

Zitierhinweis

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Comparative histories, especially between the Low Countries and Italy, have become common in recent years. As these two regions were the most urbanised in Europe, and as they followed rather different paths toward what might be termed state formation, scholars from numerous disciplines have sought to compare and contrast the regions to better understand the regions in general and selected cities within them. Comparative history has high aims and offers much in terms of new understandings, yet in some studies the comparison feels somewhat tokenistic, conducted by an individual skilled in one region and looking to another to back up the 'specialness' of that region or to find evidence to support his or her existing ideas of patterns.

In bringing an impressive depth of knowledge to both Northern Italy and parts of the Southern Low Countries, Lantschner's book avoids such weaknesses and adds a new and interesting dimension to studies of politics, rebellion and different forms of urban conflicts. There is a really impressive amount of information in this study; indeed in places such a wealth of material is likely to make it challenging to follow for an undergraduate audience. A little more might have been done to explain the situation of each of these cities, it is probably safe to assume some knowledge of Florence but less so for Verona or Liège. Equally, something on the sorts of source being used here would have been helpful for a wider audience perhaps unfamiliar with the regions(s) and their style of record keeping. The short period under consideration here – 1370–1440 – has undoubtedly been chosen to allow for depth and for useful comparisons, but a few words on why these dates were picked might have helped to set the reader firmly in this time frame. One suspects that the dates are chosen not just to engage with what Cohn identified as the cluster of revolts in the 1380s (1) but also to avoid looking at the impact of the Black Death on the selected cities and indeed on wider political systems. Such minor quibbles should not, however, obscure the fact that this is an excellent monograph and is very well written, providing a detailed overview of complex ideas and situations and in doing so adding an important civic dimension to political studies of state formation. The book is a development of Lantschner's doctoral research, as well as his previously published works, but it reads with more sophistication than some other rapidly published PhDs.

The book is made up of two parts of unequal length. Firstly, three short chapters survey ideas on 'political conflict' and address theories of violence and disorder. The second section, after a short overview, focuses on three comparative case studies to consider in depth the systems of conflict detailed and explained in the first half. This setup allows for a balanced approach and for evidence to be built up gradually. Lantschner opens with Machiavelli's discussion of Rome and conflict (though Rome is not discussed in any depth in the book) to set up the idea of tumults as part of political life, indeed as part of what made Rome so strong. The introduction makes clear that this is not an account of selected revolts and violence, rather an investigation into the logic of conflicts within the polycentric order of late medieval cities. As a result, the author sets out to write political history that focuses on cities rather than traditional discussions of 'the state'. In looking inside towns and in seeing the multifaceted groups and ideas there, rather than simply seeing them as either the enemy of centralisation or beacons of democracy, the approach set out here is an important one.

Chapter one looks at methods for legitimating political conflict, emphasising wider hopes for peace and unity in many aspects of medieval thought. A huge range of examples, from Aristotle to Emperor Henry VII, are brought in to consider what constituted crimes and how to classify conflicts. Judicial categories, and ideals of liberty and justice are discussed in broader European contexts, as well as with close reference to the cities in question, with the sections on Tournai and Florence being particularly interesting, as the latter is probably the best-studied town vis-a-vis rebellions, while the former has been largely ignored. The chapter emphasises that conflict was part of different levels of urban communities, not just 'town vs lord' but also within the urban communities involving different groups or actors, all of whom drew on connected strategies to legitimate and justify their actions.

The next two chapters look at modes of conflict and 'action groups' respectively. There is occasionally a sense of unnatural division here, since understanding *who* is in conflict is surely essential in understanding *how* conflict unfolds. Again the two chapters are well informed with regard to legal approaches and petitioning, the ways in which civic groups could bargain for power, and the violence that could break out when bargaining reached breaking point. Both chapters achieve a nice balance between the Italian and northern evidence with factions in Liège and in Italy explained equally well. The discussion of coalition is particularly interesting, and is linked to the earlier discussion of justification and legitimation with clarity. The three short chapters in section one set the stage for the case studies and the depth and development of the second half; they show the challenges of any political history and particularly of civic political history, even in a comparatively short time frame. The significance of the points touched on here regarding marriage alliances, guilds and civic hinterlands become clear in the second half of the book, with the discussion of 'public good' or 'common good' (p. 71) important to each of the later studies.

The second, and longer, part of the book explores ideas of conflicts and political systems with close reference to selected case studies. As noted, some of these might have benefited from a little more introduction than others and indeed an explanation of why these sites have been chosen (and particular why the more famous rebellions in Ghent and Bruges have been left out) might have been helpful. Chapter four presents itself as a brief overview, giving some introduction to the towns and addressing some of the issues involved in looking for systems and applying modern theories to medieval cases. The variety of conflicts and actors is made clear as are the numerous levels that need to be understood within urban conflicts, and the case for looking at each through the general logic of political conflict as well as in light of their own specific circumstances is made clear.

The next three chapters are where the real strength of the book lies and are all roughly the same length, using an Italian city and a city of the Low Countries to address the problems posed and approaches suggested in the first half of the book. They begin with a consideration of 'volatile' systems in Bologna and Liège, involving an analysis of negotiation and rumours which led to conflicts between the towns and a connected ecclesiastical authority, for Liège the prince-bishop and for Bologna the powerful University. Both forms of disorder, and indeed both cities, have been studied in isolation or in their own political context – Liège for its relationship with Burgundy and Bologna in terms of wider studies of student troubles – but in pulling them together the strength of a comparative approach is clear. Both conflicts generated a large number of narrative sources, and even traditions, and both drew together numerous 'agents' and newly united groups which had to deal with extra issues in legitimising conflict against ecclesiastical organisations. The conflicts and troubles under discussion here are linked to wider crises in Italy or Burgundy. The complexity of urban coalitions is clear here, making for interesting reading for any student of urban violence. In connecting the internal urban struggles to wider issues for the 'fragile Papal State' (p. 117) and the 21 *bonnes villes* around Liège, the influence of wider networks (or coalitions) on the semi-united groups within the two towns becomes apparent in a way that allows for the nuances in uniting and dividing parties to be appreciated.

Chapter six discusses constitutional systems of conflict in Florence and Tournai. As the author notes, constitution is an imperfect term but it is used here with style to set a very well-studied town in the context of a less studied one, and, in doing so, to emphasise the process of bargaining and the delicate process of factional negotiations. In places the plots and actors are a little difficult to keep track of (though Lantschner is to be commended for making some very complicated situations relatively clear), but the comparison between bargaining factions and bargaining parishes allows for a real appreciation of the subtler elements of conflict and the tightrope that virtually all urban groups had to walk to balance factions and hatreds. It is impressive that both towns, with their numerous urban records (in Tournai's case many are now lost and so studies must be based on older editions) have been analysed to the same

extent and the same rigour brought to bear on both situations, as it would have been easy here to let Florence dominate.

In looking at constrained conflicts in two relatively peaceful towns – Lille and Verona – the final chapter makes clear that civic politics did not necessarily have to involve violence. In studying civic conflict and revolt, it is far easier to explain why towns like Ghent or Perugia revolted than to look at why towns like Lille and Verona did not, and this final analysis is extremely valuable. Indeed, it is a shame that there is no mention of Lille before 1369, as its transfer from Flemish to French rule and back again is also interesting for the peace that characterised the process. Yet as is made clear, it is not that both cities were quiet, rather that both cities developed methods of containing and limiting conflicts, as well as the comparative weakness of guilds and parishes that made it harder for them to develop into factions as seen in Liège or Tournai. As is made clear, the potential for violence between families in Lille was as present as in the other towns discussed, and the potential for conflict with larger Burgundian and Venetian states existed in both locations. The conflict resolution systems used in Lille and Verona, with embassy systems and institutional relationships, as well as other hidden channels, shows their own systems of conflict in action and makes a valuable contribution to the study of both towns and indeed urban politics more generally.

In pulling all of this together, the conclusion does a very impressive job of making the case for political history written around civic conflict. In looking at what was going on in these six towns, in addition to, and not instead of, looking at their relationships with lords, the complexity of late medieval conflicts becomes clear. There are some notes here on what this adds to studies of ‘state-building’ and the potential of this approach in other settings, including England and Bohemia as well as cities of the Mamluk Empire, is made clear. A longer conclusion, placing the new material here present throughout more firmly within the context of wider studies might have been a nice touch. In particular Lantschner could have unpicked some of the assumptions that underlie so many state-centric works and offered suggestions for how to take city-centred political studies further. The engagement with archival sources and with contemporary chronicles throughout the work is impressive, and clearly a choice has been made to focus on these throughout the book. The introduction does a good job of setting out other recent studies, including Cohn’s studies of European trends and studies of the Low Countries by Dumolyn, Haemers, Liddy and others, but these are only touched on in passing in much of the work. The comparative approach set out here and the points on legitimation and bargaining here seem particular new and important, and Lantschner could have used this to suggest new approaches or indeed to address more critically issues in the current scholarship. These are, of course, minor points and are likely explained by good manners and by the need to keep the book under 300 pages.

Overall, then, this is an impressive book bringing in a range of examples and offering an interesting mix of well-studied cases and less well-known ones. The value of studying political conflicts through the lens of the city, rather than the state, is made clear throughout this work. In many ways, the above criticism or hopes for expansion on certain point underlines how important this work is and what an important addition it is to any study of revolt, urban politics or indeed urban studies in Italy or the Low Countries. Lantschner has managed to fit an impressive amount into a short and easy to read survey of six complex situations, and has used them to offer a new political account of the later Middle Ages.

Notes

The author gratefully acknowledges the review and thanks the reviewer for her comments.

1. Samuel K. Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe* (Manchester, 2004); *ibid. Lust for Liberty; The Politics of Social Revolt in Medieval Europe, 1200–1425* (Cambridge, MS, 2006).