia Ady's 'special subject' on the Renaissance) and lecturing for the Faculty of Modern History. In January 1942 this rather hand-to-mouth existence came to an end with his appointment to a temporary Lectureship at the University College of Southampton. From 1943 to 1945 the history staff at Southampton numbered two; his solitary colleague Alwyn Ruddock taught all English history and he European history from 476 to 1914! He was able to keep ahead of his pupils—so he claimed later—because he was able to read books in German. These must have been dark years for him. Both his parents were taken from Paris and perished in concentration camps, but his sister evaded capture and survived to have a successful career in films; at the time of writing she still lives in Paris. Nicolai himself had vivid memories of June 1944 in Southampton. Military convoys preparing to embark for the Normandy landing filled the streets around his lodgings.

[1] William Buchan, *The Rags of Time. A Fragment of Autobiography* (Southampton, 1990), pp. 248–9, 269–70.

In 1945 he was appointed to a Lectureship at Westfield College (University of London), which was to be his academic home up to the time of his retirement in 1978 (he was promoted to Reader in 1962 and to Professor in 1965). At Westfield he taught European history 400–1500 AD, the History of Political Thought from the classical to the early modern period, and a 'special subject' (studied in Italian texts) 'Florence and the Renaissance, 1464–1532'. He also, from 1949, conducted a weekly seminar at the London University Institute of Historical Research and came to have close links with the Warburg Institute (also part of the University). That Institute for many years provided him with a room which was the central office of the edition of Lorenzo de' Medici's letters. Both the Institute and Westfield made him an Honorary Fellow.

I am most grateful to Professor Olive Anderson for the following sketch of how Nicolai Rubinstein appeared to a young colleague, who became a close friend, when she joined the Westfield staff in 1949:

> When I arrived, male members of staff were a rarity—'your two men' said the ladies of the other Departments, rather satirically, of the History Department's two male lecturers, Francis Carsten and Nicolai Rubinstein. Both had been born in Berlin in 1911 (within three weeks of each other) and had reached England as part of the great diaspora resulting from Nazi policies; both were living in separate flats within the same Frognal house; and both were plainly serious scholars and conscientious teachers. Between them they taught whatever was not covered by the four-strong Department's then Head, Eveline Martin, and its medievalist, Rosalind Hill. But they were deeply unlike, and a continual source of instructive contrasts to a young colleague fresh from a very traditional Oxford women's college. Mary Stocks' combative talk gave some worldly bite to the High Table and Senior Common Room of this small, all but enclosed female Hampstead community; but Nicolai's ready friendship offered an alluring whiff of cosmopolitan scholarly glamour. Here was an academic man-about-town, a scholar party-goer, unfailingly companionable and at ease. His network of multi-national connoisseurs, Sotheby's experts, and art historians was far from unworldly; and any mutual Oxford friends we proved to have in London were always social if not academic high-fliers. To be invited to accompany him to some special lecture seemed an enormously stimulating compliment—and one that called for careful judgment in such matters as hats and gloves. In the summer of 1954 we each married, and took to repairing after our high table lunch to a certain secluded sunny bench sheltered by a high brick wall, where we talked indiscreetly; and thirty years later we still laughed over our chagrin when we hurried off to our 2 o'clock teaching after some particularly uninhibited exchanges and found one of the gardeners working behind that high brick wall.

In his Westfield years Rubinstein supervised a considerable number of doctoral candidates and many of these pupils are now familiar names in

the world of Renaissance studies. The thesis, when presented, was always thorough, well organised and well written (as fellow-examiner I can bear witness to this). Rubinstein was a very frequent participant in Italian *convegni* and in the late days of his eminence his attendance was sought with such enthusiasm that his mere presence was subsidised, whether or not he was to read a paper. A very significant contribution to the study of Florentine history was the volume he planned and edited, *Florentine Studies* (1968). The quality of the fifteen essays was notably high and the influence of this collection has often been remarked upon in Italy. At the risk of being invidious, one may mention two contributions in very different fields, Charles Davis's on 'Il buon tempo antico' and Philip Jones's 'From manor to *mezzadria*'. If one may venture a contribution to 'gender studies', it should perhaps be noted (as indeed it has already been by others) that all the contributors were male. This would surely not have been the case if the volume had been planned a few years later.

Retirement from his chair meant the end of undergraduate teaching and of college committees and university boards, but otherwise academic existence continued as before. He was for many years a member of the council (*Kuratorium*) of the German Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence —this was another important connection, as were the Harvard foundation (Center for Renaissance Studies) at I Tatti and the Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento. He benefited from spells at the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study where scholars are cocooned in order that their notes may turn into books. He gave a course of lectures at the University of Florence (1983) and held seminars at the Pisan Scuola Normale (1985). By now he was laden with honours, a Fellow of the British Academy (1971) and then recipient of the Serena medal (1974), holder of the Premio Internazionale Galileo Galilei (1985), Honorary Citizen of Florence (1991) and much more. The concept 'retirement' was absent from his vocabulary. A few weeks before his death he discussed with me the next book that he projected. This was to have been an essay illustrating the history of Florence through a number of buildings chosen to typify various stages in the city's development.

* * *

Rubinstein's first published work, based on his *tesi di laurea*, was 'La lotta contro i magnati', but only the first section appeared (1935) in the *Archivio Storico Italiano*. The main part, on 'Le origini della legge sul

sodamento' was printed as a separate publication by the Florentine firm of Olschki through the good offices of Niccolò Rodolico, editor of the *Archivio Storico Italiano*, since writings by Jews were now banned from Italian journals. The striking achievement of 'Le origini' was to affirm the place of Florence's anti-magnate legislation in an older medieval European tradition: 'possiamo mettere la legge in stretta relazione colle leggi di Pace pubblica'. This European approach to the topic, a new and most important contribution, was set out with precocious erudition. 'La legge sul sodamento', he proceeds to explain, was 'diretta contro la parte cavalleresca della popolazione cittadina, perchè in essa si vedeva il principale focolaio delle guerre interne'; 'la vendetta si è radicata nel sistema di vita della nobiltà cavalleresca'. One effect of the anti-magnate legislation (not insisted on in the article) was to create a new class, the magnates. Nicolai once told me how the realisation of this came to him one day when he was taking a walk up to Pian dei Giullari. It occurred to him that this effect was analogous to the consequences of the Nazi anti-Jewish legislation in Germany. Some people hitherto not given to thinking of themselves primarily as Jews had now been penned within a new legal category and the same must have been true of *magnati* some 650 years earlier.

Owing to his second forced emigration, several years passed before Rubinstein was able to complete his next important Florentine article. In June 1939 he wrote (in German) from a London address to Edgar Wind, then an editor of the Warburg Institute's *Journal*, asking if he might discuss with him an article on which he was working, which might interest the Institute. Nearly three years passed before he could offer for publication an article (clearly the one mentioned in 1939) on 'The Beginnings of Political Thought in Florence. A Study in Medieval Historiography'. In this piece Rubinstein began by pointing out that 'historiography as a primary source for the history of political thought is all too often neglected'. His main topic was the *Chronica de origine civitatis*, written *c.*1200, whose author had alleged an ancient antagonism between Florence and Fiesole in the light of the situation in his own time. The *Chronica* (influential on Dante and Villani, among others) also illustrated how 'throughout the Middle Ages, memories of ancient Rome had maintained their hold on mind and imagination'. No less original and convincing than 'La lotta contro i magnati', this constituted a debut so brilliant that it is impossible not to regret that its author returned only once to the thirteenth century for his principal themes. At the meeting which commemorated Nicolai and his wife Ruth (24 January 2003) one of the speakers, Professor Bill Kent, singled out the article on 'The Beginnings of Political Thought in

Florence' as the inspiration which led him to come from Australia to be a Rubinstein pupil.

The serious return to the thirteenth century was 'Dante and Nobility', the Barlow Lectures delivered at University College London, in May 1973 and now published for the first time in the first volume of the three-volume collection of selected articles by Rubinstein (Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome). The postponement in publication was probably due initially to the need to undertake wider reading than had proved possible in 1973 and in fact quite a few subsequent publications are cited in the footnotes of the published version. The lectures returned to the old topic of the vendetta and wrestled with this and other institutions connected with the concept of nobility. Much light is cast. Nobility defies precise definition, but many people said interesting things about it.

The next publication after 'The Beginnings of Political Thought' was 'Florence and the Despots', a paper read to the Royal Historical Society (1952) which dealt with some aspects of Florentine diplomacy in the fourteenth century and presented the pro-republican, anti-Signoria propaganda of Florence in the period of the wars against Visconti Milan. In a way it reads now as a tribute to Hans Baron, who had taught Rubinstein in Berlin and who took this subject as the main theme of his influential but surely unconvincing *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (1955). Rubinstein seems to have felt that the theme was rather a dead end as far as he was concerned (the status and influence of political propaganda are not defined with much conviction) and he did not return to this field, except obliquely in the 1981 lecture on '*Florentina Libertas*'. The suggestion that he was still feeling his way and not yet firmly committed to a field of study seems to be confirmed by his agreement, around this time, to undertake an edition of Paul the Deacon's History of the Lombards for the Nelson series of Medieval Classics. This edition of a fascinating historical source was not destined to materialise.

The next dozen years (1953–66) were an immensely productive, versatile and innovative period in Rubinstein's career. It is difficult to know to what extent his new interests were the product of the Special Subject he was now teaching on 'Florence and the Renaissance', but the influence seems quite clear. The subject itself was to no degree his own invention, but was already being taught at Bedford College by Miss Marian Tooley at the time of his coming to Westfield and was similar to one which had long been taught at Oxford by Edward Armstrong and later by Cecilia Ady. Among the texts set were Francesco Guicciardini's *Storie fiorentine*

and *Dialogo sul reggimento di Firenze*, both works of absorbing interest which had been little studied (though Guicciardini had been the subject of a recent book by Vittorio de Caprariis, whose view of the *Storie fiorentine* Rubinstein found unconvincing). In 'The *Storie fiorentine* and the *Memorie di famiglia* by Guicciardini' (1953) he was already into his stride, impressively familiar with the sources in the Florentine Archivio di Stato and benefiting from access to the Guicciardini family archive, and was able to pinpoint the sources used by the writer. This most satisfying and convincing article reveals a strong interest in the Medicean regime, and he was to return to Guicciardini in his Introduction to the *Maxims* and two later articles.

This was the period also of the first article of many on Machiavelli, 'The beginning of Niccolò Machiavelli's career in the Florentine chancery' (1956), but more obviously deriving from the Special Subject was a debut in the field of fifteenth-century Florentine political history, 'I primi anni del Consiglio Maggiore di Firenze (1494–9)' (1954). This quite lengthy article analysed the complicated constitutional tinkering of the first years after the flight of Piero de' Medici. Its detailed treatment made clear how the Florentine archival and unpublished chronicle sources could be used to illuminate the realities of *accoppiatori*, *tratte*, *abili*, *beneficiati* and the rest of this crucial field, up to then virtually untilled. He was to return to this period, with a rather broader approach, in his piece for the Cecilia Ady memorial *Italian Renaissance Studies*, 'Politics and Constitution in Florence' (1960). By then he had an ally and friend in rewriting the political history of Renaissance Florence. This was Felix Gilbert, once German and now American, who had embarked in this realm even before the Second World War. Gilbert's 'Florentine Political Assumptions in the period of Savonarola' (*Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* (1957)) was a pioneering and fruitful piece.

The article on the Consiglio Maggiore was accompanied chronologically by two on the 'problem of the Empire' in Florentine policy (in *Archivio Storico Italiano* (1954) and *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* (1957)). The potential threat from the Emperor Maximilian and the Florentines' difficulty in assessing its seriousness would have been encountered in reading for the Consiglio Maggiore articles, and the 1957 piece (originally a communication to the 1955 International Congress of Historical Sciences) portrayed the background to the 'imperial problem' of Maximilian's time. Both were careful, conscientious pieces, but one senses that Rubinstein came to feel that 'straight' diplomatic history was not his forte.

Something more original and exciting was to follow. This was 'Political Ideas in Sienese Art: the Frescoes of Ambrogio Lorenzetti and Taddeo di Bartolo in the Palazzo Pubblico' (1958). The crucial theme here was the derivation of Lorenzetti's political notions, conveyed in one of Europe's most fascinating masterpieces, which had been curiously neglected by previous writers (not by subsequent ones, not all of them as clever and learned as Nicolai Rubinstein!). The main contention of the article was that the background to Lorenzetti was Aristotle as interpreted by Aquinas. The mysterious regal figure represented 'the Common Good'. This article was to be productive in controversy as well as in enlightenment. In 1986 the imposing figure of Professor Quentin Skinner entered the lists (*Proceedings of the British Academy*, 72 (1986): 'Ambrogio Lorenzetti: the Artist as Political Philosopher'). He widened the question to the general one of Roman as opposed to Aristotelian influences in medieval European political writings. Ciceronian and Senecan virtues were more evident than Aristotelian qualities, he claimed, and Brunetto Latini was more enlightening than Aristotle. The regal figure was not the Common Good but a 'symbolic representation of the type of magistracy by which a body of citizens can alone hope to create or attain an ideal of the common good'. In his response of 1997 Rubinstein accepted in part the consequences of Skinner's contention that 'the political theory of the Renaissance . . . owes a far deeper debt to Rome than to Greece'. For him, the haunting regal figure was now the city of Siena, but 'rappresenta anche il Bene Comune'. Skinner was to return to the fray in 1999 (*Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 62, 1–28) with a new definition of the regal figure and a fresh emphasis on the significance of the festive dance of the young men in the well-governed city. A fertile article indeed, then, that of 1958. Much more will no doubt follow from it, though it is in the nature of the topic that no final resolution can possibly emerge that will satisfy all.

Some of the earlier contributions on Renaissance historiography also date from this period (the pieces on Poliziano, Poggio and Scala, 1954–65), but the star offering, original and authoritative, was the article on 'Marsilius of Padua and the Political Thought of his Time' (1965). Marsilio was presented, at last, in his setting; 'it is difficult to evaluate Marsilius' political theory adequately without taking into consideration contemporary political thinking in his native country and the political developments in the city in which he was born and educated, and in which he spent his formative years'. The *Defensor Pacis* was 'the fullest and most coherent defence of Italian republicanism that had yet been made'. Like

'Political Ideas in Sienese Art', this was a convincing and influential sortie into a new realm, one into which its author had probably been attracted by the inclusion of the *Defensor Pacis* in the accepted canon of texts studied in the university syllabus, within the paper on 'The History of Political Thought'.

This particularly fertile period was followed by the publication of Rubinstein's *magnum opus*. Only the piece on Guicciardini's early writings had been concerned with the political history of the Medicean period, so the book was also yet another debut. In the Preface to *The Government of Florence under the Medici, 1434–1494* (Oxford Warburg Studies, 1966) Rubinstein emphasised that 'the rich archive materials preserved at Florence have hardly been tapped by modern historians for a study of Medicean government'. 'The political regime which was founded by Cosimo de' Medici and perfected by his grandson Lorenzo differed from the despotic states of fifteenth-century Italy in the preservation of republican institutions.' 'Italian princes, not unlike later historians, tended to see the Medici as rulers of Florence.' But the situation was much more complicated than this. 'Control of elections was one of the chief instruments of Medici policy. The way in which it was established, developed, and handled is therefore the central subject of our study.' The achievement of the book was to depict the Medicean regime as an exemplar of family-led authority, not of 'tyrannical' rule. The interplay between the Medici and Florence's political class was set out with magisterial subtlety, and the reader learned how Medicean authority was developed through the piecemeal constitutional changes which secured its hold. Sortition (choice by lot) was diluted and evaded through elections by smaller numbers (*a mano*), previous constitutional institutions were replaced by less formal gatherings (*balie*) and later control was channelled through new Councils of one hundred and seventy. It was not always easy to maintain authority, hence the complaint of a Medicean that 'scrutinium omnia perturbavit' (the 'scrutiny' for the choice of councillors and office-holders had thrown everything out). The nature of the governing class was illustrated by the list of those declared eligible for the leading post of Gonfaloniere di Giustizia (1466); forty of these came from five families (ten Pitti, nine Medici, seven each from the Ridolfi, Acciaiuoli and Bartoli). What went wrong for the Medici in 1494 was not merely a disastrous foreign policy, but also Piero's handling of the *cittadini principali*. The chapter on the period 1469–92 was entitled 'The Medici at the Height of their Power', revealing the author's lack of interest in Tuscan history after 1532, but a totally new picture had emerged from his great book.

There was a second edition (1997), with small adjustments throughout taking account of the publications of the intervening thirty years, and three new Appendixes. Both editions, naturally, appeared in Italian translations. This book is far from easy reading and assumes much background knowledge and linguistic equipment of its readers. It is certainly not fare for undergraduates, although undergraduates taking the Florentine special subject were expected to familiarise themselves with it. Yet, filtered through adequately equipped readers, it has revolutionised the accepted picture of Medicean Florence.

At around the same time Rubinstein became closely involved in the relaunching of the edition of the letters of Lorenzo de' Medici. The project had been conceived in 1938 and a beginning made, but nothing had been published when it became a victim of the Second World War, and it was not revived till the 1950s. Rubinstein, who became the General Editor, and Professor Pier Giorgio Ricci were those principally involved. The Letters became a major preoccupation and Rubinstein himself edited the third and fourth volumes (1977, 1981: covering the years 1478–80). An early decision was that 'l'edizione dovesse essere accompagnata da un commento storico soprattutto su fonti archivistiche inedite'. This decision Rubinstein was later to ascribe to the 'ottimismo di un periodo giovanile della mia vita',[2] and he came to have doubts about the dimensions implied by it, but the *Lettere* have reached Volume IX and the year 1486 and have gained a new General Editor in the person of Professor F. W. Kent (himself a former pupil of Rubinstein). Professor Michael Mallett has explained (personal communication) that Rubinstein 'was a very active and hugely influential general editor, and insisted on seeing and commenting on every word written by his *curatori*. With the resources of the Warburg at his disposal he would check all the references that he could, and make frequent suggestions for the improvement of the drafts.' *The Government of Florence* had entailed the use of sources far from Tuscany (London and Paris as well as Modena and Milan); the *Lettere* involved Venice and the Vatican also—not to mention visits which proved unproductive.

Work for the *Lettere* is not reflected to any very considerable extent in Rubinstein's later publications, though this is not true of the essay in *Renaissance Venice* on 'Italian Reactions to Terraferma Expansion in the 15th Century' (1973) nor of the much later 'Das politische System Italiens in der zweiten Hälfte des 15. Jahrhunderts' (1988), a most useful synthesis which certainly merited—but did not achieve—translation.

[2] Acceptance speech, Fondazione Premio Internazionale Galileo Galilei (Pisa, 1985), pp. 10–11.

The Government of Florence led on to many articles on the politics of Medicean Florence, often brought about by the requests of organisers of *convegni* and Festschriften. A particularly important one, linked with both internal politics and diplomacy, was the British Academy lecture entitled 'Lorenzo de' Medici: the Formation of his Statecraft' (1977), which covered much new ground in depicting Lorenzo's apprenticeship. Another article, an intellectual voyage clearly giving pleasure to its author as well as to readers, was 'Lorenzo's Image in Europe' (1996), with a fascinating glance at the treatment of Lorenzo by Jacob Burckhardt, for whom Lorenzo was 'l'uomo universale', although his political role was ignored and there was no mention of him in the famous chapter on 'The State as a Work of Art'! But the most important of the articles carrying on from *The Government of Florence* is the paper on 'Oligarchy and Democracy in 15th-century Florence' (1979), a contribution to a conference on *Florence and Venice: Comparisons and Relations*. This was a masterly treatment of a crucial theme. Proceeding from the question of the representation of the Lesser Guilds to Benedetto Dei's list of two hundred ruling families (*c*.1472), he then moved on to wealth and ancient lineage, to the 'principali dello stato e del ghoverno' and 'secondary' and 'tertiary' collaborators. 'Sortition was gradually replaced by election for nearly all the most sensitive posts', a principal finding of *The Government of Florence*. Finally, 'the acceptance by the reformers of 1494 of the *veduti* of the Medicean period as the basis of the new ruling class seems to me a remarkable affirmation of continuity in the social structure of Florentine politics during the 15th century'.

After the *magnum opus* Rubinstein's publications are so versatile in the topics covered that chronological treatment seems unsatisfactory. Consequently writings on political thought will be touched on first, then those concerned with art and architecture, and finally the later pieces on historiography and humanists. The allocation is not always an easy task and this itself is an interesting observation.

Two of the articles which I treat under the heading 'political thought' bear witness to Rubinstein's fruitful insistence on the development of political vocabulary. The 'Notes on the word *stato*' (1971) analyses the earlier uses which lie behind the various senses in which Machiavelli employs the word. An ingenious element is the quotation of the text of a 1450 treaty to illustrate the use of these senses in an official document. Much later (1987) Rubinstein turned to 'The History of the word *politicus*'. This piece, which makes very good reading, is a learned and amusing pursuit which follows a word the whole way from the twelfth century to

Shakespeare. 'Le dottrine politiche nel Rinascimento' (1979) and 'Problems of Evidence in the History of Political Ideas' (1989) are syntheses, yet interesting new points emerge such as that Villani was fifteen years out in the date of death he attributed to Marsilius of Padua and that the *Principe* shocked contemporaries not because its doctrines were amoral but because they might teach the young Lorenzo de' Medici how to seize absolute power in Florence.

Rubinstein also returned a number of times in his later years to Machiavelli. The most weighty of these contributions is 'Machiavelli storico' (1987), a definitive treatment of an aspect which has received too little attention. The article deals with the classical and humanistic models followed, the sources (none of them archival, but some primary ones already in print) and the tact and omissions involved in dealing with Medicean aspects. Notable in the late piece on 'An unknown Version of Machiavelli's *Ritratto delle cose della Magna*' (1998) is the magisterial identification of the anonymous owner of the notebook containing the text analysed and published: he was (of course!) Antonio Maria Bonanni of San Gimignano—of whom a *curriculum vitae* is provided.

The later pieces on Francesco Guicciardini also include a major contribution, the 'Guicciardini politico' of 1984. One of the merits of that author was his ability to put in a nutshell the *credo* of so many Florentine *ottimati*: 'È interesse della città che in qualunque tempo gli uomini da bene abbino autorità' and in his ideal city 'tutto 'l pondo del governo si riduce alla fine in sulle spalle di molto pochi'.[3]

Rubinstein's last article, on 'Le origini medievali del pensiero repubblicano' was an appropriate finale. Republican notions were detectable in the vocabulary of twelfth-century communes. The crucial episode was Moerbeke's translation of Aristotle. Yet Remigio de' Girolami and the *Oculus Pastoralis* are also relevant. Here we return to the battle over the sources of Ambrogio Lorenzetti.

As Professor Caroline Elam (to whom this paragraph is much indebted) has explained, Rubinstein's art-historical contributions 'concentrated largely on political iconography and on the intersection of architecture and politics'. 'His seminal work on the Government of Florence under the Medici made Nicolai increasingly curious about how the architecture and interior decoration of the Palazzo della Signoria reflected the complex evolution of government in the city, as power

[3] Quoted by Rubinstein in 'Francesco Guicciardini' from the *Ricordi* and in 'Guicciardini politico' from the *Storie fiorentine*.

shifted from large public councils in huge halls to smaller committees in back rooms.' His first published piece on the Palazzo Vecchio was 'Vasari's Painting of the Foundation of Florence' (1967); this was related to the article of the same year on 'Machiavelli e le origini di Firenze' and took him into a later period than any of his other Florentine articles. It is a reminder of its author's versatility, since it was based not only on manuscript sources but on secondary literature on coins and much that had been published in Germany. He was certainly helped by his links with the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence. Understandably reluctant for some years to return to Germany, he accepted an invitation in 1981 to read a paper in Berlin and thereafter he went back several times. The next article on the Palazzo Vecchio (1987) was on classical themes in the decoration of the Palazzo, much of it subsequently destroyed. Based on a lecture given fifteen years before, it may be taken as an early hint of the eventual book. This was *The Palazzo Vecchio, 1298–1532. Government, Architecture and Imagery in the Civic Palace of the Florentine Republic* (Oxford Warburg Studies, 1995; Italian translation forthcoming). No other author would have possessed the extraordinary command of the archival sources which meant that architectural and artistic developments were linked to the political background. 'While extremely sensitive to the beauty of works of art, in his writings on them he was primarily concerned to understand their meanings or functions, conscious without immodesty that he could bring to these problems an unparalleled knowledge of political documents and texts.'[4] He also investigated every nook and cranny of the Palazzo Vecchio. As Professor Kate Lowe remembers, 'he would stand outside and we would discuss the placement/displacement of the windows on each floor'.

There were other writings which had architectural implications, such as the paper on 'Palazzi pubblici e palazzi privati al tempo di Brunelleschi' (1980), informed by interests in taxation and the question of the 'extended family', and that in the Hale Festschrift (1995) on 'Fortified Enclosures in Italian Cities under Signori'. The latter concludes with the rueful but forthright reflection (too late to offer to Hans Baron) that 'the Florentines . . . applied different criteria to liberty at home and in their dominions'. Another late article was 'Youth and Spring in Botticelli's *Primavera*' (1997) which links the Roman poets and Poliziano—and a good deal else—to insist that the figure next to Venus is 'Juventus as well

[4] Caroline Elam, 'Nicolai Rubinstein', *The Burlington Magazine*, Jan. 2003, 40–1.

as Ver'. This was (as Caroline Elam has pointed out) doubtless a product of his bedtime perusal of Horace.

Last of the themes (the allocation is somewhat arbitrary) in the later writings are 'humanism' and 'historiography'. There had been many earlier articles in these fields and very often the topic was humanist historiography. This applies to 'Bartolomeo Scala's *Historia Florentinorum*' (1964), 'Poggio Bracciolini. Cancelliere e storico di Firenze' (1965) and 'Il Bruni a Firenze. Retorica e politica' (1990). In these papers Rubinstein explained the classicising attitude of the humanists to historical writing, as exemplified in particular by the fictitious speeches attributed to leading participants. This was sometimes—oddly, as it now seems to us—compatible with some dependence on primary archival sources. Standing rather apart from these papers was 'Die Vermögenslage Florentiner Humanisten im 15. Jahrhundert' (1983) which used fiscal and other sources (including material in the Prato Archivio di Stato) to amplify the treatment of this topic in Lauro Martines' *The Social World of the Florentine Humanists*.

If it should appear that this Memoir has concentrated on the shorter pieces at the expense of the two books, it should be noted that Rubinstein once defined himself as 'one of those scholars who write articles rather than books'.[5] Among his greatest strengths as a historian was his patient determination combined with his highly organised approach to the Florentine archival and other manuscript sources. He had a fine memory, yet he must also have depended on a superb body of notes. He 'asked the right questions', but his answers depended on his methods to carry conviction in the way they did. Mining in the Archivio di Stato and the Biblioteca Nazionale, he dug out the fuel which illuminated the working of the Medicean regime over several decades. And his extraordinary knowledge of these repositories was put to the use of dozens of fellow researchers, as well as his own.

He benefited also from his broad, cosmopolitan approach, which itself was in part the product of his upbringing (he never ceased to marvel at the intellectual barrenness of that of many of his pupils). His own advantages show clearly in his very first published piece, which treats an Italian theme in the light of European precedents and parallels, an approach which has been lacking all too often in Italian historiography. Nor were his researches as solely Florentinocentric as they might at first appear.

[5] P. Alter (ed.), *Out of the Third Reich. Refugee Historians in Post-War Britain* (London/New York, 1998), p. 243.

Marsilius was a Paduan (and Nicolai himself had hesitated before choosing Florence rather than Padua as the university in which to continue his studies). Work for *The Government of Florence* and the *Lettere* involved research in archives outside Tuscany and a number of his articles are concerned with wider Italian and even European themes.

Despite his original intention of specialising in political economy at Berlin University, 'after the first year I decided that statistics and business managament were not for me'.[6] Economic history was then in its infancy as a discipline and that fact, combined with Rubinstein's own temperament, accounts for the most noticeable lacuna in his armoury. Though well equipped to detect the wiles of politicians, he was not very down to earth when it came to economic and social realities. I once quite failed to convince him that there were fifteenth-century Italians who could move their domiciles easily because their hovels had no foundations. He was puzzled when I quoted to him a passage in a fourteenth-century writer which advocated that merchants should always give a misleading version of their intended itineraries, for he had failed to link this with robbery on the roads. And he once explained to me that a publisher had (quite justly) increased the proportion of royalties which were to accrue to him as general editor of a projected volume, but was horrified when I mentioned that therefore the other contributors would receive less! His readers should bear in mind that his social *point de vue* tended to be a somewhat lofty one. To him Luca Landucci, that invaluable pharmacist, was 'humble' —which of course he was in the eyes of a Florentine ottimato. When Piero Guicciardini writes of *artefici* (craftsmen), this is rendered, surprisingly, as 'lower classes' (*The Government of Florence*, pp. 216, 319). In fact 'the people' are virtual absentees from his writings, to appear only, rather like a Shakespearian army, in rare Florentine *parlamenti*—but they are not his theme. John Najemy has justly remarked, of both Ottokar and Rubinstein, that 'the politics studied with these methods has been the politics of elites'.[7] In a sense, judgement on Rubinstein as an historian is misplaced. He himself felt strongly that writing about the past had taken a wrong turning when antiquarians were superseded by historians. His view was that things were better before causality came into the question and he would have been happy to be counted among the great *eruditi*.

[6] Ibid., p. 239.

[7] John M. Najemy, in A. J. Grieco, M. Rocke, F. Gioffredi Superbi (eds.), 'Politics: Class and Patronage in Twentieth-century Italian Renaissance Historiography', *The Italian Renaissance in the 20th Century* (Florence, 2002), pp. 119–36 (quotation is from p. 126).

Charm can be observed rather than defined, but many could testify to Nicolai Rubinstein's. It was certainly felt by his pupils. One Westfield student enquired of him whether the 'desperate' rumour of his engagement was well-founded! Children felt it strongly. Among his close friends were the Sienese Giovanni and Anne Grottanelli de' Santi. He was staying with them at a stage when their daughter Miriam was struggling with the meanings of adjectives and they were delighted when she pronounced that 'Nicolai è molto perfetto'. Not only was he a most affectionate friend, but he was never heard to speak ill of anyone, an extremely uncommon quality. He should be remembered also as a reader. Favourites were Horace (bedside reading), Herodotus and Thucydides (these in the interleaved Loeb editions), also Montaigne, Henry James and Proust. He quoted Montaigne, on duelling, to good effect in the first of all his articles ('Le origini della legge sul "sodamento"', 36, n. 89; the quotation is from *Essais*, Bk. I, ch. 23, 'Divers evenements de mesme conseil') and he was reading Montaigne in hospital in the days before his death on 19 August 2002.

Nicolai's wife Ruth (née Olitsky) was an American art historian, for many years a central figure at the Warburg Institute. In the Institute's Photographic Collection she had special responsibility for the Census of Antique Art known to Renaissance artists and she was the author, with Phyllis Bober, of *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture* (1986). Her interests did much to stimulate and encourage his own forays into art history. Their hospitality in their Hampstead flat was warm and generous and her enthusiasm and unselfish support were crucial to his achievements. She survived him by ten days only, dying after a long illness on 29 August 2002. As mentioned above, they were commemorated jointly at a meeting organised by the Warburg Institute on 24 January 2003.

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Publications

Rubinstein's publications up to 1988 are listed in his Festschrift *Florence and Italy*, pp. 515–23 and the list is continued up to 1991 in *Bulletin of the Society for Renaissance Studies*, 8,2 (May 1991), 8.

Books and articles published since 1991 (and forthcoming):

Books:

The Government of Florence under the Medici (2nd edn., 1997, Oxford Warburg Studies: also Italian translation of 2nd edn., 1999).

The Palazzo Vecchio, 1298–1532. Government, Architecture and Imagery in the Civic Palace of the Florentine Republic (1995: Oxford Warburg Studies. Italian translation forthcoming).

Studies in Italian History in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, ed. G. Ciappelli, 3 vols., Rome (Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura): Vol. I, *Political Thought and the Language of Politics. Art and Politics*, 2004: Vol. II, *Politics, Diplomacy and Constitution in Florence and Italy*, 2005: Vol. III, *Humanists, Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, 2005.

Articles:

'Machiavelli and the mural decoration of the hall of the Great Council of Florence', *Musagetes. Festschrift für W. Prinz* (Berlin, 1991), pp. 275–85.

'Cosimo *optimus civis*', *Cosimo il Vecchio de' Medici, 1389–1464* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 5–20.

'Lorenzo de' Medici. The formation of his Statecraft', in G. C. Garfagnini (ed), *Lorenzo de' Medici. Studi* (Florence, 1992), pp. 41–66.

'Fortified enclosures in Italian Cities under Signori', *War, Culture and Society in Renaissance Venice* (London, 1995), pp. 1–8.

'Piero de' Medici, *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia*', in *Piero de' Medici "il Gottoso" (1416–1469)* (Berlin, 1993), pp. 1–8.

'Lorenzo's Image in Europe', in M. Mallett and N. Mann (eds.), *Lorenzo the Magnificent. Culture and Politics* (London, 1996), pp. 297–312.

'Le allegorie di Ambrogio Lorenzetti nella Sala di Pace e il pensiero politico del suo tempo', *Rivista Storica Italiana*, 109 (1997), 781–802.

'Youth and Spring in Botticelli's *Primavera*', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 60 (1997), 248–51.

'An unknown version of Machiavelli's *Ritratto delle Cose della Magna*', *Rinascimento*, 2nd ser., 38 (1998), 227–46.

(with M. M. Bullard) 'Lorenzo de' Medici's acquisition of the *Sigillo di Nerone*', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 62 (1999), 283–6.

'Savonarola on the Government of Florence', in S. Fletcher and C. Shaw (eds.), *The World of Savonarola. Italian élites and perceptions of crisis* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 42–54.

'Le origini medievali del pensiero repubblicano del secolo XV', in *Politica e Cultura nelle repubbliche italiane dal medioevo all'età moderna* (Rome, 2001), pp. 1–20.

Volume I of *Studies in Italian History in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (see above) includes 'Dante and Nobility', hitherto unpublished (pp. 165–209).

Bibliography

N. Rubinstein, Acceptance speech, Pisa, 1985 (cited above, footnote 2).

'Nicolai Rubinstein' in P. Denley and C. Elam (eds.), *Florence and Italy. Renaissance Studies in Honour of Nicolai Rubinstein* (London, 1988), pp. xi–xiv (unsigned: by D. Waley).

P. Denley, 'The Craft of Nicolai Rubinstein', *Bulletin of the Society for Renaissance Studies*, 8, 2 (May 1991), 2–8.

P. Alter (ed.), *Out of the Third Reich* (cited above, footnotes 5 & 6), pp. 239–45 (essay based on an interview given by Nicolai Rubinstein to the editor, 1996).

Studies in Italian History in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (see above), I, includes an Introduction by D. Waley (pp. vii–xix) and a 'Nota del curatore' by G. Ciappelli (pp. xxi–xxxiv).