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**The Nineteenth Century Memory of Renaissance Italian Warfare:
Ercole Ricotti and Jacob Burckhardt**

I

Fernand Braudel famously remarked that each generation fashions war in its own image.¹ For this reason alone the memory of conflict, of trauma-- the subject of this *convegno*-- is always skewed. Indeed, warfare may be the most politicized topic of historical study, reinterpreted as it occurs by local patriotism and passed on to subsequent scholars and generations in a form that bears little resemblance to reality.

This is evident in the study of American history. Students are taught about the Revolutionary War: how it made the country independent, allowed citizens to pursue “life, liberty and happiness”— ideals that, along with economic opportunity, brought emigrant families like my own across the Atlantic. But the “revolutionary” war was fought primarily for the “rights of Englishmen.” Colonists sought their birthright, which was hardly revolutionary. Militarily we read of heroic resistance, the steadfast generalship of George Washington, the hardships he endured with the rag tag army of patriots against the best army of the day, replete with their strikingly red uniforms. Lost in this secondary school rendering of events is consideration of the impossible logistics endured by the British, who were fighting a war across an ocean on foreign terrain in an era when such travel was difficult.² Fighting long-distance war against a firmly entrenched opponent is always difficult, as America found out in Vietnam and more recently in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nevertheless, American virtue and democratic principles triumphed during the Revolutionary War. A wholly new country was born, even if it looked and smelled a lot like England.

So it has been with Italian Renaissance military history. Patriotism and national considerations have played a major role in its study. The period has come down as one of decay and decadence, when

¹ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, translated by Sian Reynolds (New York: Harper Book, 1966), p. 891

² For political debates about patriotism and the teaching of American History, see Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree and Ross E. Dunn, *History of Trial: Culture wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), pp. 25-32

Italian native martial spirit disappeared and was replaced by reliance on mercenary troops. The *trecento* is depicted as a key point of departure. States made widespread use of mercenaries,

including foreign soldiers from outside the peninsula, who arrayed themselves in large autonomous companies, *compagnie di ventura*, and ravaged Italy. By the *quattrocento* the “mercenary system” evolved and saw the rise of the great individual Italian *condottiere*, captains who began taking over the states they served. These developments, made possible by political disunity among Italian states, paved the way for the invasion of Italy by the French armies of Charles VIII at the end of the fifteenth century. Italy became the theater for the Habsburg-Valois wars.

Renaissance Italian military history is thus a sad story of devolution, culminating in conquest by foreign powers. It stands as a “distant mirror” of the foreign oppression endured by nineteenth century *Risorgimento* Italy, when the academic study of Renaissance military history first began.

The construct belongs, however, in the first instance to Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527). In several works, most notably *The Prince*, Machiavelli pointed to military decadence and the internecine struggles of Italian states as the cause of the unfortunate state of contemporary affairs throughout the peninsula.³ Italian states, like ancient Rome, gave over their armies to foreign mercenaries, eschewing native citizens in the process. Political and moral weakness led, as in ancient Rome, to a fall and subjugation by foreign powers. For Machiavelli the “sinews of war” were not money, contrary to “vulgar contemporary opinion” (chapter 10, *Prince*), but a well-ordered native infantry, which had been responsible for Rome’s greatness. This was utterly lacking in Machiavelli day.

It is not necessary to recite the details of Machiavelli’s famous thesis. The literature on the subject is vast and ever expanding. Scholars (especially in America) have pondered the different aspects of the great writer. Was Machiavelli a cold-hearted realist (as my students believe), a fuzzy headed idealist or even a writer in satiric mode?⁴ I for one read Machiavelli as the Renaissance equivalent of the modern American neoconservative. He was deeply learned, but out of touch with the realities of the present, which he abstracted and misrepresented (as intellectuals tend to do) in order to apply, or misapply, the lessons of the classical past.

Whatever one thinks of Machiavelli, his view of Renaissance war has reverberated through the centuries. It served as the basis for nineteenth century Italian scholarship, and, in particular, the work of Ercole Ricotti (1816-1883), which is the starting point of modern scholarly study. Ricotti was military engineer who fought in the First Italian War of Independence (1848-9). He wrote his doctoral thesis on the history of Italian war, which later became the multi-volume *Storia delle compagnie di ventura in Italia* (1844–1845).⁵ The book is a genuine master work, with extensive use of chronicles and archival documents at a time when such scholarly apparatus was unusual. It won for Ricotti a “cattedra” in 1846 at the university at Turin (1846) in military history.

The importance of Ricotti and his work needs to be stressed. Ricotti was a famous figure in his lifetime. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death, Ricotti was honored in his native Voghera by Ferdinando Gabotto, himself a prominent scholar, who said of his forebear that “no one among the Italian historians of his age was more known for the severity of his investigations, sobriety of his form, and reflects better his era.”⁶ But Ricotti is not well known in the Anglophone academy, or in the broader field of Renaissance historical studies. Ricotti’s influence is restricted to the study of Italian warfare, for which his *Storia delle compagnie di ventura in Italia* is the urtext. Ricotti’s tone is unmistakably nationalistic. He began the *Storia* with a long preface dedicated to the King Carlo

³ See *The Prince* (bks. 12, 13), *The Art of War* (bk. 1), and *The Discourses* (bk. 2, discourse 20). Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. and ed. David Wooten (Indianapolis, 1995), 38–45; *The Discourses*, trans. Leslie J. Walker, ed. Bernard Crick (New York, 1970), 339–41; *Art of War*, trans. and ed. Christopher Lynch (Chicago, 2003), pp. 13–32.

⁴ See Garrett Mattingly, “Machiavelli’s Prince: Political Science or Political Satire,” *The American Scholar* 27 (1958), pp. 482-491

⁵ Ercole Ricotti, *Storia delle compagnie di ventura in Italia* (Turin: Giuseppe Pomba, 1844-5)

⁶ *Commemorando Ercole Ricotti in Voghera, discorso di Ferdinando Gabotto* (Voghera, 1908), p. 5.

Alberto of Piedmont-Sardinia, from whom Ricotti sought and ultimately received favors. Ricotti stated his desire to serve the *patria* through his writing: to show how Italy had continually in the past been victimized by foreign powers, as was the case also in the present day, and how studying the past made it possible to understand better the present.⁷ Ricotti's work thus belongs under the rubric of *Risorgimento* literature. It inspired a series of nationalistic works, most notably the long detailed article (1851) by Giuseppe Canestrini (1807-1870), which used additional archival evidence to fill in the details of Ricotti's schema of Italian military decadence, political disunity and subjugation by foreign powers.⁸

Ricotti's interpretation remains so fundamental to the study of Renaissance Italian war to this day that it deserves close scrutiny. Ricotti started his analysis with the Lombard invasions of Italy in the sixth century, the first of a series of outsiders that would harass the peninsula. He traced developments to the sixteenth century, when Italy was overrun by foreign armies. The key stage was in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with the advent of the *compagnie di ventura*, which forms part of Ricotti's title, followed by the rise of the *condottiere*/prince. Ricotti's debt to Machiavelli is obvious. Like Machiavelli, Ricotti specifically equated the development of the mercenary system with the loss in Italy of a native fighting spirit. Ricotti placed Machiavelli, however, in a broader context and accentuated the national dimension embedded in the great Florentine writer's work. To do so, he accentuated the role of the *compagnie di ventura*, the foreign element in Italy.

Ricotti's divided the history of Italian warfare into distinctive phases. He presented the communal period, corresponding roughly to the time of the two German Fredericks in Italy (1100-1250), as standing in stark contrast to the era of the companies that followed it. The communal period was a time of Italian native pride and fighting spirit. The wooden wagon or *carroccio*, wheeled by local armies into battle, served as a tangible symbol of communal solidarity and martial will. States regularly joined together to oppose external powers, particularly the hegemony of German emperors. The most famous example was the Lombard League of 1167 and its subsequent incarnations, which led to the great victory at Legnano in 1176, presented by Ricotti as a precocious instance of Italian national spirit in the face of foreign oppression. The communal period was followed by political and social decay and recourse to "hired men" in the fourteenth century, when mercenaries came not only in single spies but battalions. The devolution of the Italian military was linked, as in Machiavelli, to the disunity of states.

The basic schema was adopted by Giuseppe Canestrini and appears also in the influential works of later scholars, such as the Piero Pieri and Michael Mallett. Pieri and Mallett accepted Ricotti's outline of military events and sought to place Italian war in a broader economic, political and social context. Pieri, who wrote also about Machiavelli and the *Risorgimento* warfare during his distinguished career, followed closely Ricotti's depiction of a decline of Italian native militia coinciding with the rise of the companies of adventure. He carefully traced the "tramonto" of the native infantry to the battle of Altopascio in 1325, giving added historical context to Ricotti's general statements.⁹ In his *La crisi militare italiana* (1934), later revised as *Il Rinascimento e la crisi militare Italiana, 1494-1530* (1954), Pieri deemphasized the "moral" dimension to Italy's military decline and foreign subjugation and stressed instead the social and political weaknesses that left Italy susceptible to conquest.¹⁰ In *Mercenary and their Masters* (1974) Michael Mallett

⁷ Ercole Ricotti, *Storia delle compagnie di ventura in Italia* vol 1, p. xiv

⁸ Giuseppe Canestrini's long article, published in 1851, remains, along with Ricotti, the standard treatment of Italian military organization. Giuseppe Canestrini, "Documenti per servire alla storia della milizia italiana dal XIII secolo al XVI, *Archivio Storico Italiano*, XVI [1851]

⁹ Piero Pieri, "Alcune questioni sopra la fanterie in Italia nel periodo comunale," *Rivista Storica Italiana* 50 (1933), pp. 607-608

¹⁰ Piero Pieri fought in World War I, See Piero Pieri, *La crisi militare italiana nel Rinascimento nelle sue relazioni con la crisi politica ed economica*, (Naples: Ricciardi, 1934); *Machiavelli e la politica del suo tempo* (Turin: Gheroni, 1953); *Storia militare del Risorgimento. Guerre e insurrezioni* (Turin: Einaudi, 1962); *Il Rinascimento e la Crisi militare Italiana, 1494-1530* (Turin: Einaudi 1954)

traced the use of mercenaries in Italy more surely to the communal period.¹¹ But he accepted Ricotti's emphasis on the importance of the era of the foreign companies, to which Mallett devoted a whole chapter. He follows the discussion of the companies, like Ricotti, with one on the rise of the individual Italian *condottieri*.¹² Paolo Grillo's recent summary of Italian warfare (*Cavalieri e popoli in armim* 2008) is strikingly similar to Ricotti. Grillo begins with the Lombard invasion of Italy (after a brief description of the state of affairs after the fall of Rome). He follows with a discussion of the communal period, then the "crisi" and the "Age of the Companies of Adventure" in the *trecento*. Grillo then outlines the development of the "mercenary system" in the fifteenth century and the emergence of more powerful *condottieri* and the invasion of Italy by the French. Maria Nadia Covini's insightful recent essay on Italian warfare from 1300 to 1600 follows the same outline. She calls the *trecento* and advent of the foreign companies the "low point" in Italian military organization.¹³

II

What has been lost in the adoption and revision of Ricotti's version of Italian warfare is his interest in, and protracted discussion of, "individualism (*individualismo*)." According to Ricotti, individualism stood at the very core of Italy's military problem and led directly to the formation of the companies of adventure, which were its most glaring manifestation. Ricotti's interest in individualism links him to his more famous Swiss contemporary, Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897), whose statements on the subject are well known, but have never been compared with those of Ricotti. Burckhardt famously saw individualism (*Individualismus*) as the very essence of the "Renaissance" in Italy. Individualism created the Renaissance man whose "thirst for fame and talent for monumental works" allowed him to succeed "by talent not birth."¹⁴

Burckhardt's description of individualism is undoubtedly the most celebrated argument regarding the nature of the Italian Renaissance. It has served as the basis of countless studies and lay at the heart of considerations of "Renaissance" as an operative period label. Burckhardt's individualism was, like Ricotti's, connected to military developments insofar as the mercenary soldier, the *condottiere*, was its embodiment. The *condottiere*, like individualism, was characterized by "illegitimacy" and "self-determination." The lack of comparative study of the two authors on this issue is striking especially since Burckhardt's *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860) was written after the *Storia delle compagnie di ventura in Italia*. Burckhardt's book has been translated into many languages. Ricotti's opus remains in Italian.

The scholarly status quo is regrettable. Indeed, I believe that the difference in the treatments of individualism by the two authors stands at the core of two very different historiographical traditions regarding the study of Italian warfare on the one hand and the study of the Renaissance on the other. It is the reason that the study of warfare has not properly accounted for the notion of Renaissance, and the study of the Renaissance has not accounted properly for the role of warfare. The two discourses have been separate, to the detriment of both.

III

¹¹ Michael Mallett, *Mercenaries and Their Masters* (Totowa, NJ, 1974), p. 13. Scholars have mostly reinterpreted the communal period. Daniel Waley, "The Army of the Florentine Republic from the Twelfth to the Fourteenth Century," in *Florentine Studies*, ed. By Nicolai Rubinstein (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968); A.A. Settia, *Communi in guerra: Armie ed eserciti nell'Italia delle città* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1993); Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur, *Cavaliers et citoyens: Guerre et société dans l'Italie communale, XIIe–XIIIe siècles* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2003)

¹² Mallett devoted chapter 2 (the era of the companies) to the companies of adventure. Michael Mallett, *Mercenaries* pp. 25-50

¹³ Maria Nadia Covini, "Political and Military Bonds in the Italian State System, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Century," in *War and Competition between States*, ed. Philippe Contamine (Oxford, 2000), p.14

¹⁴ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (New York: Modern Library, 2002) p. 102

For Ricotti and Burckhardt individualism reflected the insecurity of the times. In Ricotti the insecurity led to the formation of companies of armed men, the *compagnie di ventura*, which served as the distant mirror of events of Ricotti's own the day. In Burckhardt individualism was both a sinister and creative force, exemplified in the personalities of *condottieri*, who took over states they

served. Individualism created the calculating Renaissance man, whose ambit was primarily a political world, which Burckhardt sketches out in detail. To the extent that Burckhardt treated warfare itself, it was as a "work of art," a reflection of rationality and cool calculation of the *condottiere*. The discussion is abstract. Burckhardt compares the calculating illegitimate Italian captain to true lord/noble who fought wars elsewhere in Europe. The latter wholly lacked the spirit of individualism of the *condottieri* and the penchant for military innovation that went with it.

The obscurity of Ricotti's treatment of individualism warrants closer study. The Italian scholar devoted a whole chapter (chapter seven) to individualism. He equated it with "uncertainty and confusion," which derived from an "absence of general principles." The latter expression is used often by Ricotti. Absence of general principles resulted from political disorder, in particular the lack of "properly ordered states" to "guide men" and incline them "to conform to one another" for the sake of the "public good"¹⁵ Ordered states possessed laws, magistrates, religion and, above all, armies. Individualism arose where institutions failed.¹⁶

Ricotti's individualism thus resembles Burckhardt's in that it reflects a basic spirit of the times. And like Burckhardt, Ricotti stresses widespread disorder throughout the Italian peninsula as a precondition. Ricotti recounts the jealousies among cities, the lack of internal justice, the triumph of faction, the absence of public authority and administrative and financial institutions, frequent changes in government, banishments and lack of public morals.¹⁷ All these are familiar to readers of Burckhardt.

But Ricotti goes on to equate his individualism more specifically with a "spirit of adventure" (*spirito di ventura*). He posits this spirit-- and individualism-- in the Middle Ages, the period of greatest fragmentation in Italy.¹⁸ Burckhardt never uses the term "spirit of adventure" and he pointedly, and famously, distinguishes his individualism from the Middle Ages, which was "corporate and veiled," the direct opposite of individualism. Ricotti, by contrast, links individualism to corporatism and "the spirit of association" of the Middle Ages, bringing Burckhardt's two antagonists together. Ricotti then devotes a separate chapter to medieval corporatism. Ricotti's assessment is clear and forceful: individualism led to corporatism. For Ricotti, the most representative corporate form was the "association of arms," that is, private military groups of men, who joined together for the sake of sustenance and protection.¹⁹ The most dramatic manifestation of these associations were the companies of mercenaries (*compagnie di ventura*) of the *trecento*.²⁰

Ricotti's argument has a decidedly Hegelian aspect to it. Individualism and corporatism are simultaneously opposing forces. They produce a synthesis in the form the military bands, which Ricotti then carefully compares to other corporate medieval forms. An additional "passo" in the *trecento* -- a further devolution of Italian society--was, however, necessary for the era of the companies of adventure to truly arrive.²¹ This occurred with the "disappearance in Italy of citizen militias," which Ricotti dates to 1330--quite close to Pieri's later dating to the battle of Altopascio in 1325.²²

¹⁵ Ricotti, *Storia delle compagnie di ventura in Italia*, vol 1, p. 225

¹⁶ Ricotti, *Storia delle compagnie di ventura in Italia*, vol 1, pp. xxii, 228

¹⁷ Ricotti, *Storia delle compagnie di ventura in Italia*, vol 1, pp. 237-240

¹⁸ The title of Ricotti's chapter is "On the Spirit of the Adventure in the Middle Ages" ("Dello spirito di ventura nel medio evo").

¹⁹ Ricotti, *Storia delle compagnie di ventura in Italia*, vol 1, pp. 256, 274

²⁰ Ricotti, *Storia delle compagnie di ventura in Italia*, vol 1, p. 228

²¹ Ricotti, *Storia delle compagnie di ventura in Italia*, vol 1, p. 266

²² Ricotti, *Storia delle compagnie di ventura in Italia*, vol 1, p. 265

After establishing his point, Ricotti gives a long narrative of the companies, beginning with Roger de Flor and his Catalan Company, which ravaged Sicily and Byzantium in the early fourteenth century. He follows this with a detailed account of a succession of “associations of men in arms,”

including the great German bands of the *trecento* and their English and Hungarian counterparts. Ricotti gives much space to the Germans, whose involvement in Italy was, owing to the Empire, long standing. They provided an apposite historical precedent for the modern day foreign oppression of Italy in Ricotti’s lifetime.

Subsequent military histories followed Ricotti in treating the companies of adventure as a distinct phase of Italian military development. Indeed, they treat the era as the critical phase, which underscored the decay of Italian military prowess and the political disunity on the peninsula. What is striking, however, is that Burckhardt, for all his attention to individualism and mercenaries, says nothing at all about this phase of Italian military development. There are no companies of adventure in his famous work. Indeed, there are, upon close inspection, no German mercenaries in Burckhardt.

The Swiss historian deals with the events of the *trecento* in a strikingly different way than Ricotti. Burckhardt’s *trecento* is filled with “tyrannies, great and small” and with illegitimate political leaders whose “misdeeds,” he tells us, have only been “circumstantially told” by historians.²³ Burckhardt focuses on these men and their involvement in politics; individualism told in terms of the “state” rather than war. Burckhardt links the further development of the state in the *quattrocento* directly to the development of the mercenary system, both of which became “altered in character.”²⁴ The *condottiere* now founded “independent dynasties of their own.” Petty despots entered the service of larger states, furthering still more the effect of individualism by creating a “system” founded on illegitimacy. The men acted with “greater calculation; and the *condottiere* was the “highest and most admired form of illegitimacy.”²⁵

III

The difference between Burckhardt and Ricotti is quite striking. Burckhardt retains Ricotti’s (and Machiavelli’s) view of the murky morality of mercenaries, but he excludes entirely the national dimension of their service. The absence of national considerations in Burckhardt is not in itself surprising given the Swiss historian’s well-known dislike for the world he lived in. The historian Richard Sigurdson has noted the use of the term “unzeitgemäss” (“untimely”) to describe Burckhardt’s relationship with the events of his day.²⁶ Burckhardt’s disdain is evident in his description of the “political units” of Italy as representing the “modern political spirit” of “unbridled egotism.”²⁷

But what is so unusual in Burckhardt, and has gone curiously unnoticed by scholars, is the degree to which he ignored a whole phase in the history of war, of mercenaries. prior to emergence of his “calculating” and “illegitimate” *condottiere* of the fifteenth century. Placed beside Ricotti, Burckhardt’s treatment of the *trecento* is singular. Although the preconditions (conflict, disunity) for individualism are the same for both authors, Burckhardt *trecento* examples are removed from the battlefield and their military context. And Burckhardt’s examples are all Italian. The *dramatis personae* for Burckhardt’s *trecento* includes Doge Agnello, the “upstart” ruler of Pisa, who reclined on rich draperies and showed himself “at the window of his house” as if a “relic;” Can Grande della Scala of Verona, who was the apotheosis of the ruler whose “thirst for fame” made him surround

²³ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, p. 7 (section “Despots of the Fourteenth Century,” first part called “The State as a Work of Art).

²⁴ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, p. 12

²⁵ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, p. 16

²⁶ Richard Sigurdson, *Jacob Burckhardt's Social and Political Thought* (Toronto 2004), p. 7

²⁷ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, p. 4

himself with poets, and the Visconti of Milan, who were “the most complete and instructive type of fourteenth century tyranny” resembling “the worst of the Roman emperors.” Notably absent from Burckhardt’s list is Castruccio Castracane, lord of Lucca and Ghibelline warrior, who ruled Tuscany and whose military prowess enticed Machiavelli to write a biography of him. Ricotti gives

much space to Castruccio, whom he sees as critical to the formation of the companies of adventure. Ricotti introduces us to Castruccio in book seven as a “fuoruscito, mercatante and lord of Tuscany” and gives a detailed description (in the first chapter of the second book) highlighting Castruccio’s central role in bringing bands of German mercenary troops to Italy to fight his wars.²⁸ Burckhardt, by contrast, mentions Castruccio Castracane only in passing, and not as part of his discussion of the *trecento*. He mentions Castruccio much later as “a fancy picture of a typical despot.”²⁹ Burckhardt specifically notes Machiavelli’s biography of Castruccio, but avoids the military campaigns that made the tyrant famous and brought German mercenaries to Italy.

The differences between the two scholars are evident also in their treatment of Can Grande della Scala of Verona. Ricotti carefully narrates the details of the career of Can Grande, Dante’s famous patron, immediately after speaking about Castruccio. Ricotti’s discussion of Can Grande is long. It stresses how Can Grande furthered the use of companies of mercenaries in Italy by means of his frequent wars and his preference for employing Germans in his armies.³⁰ Burckhardt’s Can Grande, by contrast, has nothing to do with war or mercenaries. He is a despot, whose desire for fame expressed itself in a “passion for monumental works.” Can Grande did so by keeping company with “poets and illustrious exiles,” who conferred a “new legitimacy” on him.³¹ Burckhardt quotes Petrarch, who was in fact not one of the poets or exiles who visited Can Grande’s court, but who nevertheless knew his way around such places from his later experiences at Padua. Petrarch implored lords like Can Grande to be “father to their subjects” and “love them like children.”³²

The last example underscores the very careful rendering of Renaissance history by Burckhardt. By evoking Petrarch in his discussion of Can Grande, Burckhardt temporally sets him apart from Ricotti’s warlike Can Grande, patron of Dante, who fought wars and employed bands of foreign mercenaries. Burckhardt treats Can Grande in a steadfastly political context, highlighted by Petrarch’s wholly anachronistic quote on the proper mode of governing.

Indeed, Burckhardt uses strikingly few historical examples from the *trecento*. When speaking of the period, Burckhardt pointedly tells his readers that he will not provide a narrative of events, claiming that the despots of the era present us with “higher interest than mere narration.” The statement, which may otherwise seem based on stylistic considerations, is more meaningful when placed beside Ricotti. Ricotti’s depiction of the *trecento* involves a singularly detailed narrative, in which he gives many specific examples. Ricotti in fact overtly advocates the utility of his narrative style. He states that a chronological rendering of facts was essential to historical certitude (“la verità storiche”). Without such “invincible evidence,” proper reasoning is impossible.³³

The contrast between the two authors could not be more plain. The two seem to be in open conversation with each other, and at odds. It is in their accounts of *quattrocento* Italy that Burckhardt and Ricotti begin to converge. The *condottieri* are for both men largely Italian and both authors cover much of the same material, giving prominence to Francesco Sforza as the apotheosis of a skilled, ruthless *condottiere*.³⁴ But here too there are important distinctions. Ricotti segues from his discussion of the *trecento* to the *quattrocento* with the example of the English *condottiere* John Hawkwood and the German *condottiere* Lutz von Landau. They are “transitional” figures, who

²⁸ Ricotti, *Storia delle compagnie di ventura in Italia*, vol 2 pp. 12-16

²⁹ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, p. 67

³⁰ Ricotti, *Storia delle compagnie di ventura in Italia*, vol 2, pp. 16-28

³¹ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, pp. 7-8

³² Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, p. 8

³³ Ricotti, *Storia delle compagnie di ventura in Italia* vol 1., pp. xvii

³⁴ Ricotti, *Storia delle compagnie di ventura in Italia*, vol 3, p.155

were given land in return for their service, leading to the careers of Alberigo da Barbiano and a “distinctly Italian tradition” of *condottieri*, who became involved in local politics. Burckhardt spoke of the very same transition, but he mentions only the Englishman, John Hawkwood and leaves out the German Lutz von Landau. Lutz thus shares the same fate as the companies of adventure, which

were filled with Lutz’s German countrymen, who preceded him in Italy and who play such a prominent role in Ricotti’s work.

IV

Whether or not Burckhardt read Ricotti is unknown. Ricotti was already a prominent professor by the time the Swiss scholar wrote his *Civilization*. It would seem unlikely that Burckhardt was not aware of Ricotti and his work. In any case, the different approaches of the scholars had important consequences for the study of Renaissance Italian warfare and the Renaissance more generally. Burckhardt’s steadfastly political depiction of the *condottieri* encouraged much of the subsequent scholarship on the Renaissance to proceed forward without proper consideration of warfare. Scholars following the Burckhardtian tradition have investigated the calculating spirit of individualism and transcendent issues of Renaissance identity and personhood.

The study of Italian war is similarly skewed. Ricotti’s attention to narrative and to a devolutionary stage model of Italian warfare has relegated the subject to its own subfield, largely disconnected from the broader discourse on the Renaissance in Italy. Current histories of war, as we have seen, continue to tell the story of decadent Renaissance period in terms of more heroic medieval communal period. Where there has been revision, it has occurred largely in terms of Ricotti and the nineteenth century construct of war. When Michael Mallett argued for the stirrings of a standing army in fifteenth century Venice--hoping to bring Italian military developments more in line with developments elsewhere in Europe-- he did so using evidence of longer term contracts for service (*condotte*), terms sketched out already by Canestrini in his seminal essay of 1851.³⁵ Recent research has shown, however, that the length of *condotte* and the length of actual service of soldiers was not at all one and the same.³⁶

The entrenched narrative has limited understanding of the realities of Renaissance military history. It hides points of continuity with the past and similarities in military practice over the decades and centuries. It masks disconcerting evidence that foreign mercenaries were often faithful soldiers, integrated into the communities they served, and that Italian “national” sentiment regarding Germans (notwithstanding Petrarch’s *Italia Mia*) is not easily found in the contemporary sources. Most important, the discourse has obscured the coincidence between the military and pacific activities of states, for which there was no clear line of distinction.³⁷

Ricotti and Burckhardt may thus be said to represent two distinct “faces” of Machiavelli. Ricotti reflects the national implications of Machiavelli and his treatment of mercenaries as a symptom of the loss of native martial spirit and a prelude to the subjugation of the peninsula by foreigners.

³⁵ Michael Mallett, “Venice and Its Condottieri, 1404–1454,” in *Renaissance Venice*, ed. John Hale (London, 1973), p. 139. On developments in Milan, see Maria Nadia Covini, *L’esercito del duca: Organizzazione militare e istituzioni al tempo degli Sforza* (Rome, 1998).

³⁶ William Caferro, “Continuity, Long-Term Service and Permanent Forces: A Reassessment of the Florentine Army in the Fourteenth Century,” *The Journal of Modern History* 80 (2008), pp. 219-251

³⁷ See William Caferro, “Travel, Economy, and Identity: A Reassessment of the Mercenary System in in Fourteenth-Century Italy, *From Florence to the Mediterranean and Beyond*, edited by D. Ramada Curto, E. R. Dursteler, J. Kirshner and F. Trivellato, (Florence: Olschki, 2009), pp. 363-380 and “Warfare and Economy in Renaissance Italy, 1350-1450,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 39 (2008), pp. 167-209

Burckhardt reflects the political/psychological side of Machiavelli and his treatment of mercenary/prince as political rulers, whose behavior was conditioned by the forces of virtù and fortuna. In any case, a true history of Renaissance warfare remains to be written-- one that is wholly independent of the nineteenth century nationalist model that held the field for so long.