

Tumulti: Moltitudini ribelli in età moderna. Angela De Benedictis.
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The early modern era was an age of revolt in Europe, particularly urban revolts that marked the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During this time the growing power of absolute princes curtailed the traditional rights and privileges of civic and aristocratic elites. Harkening back to age-old traditions that dated to the Middle Ages, patricians and nobles legitimated revolt as a defense of venerable liberties against tyrannical and oppressive government. In this study of revolts in early modern Italy, Angela De Benedictis examines the justifications that jurists, theologians, and the rebels themselves offered in defending revolts from accusations of *laesae maiestatis*. She finds that there was a long tradition of legal and theological defense of legitimate revolts that survived well into the age of Jean Bodin and Thomas Hobbes.

De Benedictis's study is based on an analysis of four cases studies from Italy: the revolt of Urbino (1572–74), the uprising against Spanish rule in Messina (1674–78), the Salt War in the Piedmont town Mondovì (1680–82), and the rebellion of the Mantuan town of Castiglione delle Stiviere (1689–94). Variousy calling these revolts uprisings, rebellions, and tumults, De Benedictis argues that they shared similar justifications and ritual actions. Despite differences in geography and time, in all four cases the tumults were provoked by perceived slights against communal privileges of towns and their elite citizens, more often than not by increases in taxes on staples such as bread and salt or infringements of collective rights and autonomy by absolutist princes. The ritual actions of the people also signified a unity and a legitimate use of violence. In most cases the tumults began with a call to arms — with the ringing of the town's main church bell, an assemblage of the civic elite, and the occupation of key governmental buildings. Throughout the course of these tumults town leaders sent delegates to talk to the prince's representatives, hoping to have hated taxes and violations overturned. Using mostly chronicles of the revolts, but in the case of Urbino a privileged trial of the tumult's leaders, De Benedictis argues that the rebels saw their actions as legitimate and vigorously defended themselves against charges of *laesae maiestatis*.

Analyses of these tumults take place in the three chapters (the first chapter for Urbino and the last two chapters for the three revolts that occurred during the seventeenth century). In between these two points, De Benedictis examines how contemporary

jurists, theologians, and political authors, both in Italy and elsewhere in early modern Europe, viewed rebellion. Tracing the evolution of scholarly thought on licit revolts from the fourteenth-century jurists Bartolo da Sassoferrato and Baldo degli Ubaldi, she finds both condemnation of rebellions and support for them. In the latter case, rebellions had to be grounded in just grievances that warranted disobedience from a prince's subjects. This was the only way to avoid charges of *laesae maiestatis*. The section also examines depictions of rebellion in emblematic literature and popular plays of the time. With their didactic purposes, these forms of literature typically denounced all rebellions as violations of the duty and loyalty that subjects owed princes. While the discussion of legal, theological, and political treatises on rebellion are necessary to put the four cases in perspective, the foray into literature is an unnecessary excursion that doesn't add much to De Benedictis's argument.

De Benedictis provides a well-researched study of useful case studies of overlooked Italian revolts along with arguments that contemporaries used to defend licit rebellion from charges of *laesae maiestatis*. The studies of the Salt War of Mondovì and the tumult in obscure Castiglione degli Stiviere are particularly welcome. Her scholarly lenses tend to focus on the elites who led and participated in the revolts against princely tyranny. At times this focus obscures the participation of the popular classes in these revolts. For example, she has the revolt of Messina beginning in 1674, when the elites took over the popular tumult that had begun two years earlier. Nevertheless, De Benedictis is precise in her terms and analysis, preferring the term *tumult* over *revolt* in her depiction of the actions of rebels. The term *tumult* suggests the rebels did not want to overturn princely rule; rather, they were defending ancient liberties.

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