

The Unruly Tongue

Speech and Violence in Medieval Italy

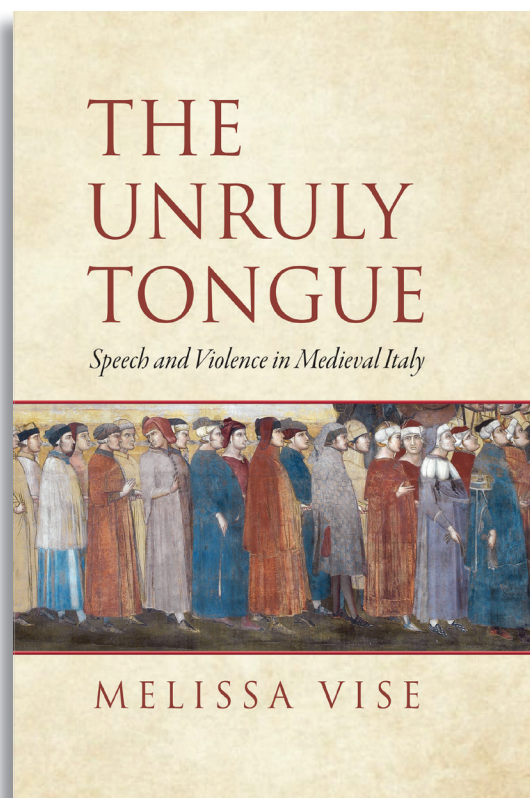
Melissa Vise

"Brimming with fresh ideas and original insights derived from impressive archival investigations, *The Unruly Tongue* offers a sophisticated, thoroughly researched exploration of ideas about speech in the public forum in the historical context of the later medieval Italian communes."—Brett E. Whalen, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

A cultural history of speech in medieval Italy, *The Unruly Tongue* explores the process through which science and medicine, politics, law, literature, and theology informed a new ethics of speech. Offering a new account of the power of words in Western thought, Melissa Vise shows how the regulation of speech became integral to republican values in medieval Europe.

Citizens of Italy's republics understood themselves to be subject to the power of words, because words had furnished the grounds for their political freedom. But words also contained the potential for violence, and thus needed to be controlled, and even prosecuted. Vise shows how the laws that governed speech in medieval Italy represented broader cultural understandings of human susceptibility to speech. From civic courts to ecclesiastical courts, from medical texts to the works of Dante and Boccaccio, *The Unruly Tongue* uncovers a major shift in how people perceived the power of speech.

Melissa Vise is Associate Professor of Medieval Mediterranean History at Washington and Lee University.



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