

# Renaissance and Reformation

## Renaissance et Réforme



## Preface

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Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533): Faith, Antiquity, and the Witch Hunt

Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533) : Foi, Antiquité et chasse aux sorcières

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## Preface

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Since the publication of Charles B. Schmitt's groundbreaking monograph *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533) and His Critique of Aristotle* (1967), scholars have become increasingly aware of this significant yet puzzling figure of early modernity and his importance in redefining the multifaceted complexity of what we call the Italian Renaissance.<sup>1</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico's unique approach to humanism, demonology, and skepticism has led scholars such as Gian Mario Cao, Armando Maggi, and Walter Stephens to write extensively about him and his impact on early modern thought.<sup>2</sup> Even Wouter J. Hanegraaff—one of today's leading scholars on the history of ideas in the early modern period—assigned a pivotal role to Gianfrancesco in his renovated grand narrative of Renaissance thought.<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding the increasing scholarly attention paid to Gianfrancesco Pico, much work still remains to be done in order to understand more fully the significance of his contributions to early modernity, especially if one looks beyond his influence on modern skepticism. In fact, Gianfrancesco's works deal with themes that are essential if we are to expand our historical narrative of the Italian Renaissance to include such topics as the role of astrology and witchcraft theory in early modern Europe, the spreading of the cult of "living saints" in Italian lands, the survival of medieval forms of devotion, the influence of Neoplatonism in mainstream humanist thought, and the philosophical and psychological enquiry into the imagination. Despite the importance of such topics in contemporary research, and notwithstanding Gianfrancesco's widely accessible bibliography, most of these questions remain unanswered and most

1. Charles B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469–1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*, International Archives of the History of Ideas 23 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967).

2. See Gian Mario Cao, *Scepticism and Orthodoxy: Gianfrancesco Pico as a Reader of Sextus Empiricus* (Pisa: F. Serra, 2007); Armando Maggi, *In the Company of Demons: Unnatural Beings, Love, and Identity in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

3. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

of his works unedited, untranslated, unread. This collection of articles thus seeks to at least begin to address some of these questions by weaving together some of the most innovative and authoritative viewpoints on Gianfrancesco Pico, by taking into account the last sixty years of research, and by considering new approaches. This special issue is thus an open invitation to shed more light on some of the most obscure aspects of Gianfrancesco's works and thought in the hope of broadening the discussion on this enigmatic and yet fundamentally important Renaissance thinker.

This collection of articles finds its origins in a series of panels presented at the annual meetings of the Renaissance Society of America (RSA). I would therefore like to thank the RSA Religion Discipline Group and the Centro di Studi medievali e rinascimentali "E. A. Cicogna" for sponsoring some of these panels. My thanks also go to the Early Modern Conversions research project and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for their support of my research. This special issue would have not been possible without the support of William R. Bowen, Jacqueline Edwards, and the entire editorial board of *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* who welcomed the collection into their journal. Finally, I would like to thank Konrad Eisenbichler and Matteo Soranzo for their help in shaping this project and for their kind and patient supervision.