

Andrea Gamberini, The Clash of Legitimacies. The State-Building Process in Late Medieval Lombardy, Oxford (Oxford University Press) 2018, XVI–240 p., 3 b/w maps, 2 fig. (Oxford Studies in Medieval European History), ISBN 978-0-19-882431-2, GBP 65,00

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»The Clash of Legitimacies« offers a highly interesting analysis of the evolution of the »political physiognomy« of Lombardy over a long period of time (roughly 1100–1500), and in particular about the confrontation – the »clash« – of the many actors involved in this evolution. The book is a translated and revised version of »La legittimità contesa. Costruzione statale e culture politiche (Lombardia, XII–XV secolo)«, published by Viella in 2016. The English subtitle curiously obliterates what is at the core of Gamberini's interest: political cultures. In fact, the principal aim of this work is to provide a revised analysis of the state-building process not limited to an institutional perspective. In order to accomplish this, »The Clash of Legitimacies« builds on a quite impressive amount of secondary literature and offers an accurate summary and discussion of the last two decades of historiographical renewal. Most of these works are the result of research conducted by scholars gathered around Giorgio Chittolini, among whom Gamberini has been one of the most productive.

The main thesis is that political conflicts were fuelled not only by the pursuit of resources and power, but also »by the survival of a plurality of political cultures, different in terms of both content and structure« (p. 2). The state, which included cities and the regional *Signorie*, never had a monopoly on force or legitimacy: »Principles of political culture, heterogeneous in terms of both content and origin, continued to be valid, and thus, coming into collision with those espoused by the state, created misunderstanding, tension and conflict« (p. 5). In Gamberini's perspective, political cultures, or »elements of political culture« (p. 8), are not just »mentalities«, nor are they coherent and self-referential systems of beliefs and ideals. Rather the point is to acknowledge the existence of diverse values and political ideals and observe the way in which individual political actors appropriated, used and in some cases deformed them. From that point of view, »The Clash of Legitimacies« masterfully succeeds in sketching out how political society, both in the city and in the countryside, operated in northern Italy.

Gamberini's book consists of two main parts. The first deals with medieval Lombardy (mainly the Po Valley area, even though the author ventures sometimes to nearby Tuscany or to Genoa) during the communal period. Here the author retraces the formation of the commune during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The projection of communal power outside the city walls and the efforts to impose its dominion on the surrounding countryside is one of Gamberini's principal focuses. Confrontation



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with the Empire, particularly with Barbarossa, and the complex appropriation of Roman law, fuelled this process. The second section reduces its scale of observation to Visconti-Sforza Lombardy during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The main point is that the consolidation of princely power certainly absorbed and integrated the various political actors, but never really eliminated them. The result was a complex »stratification of languages and idealities in which the old was aggregated to the new, in an arrangement of extreme tension« (p. 197).

The choice to treat the »communal era« (the era of the city-state) and the »regional State« (or »*Signoria* of regional dimensions«) as part of the same analysis is especially valuable – this is rare in the historiography, which tends to treat these two periods separately. Gamberini's conviction is that, although the two periods possessed their own characters, the communal legacy was still important for the late medieval regional state. In the end, the state-building process, as seen from medieval Lombardy, was a complex mix of confrontation and dialogue involving public authorities (the empire, the communes and the regional *Signoria*) and local powers (factions, rural communes and lords), which at times shared common ideals but at others were divided by opposing political cultures.

Given the amount of secondary literature referred to, the very long chronological scope adopted, and the richness of the analysis, it would be unfair to dwell on what is lacking in the book. However, a chapter devoted to a political actor that is not sufficiently discussed – ecclesiastical institutions – would have been welcome in both parts. This is not to say that they do not appear or that Gamberini is unaware of their importance; indeed, one can find interesting remarks about these actors in some of the chapters. However, a full discussion in a chapter like those dedicated to rural communes, seigneurial lordships and factions would have helped the discussion.

In light of abundant research, a discussion of the political role and preaching of the mendicant orders, in particular the Franciscans and the Augustinians, would have been interesting. And, although the political power of bishops had been weakened during the communal era, one wonders about the role played by chapters, both cathedral and secular, in, for example, the »culture of possession« (cf. p. 33–39 or 91–100) that is so central to understanding the development of the city commune and the regional state.

Students as well as seasoned researchers will find much in »The Clash of Legitimacies« to stimulate their reflections. Andrea Gamberini has produced what is, and will long remain, one of the best syntheses of the political society – and its historiographical revival – of northern Italy during the high and late Middle Ages.



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