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## Review of *Shaping History: Ordinary people in European politics, 1500-1700*.

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*Shaping History: Ordinary People in European Politics 1500-1700.* By Wayne Te Brake. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998. Pp. xiii, 221. \$45.00.)

In this groundbreaking study of the relationship between popular political action and state formation in early modern Europe, the author argues for "the interactions of rulers and subjects as the heart of political history" (188). Rather than seeing popular risings as a tragic sideshow demonstrating the futility of resistance to the consolidating activities of early modern rulers, Wayne Te Brake depicts ordinary people as effective political actors making conscious bargains with their overlords. In a comparative analysis across Western and Central Europe, he examines the impact of the actions of the populace in three chronological phases: the "First Reformation," the latter half of the sixteenth century, and the crises of the mid-seventeenth century.

The author concludes that over the course of this period, popular mobilization in response to princely assertions of cultural and political sovereignty resulted in a variety of forms of polities, ranging from what he categorizes as "segmented sovereignties" in the case of the Dutch and the Swiss, to "territorial sovereignties" in France and England (184). Te Brake makes a convincing case that although ordinary people did not necessarily end up benefitting from their own actions, they nonetheless compelled the other two parts of the body politic—the local elite and the monarch—to take notice of their grievances. Sometimes, by means of alliance with elites, they even won royal concessions, and in any case, both fear of and alliance with the populace caused political realignments that reshaped the trajectory of a state's development. In presenting this argument, Te Brake not only moves the masses front and center, he shifts the focus away from a narrow national perspective to one that is both regional and Europe-wide and reinvests the Reformation with political as well as religious meanings. His rendition of a coherent account of such a complicated topic drawing on a large number of cases is aided by an impressive grasp of the current literature, the salience of which he presents with admirable economy and precision.

As he foresees, criticisms of this powerful book relate to its scope and depth. Te Brake usually treads carefully a line between overly-detailed local study and unsubstantiated broad assertions; his consideration of the early Reformation in Germany particularly suffers from a lack of specifics regarding the actors and the negotiations that he insists are so important. Although the image of the popular hero, Masaniello of Naples, dominates the cover illustration, the ordinary people with whom Te Brake is concerned rarely emerge either in their specific actions as a crowd, or as individuals. Thus, the overall impression remains one of elite, individualized actors confronting an abstract, anonymous force.

The diagrams, which abound in this book, reinforce this abstraction, even as they usefully illustrate the categories and dynamics that the author proposes. No doubt the brevity of Te Brake's accounts of these bargaining moments will be fleshed out in subsequent historical studies that will respond to the call that this book so effectively makes for more central consideration of the role of ordinary people in shaping political history.