

Forms of popular protest and notions of democracy in Italy during the Italian Wars

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Abstract

This essay examines popular protest and resistance during the Italian Wars, 1494 to 1559, emphasizing the importance of the decade of the 1520s. It is a comparative analysis with Italy's more thoroughly studied epoch of insurrection during the late fourteenth century and concludes that the latter period, characterized by warfare and the growth of absolutism, was rich in new forms of protest wedded to ideals of equality and early practices of democracy.

Keywords: mutiny, shopkeepers' strikes, Francesco Guicciardini, equality, democracy, women, *libertà*.

Formes de protesta popular i nocions de democràcia a Itàlia durant les guerres italianes

Resum

L'article examina la protesta i la resistència populars durant les guerres d'Itàlia, de 1494 a 1559, i mostra la importància que hi va tenir la dècada de 1520.

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The research for this article relies on my *Popular Protest and Ideals of Democracy in Late Renaissance Italy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2022.

Mitjançant una anàlisi comparativa amb l'època d'insurreccions del segle XIV, molt més estudiada, estableix que aquesta etapa posterior, caracteritzada per la guerra i l'ascens de l'absolutisme, va ser fecunda en noves formes de protesta, relacionades amb ideals d'equitat i pràctiques incipients de democràcia.

Paraules clau: motins de soldats, vaga de comerciants, Francesco Guicciardini, equitat, democràcia, dones, *libertà*.

Formas de protesta popular y nociones de democracia en Italia durante las guerras italianas

Resumen

El presente artículo examina la protesta y resistencia populares durante las guerras de Italia, de 1494 a 1559, y muestra la importancia que a este respecto tuvo la década de 1520. Mediante un análisis comparativo con la época de insurrecciones durante el siglo XIV, mucho más estudiada, establece que esta etapa posterior, caracterizada por la guerra y el ascenso del absolutismo, fue fecunda en nuevas formas de protesta, relacionadas con ideales de equidad y prácticas incipientes de democracia.

Palabras clave: motines de soldados, huelga de tenderos, Francesco Guicciardini, equidad, democracia, mujeres, *libertà*.

The 1520s stand out in the history of early modern insurrection, first because of the so-called German Peasant's revolt (1524–1526),¹ and second because of the urban revolts: the *Comunidades* of Castile in 1520–21, and the *Germanies* in Valencia, 1519–23. Except for some notice of the German uprisings that snaked their way into the Trentino, northern regions of the Alto Adige, and across the borders of the Veneto, historians have given scant attention to the importance of this decade to in-

1. On this misnaming, see Giorgio POLITI, «Rivolte contadine e movimenti comunali. Una tesi», in S. Gasparri, G. Levi, and P. Moro, eds., *Venezia: Itinerari per la storia della città*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1997, pp. 159–192: 166, relying on Peter Blickle's work.

surrections across the Italian peninsula. This is surprising given the steep rise and number of uprisings (191 of them) that appear in narrative sources and dispatches in my samples. During the long period of the Italian Wars from 1494 to 1559, only one decade counts more, that of 1501 to 1510. However, nearly a third of these uprisings (61 of them) came in the last two years of the decade with the international onslaught on the Venetian state, orchestrated by Pope Julius II.

1. *A decade of disasters*

This essay will examine protest and resistance during the Italian Wars, 1494 to 1559, but principally during the 1520s: a decade riveted by plague, famine, and warfare, which featured several of the most devastating sackings of cities in Italian history (Como in 1521, Genoa in 1522, Pavia in 1527 and again in 1528, and Rome in 1527 with the highest fatalities of any sacking in Italian history).² Given these catastrophes, we might expect the decade to corroborate generalizations in the historiography, reaching back to the 1950s: that “pre-industrial” revolts sprung from destitution and biological necessity and were correlated closely with natural disasters and periods of dearth, with the most common form of revolt being bread riots.³ While this was certainly not the case for the later Middle Ages in Italy or elsewhere in Western Europe,⁴ during the Italian Wars, and especially in the 1520s, a rough correlation between grain shortages and the frequency of popular uprisings had formed. Accord-

2. Stephen BOWD, *Renaissance Mass Murder: Civilians and Soldiers during the Italian Wars*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018, p. 4.

3. See Patricia CRONE, *Pre-Industrial Societies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, p. 75; and Yves-Marie BERCÈ, *History of peasant revolts: The social origins of rebellion in Early Modern France*, transl. Amanda Whitmore, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 100-102. For my criticism of these generalizations, see *Lust for Liberty: The Politics of Social Revolt in Medieval Europe, 1200-1425*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Ma., 2006.

4. See COHN, *Lust for Liberty*, pp. 70-72, 74, 108-109, 130-132, 208, 270-272, 274.

ing to the Florentine Friar Ughi, these shortages peaked from 1525 to 1528.⁵ Moreover, average real wages of unskilled workers in the Florentine building trade reached their lowest point since 1310 in 1527, – presently the earliest date in which real wages have been calculated anywhere in Italy. In 1527, these wages stood at less than half the real value they fetched two centuries earlier.⁶

Although food shortages formed one context for popular conflict during the 1520s, neither grain nor bread riots marked this decade of spiralling uprisings. From my sample of 751 uprisings and popular protest during the Italian Wars, only two uprisings in the 1520s flared with insurgents' shouting for bread or grain: "Pane! Pane!"⁷ Neither, however, mentioned attacks on granaries, bakers or their shops, or described insurgents boarding ships laden with grain for export to other cities. Instead, the period of grain and bread riots preceded the Italian Wars, during the 1470s, and had virtually disappeared after 1484.⁸

2. *Forms of popular protest: the ones in the late Middle Ages compared with those of the Italian Wars*

So what were the forms of popular protest to fill the disastrous decade of the 1520s? In several respects these insurrectionary actions did not differ widely from those of Italy's heyday in popular protest of the second half of the fourteenth century. Those of the 1520s, as with ones

5. Fra Giuliano UGHI, *Cronica di Firenze o compendio storico delle cose di Firenze dall'anno MDI al MDXLVI*, in F. Frediani, ed., *Archivio Storico Italiano*, appendice 7 (1849), p. 136.

6. Richard GOLDTHWAITE, *The Building of Renaissance Florence*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1980, based on my calculations from appendix 3: pp. 438-439.

7. The first occurred in Ferrara on 17 March 1527; the second, a day later, confined to soldiers camped at Borbone near Rieti; *I Diarii di Marino Sanuto*, ed. R. Fulin, F. Stefani, N. Barozzi, G. Berchet, M. Allegri, *et al.*, 58 vols., R. Deputazione veneta di storia patria, Venice, 1879-1903 (hereafter SANUDO, *Diarii*), XLIV, col. 328.

8. See COHN, *Popular Protest & Ideals of Democracy*.

during the Italian Wars more generally, continued to occur in cities. Only 86 of 751 incidents from 1494 to 1559 involved peasants and some of these were in alliances with urban artisans of the *popolo*, even if this percentage of 11.5 more than doubled those found in my earlier samples for Italy from the thirteenth century to 1425 (57 of 1,112 uprisings).⁹ Most notable of these peasant uprisings were the ones that crossed northern Italy's borders and galvanized peasant sympathies in the Trentino, Veneto, and Friuli from 1524 to 1526: twenty-three of these explicitly referenced the German movement. Moreover, another fifteen uprisings of *villani* occurred in the 1520s, before or after the German Peasants' revolt or in different areas of the peninsula without mentioning the German movement. Most often, these were attacks against soldiers billeted in their villages, who had abused women and stole or destroyed villagers' possessions. Further, these documents include incidences of peasant resistance against their local nobilities or incursions of city-states on peasant rights and properties. This decade scored the highest percentage of uprisings from the countryside with one in five of its protests involving rebels from these areas, more than doubling those during the Italian Wars before and after the 1520s and almost quadrupling the percentages for late medieval Italy.

Uprisings engrained with religious sentiments also remained rare during the Italian wars. In the Middle Ages, this rarity distinguished Italian uprisings from ones north of the Alps, but it became more emphatic after the fifteenth-century Hussite rebellions, and more so with major waves of interregional and religious unrest in the first half of the sixteenth century: the Pilgrimage of Grace against Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, which swept across several English counties in 1536-37,¹⁰ and most significantly the continental revolts of the Bund-

9. COHN, *Lust for Liberty*, p. 32.

10. Clifford Stephen Lloyd DAVIES, «The Pilgrimage of Grace reconsidered», *Past & Present*, 41 (1968), pp. 54-76; «Popular Religion and the Pilgrimage of Grace», in A. Fletcher and J. Stevenson, eds., *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England, 1500-1700*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, pp. 58-88; Andy WOOD, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics in Early Modern England*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2002,

schuh, followed by the German Peasants' War of 1524–26, which traversed more than a thousand kilometres.¹¹ For religious-inspired insurrections, the Italian trajectory during the Italian Wars went in the opposite direction from that it had in the late Middle Ages and what was occurring contemporaneously in other regions of Europe. Although the participation of clerics in popular insurgency in medieval Italy amounted to only 2 percent, during the Italian Wars their numbers shrank to a mere handful. Moreover, for the later period, no clerical leaders of popular protest emerge and certainly no one approaching the importance of the Augustinian Friar Iacopo Bussolari (or Bossolaro), who used his pulpit in Pavia to inspire and organize four revolts, 1356 to 1359, to liberate Pavia from Milanese control and combat the «tyranny» of Pavia's leading family, the Beccheria.¹²

Nor did the Italian wars register transregional religious movements with political agenda, such as the Great Alleluia in 1233, the Bianchi of 1399–1400, or more localized peace movements as with the young children and adolescents (*pueri et juvenes*) of Parma in 1331, who on several occasions danced through city streets and into the countryside with branches, twigs, and garlands of flowers, chanting: «long live, long live; peace, peace; death to the taxes and gabelles», and succeeded in nego-

pp. 50–51; and Ethan SHAGAN, «Pilgrimage of Grace and the Public Sphere?», in P. Lake and S. Pincus, eds., *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2007, pp. 31–58.

11. Andries RAATH and Shaun de FREITAS, «Rebellion, Resistance, and a Swiss Brutus?», *The Historical Journal*, 48 (2005), pp. 1–26: 5. For the mix of theology and social grievances during the Bundschuh, peasant revolts in the region of Zurich, and the German Peasants' War, see Tom SCOTT, *Town, Country, and Regions in Reformation Germany. Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions*, Brill, Leiden, 2005, pp. 125–148; and Robert SCRIBNER, «Peasant Politics in Early Modern Europe. A Review Article», *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History*, 28 (1986), pp. 248–254.

12. See COHN, *Lust for Liberty*, pp. 114–115; Fabio ROMANONI, «Come i Visconti asediavano Pavia. Assedi e operazioni militari intorno a Pavia dal 1356 al 1359», *Reti Medievali Rivista*, VIII (2007), estratto; and Riccardo RAO, «Il sistema politico pavese durante la signoria dei Beccaria (1315–1356): 'élite' e pluralismo», *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Moyen-Age*, 119 (2007), pp. 151–187.

tiating a peace between Parma and Lucca.¹³ By contrast, except for several anti-Semitic riots that clustered in the early days of the Italian wars in Naples and towns of the Regno in 1495,¹⁴ and then in Rome and the Papal States at the end of this period,¹⁵ only two religious movements with political aims appeared from 1494 to 1559. The first was the spillover of the German peasants' revolts of 1524-26. However, in contrast to reports and the petitions of the German rebels, the Italian sources rarely mentioned religious doctrine or ideals underpinning those that crossed its northern borders. The most explicit case was an invasion of alpine peasants into Trent on 17 March 1525. They assembled in the Episcopate's central square and delivered public pronouncements on their views. Although Luther was not named, his ideas were present in their demands: the ruler of «this land should be the Cesare and no longer ecclesiastical lords».¹⁶ A month later, Venetian dispatches noted that these Tridentine peasants were doing something new in promoting themselves as «*Verbum Dei defensores, solius Caesaris servitores*» (the defenders of the Word of God and servants of Cesare alone).¹⁷

The second Italian religious movement with significant political ramifications is, however, difficult to label as a popular movement, despite widespread participation across class lines. Moreover, it was limited to one city – Florence – without any ripples running even through its *contado* or subject cities. This movement of the *Piagnoni* led by the

13. COHN, *Lust for Liberty*, p. 140. Also, see the protest of small children in 1347, who marched through Naples's streets to the royal palace of the Angevin queen, Joanna I (1343–1382), crying «Pace, Pace» and waving banners of the two Sicilies to end Naples's war with Sicily; or the little-known peace movement of flagellants, originating in San Miniato al Tedesco in 1311; see references in COHN, *Lust for Liberty*, pp. 184, 6 and 105, respectively.

14. COHN, *Popular Protest & Ideals of Democracy*, pp. 145–146.

15. *Ibidem*, pp. 144–145. However, three attacks against Jews with popular backing surfaced during the 1520s: one at Modena in November 1523, one at Trent in March 1525 in conjuncture with the peasants' invasion into the city, and a third on 10 June 1526 against converted Jews (*marani*); for the sources, see *Ibidem*, pp. 97, 146–147.

16. SANUDO, *Diarii*, XXXVIII, col. 316.

17. *Ibidem*, col. 336.

Dominican preacher and prophet, Savonarola, also spurred counter movements which opposed the prophet (the *Compagnacci* and *Arrabbiati*) with their religious and political ideals. These religious debates and clashes between republicans and Medici sympathizers continued into the 1530s but had reached their pinnacle in the years between the ousting of the Medici and the creation of Florence's largest-ever government assembly – the *Consiglio Maggiore* – in December 1494, and the prophet's execution on 23 May 1498.¹⁸ In 1527, struggles of aristocratic youth and scions of republican oligarchs, who may have stirred some popular support, mounted two revolts that challenged Medicean domination and briefly revived oligarchic republican rule. By then, however, the sources reported nothing about any religious influences.

3. *Distinctive characteristics of protests during the Italian Wars: Women*

Did the Italian Wars, and in particular the decade of the 1520s, revive the popular insurgency of the late Middle Ages, and if so, did any new characteristics arise? The following three sections will investigate three protagonists of popular protest: women, soldiers, and shopkeepers. As surveyed in my *Lust for Liberty*, women appear with extreme rarity in the sources for medieval popular protest.¹⁹ For late medieval Italy, their absence was even more stark in judicial records than in

18. Among many others, see Lorenzo POLIZZOTTO, *The Elect Nation: The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494–1545*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994; Stefano DALL'AGLIO, *Savonarola and Savonarolism*, transl. John Gagné, Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, Toronto, 2010; John NAJEMY, *A History of Florence 1200–1575*, Blackwell, Malden, Ma., 2006; and COHN, *Popular Protest & Ideals of Democracy*, pp. 76–77, and 147–150.

19. Despite their rare appearance as rebels from numerous sources, Justine FIRNHABER-BAKER, «The Social Constituency of the Jacquerie Revolt of 1358», *Speculum*, 95 (2020), pp. 689–715; and Alice RAW, «Gender and Protest in Late Medieval England, c. 1400–c. 1532», *English Historical Review*, 136/582 (2021), pp. 1148–1163, have insisted that they must have been there. Their absence supposedly redounded simply

chroniclers, despite women's marked appearances for a wide range of other crimes.²⁰ With the Italian Wars, the role of women in insurrection had changed fundamentally, first in all women's bands and together with men in repairing city walls, gates, and bastions to resist foreign incursions on their liberties and in wars against their dominant lords, most notably with Pisa's struggles against Florence in 1494 to 1509 and Siena's, along with other cities such as Montalcino and Ravi in the Maremma against Medicean domination in the 1550s. These struggles and women's vital role in them can also be seen in less-studied cases, as with Vigevano's resistance on Easter, 18 April 1557, against the Duchy of Milan's billeting of 12,000 Spanish foot-soldiers and 1,500 horsemen with their animals inflicting great damage on the city and its environs. According to Vigevano's local chronicler, «In only a few days they [civilian men and women] dug the surrounding ditches deeper and refurbished the fortress to perfection».²¹ For Pisa's fifteen-year struggle for independence, reports of women's participation defending their cities against the rule and abuses of outside powers were more numerous and detailed. As early as 1500, the Florentine statesman and historian Francesco Guicciardini, despite his pro-Florentine sentiments, praised the Pisans: men and women, «eagerly (*popolarmente*) carried out the work of repairing battle-worn walls and bastions».²² Five years on, another Florentine, Bartolomeo Cerretani, went further. More than any source concerning either sex at any time or place for rebels during the Italian Wars, he detailed the organization of these Pisan women. They elected ten captains to head squadrons to repair the city's defences. Under each, fifty women were recruited to cart brushwood and other materials into the city. Each woman «with a basket on her shoulders» exhib-

on the prejudices of the sources. How do we then explain the sudden increase of women rebels by the end of the fifteenth century?

20. COHN, *Lust for Liberty*, p. 135.

21. *Cronaca di Vigevano, ossia dell'origine e principio di Vigevano ... di Cesare Nubionio*, ed. C. Negrone, 205-386, in *Miscellanea di Storia Italiana*, XXIX (1891), p. 323.

22. FRANCESCO GUICCIARDINI, *Storia d'Italia*, ed. C. Panigada, 5 vols., Gius. Laterza & Figli, Bari, 1929, II, pp. 4-6.

ited «great skill, will, and speed, arduously performing her duties» in aid of the Pisan revolt.²³

During the Italian Wars women, moreover, went beyond supporting roles. Again, the struggles to capture the greatest attention from chroniclers on women were Pisa's uprisings against Florence, 1494 to 1509. As seen from the accounts of Cerretani and Guicciardini on women in non-combatant roles, not even Florentine writers ignored or belittled these women as combatants, nor was it backhanded praise to insult the male rebels. In addition to participating in public demonstrations, chants, and risking their lives repairing city fortifications, women performed secretive and perilous tasks that became known only when they were captured. According to the Florentine chroniclers Luca Landucci and Agostino Lapini, Pisan women left the city carrying letters hidden in their genitals (*nella natura*) intended for the pope's son Lord Valentino, which no doubt were pleas for assistance.²⁴

At least six sources – chronicles and dispatches from Venice, Modena, Faenza, Brisighella, and Ferrara – described women's activities as armed soldiers in defence of their city's liberties. On 20 August 1499, the Venetian aristocrat Girolamo Priuli noted that Pisan «nobles, citizens, and peasants (*contadini*), men and women, some armed with swords, some with lances, and some with stones and rocks came together, all resigned to die». They attacked a part of Pisa taken by the Florentines.²⁵ In June 1500, Priuli praised Pisan women's valour, now from the countryside. Called into the city, they formed «a military unit of men and women, gallantly intent on sacrificing their lives to defend

23. Bartolomeo CERRETANI, *Storia Fiorentina*, ed. G. Berti, Olschki, Florence, 1994, p. 340.

24. *Diario fiorentino di Agostino Lapini dal 252 al 1596*, ed. G. Odoardo Corazzini, Sansoni, Florence, 1900, p. 35. Luca LANDUCCI, *Diario fiorentino dal 1450 al 1516, continuato da un anonimo fino al 1542*, ed. I. Del Badia, Sansoni, Florence, 1883, p. 212, supplies fewer details and said the letters were addressed to the pope.

25. Girolamo PRIULI, *I Diarii di Girolamo Priuli [AA. 1499–1512]*, ed. A. Segrè (vol. 1) and R. Cessi (vols. 2 and 4), *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, 24/3, 5 vols., Nicola Zanichelli, Bologna, 1933–1941, I, p. 162, from Pisan correspondents.

their country (*patria*). In their first battle, «especially the women fought with exceptional courage», forcing the French to retreat, killing more than four hundred of them.²⁶ A month later, the Modenese diarist, Jacopino De' Bianchi, reported that «beyond the men and their Spanish allies», the Pisan forces possessed

[...] wise women, dressed in military boots with leather armour (*coracine*) on their backs [...] Armed with lances and hooks with long spikes and slicing edges, they proved to be of great value. The men and women stuck together with great fervour, sharing their equipment so that no one lacked anything [...].

He then elaborated further on the women's courage and the numbers of French soldiers they killed, claiming the Pisans suffered few casualties.²⁷

The most remarkable feature about the Pisan women's role as combatants derives from dispatches collected by Sanudo.²⁸ In September 1505, the Pisans had «defended themselves well, and its women had done their job (*dover*)». They formed two squadrons with one of their own as captain (*una capetania*). When the big bell rang, the men appeared; when the little bell rang, the women came forth and fought courageously (*virilissimamente*, according to the Faenza dispatch; *mirabilmente* from the Brisighella one). A letter from Paolo Vitelli at Ferrara attests that a women's army had already been in place since 1499: «at this moment, one of the most fraught of the war... the women even had an organization of a military sort».²⁹

The Pisan rebellion was certainly not unique in describing women rebels as armed combatants or as leaders in popular uprisings to defend

26. *Ibidem*, II, pp. 10-11.

27. *Cronaca Modenese di Jacopino De' Bianchi detto de' Lancellotti*, ed. C. Borghi and P. Fiaccadori, Parma, 1861, p. 198, 11 July 1500, Monumenti di Storia Patria delle Provincie Modenesi. Serie delle cronache.

28. SANUDO, *Diarii*, VI, cols. 238 and 239.

29. Cited in Michele LUZZATI, *Una guerra di popolo: Lettere private del tempo dell'assedio di Pisa (1494-1509)*, Pacini Editore, Pisa, 1973, p. 150.

their cities. In 1501, a case from Rome appears even more extraordinary than those from Pisa. The French army under the command of Count of Gaiazo – *el gran bastardo* – entered Rome and took up lodging, no doubt displaying the usual arrogance and allowing his billeted soldiers to engage in robbery and sexual violence. In one respect, the leadership of an unnamed young woman citizen of Rome (*zovene cittadina romana*) went beyond the unnamed Pisan *capetania*. «By force», she led a revolt, not only of women, but also of men, and with the ringing of bells, they killed 150 of the 160 billeted French soldiers, tearing them to bits «by dragging them as if animals», then dumping their remains in the Tiber.³⁰

Thus far, none of these cases have touched the 1520s, when the numbers of uprisings soared; rather they cluster either at the beginning of the Italian Wars or at their end, when more descriptions of women as non-combatants and combatants can be added during Siena's resistance against Florentine and German occupation of their territory.³¹ However, a case from Vigevano in 1526 also suggests that the 1520s may have witnessed a swelling of women's participation in defending their cities against external rulers. In the uprising that provoked Vigevano's sacking in 1526, its local chronicler remarked that «numerous men and women» defended their city, but he relates only one story of a combatant, and it concerned a woman, even if the «courageous» one was identified by her husband and not her Christian name. She «had assumed the role of a soldier» and «engaged in hand-to-hand combat (*corpo e corpo*) against the [occupying] Spanish army to their great surprise, until finally she was brought down». The sacking that ensued to punish the rebels lasted seventy days and slaughtered 287 inhabitants. According to the chronicler, women suffered the worse.³²

30. *Cronaca Modenese di Jacopino De' Bianchi*, p. 239.

31. See COHN, *Popular Protest & Ideals of Democracy*, pp. 81-82 and 86.

32. *Cronaca di Vigevano*, pp. 296-297.

4. *Strikes by shopkeepers*

Two further forms of popular uprisings, from 1494 to 1559, show innovations that distinguish this understudied period of insurgency from its late fourteenth-century heyday. These were shop closures – a form of strike by shopkeepers – and mutinies of soldiers. Surprisingly, both were almost completely unknown from the late medieval Italian sources in Italy and from other parts of Western Europe. For both, the decade of the 1520s played a crucial role. In numerous sixteenth-century uprisings, shopkeepers turned first to non-violent means of protest by locking their shops. A new chant entered the rebels' lexicon: «Serre, serre». Earlier, such chants could occasionally be heard in the case of emergencies or festivities, but not as a tactic of revolt. The earliest of these tactics that I have so far spotted comes from Gaeta in June 1495, «all the *popolo* took up arms»: their first act came defiantly but peacefully with shopkeepers locking their stalls and shops.³³ Such tactics, however, remained rare until the 1520s. After Gaeta, the next one to appear does not come until May Day 1499, when the butchers of Ferrara closed their stalls to protest their duke's mandatory change in the price of meat.³⁴ Another shop-locking as an act of defiance came the following year in Cremona.³⁵ Yet, in the first two decades of the sixteenth century, only a further two lockdowns appear in thousands of dispatches in Sanudo's collection combined with over a hundred contemporaneous chronicles. One appears from Naples in 1510, when «the men of the city» staged an armed revolt «in various places» to oppose the decision of the viceroy and king of Naples and Spain to introduce the Spanish Inquisition into the *Re-*

33. *Cronica anonima dal'anno 1424 all'anno 1499*, I, pp. 176-186, in A. A. Pelliccia, ed., *Raccolta di varie croniche, diarij, ed altri opuscoli cosi italiani, come latini appartenenti alla storia del Regno di Napoli di Pietro Giannone*, 5 vols., Bernardo Perger, Naples, 1780, p. 184; and Tommaso PEDIO, *Napoli e Spagna nella prima metà del Cinquecento*, F. Cacucci, Bari, 1971, pp. 157-158.

34. *Diario Ferrarese dall'anno 1409 sino al 1502 di autori incerti*, ed. G. Pardi, *Reum Italicarum Scriptores*, 24/7, 2 vols., Nicola Zanichelli, Bologna, 1928-1933, p. 227.

35. PRIULI, *Diarii*, I, p. 268.

gno. After assembling and creating a union of the *popolo* and nobles, shopkeepers locked their shops, chanting «fero, fero» (iron, iron, meaning “to arms”) and «serra, serra».³⁶ A second one comes from Milan in June 1515, when its nobles, citizens, and the *popolo* united («sono di un pezo») against their duke, Massimiliano, for imposing an exorbitant tax of 300.000 ducats.³⁷ The revolt began with a citywide lockdown of shops from which processions with precise meeting points were intricately organized. The revolt succeeded: only 14.000 ducats of the initially demanded 300.000 were paid, and for that price the *popolo* won three new offices.³⁸ The next lockdown did not occur until 1522 at Cremona, to initiate an uprising of the *popolo* against a highly regressive head tax (*Datio del retagno*), which paid soldiers to guard against insurrections.³⁹

From five lockdowns during the first twenty-five years of the sixteenth century, the number rose to seven in 1526 alone. Police (*sbirri*) accompanied by German soldiers set off the first of these, when they tried to rob a poor merchant saddler in Milan on April 24.⁴⁰ Several days later, a second one occurred when Milan’s *popolo* rose up to assist Francesco II Sforza against the Imperial government. Not only did the shopkeepers lock their stalls: now they «purposefully made a mess of anything that could be eaten or stolen». Later that week, Antonio De Leyva and his captain, the Marquise Del Vasto, arrested a young man

36. *Cronaca di Napoli di Notar Giacomo*, ed. P. Garzilli, Stamperia Reale, Naples, 1845, p. 325.

37. Gianmarco BURIGOZZO, *Cronica Milanese dal 1500 al 1544, con note*, La Libreria Ferrario, Milan, 1851, p. 11; and SANUDO, *Diarii*, XX, col. 344.

38. See Gino FRANCESCHINI, «Parte II: Le dominazioni francesi e le restaurazioni sforesche», in G. Treccani Degli Alfieri, ed., *Storia di Milano*, 17 vols., Fondazione Treccani Degli Alfieri, Milan, 1953-1966, vol. VIII: *Tra Francia e Spagna (1500-1535)*, p. 172; and John GAGNÉ, *Milan Undone: Contested Sovereignities in the Italian Wars*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Ma., 2021, p. 240.

39. *Cronaca di Cremona. 1494-1525*, pp. 189-276, in *Bibliotheca Historica Italica, Societatis Longobardicae*, 4 vols., Brigola Bibliopola, Milan, 1876-1886, I, p. 253.

40. *Cronica di Antonio Grumello Pavese, dal MCCCCLXVII al MDXXIX*, in G. Müller, ed., *Raccolta di cronisti e documenti storici lombardi inediti*, 2 vols., Francesco Colombo, Milan, 1856-1857, I, p. 399.

who resisted arrest, after chanting, «Ittallia, Ittallia». «Immediately», their guard killed him, which set off alarm bells across Milano, calling the *popolo* to arm: «everyone carried their flags and every shop was locked». ⁴¹ On 19 May 1526, these tactics spawned a larger revolt in Naples, one between the *popolo* and nobility over rights to be guards of two city gates. After negotiations with the viceroy had left the *popolo* empty-handed, cries of «serra, serra» resounded through the city, and suddenly «all the shops shut». Attempting to end these tactics, the viceroy passed a decree prohibiting the *popolo* from carrying weapons and forcing them to re-open their shops. ⁴²

On 9 June another *tumulto* flared in Milan. Sparked by theft in the piazza «in broad daylight», all shops in the city were locked. Imperial troops arrived, declared a state of emergency, and demanded the shops to be reopened immediately. ⁴³ Still in Milan, on June 10, the *popolo* locked their shops as a bargaining chip to prevent their imperial rulers from giving the office of the Vicariate of Justice to a nobleman. ⁴⁴ Less than a week later, food shortages led to further incidences in Milan and in protest «all the shops» were locked. ⁴⁵ The following year, these tactics reached central Italy. On April 26 1527, young Florentine noblemen led an uprising (later called the *Tumulto del Venerdì*) to overthrow the Medici. It began with shop closures. In five hours the Medici had crushed the youths' occupation of the *Palazzo Vecchio*, and the following day harsh penalties were promulgated: all shops were forced to re-open under pain of one hundred lashes and a fine of 100 ducats. ⁴⁶ Two weeks later, a second revolt led by Florence's old oligarchic families succeeded in overthrowing the Medici. Again, shop closures starred as the

41. *Cronica di Antonio Grumello*, pp. 400-401.

42. SANUDO, *Diarii*, XLI, cols. 581-582.

43. *Ibidem*.

44. SANUDO, *Diarii*, XLI, cols. 591-592.

45. SANUDO, *Diarii*, XLI, cols. 616-617.

46. Cited in John N. STEPHENS, *The Fall of the Florentine Republic 1512-1530*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1983, p. 200.

opening act.⁴⁷ By the 1530s these tactics had declined, along with the number of insurrections, and their occurrences now focused on Naples in its resistance to the Viceroy's attempts to impose the Spanish Inquisition on the *Regno* in 1533 and 1547.

The tactics of lockdowns led to other forms of civil disobedience and demonstration to show the insurgents' strength in numbers to their rulers and instil unity within often broad coalitions that allied rebels across different social strata. One such tactic was the use of religious processions to amass followers, avoid curfews, and place rebel forces in strategic positions. These were another new element of early modern popular protest, with only a dim foreshadowing from the late Middle Ages, and call into question a present sociological consensus that demonstrations became features of social protest only by the nineteenth century.⁴⁸

5. *Mutinies of foot-soldiers and galley men*

A second innovation in forms of revolt that developed during the Italian Wars is more surprising: the mutinies of soldiers and galley men. In my earlier research on insurrection in Western Europe and England from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century,⁴⁹ I found evidence of only

47. SANUDO, *Diarii*, XLV, cols. 138-9.

48. On demonstrations as tools of modern social movements see, among numerous places, Charles TILLY, *Contentious Performances*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 14; and *The Contentious French*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Ma., 1986: «large strikes, public meetings, rallies, demonstrations [...] and social movements» developed mostly after 1848 in France but earlier [in the nineteenth century] in Île-de-France and Nord (307). Also see Sidney TARROW, *Power in Movements: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, pp. 31-32; and Hank JOHNSTON, *What Is a Social Movement?*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2014.

49. *Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe: Italy, France, and Flanders*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2004, Medieval Sources series; *Lust for Liber-*

two mutinies (which, in fact, were interconnected),⁵⁰ and a further one from the secondary literature,⁵¹ despite the importance of the Hundred Years' War, the campaigns of kings Edward I, II, and III of England in France, Spain, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, the wars between Florence and Milan and between Pisa and Florence, and the ones with or against the Papal States that engulfed much of central and northern Italy.⁵² Moreover, in my current study from fourteenth-century chronicles until 1496, I have found none. By contrast, for the 1494 to 1559 period, eighty-five mutinies, comprising over 11 percent of the insurrections I have found for the Italian wars, have surfaced. These were mostly demands by soldiers or *galioti* for unpaid wages. Here, the importance of the 1520s is even more striking than the trend in the shop lockdowns. From 1500 to the summer of 1509, I have spotted only one mutiny, despite these years being rife with warfare, including some of the most devastating sieges and sackings of cities such as Capua in 1501 and Rimini in 1503, and Pisa's fifteen-year struggle against Florence. In addition, some of the most crucial battles of these wars – Fornovo in 1495, Novara in 1500, Agnadello in April 1509 – occurred before the summer of 1509. Nor did the mutinies begin with Charles VIII's invasion and the swift movement of troops through mainland Italy from 1494 to 1496. Instead, almost half of the mutinies I have found occurred in the 1520s (39 of them), and over the ten years between 1523 and 1532, there were forty-nine, 58 percent of the total. Overwhelmingly, those on the lowest rungs of the military hierarchy were the ones to organize these protests, as with Venetian galley men who on arriving at Venice had been disarmed with their wages suspended. They marched to San

ty; and *Popular Protest in Late Medieval English Towns*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013.

50. These were ones of Genoese sailors in 1339; see COHN, *Lust for Liberty*, p. 107.

51. See COHN, *Popular Protest & Ideals of Democracy*, p. 121.

52. This third one was a mutiny over back wages of John Hawkwood's foot soldiers in September 1373; William CAFERRO, *John Hawkwood: An English Mercenary in Fourteenth-Century Italy*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2006, pp. 160-161.

Marco, chanting: «Fame! Fame! and other things (etc.)», and sacked the bakeries lining the piazza.⁵³

Yet, these protests went beyond matters of wages and reflect these soldiers' organizational sophistication. In demanding payment for their services, they first assembled and negotiated with their officers and often chased them away and elected their own captains, as if this were a right of employment. For instance, Guicciardini described Italian foot-soldiers in southern Germany, who in 1532 refused to obey their captains and (according to Guicciardini) went on a rampage through German villages. It is one of the few mutinies, for which more than a single document survives: for this one, at least six appear. Guicciardini's lends the Italian foot-soldiers the least agency in opposing their captains. He even belittles them, and says nothing about electing their own leaders. Possibly to cover for his countrymen's behaviour or his disdain for those who threatened hierarchies, he claimed that the soldiers' captains cajoled the soldiers to revolt against other captains concerning «the enterprise» of going to Hungary. By his account, they did not even know why they were rebelling.⁵⁴ However, five dispatches picture the Italians not as ignorant or misguided: a report from Innsbruck on October 10 described them mutinying, «electing their own leader».⁵⁵ Four days later, another correspondent reported them electing several leaders, one of whom was named as their *comissario*. The other three dispatches described the soldiers not as undisciplined plunderers, but in negotiations for their safe passage back to Italy, drafting agreements with governors such as the capitano [*del popolo*] of Chiusi.⁵⁶

Other cases concerned Spanish soldiers in Italy, as in September 1517, when foot soldiers (*fanti*) decided they could no longer tolerate their commanders and among themselves divided their army into two parts: one to assist their king in quelling revolts in Naples and Sicily, and the other to leave and serve under Francesco Maria, the king's aid

53. SANUDO, *Diarii*, IV, col. 27.

54. GUICCIARDINI, *Storia d'Italia*, IV, p. 306.

55. SANUDO, *Diarii*, LVII, cols. 88-89.

56. *Ibidem*, LVII, cols. 88-89.

(*dil suo servito*).⁵⁷ More remarkably, Spanish soldiers on campaigns in Piedmont in 1523 rebelled against their captains and elected their own. Then, collectively, and not from any dictates from their new officers, they surveyed regions through the Duchy of Milan to find where their military prowess would reap the highest rewards and, as a result, elected to move to Vigevano to establish a military operation for profit.⁵⁸

6. *Cries for libertà*

Further elections, assemblies, and decisions made by rank-and-file soldiers and *galianti* can be added, revealing within this hierarchical profession rudimentary ideals of democracy, especially during the 1520s. Did these ideals then grow among civilian communities against the backdrop of brutal and abusive states, military occupation, with invasions, coups and sackings by foreign monarchs and the papacy? One source to express ideals during the zenith of popular protest of the late fourteenth and the early fifteenth centuries were the chants of popular rebels reported in chronicles and judiciary records. These decried excessive and regressive taxes —«Muora i Dacii e Gabelle!»— hailed the power of the *popolo* and *popolo minuto* —«Long live the popolo», «Viva lo popolo minuto!» and resisted elite efforts to extinguish artisans' guilds —«Long Live the guilds», and in Florence «the XXIV guilds», which had granted rights of citizenship and participation in Florence's legislative councils to disenfranchised workers after the July 1378 *Tumulto dei Ciompi*.⁵⁹ By contrast, chants of popular rebels during the Italian wars re-

57. *Ibidem*, XXIV, col. 641.

58. *Cronaca di Vigevano*, pp. 282-283.

59. In Florence, the efforts of artisans to regain their loss of citizenship and membership in their own guilds endured in uprisings that lasted until 1414. Also, in other Italian cities, artisans continued to struggle for these rights to form guilds and obtain citizenship into the fifteenth century, as in Bologna with cries of «Long live the People and the Guilds» (*Viva il popolo e le Arti*) in an uprising of 1411 and again in 1415; *Diario Ferrarese*, pp. 10-11, and 15.

veal little about their demands and almost nothing about any zeal for political participation. It was more the opposite. Their chants praised outside powers – territorial states such as Venice («Marco, Marco»), the Church or the papacy («Ghisa, Ghisa»), foreign monarchs («viva, viva Spagna»), or old feudal families («Viva gli Ordelasse»), imploring them to overthrow the rebels' present rulers and take control of their governments.

The one chant possibly to express an underlying inspiration or ideology of the popular rebels during the Italian Wars was «Viva la libertà!», or simply, «Libertà! Libertà! », and occasionally, «Death to the tyrants!». Chants for liberty and their accompanying demands formed a central plank of my *Lust for Liberty*, in which I argued that a fundamental change in the ideology of popular revolt occurred during the second half of the fourteenth century in Italy, France, and Flanders. No longer was liberty exclusively pinned to elites in medieval society as the preserve of their privileges or exemptions. Instead, even those on the lowest rungs of labour from c. 1355 to the end of the century shouted «libertà!» in struggles to form new guilds and gain rights of citizenship. Liberty's meaning could now extend across adult male urban society as well as condemn the special privileges of oligarchs and nobles.⁶⁰

By the late fifteenth century, however, this was no longer the case, despite «libertas» and «Down with tyranny» persisting and appearing in at least thirty-six uprisings. Itscriers and meaning had changed. By the time of Charles VIII's crossing of the Alps, uprisings staged by the *popolo minuto* had virtually disappeared. No cries of «libertas!» were now heard from them. Yet for the *popolo*, *libertas* remained as an ideal. Even the aristocrat Francesco Guicciardini saw Pisa's struggle in 1494 against his city as a struggle for «liberty», despite arguing that Charles VIII's invasion had made it possible.⁶¹ Moreover, these cries accompanied Pisa's early acts of rebellion by destroying Florence's symbols of domin-

60. COHN, *Lust for Liberty*, ch. 10.

61. GUICCIARDINI, *Storia d'Italia*, I, pp. 88-89.

ion, its statues of *marzocchi* that lined Pisa's bridges.⁶² Similarly, Priuli saw the rising of the Neapolitan *popolo* in February 1495 as a revolt to free Naples «from the tyranny of the house of Aragon», and with the assistance of the new French king, Charles VIII, the *popolo* won back their right to elect the *Eletto del Popolo* that had been taken from them by the Aragonese.⁶³

The swings of government in Milan from one ruler to another at the end of 1499 presents a clearer case when a *popolo's* achievements for representation may have rested more with their rulers than themselves. The city's opposition to «tyranny» («quell stato per tyranizar») came from the «old court» of Milan, which assembled its elite citizens with the *popolo*, but for their «liberty» the *popolo* had to pay 400,000 ducats.⁶⁴ The ironies of «liberty» were greater in Renaissance Tuscany. The *Ribellione* of Montepulciano in March 1495, then subject to Florence, began with shouts of *libertà*. Yet no signs of the *popolo* demanding constitutional change are visible. Instead, the revolt had the secret backing of the Sienese, and after Florence's *podestà* went into hiding, the rebels called for a new *podestà* from the leaders of Siena.⁶⁵ Arezzo's revolt from Florence in 1502 followed a similar script. Elite conspirators against the Florentine Republic engaged in secret meetings and came to an agreement with the *condottiere* Vitellozzo Vitelli to incite a rebellion among the *popolo*. They did so by chanting «the name of liberty» through the city, then quickly ushered in military rule.⁶⁶ The leaders of

62. *Ibidem*, I, pp. 88-89; LANDUCCI, *Diario fiorentino*, p. 78; Piero VAGLIENTI, *Storia dei suoi tempi 1492-1514*, eds. G. Berti, M. Luzzati, and E. Tongiorgi, Nistri-Lischi and Pacini Editori, Pisa, 1982, pp. 17-18; Paolo GIOVIO, *La prima parte dell'istoria del suo tempo*, transl. L. Domenichi, appresso D. De' Farri, Venice, 1556, p. 46.

63. PRIULI, *Diarii*, I, p. 16; and Michelangelo SCHIPA, «Contese sociali napoletane nel Medio evo», *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane*, 32 (1907), pp. 787-797.

64. SANUDO, *Diarii*, III, col. 48.

65. Piero di Marco PARENTI, *Storia fiorentina*, ed. A. Matucci, 2 vols., Studi e Testi, 33 and 46, Olschki, Florence, 1994-2005, and vol. 3, Scuola Normale, Pisa, 2018, I, p. 200.

66. GUICCIARDINI, *Storia d'Italia*, II, p. 36.

the uprising were not artisans or shopkeepers but pro-Medici clients, who called on outside military forces – the Orsini, Vitelli, and Baglioni.⁶⁷

However, by the 1520s, rallying *libertà* or condemning tyranny re-emerged from their earlier late medieval past that had buttressed constitutional gains for the *popolo*. In 1525, «the desire for liberty» in Siena had created a new underground movement or *professione*, called the *libertine*, who armed and mobilized against a Sienese government of the elite party, the *Nove*. The rebels rose up against the government's «tyranny» and replaced it with one of the *popolo*.⁶⁸ Further cries for liberty resounded during the sweep of the German Peasants' War into northern Italy, in places such as Bressanone, Bolzano, and Merano in the Alto Adige.⁶⁹ In April 1526, soldiers from Milan's imperial tribunal tried to arrest a saddle-maker to collect 500 *scudi*. Word of his arrest ripped through the city, spurring an uprising with an ideological layer. «All of the city» rioted (*tumultuò*), chanting «free our country (*il Liberazione della patria*)». Against these odds and political tensions reported to be rising in Milan, the Spanish foot-soldiers relented. In fact, my survey shows that no year in any city during the Italian Wars had more uprisings than Milan in 1526. With this defeat of the imperial government, Sanudo's correspondent concluded: «Milan had been emboldened, ready to liberate all of Italy from servitude, because now they knew they had a chance».⁷⁰ Liberty as a call for constitutional change to widen the political franchise reached its peak with an uprising in Genoa in 1528. «Under the name of liberty», the *popolo* created a new Council of Four Hundred and limited the doge's power to a two-year office.⁷¹ This late medieval revival in the meaning of liberty would not, however, last. In

67. CERRETANI, *Storia Fiorentina*, p. 300; Orlando MALAVOLTI, *Dell'Historia di Siena scritta da Orlando di M. Bernardo Malavolti, Gentiluomo Sanese*, Salvestro Marchetti Libraro, Venice, 1599, pt. 3, 108v; GUICCIARDINI, *Storia d'Italia*, II, p. 35; and PARENTI, *Storia fiorentina*, III, p. 47.

68. GUICCIARDINI, *Storia d'Italia*, IV, p. 282.

69. SANUDO, *Diarii*, XXXVIII, pp. 361-362, 380-381.

70. *Ibidem*, XLI, cols. 230-331.

71. GUICCIARDINI, *Storia d'Italia*, V, pp. 237-238.

the year of Genoa's change of constitution, Florence attempted a revolt. Theirs, however, was top down, orchestrated by the government handing weapons to the youth of the *popolo* between the ages of 18 and 24. Once assembled in the piazza Signoria, they chanted «Long live the popolo; long live liberty», but without any demands to change Florence's constitution.⁷² The ultimate irony in the use of liberty came with an uprising in Genoa on 3 January 1547: those opposed to the house of the Doria, allied with the papacy and the king of France – the principal forces of autocracy and abusers of power during the seven decades of the Italian wars – and staged a coup d'état while chanting «Long live the *Popolo* and liberty».⁷³

7. Rudimentary elements of democracy

By the early modern period in Italy, chants no longer do justice in revealing the underlying motivations of popular protest. Instead, chronicle reports and the great increase in dispatches from local officials back to their capital cities point in other directions. We have already encountered women's dramatic increase in aiding rebellions of their towns and cities against domination by their capital cities or foreign powers, shopkeepers' strikes, and soldiers' mutinies that deposed their captains, elected new ones, and gathered in assemblies to decide which campaigns they would follow. Yet the bulk of the 751 incidents I discovered overwhelmingly concerned uprisings of the *popolo* in urban settings, 79 percent of the cases. In these, rudimentary elements of democracy can also be detected at the forefront of their actions and demands, which occasionally included villagers or even women, as seen above by women electing their military captains and those to head squadrons responsible for repairing city walls and fortifications. In the last stages of Pisa's

72. SANUDO, *Diarii*, XLIX, col. 146.

73. *Cronache pontremolesi del Cinquecento*, ed N. Zucchi Castellini, Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Province Parmensi, Parma, 1980, pp. 69-71, Fonti e Studi, serie prima, X.

revolt against Florence, Pisans elected ambassadors to go to Piombino to negotiate the peace; the elected came from the *popolo* and *contadini*.⁷⁴ The following year, peasants in the *contado* of Vicenza defended their villages from attacks by several armies and killed two hundred foot-soldiers. To guard mountain passes, they then «elected» sixty peasants, who «performed well».⁷⁵

Much more numerous were the assemblies formed by the urban *popolo*, who elected leaders and made decisions to ally with other classes, plan tactics, agree on targets, and draft demands for new governmental policies. These assemblies could amass large numbers. For instance, on the morning of April 10 1507, four thousand *popolari* assembled outside Genoa's town hall to elect the silk weaver Paulo da Nove as *doge*, who was then ratified «by the whole *popolo* in piazze and streets across the city».⁷⁶ After the successful revolt of the Genoese *popolo* in 1507, two thousand artisans assembled in and outside the church of Santa Maria di Castelletto and elected nine *tribuni della plebe* to oversee governmental operations.⁷⁷ In 1509-10, the united opposition of the *popolo* and nobility to the Spanish Inquisition led to elections of officials and meetings in churches, where the *popolo* deliberated and «agreed (*tucti in uno voto*)» on the best tactics to oppose their viceroy.⁷⁸ With a pause in hostilities between the *popolo* and nobility on the island of Lesna (present-day Hvar) in June 1512, the *popolo* elected a constable for the island with twenty-five officers (*provisionati*) serving under him.⁷⁹ A letter from Crema informed the Venetian councils of the impending revolt in Milan in June 1515, reporting that «nobles, citizens, and the *po-*

74. GUICCIARDINI, *Storia d'Italia*, II, 288.

75. SANUDO, *Diarii*, XXIII, col. 206.

76. Christine SHAW, *Popular Government and Oligarchy in Renaissance Italy*, Brill, Leiden, 2006, p. 161.

77. FRANCESCHINI, «Parte II: Le dominazioni francesi», pp. 99-101; and Carlo TAVIANI, *Superba Discordia: Guerra, rivolta e pacificazione nella Genova di primo Cinquecento*, Viella, Rome, 2008.

78. *Cronaca di Napoli di Notar Giacomo*, p. 322.

79. SANUDO, *Diarii*, XIV, col. 321.

polo were of one piece» and had elected twenty-four officers.⁸⁰ In 1522, the Milan *popolo* resisted French rule, by first «electing» in each of their parishes captains to guard the city and remote outposts.⁸¹

This list of rebel assemblies and elections during the Italian Wars can easily continue, but attention must be given to further aspects that distinguish these uprisings and their demands from those of the late Middle Ages. One was a new emphasis on the respect of the law and community rights to redact their own statutes. Maintenance of the rule by law required further involvement of commoners with new tools of negotiation, as seen with Venice's island dependencies electing their own ambassadors to travel to Venice to argue for and confirm laws that they had already promulgated in council meetings at home.⁸² After its revolt against Milan in 1499 and acceptance of Venetian rule, Cremona's first demands were to obtain rights to redraft the city's ordinances and scrap the «tyrannical ones» Milan had imposed on them over the past decade.⁸³ The following year, the newly-formed French government in Milan reneged on its promises to uphold its citizen statutes that then constituted a major plank of their revolt and led to the brief restoration of Ludovico Sforza as Milan's ruler.⁸⁴ According to Guicciardini, the 1506 revolt between nobles and *popolari* in Genoa erupted because the *popolari* «no longer wished to endure the arrogance (*superbia*) of the nobility». The *popolo* achieved its goal, restraining noble power by passing laws which the aristocrat Guicciardini disparaged as «severe and mean-spirited» ones.⁸⁵

When Brescia handed its government over to Milan in November 1512, its *popolo* insisted that Duke Massimiliano Sforza first confirm their statutes in their town hall (*Broletto*).⁸⁶ On 1 December, before

80. *Ibidem*, XX, col. 344.

81. GUICCIARDINI, *Storia d'Italia*, IV, p. 154.

82. SANUDO, *Diarii*, X, col. 694; and XII, cols. 21, 34; and 408.

83. PRIULI, *Diarii*, I, p. 217.

84. GAGNÉ, *Milan Undone*, p. 237

85. GUICCIARDINI, *Storia d'Italia*, II, p. 186.

86. *Storia di Brescia*, ed. G. Treccani Degli Alfieri, 4 vols., Morcelliana Editrice, Brescia, 1961–1964, II, p. 279.

revolting in 1515, the *popolo* of Milan elected their own captains of the city gates and parishes. After the elections, they promulgated «many provisions» before agreeing to negotiate with the duke on what taxes they would pay.⁸⁷ The administrative life of the Lucchese revolt of the *Straccioni*, in 1531-32, began as a legal battle over the restrictions silk manufacturers had placed on weavers. But soon silk workers and other artisans acted as a parallel government. They sent representatives to attend town-hall meetings, where they intervened «to implement *capitoli*» that they had previously passed in their assemblies. These widened artisans' political franchise, first by increasing the number of *popolo* in the city's major and minor chambers, and then by raising the number of senators to include the *popolo*.⁸⁸ Finally, popular rebels fought to preserve existing statutes against challenges from authoritarian rulers who placed themselves above the law, as seen in the first acts of Perugia's revolt of the *popolo* on 10 February 1535. The sparks of this uprising that resurrected the medieval legislative Council of Five Hundred were violations of Perugia's municipal statutes by its governor, Cesaro Triulzi.⁸⁹ Before re-creating this council, Perugia's *popolo* assembled in the city's major piazza with a prior and notary on a platform to sign a contract pledging to uphold the laws of Perugia.⁹⁰

8. *Calls for equality*

Another demand of popular rebels during the Italian Wars concerned economic equality, which the political scientist Juan Linz has argued is

87. FRANCESCHINI, «Parte II: Le dominazioni francesi», pp. 170-172.

88. Girolamo TOMMASI, *Sommario di Lucca, 1004-1700. Libro terzo (1430-1560)*, ed. C. Minutoli, in *Archivio Storico Italiano* (1847), pp. 311-483: 400.

89. *La Cronica perugina cinquecentesca di Giulio di Costantino*, eds. G. Rossetti and G. Scentoni, Centro italiano di Studi sull'alto medioevo, Spoleto, 1992, pp. 209-210.

90. *Ibidem*, p. 21.

democracy's more radical dimension.⁹¹ The use of the words *l'équità*, *l'inequità*, and other terms such as *parimente* to discuss social, political, and economic relationships expands exponentially in early sixteenth-century Italy, especially in relation to its near-total absence in reports of popular insurrections in the late Middle Ages and not only in Italy. These centred mostly on taxation. For instance, on March 8 1525, Count Rangon demanded that Modena's Council of the *Conservatori* impose a new tax to pay for his cavalry of 400 horses. This created a great fuss (*grande clamore*) among Modena's citizens, not because they questioned the tax, but because of its inequality by exempting some but not others.⁹² Expressions of equality and demands for its implementation, however, became more visible in the Duchy of Milan after Charles V had become duke of Milan in 1536 and had reformed the Milanese commissions responsible for evaluating supplications. Suddenly, the flood gates opened in the 1540s: numerous petitions from villages and provincial cities entered the Duke's court and new arguments justified demands for fiscal assistance. Among these, ones decrying inequality became prevalent. An explanation of these changes may also go back to the 1520s, resting on Charles V's experience in Castile, where he had learnt from the civil strife of the *Comunidades* and *Germanies* the value of negotiation. Faced with urgently needed finances, he granted municipalities rights to submit petitions before they would discuss subsidies.⁹³

In the 1540s, towns and villages of the Milanese Duchy suddenly decried unequal treatment and economic inequality, based on geographic inequalities between communities and on corruption of municipal or regional elites, who dodged their fiscal obligations by dumping them

91. Juan LINZ, «The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown, & Equilibration», in J. Linz and A. Stepan, eds., *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1978, p. 97.

92. *Cronaca Modenese di Tommasino De' Bianchi detto de' Lancellotti*, C. Borghi, L. Lodi, and G. Ferrari Moreni, eds., 12 vols., P. Fiacadori, Parma, 1862-1880, II, p. 59, Monumenti di Storia Patria delle Provincie Modenesi. Serie delle cronache.

93. Aurelio ESPINOSA, *The Empire of the Cities: Emperor Charles V, the Comunero Revolt, and the Transformation of the Spanish System*, Brill, Leiden, 2008, pp. 102-114.

on those least able to pay. The most common means for expanding and preserving these inequalities were tax assessments (*estimi*), whereby the assessors, who were also the local elites, grossly overestimated the property values of the *plebes*, while underestimating their own. Space does not allow an examination of the rich variety of cases, language, and the ways in which these supplicants presented their fiscal demands by arguing for political change: only with offices given to the poor could corruption and fiscal inequality be combated.⁹⁴

I argue that this awareness of and struggle against inequality was essentially new in sixteenth-century Italy, and probably across Europe. Here, I return to my earlier work on popular revolt in the late Middle Ages⁹⁵ and then to my studies on the Florentine state, 1348 to 1434, based on community petitions.⁹⁶ First, in the narrative sources, c. 1250 to 1425, concepts of social and economic equality and inequality are difficult to spot, and use of words to express equality or inequality in human relations are extremely rare. Even for the *Ciompi* Revolt, with the far-reaching demands of disenfranchised woolworkers for citizenship and rights in representative assemblies, neither *egualanza*, *inegualanza* nor other words and phrases for these concepts emerge in the surviving documentation. In legislating the *Ciompi*'s three new revolutionary guilds in July 1378 that bestowed rights of citizenship and representation to most adult males living in Florence, no demands of equality were made. Their new revolutionary guilds comprised only three among the now twenty-four guilds, even if initially they obtained a third of the posts in the governing committee of the *signoria*.⁹⁷ Given the size of their constituencies, these artisans per capita had bargained

94. For these, see COHN, *Popular Protest & Ideals of Democracy*, ch. 8.

95. *Idem*, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe; Lust for Liberty*; and *Popular Protest in Late Medieval English Towns*.

96. *Idem*, *Creating the Florentine State: Peasants and Rebellion, 1348-1434*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, part III.

97. John NAJEMY, «Civic Humanism and Florentine Politics», in J. Hankins, ed., *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 83.

for far fewer votes than those possessed by traditional guildsmen, and they refrained from challenging the hierarchical inequalities between major and minor guilds.

A better comparison with Milan's supplications derives from my earlier work on the Florentine territorial state, principally from the hills and mountains of the Mugello and the *Alpi fiorentine*. For these regions, the Florentine *provvisioni*, with its near-daily legislation of decrees, including pleas from towns and rural communities, presented 2,160 community petitions from August 17 1347 to February 28 1435.⁹⁸ From these, I found more regarding notions of equality than from all the late-medieval chronicles of Italy, France, the Low Countries, and England that I had read combined. Yet only fourteen petitions used *equalitas* or *inequalitas* to express human relations, and eleven of these derived from the government, not from communities seeking fiscal or social equality. The remaining three were supplications from small towns of Florence's *contado*: Castrofranco Valdarno Superiore in 1374, San Benedetto in Alpe (near the Tuscan-Romagna border) in 1405, and San Clemente Montecaroso in the Mugello in 1415. These concerned fraudulent assessments of the *estimo* that favoured the wealthy «against all decency and a sense of equality that had caused the poor to become poorer», as «the men» of San Benedetto put it.⁹⁹

The difference in frequency of these words between the two periods is colossal, from 3 of 2.160 petitions compared with 27 petitions of 585, an increase of over 30 times (and more so, if the number of times these words appear in these documents is compared). Furthermore, these differences climb considerably higher if words such as *parimente* and *le sue portioni*, implying fiscal inequality (and appearing in 54 further supplications from the 1540s) are added. By contrast, words for equality, such as *pari* or *ad parium* appear in only three instances that expressed social or political connections in my Florentine sample, and one of these con-

98. COHN, *Creating the Florentine State*, part III.

99. Archivio di Stato, Firenze, Provvisioni Registri, num. 62, 64v; 93, 198r-199v; and 105, 66v-68r.

cerned equality between magnate parties.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, differences between Milan's petitions and the «Ancient Petitions» addressed to the English Crown from 1100 to 1499 present an even starker contrast: of 18,616 petitions, only two contain variants on the words equality or inequality expressing human relations.¹⁰¹

But more to the qualitative side: concepts and ideals of equality in revolt and negotiation with rulers during the Italian Wars diverge sharply from Italy's earlier flowering of popular revolt. For plebeians and artisans in cities like Cremona, Novara, Lecco, Pavia and others, and in villages such as Pagazzano, Maccagno, Canobbio, Pieve, Omegna, Pallanza, equality had become a right, a matter of justice that demanded changes in fiscality and condemned the corruption of nobles, wealthy citizens, and governing officials. These notions of equality and the demands to accompany them went beyond notions of rights in the communal period¹⁰² or the ideology of the Middle Ages' most sophisticated rebels – Florence's *Ciompi*. Nor were these sixteenth-century pleas always pitched respectfully as reliant on ducal clemency. As several supplications expressed,¹⁰³ equality depended on gaining constitutional changes, grounded in democratic principles: rights of election and representation.

9. Conclusion

This essay has concentrated on popular protest in Italy and its colonies during the Italian Wars, 1494 to 1559, and has shown the particular im-

100. *Ibidem*, num. 60, 72r-v; 76, 245v-246v; 108, 110v-111r.

101. Ancient Petitions SC8, UK National Archives, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue/>, SC 8/210/10461; accessed 10/11/2019.

102. See Fabrizio RICCIARDELLI, «The Italian City-States and the Roots of Democracy», in F. Ricciardelli and M. Fantoni, eds., *Republicanism: A Theoretical and Historical Perspective*, Viella, Rome, 2020, p. 126: «In the communal period the principle of the equality of political right simply did not exist».

103. COHN, *Popular Protest & Ideals of Democracy*, pp. 210-218.

portance of the 1520s. In addition, its approach has been comparative, even if not yet with events north of the Alps or across the Mediterranean: the *Comunidades* and *Germanies* in the early 1520s or the German Peasants' War of 1524–1526. Rather, the Italian uprisings between 1494 and 1559 have been compared with popular uprisings in Italy and other places in Europe during the later Middle Ages to uncover what was new about popular insurrection in the later period of warfare, climatic and economic crisis, foreign occupation, and growth of absolutist states. Our investigation defies earlier assumptions that the growing imbalances between the military might of ruling elites and their subjects all but suffocated effective popular resistance.¹⁰⁴ Instead, these years spawned new forms of women's insurgency, strikes by shopkeepers who locked their stalls, and mutinies of soldiers and galley men, who deposed their officers, elected new ones, and collectively chose which campaigns to follow. In addition, these years of warfare and the early growth of absolutism have counterintuitively shown the growth of ideals of democracy that were embedded in notions of equality. The question now becomes: did these new impulses and movements produce similar trends north of the Alps from the late Middle Ages to the mid-sixteenth century?

104. *Ibidem*, p. 3, note 10.