

Tornyok harca a középkori Rómában Game of towers in medieval Rome

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Alberto Di Santo: Guerre di torri. Violenza e conflitto a Roma tra 1200 e 1500. La corte dei papi 28. Viella, 2016. 369 pages

The previous works of historian Alberto Di Santo served primarily educational purposes. For instance, he participated in the compilation of an archaeology themed educational program of the Italian state television. His earlier works are focusing on Italy's medieval built heritage, a lighter toned work was published about the historical city centre of Naples (*Napoli. Il centro storico*, 2005.), and on the environment of the dome of Pisa. (*Piazza del Duomo di Pisa*, 2004.). The examination of the Roman aristocracy's constructions between the 8th-14th centuries - in which he has explored the utilization of the ancient ruins in medieval fortresses - (in association with Sandro Carocci: *Monumenti antichi, fortezze medievali: il riutilizzo degli antichi monumenti nell'edilizia aristocratica di Roma*, 2010) served as a useful preliminary study for the monography discussed here.

Though the author's earlier works can be regarded as high quality educational works, the study discussed here fulfils every scientific requirement perfectly. This is proved by the fact that it was published as the 28th volume of the publication series dealing with the papal court, (*La corte dei papi*) edited by Agostino Paravicini Bagliani.

In his book Alberto Di Santo discusses the history of the various manifestations of violence – a remarkably popular theme in our days. A great advantage of his work is that he does not examine the main points of the topics from a general point of view but focuses on certain cities. This is a novelty, since prior to his publication professional literature concerning Italy on this topic typically examined only a given city's single series of events or conducted a comparative analysis on a certain conflict type observed in several regions. Maire Vigueur's book, published in 2003 (*Cavaliers et citoyens. Guerre, conflits et société dans l'Italie communale, XII-XIII siècles*) is an often cited¹, important academic source of Di Santo's work. However, Maire Vigueur examines the conflicts of the Italian cities' elite in general, placing a great emphasis on social background. In Di Santo's work the latter aspect does not get such a prominent role. The objective of the *Guerre di torri* is to examine the details of violent events and the use of related terms and their modifications, thus the author presents Rome's conflict history between 1200 and 1500.

The most cardinal sources examined in the book are the chronicles and historic works concerning Rome's history. Among those the most often referred are the historical works of the "Roman Nameless", Stefano Infesurra and Gaspare Pontani. However, Di Santo does not use the archives. This has thematical reasons on one hand, on the other, as the author mentions it too, the documents related to the subject were mostly destroyed².

Regarding the structure of the monography, it can be divided into chapters and subchapters. The three main thematical sections are the following: the forms of the manifestations of

¹ Di Santo uses the Italian translation of Maire Vigueur's French work: *Cavalieri e cittadini. Guerra, conflitti e società nell'Italia comunale*. Bologna, 2004.

² In 1527 during the raid of Rome numerous documents were destroyed, mainly the materials on city's official records. Maire Vigueur, Jean-Claude: *L'altra Roma*. Torino, 2011. IX–XIV.

violence, the driving forces of the Roman conflicts and the perception of violence of the related sources.

In the first section Di Santo sets out from the various forms of tournaments, getting through the topic of marauding groups arriving at the grain wars; the violence against the individuals and the atrocities suffered by the Roman Jews.

In my opinion the climax of the first section are the 6th-8th subchapters in which we can read about the development of the duels in Rome. This part touches on the previous topics, that is the tournaments, competitions, as well as the period's concept of honour. The author writes about a certain "development" of the duels, thus he gets from the trials by ordeal of the early middle ages to a specific case in 1408 he quotes partly literally. According to the story written down by Antonio dello Schiavo on an early Saturday morning Rinaldi Gascogna and Piero de Montechia fought a duel on the square of St Peter in front of a crowd of Roman spectators. As it turns out from the chronicle they agreed on the exact venue of the duel and they ensured that an adequate number of witnesses would be present. In the duel, which started on the agreed time with identical weapons, ended with the victory of Piero de Montechia, who has wounded his opponent three times on his left arm. The precise definition and enforcement of the rules were due to the hired judges who conducted the duel, thus the opposing parties saw Piero's victory as a legal judgement in their dispute. This accepted form of duel separated sharply from those private duels fought for honour without the consent of the authorities. As we learn from Di Santo this was condemned partly because it diminished the importance of the city's jurisdiction. The author – very correctly – points out the possible parallels between the duels and *vendetta*, and later on in the 6th chapter he states that the *vendetta* can be regarded as the exact opposite of duels, however he does not elaborate on this on a deeper level, nor does he raise the question that the uncontrolled duels might have been regarded illegal because further conflicts could have stemmed from them. Even though the relating subchapters are rich in details, it might cause the reader to feel that something is missing.

In the second part the author grants an entire chapter for the ambushes and city uprisings. The subchapter on the panic triggering force of rumours is especially interesting. This could be an interesting source for researchers of information history as well, as we get a picture on how a serious conflict could have emerged from an unverified gossip.

Following this, Di Santo examines in a separate chapter (5th chapter p. 195-221.) the roles of different Roman palaces, towers and several other buildings in the various conflicts. Primarily we can read about the political and armed conflicts during 1199-1205 between Giovanni Capocci, a *senator* deprived of his office and the supporters of the newly elected Pope Innocent III. In these conflicts the siege of the Capocci tower played a key role.

The former senator, enjoying the support of the Roman *popolo*, turned against the Pope and his family, the Contis. By 1204 the armed conflict developed into a kind of stationary warfare, thanks to the supporters of the pope who started to build smaller towers (*torricella*) and fortifications in the vicinity of the construction of Capocci's tower.

Other researchers of the topic, like Maire Vigueur, examined first of all the family and political background³ of Capocci, but in the *Guerre di torri* we can read a more detailed investigation on how the opposing parties forged advantage even from the position of antique buildings. The author's expertise in the topic is conspicuous, presumably due to his experience he obtained during his studies on the built heritage. However, in mind with this, the chapter is perhaps a little too short, certain military and city history explanations were put among the notes instead of the main text, and the reader might feel the need for a skeleton map for a more thorough understanding of the network of the buildings. The chapter on the use of these buildings in actual fights leads up to the next subject; the conflicts of the Roman elite, which we can read about in the 6th chapter.

Di Santo examines the Roman party fights between 1471 and 1486 in detail, which started with the fights of the della Valle and the Santacroce family at the time of the election of Pope Sixtus IV. The primary source of the series of events is Conti da Foligno who wrote down the *vendetta*,

³ Maire Vigueur: *L'altra Roma*, 168–170., 176.

which resulted in a series of further armed conflicts. Di Santo briefly investigates the question of the protection of one's honour and identifies it as the general cause of *vendettas*. He finds that the conflict of the della Valle – Santacroce families is particularly interesting, because the two families were in good relations and in business partnerships. According to the sources their disagreements continued, as the Santacroce was the client of the Orsini family, while the della Valle was the client of the Colonna family. The author brilliantly using the logics of the Italian party fights draws a parallel between the Florentine Cerchi-Donati fights, which has the same cause in the background; that the disagreements of their clients, the Manieri and the Gherardini families, escalated in the city. Di Santo – relying on the relating sources – comes to the conclusion that the party fights in fact did not originate from the Santacroce and della Valle families, but between the Orsinis and the della Valles. According to the chroniclers the conflicts ended with an extraordinary episode; after the attack of the Santacroces a Colonna and several della Valles lost their lives. The pope then – very surprisingly – did not punish the Santacroces or the Orsinis, but the victims of the attack, the della Valles. According to the author the reason behind the decision of Pope Sixtus IV was that knowing the working mechanism of the conflicts he simply wanted to terminate the series of party fights which seemed to be a vicious circle of attacks and counter attacks. Finally, he banished the della Valles. Di Santo's explanation is remarkable, but not thoroughly convincing, since he does not examine the relationship between the pope and the opposing families. In the chapter which is more than fifty pages we can read a very detailed and good analysis on the conflict types characteristic in the Italian cities; the analysis is very thorough regarding both the methodology and the conclusions.

The 8th chapter of the *Guerre di torri* is also the last thematic chapter on the history of medieval Rome, it presents the most important narrative sources of the era. According to the author in examining the violent events the political and social orientation of the author of the source should be taken into consideration – due to these orientations the authors of the sources can often arrive at extreme viewpoints in their chronicles. Di Santo analyses the chroniclers' perceptions and the impacts and influence that reached them. He divides the viewpoints of the authors he examined into three groups (1) the viewpoint according to which the violence committed legally in best interest of the city is absolutely legitim, (2) according to which violence can be justified in one or two cases, even if unlawful (3) and those who obviously condemn all forms of violence. According to the author among the chroniclers who are writing about Rome, Gherardi da Volterra is characterized by all three above mentioned categories, Antonio di Pietro dello Schiavo is shocked by violent events, Paolo di Lello Petrone is specifically against Colonna, while Antonio de Vascho clearly favours the Orsinis. Di Santo's often quoted source Stefano Infessura criticizes the decisions of Pope Sixtus IV, while Gaspare Pontani sympathizes with the pope.

As a final conclusion Di Santo states that the client network of the elite Roman families stayed strong until the end of the examined era. This is how it could happen that towards the end of the 15th century a Roman could kill another Roman, simply because he executed his client, who moreover was a highwayman. This characteristic of the Roman society is called a "hot iron" by the author, which made its impact felt in every areas of life, from politics to economy. The families building on their client network and their connections with their relatives, first of all the Orsinis and the Colonnas became so influential, that not even the popes could inhibit their power. The relationship of the elite, that is the "*baroni*" and the popes was characterized by extremities and without compromises; certain families were either the friends of the pope or his enemies.

Alberto di Santo's work examines a wide spectrum of conflict situations and various manifestations of violence. The author meets the set goals perfectly. He draws up important conclusions, either on the topic of duels or on the Santacroce – della Valle party fights. Certain subtopics, for example the examination of the connection between the duels and vendettas might have required further inquiries, which would have led to further questions. The reason behind the lack of such further investigation may be due to the fact that the author has undertaken the examination and presentation of a huge material, and the relative lack of sources on the era should be taken into consideration as well. It is indisputable that Alberto di

Santo's *Guerre di torri* is an unparalleled work, but not necessarily because of its findings, but because of the extraordinary topic handling. This book will be certainly an often-quoted source and supporting point of the researchers of the Italian cities. Beyond them it can be recommended with good heart to those historians, who would like to gain some insight into the world of city conflicts.