

Were there popular revolts in Venice?
People, politics and protests in the Venetian lagoon (15th-17th centuries)

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For many years, the classical historiography of Venice claimed that the most Serene Republic knew no noble factions, no popular revolts, no uprisings, and no real resistance against patrician authority. Scholars have criticized the so-called myth of Venice, analysing and dismissing it as a rhetorical device used by patricians to promote their institutions: the Venetian government was neither better nor more efficient. Yet while other Italian and non-Italian states went through revolts and violent uprisings, Venice alone seems to have been inherently socially and politically stable. Recent studies for other states and periods, however, underline that the absence of successful rebellion does not equate the absence of political protest.

We would like to invite the participants to focus on the question whether or not Venice has known any popular revolts. Have they, in their own research, come across events that could be identified as revolts or (collective) popular protests? The following questions and themes can serve as guidelines:

Forms

Do we need to consider forms of crowd actions and demonstrations that have not been identified as “revolts”, but that had the same intention or manifestation? Which groups or individuals were involved? Can we discern patterns in the use of urban space during protests? Did the Venetian urban setting itself (more canals than streets; more lagoon than *piazze*) influence the shape of popular protests? Are there specific “Venetian” rituals or a specific symbolic language of protest?

We would like to explore the different forms of action that we can find in the archives, such as demonstrations of the *Arsenalotti* asking for the rise of their salary, the contestation of the authority of public officers, popular rituals during major celebrations, etc.

Sources

In what way do the Republic’s archives report protests and dissent? Was there any space to record incidents of dissent and forms of protest? If not, can we answer our main question by reading the official records “against the grain”, by focusing on contradictions, silences, and denials? Are there alternative sources that go beyond the official perspectives and rhetoric of peace and concord?

Reaction

How did patricians react to contestation and resistance? Did popular protests influence patrician decision making? In what ways?

The workshop could be an opportunity to reconsider the different institutions of coercion in Venice (police, justice, guards, new institutions or changes in their mandates...), the way they could act and react, and their jurisdiction.

Comparison

By inviting scholars working on other geographical areas, but with an interest in popular revolts and politics, we would like to incorporate a comparative aspect to the discussion. This can help challenge our usual questions about Venice and shift our interest towards fields, forms, and events that may have been underrated or forgotten.