

Serge Brunet, José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez, Les milices dans la première modernité, Rennes (Presses universitaires de Rennes) 2015, 184 p. (Histoire), ISBN 978-2-7535-4297-6, EUR 18,00.

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For Niccolò Machiavelli and other republican thinkers, citizen militias stood at the summit of military organization; a free citizenry, volunteering their military services out of a collective sense of civic responsibility and patriotism, would form the best possible army. Yet in 1632, and writing of the lamentable resistance that it put up against the largely mercenary army of the Swedes, Maximilian I, the Bavarian Elector wrote that »the (local) militia has served badly and has been entirely useless and without effect«. The Elector's edict went on to abolish local military service in return for a cash payment that would be used to hire good quality – i. e. mercenary – troops. This paradox between high-flown rhetoric about the moral and military benefits of citizen militias, and the often extremely disappointing results of their deployment in practice, is one of the issues that makes the present volume of essays under review particularly welcome.

The aim of these essays is not however to draw simple binary distinctions between virtuous but ineffective militias and corrupt but capable professional armies. The most obvious point emerging from a book whose essays explore militias across 16th and 17th-century France, Spain, Italy, Malta and the Spanish Netherlands, is the extent to which the forms of military organization implied by the term »militia« are exceptionally diverse. Indeed, the sharp distinction between the words »army« and »militia« in English, which reflects an intense 200-year political debate about military organization and its relation to political »tyranny«, has no equivalent elsewhere in Europe. In other European languages militia is a far more malleable term, derived from the Latin, in which *militia* was simply an army, and *milites* referred usually to infantry soldiers. This Latin double-root is discussed in Anne Brogini's essay on the Knights of Malta, and militia is here used to describe what might seem the least militia-like of all early modern military organizations: the Order of Malta, staffed by an international warrior class, trained in the deployment of privateering galleys, and funding their military operations through captured prizes. Yet the pivotal political issue for the Knights of Malta was whether they were *milites Christi*, owing their authority solely to the Pope and the Church; or whether, thanks to the donation of Malta to them by the Emperor Charles V, they were more immediately bound by vassalage ties to serve as a *milice du prince*, indeed a *militia hispaniae*. In neither case could they be described as a »citizen« militia as widely understood, but the Knights draw us back to a key definition of militia. In all the cases discussed in the volume, a militia, unlike a regular army, has a mediated relationship to the central ruler, and it may also acknowledge various kinds and levels of local authorities and influences. Or like the Order of Malta, it may play off two jurisdictions to retain a distinct local system of control and decision-making. In other cases the relationship between local and central authority is complex in different ways. The *milice bourgeoise* at Amiens was a proud symbol of the city's autonomy



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and civic cohesion. However as Olivia Carpi points out, involvement with the Catholic League in the 1580s and the militia's humiliation in 1597 when the Spanish took the city in the face of feeble resistance, crushed its reputation in the eyes of Henri IV, who installed a royal garrison in the citadel. But to general surprise the King ordered the re-establishment of the militia in 1598. Although Henri IV regarded with suspicion a militia whose loyalty was more directly to the city than the crown, the financial advantages of offloading the costs of defence onto the local community were too great to reject. Despite a degree of frustration at royal meddling in urban politics, the *milice bourgeoise* came once again to become a focus of urban identity, and even a mechanism for enforcing civic responsibility; the militia authorities took the evasion of compulsory military service seriously, and the *milice* proved its worth in the conflict with Spain in the 1630's.

More controversial was the role of militias in times of civil war, and the first essay on this subject, by Yves Junot, looks at the militia in Valenciennes during the Dutch Revolt in the 1560's and 1570's. Initially infiltrated and taken over by Protestant radicals and used to purge Catholic elements from the city, Catholic reassertion brought about the re-establishment of the militia, and its development not only into a Catholic defence force but an active support for the Army of Flanders, a symbol of the city's reconciliation with the Catholic, Spanish government. Pursuing the same theme of militias during civil war, the centrepiece of the volume is a 53-page *tour d'horizon* by Serge Brunet, examines the numerous and very different militias that grew up in the *Midi* through local initiatives to defend and assert the rights of Calvinists and Catholics at the outset of the French Wars of Religion, from 1560–1563. The Wars of Religion were, as Brunet asserts, the age of militias: a massive upsurge in private military force, created or hired by local communities for defence or to assert confessional objectives, and entirely independent of the crown and its administrators. The study takes us from *confréries* of Catholic penitents in Provence who organized themselves into armed force for the defence of the faith, through to initiatives by local nobles, such as the *ligue* created by Frédéric de Foix-Candale around Bordeaux, nominally to defend Catholicism, but no less to support Candale against his local enemies and to consolidate his power through military patronage and intimidation. Brunet's study focuses more on Catholic than Calvinist military organization, and reveals just how extensively and in how many different forms the Catholic communities in Provence, Languedoc, Guienne organized their local defences against the fast-growing Protestant threat.

Moving across the Alps, Gregory Hanlon offers a broad introduction to the role of militias in the Northern Italian states at the beginning of the Franco-Spanish war of 1635–1637. Drawing upon Hanlon's ground-breaking recent studies of the Duchy of Parma under Odoardo Farnese and of the 1636 battle of Tornavento, the essay is focused on the organization of peasant militias as defence forces, and their material impact on the countryside as the struggle turned into attritional and partisan warfare. Finally, three essays shift attention to the lands of the Spanish monarchy, two exploring the frontier regions of the Basque lands and Cerdagne, and a third, contributed by the co-editor, José Ruiz-Ibáñez, returning the discussion to the Spanish Netherlands in the last two decades of the 16th century. In all cases the focus is on the balance of interests that determined the militias' commitment to narrowly defensive local interests, and the potentially more extensive demands of service to the crown. All three essays confirm that it was a balance tipped in favour of the local communities, as a relatively weak centre accepted local military traditions and autonomy in return for defence at strategically important points in the monarchy. If as, Susana Truchuelo-García maintains,

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Philip II maintained the potential to *exercise his potestas absoluta* in matters of defence, it was clear that military organization in the Basque lands depended, as elsewhere in the monarchy, on a spirit of cooperation and compromise with local military traditions.

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