Introduction

During the early modern period, the territory of Lombardy was of central importance in the military dynamics involving the entire Italian peninsula and its relationship with the European states. Because of its geographical position, Lombardy was an important crossroads for commercial transit with a remarkable network of roads, also used by the armies. The Lombard military organization had assumed a prominent position in Italy since the era of the communes.

In the course of the three centuries that I shall be considering, military organization in Europe underwent profound transformations defined by some historians as a “military revolution”. This process was characterized by growth in the size of armies and by the adoption of important technical and tactical innovations which have been discussed elsewhere. But a constant that could be defined as anthropological clearly emerges: the mingling of the military world with other social spheres. In current Western culture the military is confined to a circumscribed area. Our society in general is primarily civilian. War during the early modern period involved the whole of society, and the military world was not distinct from civil society. This long-standing intertwining influenced all levels of political organization, social stratification, finance, economy, culture and daily life. Some historians have described the military organization as a “mirror” of the society of that time. It was an essential and immanent element that reflected political structures, social hierarchies, economic development and scientific knowledge. At the same time, because of the pervasive and everyday presence of war, it impacted on all the other components

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of society.\textsuperscript{2} It has also been observed that, up until the Renaissance, there was no clear affirmation of the exclusive power of the Prince, compared to the nobility, to make war.\textsuperscript{3}

For these reasons, although during these centuries there was an increasing professionalization of the military, we cannot consider the army as external to society, regulated by its own norms, a world to itself, in which developments were exclusively linked to technological, logistic and tactical innovations. In the past, this idea dominated military history, deriving from a perspective unthinkingly taken from the present, which does not satisfy either the need to understand the societies of the past, nor the study of the military phenomenon itself in its historical dimension. Between the Middle Ages and the modern era, social rank regulated relationships between people, and the development of specialized knowledge, careers and abilities was circumscribed by this social stratification. All these aspects emerged clearly in Lombardy, which was heavily involved in military conflicts, as much as, if not more than the other European states. It was mostly in the late eighteenth century that became evident, quite gradually and inconsistently, forms of differentiation and separation of the military from the rest of society in the education, careers, laws, lodgings and welfare institutions.

The Duchy of Milan and Military Organization in the Later Middle Ages

During the fourteenth century, the Italian peninsula saw an increase in conflicts linked to ambition to expand cities and the signori who sought to extend their hegemony and establish widespread regional dominions. Such was the case of the Visconti, whose dominion reached its maximum extension under

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