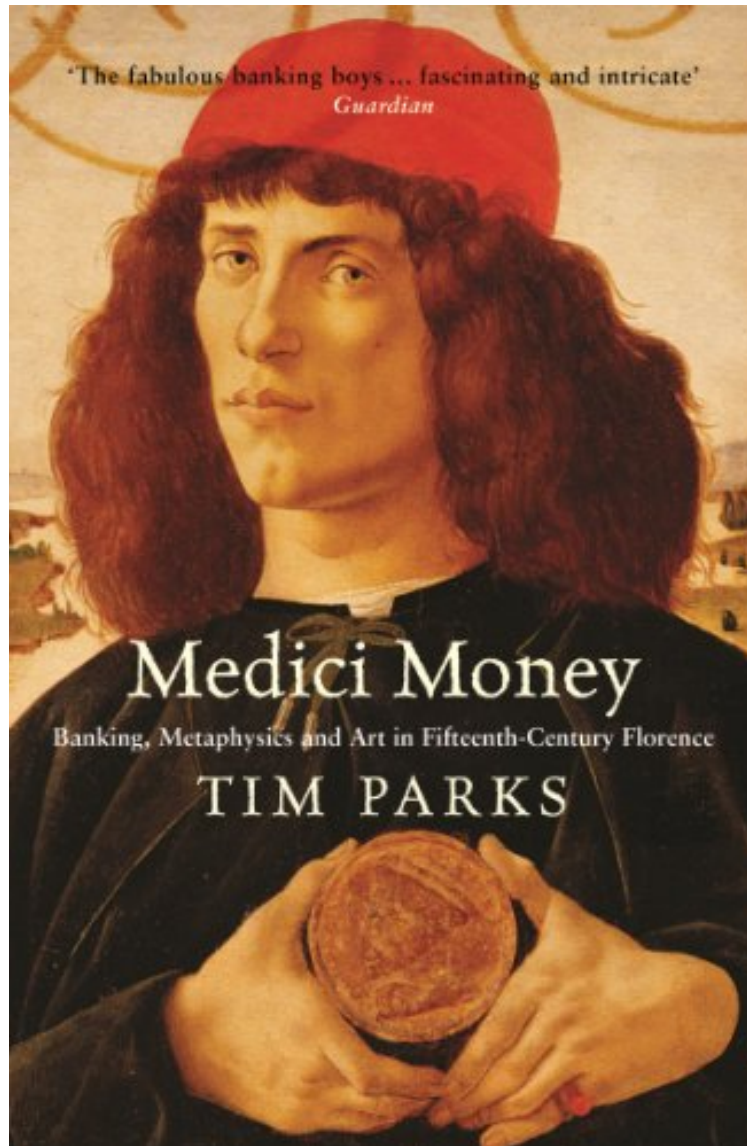


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Medici Money: Banking, metaphysics and art in fifteenth-century Florence

Tim Parks

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Tim Parks : Medici Money: Banking, metaphysics and art in fifteenth-century Florence before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Medici Money: Banking, metaphysics and art in fifteenth-century Florence:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Part of financial historyBy aalorsoI like the book but I would preferred a stronger focus on the financial aspects, like a forensic audit of the bank, in order to have a complete picture of the rise and fall of this important institution of the Renaissance. Keeping the timeline of events was difficult for me,

but I guess it was a tremendous task for the writer considering the events developed over more than a century. If you are planning to visit Florence this book is a must!!6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Erudite and WittyBy Diego BanducciOne of the problems in reading about the Renaissance, Florence and the Medicis is wading through the mounds of obsequious nonsense that has been written on these subjects, in order to get at the real nature of the people and the times. Mary McCarthy did it in *The Stones of Florence* and now Tim Parks has done it again, although in a totally different way. While McCarthy focused primarily on art, Parks homes in on the business dealings of the Medici family in the economic and political climate of the times. At the same time, he repeatedly contrasts their period with ours. An example:"But the tools of persuasion that make such things (influencing public opinion) possible today-our modern media, mass production, and mass consumption-were not available to the Medici. Nor had anybody thought of the trick of allowing two apparently opposing, but secretly complicitous factions to rotate in power at the whim of a complacently 'enfranchised' population."All in all, a thoroughly intelligent and enjoyable book.By the way, Parks is a respected literary scholar who has written several books of literary criticism and two screamingly funny books about living in Italy: *Italian Neighbors* and *A Season with Verona: Travels Around Italy in Search of Illusion, National Character, and...Goals!* Highly recommended.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Beautifully argued popular history.By Deirdre McCloskeyParks shows he is as skilled at popular history as he is at travel books about Italy. Popular history tends to one darn thing after another. (take Norwich's books on Venice. . . please). Not Parks: as in all his books, he has an argued point that gives you insight into Italian history.

The Medici are famous as the rulers of Florence at the high point of the Renaissance. Their power derived from the family bank, and this book tells the fascinating, frequently bloody story of the family and the dramatic development and collapse of their bank (from Cosimo who took it over in 1419 to his grandson Lorenzo the Magnificent who presided over its precipitous decline). The Medici faced two apparently insuperable problems: how did a banker deal with the fact that the Church regarded interest as a sin and had made it illegal? How in a small republic like Florence could he avoid having his wealth taken away by taxation? But the bank became indispensable to the Church. And the family completely subverted Florence's claims to being democratic. They ran the city. *Medici Money* explores a crucial moment in the passage from the Middle Ages to the Modern world, a moment when our own attitudes to money and morals were being formed. To read this book is to understand how much the Renaissance has to tell us about our own world. *Medici Money* is one of the launch titles in a new series, Atlas Books, edited by James Atlas. Atlas Books pairs fine writers with stories of the economic forces that have shaped the world, in a new genre - the business book as literature.

From Publishers WeeklyStarred . The Renaissance, so often seen as a clean break with the medieval past, was really an age of creative ambivalence and paradox. In this marvelously fresh addition to the Enterprise series, Parks, author of the Booker-listed *Europa* and a literary observer of modern Italian life, turns to Florence and to a particularly compelling contradiction. The spirit of capitalist enterprise that fostered cultural originality and underpinned patronage was accompanied by a Christian conviction that money was a source of evil and that usury was a damnable spiritual offense. In the space where this cultural conflict plays out, sometimes as stylized as one of Lorenzo II Magnifico's tournaments, sometimes as life-threateningly fiery as Savonarola's sermons against worldly vanities, we find a world both akin to our own and almost incomprehensibly distant. Parks is a clear-eyed guide to the ambiguities of Florentine culture, equally attentive to the intricacies of international exchange rates, the spiritual neurosis about unearned income, the shocking bawdiness of Lorenzo's carnival songs and the realpolitik of 15th-century power. His prose is swift and economical, cutting to the chase. Like the Medici-commissioned funerary monument for the anti-Pope John XXIII, the effect is startlingly vibrant, resembling "those moments in Dante's *Inferno* when one of the damned ceases merely to represent this or that sin and becomes a man or woman with a complex story, someone we are interested in, sympathetic towards." (May) Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.From BooklistParks displays a keen observance of people's complexities and malleable motives in this account of the fabled Medici dynasty of Renaissance Florence spanning 1397-1494. The Medicis rise in banking and dissipate as succeeding generations neglect the ledger book and devote themselves to art and politics; indeed, one of the last Medicis, Lorenzo, dubbed the Magnificent, should have been called the Bankrupt. Parks effects a worldly, shoulder-shrugging tone to his descriptions of passing subterfuges as the Medicis maneuver through the snake-pit of fifteenth-century Italy. Their prime problem was the church's prohibition of usury, but the Medicis' acumen in circumventing sin created a second dilemma--warding off political poaching of their fortune, which they surmounted by taking over the Florentine republic through chicanery. As rulers, they inherit a third difficulty: Florence's survival in international politics. But the Medicis come to grief in a French invasion. Is there anything new under the sun when money mixes with politics and religion? Parks' marvelously entertaining history suggests there might be. Gilbert TaylorCopyright copy; American Library Association. All rights reserved A delightful guide to both the Florentine Renaissance and the family history of one of Europe's greatest dynasties. -- Ross King, author of *Brunelleschi's*

DomeA gift to anyone who has been dazzled by Florence. Splendid reading. -- Frances Mayes