

War, society and finance in the last decades of Spanish Lombardy

D. Maffi, *La cittadella in armi. Esercito, società e finanza nella Lombardia di Carlo II 1660-1700*, Franco Angeli, 2010

by Christopher Storrs

This new series, *Studi e ricerche storiche*, from the publisher Franco Angeli aims to give a voice to the “new voices” in Italian historical culture, and especially to younger scholars with something original to say. This is certainly true of the volume under review, a study of war, society and finance in the last decades of Spanish Lombardy.

Few historians have anything positive to say about the reign of the last Spanish Habsburg, Charles or Carlos II (1665-1700), thought by some to be an imbecile, and who had the misfortune to face the aggressive Louis XIV of France. Charles’ supposed mental and physical decrepitude has often been taken as a metaphor for the supposed decay of Spain – the Spanish Monarchy – as a whole. The decline of that polity has generally been thought to embrace many of its component parts, including Milan, although neglect of the latter on the part of historians owes something, too, to a generalised sense of the nullity that was early modern Italy, squeezed between two heroic ages of achievement, Renaissance and Risorgimento. Increasingly, of course, this overdone cliché is being exposed as untenable, and will be rendered even more so by the volume under review. Maffi demonstrates that there was much more to Spain, its king and the Spanish Monarchy in Italy than the tired old historiography of Spanish – and Italian - decline acknowledged; he does so by rescuing from oblivion the second army of Habsburg Spain, Army of Lombardy.

Chapter 1 briefly outlines the history of the Army of Lombardy (a force too often neglected in favour of the Army of Flanders) to 1660 and sets it in the context of the Spanish Monarchy’s broader strategy

in Charles II's reign: in 1692, during the Nine Years War (1688-97), when the Army of Lombardy frequently operated in neighbouring Piedmont, in support of Charles II's ally, Victor Amadeus II, Duke of Savoy, against France, units of that force participated in the allied invasion of Dauphine, the only allied incursion into France moment – ultimately unsuccessful – of any moment during that conflict. The force survived the demise of the last Habsburg only to disappear in the War of the Spanish Succession, along with Spanish Italy. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 consider the composition and structure of the Army of Lombardy, from recruitment of the men in the ranks to the command structure, with details given inter alia of the army's system of military policing and justice. Particular attention is paid to the local component of the Army of Lombardy, and the way the Milanese aristocracy maintained its role as a military elite. Chapters 5 and 6, finally, discuss the finances of the force. Various appendices list the general officers, and give details of pay and allowances.

What does Maffi show? For one thing, the Army of Lombardy was much larger than has been acknowledged. Drawing on the frequent reviews or musters, Maffi reveals that the Army of Lombardy reached a low of just over 4,500 in 1666 but peaked at over 22,000 men (including those in garrison) in 1686, 1693 and 1695 and - although there were some remarkable fluctuations - averaged about 20,000 in the Nine Years War. Less surprisingly, infantry preponderated over cavalry (generally the ratio was about 75: 25). The quality of those forces was, again, better than hackneyed opinion allows: In the Nine Years War again, the Spanish cavalry showed itself superior to the French on more than one occasion. As for the “national” composition of the Army of Lombardy, Spaniards always contributed the largest single element, 66% in 1661, but the force always depended, more so in war than in peace, on a substantial influx of non-Spaniards: in 1691, the Spaniards contributed just 27% of a force whose other main components were Lombards (an all time high of 37% in 1678), Neapolitans (a record 17% in 1695), Germans, the largest non-Spanish group (providing 37% of the total in 1668), Swiss and Grisons. Regarding the Lombards, Maffi demonstrates the continuing link between the local (aristocratic) elite and high military office and –

equally important – emphasises that the holding of such senior positions was no mere sinecure; on the contrary, those who secured superior positions were often (especially in the infantry) men of merit with distinguished careers behind them and who were able to rise precisely because of their meritorious service. (This is not, however, to deny that a number of the Spanish governors of Milan had to combat a tendency towards the “patrimonialisation” of military commands by some of the great families, a development aided by the Spanish Court’s use of such posts to reward those families ready to accept its patronage. For the same reason, the administrators of the Army of Lombardy often found it difficult to pursue effectively those officers found guilty of abuse or fraud.

As for funding, the Army of Lombardy was the first – the most demanding – call on the Milanese exchequer. It was not only the army itself; also costly were the fixed defences – the fortifications - of the Milanese. Before 1660, the Milanese had depended upon aid from Spain, ie Castile. However, for most of the reign of Charles II, such support was not forthcoming. This changed with the Nine Years War: between 1688 and 1697 Madrid invested in the defence of Lombardy 1,700,000 scudi, although this was still far less than the Spanish Court provided for Flanders and Catalonia. Some of this money was supplied not from Spain but from the other parts of Spanish Italy, above all the kingdom of Naples. But, even with this outside help, the people of the Milanese had to carry a substantial fiscal burden, which not surprisingly peaked in the 1690s. The Milanese sought through its representatives in Madrid to have this charge eased, but with little success: in 1700 the continued commitment of king and ministers to a substantial Army of Lombardy meant that Charles II’s Milanese subjects continued to bear a substantial fiscal load. But, as Maffi observes, there were no revolts in Lombardy, in masked contrast with the disorders in Sicily and Aragon/Valencia in the reign of the last Spanish Habsburg.

Maffi’s research is founded - as his dense footnotes reveal - upon an impressive range of primary sources. Supremely important are the materials housed in the main Spanish early modern archive, in the

castle of Simancas outside Valladolid. Particularly important are the *Secreteria de Estado* series and *Secretarias Provinciales* (Milan). Also invaluable to Maffi has been the *Guerra Moderna* series. In Madrid, Maffi has used, in the *Archivo Historico Nacional*, the *Estado* and *Consejo de Italia* series. Of course, various Milanese collections also underpin Maffi's findings. Remarkable skill of Maffi in deploying such a vast amount of data – troop numbers, sums remitted and so on – without it completely overwhelming, submerging him and his argument(s). This is a tour de force. The study is also founded upon an impressive mastery of the secondary literature, in all languages. For the non-Italian reader, the tabulation of much of the data discussed in the text - levies of troops within the Milanese; officers of aristocratic and patrician origin serving in the Army of Lombardy (there were 20 Visconti); the ordinary budgets of the Milanese; the incidence of military expenditure in given years; and sums remitted to Milan from Spain, Naples and Sicily in the period - is enormously useful

It is in part these impressive sources and his impressive handling of them which make Maffi's book so convincing, and ensure that its findings will have great impact. His rescuing from near oblivion the Army of Lombardy goes far beyond my own effort a more than a decade ago; it also has broader implications. This monograph will have to be taken into account by historians of late Habsburg Spain, which enjoyed the services of a number of very able and determined governors of Milan, including for example the marquis of Leganes, contradicting commonplaces to the effect that the Monarchy lacked a talented ruling elite). Maffi's work also has implications for the understanding of late seventeenth century Italy and for that of early modern warfare. The Army of Lombardy will must now take its place in the debate about the "Military Revolution". In this connection, Maffi takes issue with Hanlon's thesis of the "twilight" of an Italian military tradition, arguing on the contrary – as has been noted above – that there remained a clear and indissoluble link between aristocracy and arms. Last, but by no means least, Maffi's demonstrates the importance of the Nine Years War, which is slowly but surely escaping from the shadow of the subsequent War of the Spanish Succession, and which is here revealed to have an important Italian

dimension. Maffi's book also has implications for the place of late seventeenth century Spain – the Spanish Monarchy - in current discussion of the so-called “fiscal-military state”. This is a remarkable and important book by a outstanding young researcher, one which reshapes our understanding of late seventeenth century Milan, Italy and Spain.

Christopher Storrs teaches at University of Dundee (Scotland). Storrs' main interest is in state formation, the rise and fall of empires, and international relations (including war) in early modern Europe. The subject of his last book, *War, Diplomacy and the Rise of Savoy 1690-1720* (Cambridge, 1999), was the rise of a small Italian state during a period of major warfare in Europe, between 1690 and 1720. Currently, I am particularly interested in the Hispanic world.