

**Carlo Baja Guarienti, *Il bandito e il governatore. Domenico d'Amorotto e Francesco Guicciardini nell'età delle guerre d'Italia*, Viella, 2014, 235 p., ISBN 978-88-6728-208-1**

The work of the young researcher Carlo Baja Guarienti, published in 2014, represents the outcome of his doctoral research, finished seven years ago. Guarienti is currently a professor of Modern History at the Department of Humanist Studies from Ferrara University. This is the institution where he obtained his BA in Classical Studies and later completed his PhD in models, languages and traditions in Western culture. The PhD thesis, *Francesco Guicciardini e il bandito Amorotto. Poteri e culture in conflitto nella Reggio del Cinquecento*, as well as the articles and studies published in scientific journals in recent years, reveal Guarienti's deep knowledge of his subject matter, based on both successive accumulations and refined understanding of this area of investigation.

After half a millennium, two different characters are put face to face in a new confrontation. The context is traced from the beginning, the wars between Guelph's and Ghibelline's, the local conflicts from the Reggio area, given the reconfiguration of political arena as a result of the appearance of new protagonists, new families. The character around which the book is built, Domenico da Bretti, known to the contemporaries and to the subsequent traditions as Domenico D'Amorotto is introduced in the second chapter of the book, through first sources that mentioned him: the writings of Panciroli and Giambattista Bebi, created several decades after the passing of the so called "bandit". These sources arise in the author's mind a defining issue for the way he builds his entire work: how much of the data on the biography of Domenico represents historical truth and how much of the construction is legendary? Trying to give a convincing answer, the next sequences of the book will focus on the reconstruction of the character's life, gathering information from a variety of sources, assembled in a biographical puzzle that is then compared with the legends surrounding him.

If formally the book includes six chapters and an introduction, in terms of analysis it is divided into two parts. The first one (chapters 1-5) captures Domenico's actions in relation to different events and individuals involved in the conflicts that occurred in Italy at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The second part, which comprises the last chapter, represents an analysis of the manner in which the image and the story of Domenico evolves and it is transformed in subsequent periods, through mythicization and attempts to fit him into the typology of the bandit.

Domenico and his early life are analyzed in connection to his family and his place of origin, a mountainous region, located away from the town

and characterized by dispersed houses, elements likely to influence relations with the authorities, with the law and the way it is applied. The author draws attention to the concepts of center and periphery, not only as elements of spatiality, but also as cultural realities. The fact is relevant, because it explains the human behaviors, including Domenico's actions. As anticipated, the relationship with the authorities is also a key theme, as the very title suggests. The typology within which Domenico's existence is framed, the "bandit", is defined by reference to the balance of power. This way it is introduced a second character, Francesco Guicciardini, seen here in his position of political authority, governor of the province of Reggio. There are also illustrated events that took place before Guicciardini moved to this area, events which, in one way or another, led to his appointment as governor: his political experience, along with specificities of his political thought, his governance profile, his expectations and intuitions, his complaints and conflicts and events in which he got involved, as well as events from his private life. However, it should be noted that Guicciardini appears rather in the background, being given a low profile. All this information is relevant in as much as it helps shaping the context within which Domenico acts and to complete an objective characterization, including Guicciardini's perspective and perception of the relationship between the two.

But we must not forget the third actor, significant both for the action and for the book: the community. The community's reaction is likely to influence the course of events; the support or disapproval of the community tips the balances; the bandit or the outlaw himself cannot exist without reference to a community from which he tries to escape, without its support, without a good cause to fight for, without the perpetuation through legends, folk stories and collective myths. Therefore, in most cases the analysis is accompanied by an interpretation on a symbolical level and an interpretation of the popular perception.

In addition, the author always makes the connection between events or local developments and what is happening in other areas, in the Italian space or Europe, providing a good contextualization. Beyond presenting the facts the way they were stated by the sources, the evidence is completed in an integrative approach, with interpretations that includes the particularities of the geographical area, the economic characteristics, perceptions and sensibilities of the era. Last, but not least, there is interrogated a wide variety of sources and the information obtained is corroborated to discern not only the manner in which the characters act, but also what they think about these actions, how they understand the events, how aware of what is happening they are. While investigating chronicles

and correspondences that transcribe speeches or direct dialogues, the author highlights their limits and the potential concerns: possible distortions in the transition from oral to the written form, the intervention of subjectivity, the false impression of extreme precision and accuracy. The effort in collecting sources (from archives of Bologna, Modena and Reggio Emilia and other major libraries in the region) is matched by the effort required by the necessary methodology to approach very different types of sources, produced by religious corporations or communities and urban councils, narrative sources consulted in manuscript or printed editions.

Thematically, Guarienti's book brings clarification regarding political strategies, the relationship between politics and justice, the way families and factions used to act, aggregation and social dynamics in Italy during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Emphasis is placed on the attempts made in order to seize power, to increase the prestige and honor. The manifestations of violence are everywhere: plots, murders, mutilations-some of them used as demonstrative, exemplary actions. As expected, different perceptions of power have a central role, whether coming from those who hold it, those who challenge it or those on which it is exercised: central and local authorities, secular and ecclesiastical authorities, families, communities, etc. In fact, this is an investigation which gives contours to early modern society. Thus, the intention of the authors of micro-stories - that of recreating through the story of an individual an entire era - is easily discernible.

The work is worthwhile reading also because it can provide an example of approaching a subject of local history, a model of decentering history, to which some contemporary historiography currents tend. By comparison with what Natalie Zemon Davis claimed in her speech at the Holberg Prize Symposium in 2010,<sup>1</sup> Carlo Baja Guarienti's investigation falls among the ones assuming a decentralizing approach. The subject of banditry is uncommon, the geographical space is treated as a symbolic space, two very different characters are brought together, the Italian wars disclose another face, Guicciardini's profile and the sources created by him are analyzed in different terms, other than the historiographical perspective.

In conclusion, even if sometimes the reading is hampered by complicated constructions of long sentences, by the development of the action itself and the multitude of analytical levels followed parallel or successively, *Il bandito e il governatore* offers an exemplary approach of a slightly unusual topic. The vision is integrative when it comes to the sources, the themes, perspectives and even historical genres, combining the biography and micro-history with historiography and cultural history.

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<sup>1</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Doing Decentered History. Decentering History: Local Stories and Cultural Crossings in a Global World', *History and Theory*, 50 (2010): 188-202.