

Gian Mario Anselmi and Angela De Benedictis, eds. *Città in Guerra: Esperienze e riflessioni nel primo '500. Bologna nelle "geurre d'Italia."*

Bologna: Minerva Edizioni, 2008. xiv + 322 pp. €20. ISBN: 978-88-7381-246-3.

Angela De Benedictis. *Una guerra d'Italia, una resistenza di popolo: Bologna 1506.*

Collana di storia dell'economia e del credito promossa dalla Fondazione del Monte di Bologna e Ravenna 13. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004. 204 pp. €13. ISBN: 88-15-10216-7.

These two books contribute significantly to our understanding of the extraordinarily neglected epoch of the Italian Wars. For centuries Italian historians had disdained the period as one of decline and degeneration — as an era that seeded the long-enduring failure of Italians to form a nation. Military history in particular languished and the last major Italian work on war itself is by Piero Pieri, published in 1952. But despite the prominence of *war* in the titles of these new books, their focus is not on firepower, angle bastions, or the permanence and professionalism of armies, but on the political and diplomatic processes and rhetorical practices that led to war, and the consequences of war. They do not mark a return to *histoire événementielle*, but pursue their themes in modes that reflect the new methodologies of recent decades: microhistory, the breaking down of barriers between literary and historical analysis, and the desire to move away from a singular authorial perspective and to hear the conflicting views of the past.

The book by De Benedictis, written with exceptional clarity and elegance, compares multiple contemporary views of the events during and after the “small war” of Julius II in 1506 that resulted in his bringing Bologna under the direct control of the papacy. With a range extending from the propapal opinions of Paride Grassi, master of ceremonies of the papacy, to the pro-Bentivoglio sympathies of the German student Christoph Scheurl, this method reveals the tensions, uncertainties, and erratic decision-making that underlay the determination of papal policy and the bluster and then flight of Giovanni II Bentivoglio prior to Julius’s actual advance on the city. De Benedictis makes these events come alive and important to us not merely as a stage of papal state formation but for their enormous impact on and significance for those who experienced them. There is a limitation inherent in this approach: it is difficult to evaluate De Benedictis’s embrace of Erasmus’s view of Julius II as a tyrant without a more extensive discussion of the historiographical literature on the concept of

tyranny in this period and analysis of the attribution of Bentivoglio himself as the tyrant, not only by Julius but also by his papal predecessors.

The eighteen essays of *Città in guerra* are drawn from a 2006 conference and seven of them overlap with De Benedictis's book, sometimes dealing with the same events of the 1506 war, but adding new information or perspectives, particularly on the symbolic practices of the papacy and their relationship to diplomacy and politics and the propaganda employed by both sides of the confrontation, from Paride Grassi's diary to the *scrittari* — anonymous poetry pasted on the walls of buildings and pamphlets that were circulated privately. For example, Forni sees a change in papal propaganda that is evident by the 1530s. Julius II during his triumphal entry into Bologna in 1506 scattered gold coins with the legend "Bononia per Iulium a tiranno liberata"; Paul III Farnese in 1553 during his entry into Perugia after the bloody Salt War, founded instead a literary academy and promoted publication of a pamphlet of laudatory poetry, a transition that Forni describes as a shift from the anti-tyranny ideology aimed at a factionalized city to the pastoral myth of peace and *prosopopeia* of the reconciled city. Gramellini reviews an earlier episode of papal offensive against Bologna — the threat from Alexander VI and Cesare Borgia. She explicitly seeks to move beyond a recounting of the events by using two chroniclers, Leonardo Alberti and Friano Ubaldini, the former for an external perspective and the latter to show the emotional reactions within the city. She also demonstrates how Ubaldini uses a paratactical style to convey the mounting tensions within the city.

Visceglia also turns to the diary of Paride Grassi, showing how flexible an instrument of political expression ceremony was at this time and how Julius II calibrated ceremony to the rank and wealth of the cities in his dominion and how the procession of the *Corpus domini* signified the double pact between God and man and the people and their sovereign, the pope — thereby emphasizing the temporal as well as spiritual aspects of papal authority. Ceremony was bent to political, military, and diplomatic circumstances, and language used as a weapon, invoked most dramatically in a "lexicon of dichotomies" against the French king. Rospocher shows how Julius's supporters used the myth of a new golden age ushered in by the pope's leadership and policies: Giles of Viterbo in a public oration in 1507 compares the pope to Julius Caesar, and street singers expressed their yearning for a new era incarnated in the "gran pastor."

Other essays look to the impact of war beyond Bologna's "small war" of 1506. Taviani reviews the revolt of Genoa, especially the flight of the nobles from the city, the division between *popolo grasso* and *popolo minuto* and the sustained expressions of loyalty to the French king throughout the revolt. Arcangeli concludes that the impact of war on the Lombard cities promoted the search for more representative institutions and weakened urban oligarchies. Felicitously, this collection of essays breaks the north-south barrier and includes an essay by Valeri on the perspectives and publication fate of southern chroniclers of the wars in Naples from 1494–1504. These writings were neglected, published only at the end of the Cinquecento and then ignored until the end of the eighteenth century. Valeri attributes this neglect to

the role of the baronial conspiracy of 1485–86 in weakening the Regno's resistance to invasion and the bias of the aristocratic class that prevented it from recognizing that factor during the centuries of subjugation. Niccoli invokes images of mountains of the dead, abandoned or burned on the battlefield. The dead fanned a climate of fear in an era that believed pestilence was transmitted through the odor of rotting bodies or smoke from pyres.

Other essays focus on more traditional analyses of contemporary works. For example, Quaglioni interprets Commynes's chronicle as the first to understand the profound significance of the dramatic epochal shift that the invasion of 1494 represented. Zancarini, in one of the few essays to address a military issue directly, questions whether Gaston de Foix's lightning-quick campaign actually had any permanent effect or represented a new military strategy. Marchand views the Sack of Prato from a multivocal perspective similar to that used by De Benedictis, and shows how an historical event can be rewritten as a function of the genre in which it is placed. In a stimulating essay, Anselmi presents a fresh interpretation and strong defense of the perspicacity and value of Machiavelli's *Art of War*. By combining literary criticism and historical analysis he demonstrates that Machiavelli's use of the classical format of the dialogue, which has perplexed critics, especially military historians, helped Machiavelli gain a more direct grasp of reality, conceptualize the state as an organism of growth and expansion, and therefore justify the importance of the pitched battle as the central ideal and structural foundation of military policy. He also illuminates how Machiavelli used overpowering rhetoric to sweep away all doubts and perplexities that imitation of the Roman model might provide and relates Machiavelli's rhetoric to his experience in writing for the theater.

These two books complement each other and share approaches that enable them to give us fresh and vivid interpretations of the diplomatic, political, and military events and dilemmas that made the Italian Wars a period of painful challenges that contemporaries faced with rage and despair, but also with vigor and courage.

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