Although the origins of civilian emigration can also be traced as far back as the Middle Ages, it remained entirely secondary until the nineteenth century when mass movements of civilians finally replaced the mercenary system. Prior to the nineteenth century many of the civilian migrants were
religious refugees—members of various sects, Anabaptists, Mennonites, Pietists, and others escaping cruel persecution by the conservative state churches of certain Protestant cantons, such as Zurich and Berne. Later on the predominant causes were economic, agricultural, and industrial depressions that led nearly half a million Swiss to leave their native land during the last century and a half.

This colorful history has given rise to a voluminous literature, but most of the historical accounts are specialized monographs dealing with limited aspects of the phenomenon. Condensed overviews of emigration also exist in general Swiss histories and in the demographic literature, but there has been no comprehensive treatment of Swiss emigration per se. Leo Schelbert, a Swiss scholar teaching church sources and other documentary materials in Zurich and Berne. Later on the predominant causes were economic, agricultural, and industrial depressions that led nearly half a million Swiss to leave their native land during the last century and a half.

The book consists of four parts. In part one Schelbert discusses migration theories drawn from the demographic literature and also considers the problems of causation and motivation from the point of view of the individual migrant. He next portrays migration as a process, i.e., the various steps a migrant had to take in leaving home, the means of transportation available in different periods, the role of emigration agencies, the hardships of the journeys, and the conditions facing the migrant in various countries of destination. Throughout, the perspective is that of the individual migrant, illustrated by documentary evidence.

Part two presents a historical and statistical overview of both military and civilian emigration, separated by areas of destination. Part three offers a selection of official and personal documents designed to afford the reader a vivid sense of the experiences of Swiss emigrants in a variety of circumstances. These documents consist of letters and reports from Swiss soldiers and settlers in different parts of the world and at different times during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Also reprinted are some official documents illustrating the attitudes and actions of government authorities in Switzerland and in several receiving countries. The last part of the book contains a discussion of the type and quality of source materials to be found in various archives and an extensive annotated bibliography of the secondary literature.

One may quibble with some of Schelbert’s interpretations. Focusing on the individual migrant, he tends to understatement the role played by economic and demographic background factors. But these are matters of emphasis which do not seriously detract from the merits of the book. The skillful use of documentary sources contributes to a better understanding of the migration experience, not only in the national context of Switzerland but in Europe as a whole.

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This book makes two major contributions to Renaissance studies. First, it provides a detailed description and interpretation of the development of the Florentine political system from 1378 to 1430, based on the author’s unrivaled mastery of the sources. Second, it sets forth in its central chapter—”The Florentine Reggimento in 1411”—an explanatory model of the social and economic relationships upon which, in the author’s judgment, the political system rested.

Conceptually, the volume is a continuation of Brucker’s Florentine Politics and Society, 1373-1378 (1962). Here again, the records of the pratiche, political deliberations of leading Florentine citizens, are systematically mined for evidence of changing attitudes toward internal political and fiscal problems, foreign affairs, and the nature of governance itself, as well as fairly detailed prosopographical material on the distribution of power and influence in the Republic. But Brucker’s task is far more complex here than it was in his earlier work. The period from the revolt of the Ciompi to the advent of Cosimo de’ Medici, apart from being one of the principal battlefields of Florentine historiography, involves far subtler relationships between political, fiscal, administrative, diplomatic, and intellectual developments. No one is more aware of this than the author. His claims are modestly formulated and generally supported by impressive amounts of evidence. His differences with other historians are noted, but not stressed; not the least of the book’s virtues is that it is entirely free of the jejune polemics with which the rest of Florentine history has been fouled in recent years.

The process Brucker traces is the transformation of the Florentine regime from a polity dominated by corporate institutions (guilds, confraternities, papal and antipapal factions) to one in which a “leadership elite,” functioning primarily as individuals, helped to steer the city through the recurrent crises which “each year brought” (p. 283). This elite is identified, and its evolving new style of political behavior followed, through the pratiche. In these debates, of which we know the content from