“Rather the Wealth to Support Their Status than Their Quality as Soldiers”. The Social Position of the Officers in Lucca’s *Ordinanze della Montagna*, 1550-1600*

*Jacopo Pessina*

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the social position of the officers of the Republic of Lucca’s *Ordinanze della Montagna* during the second half of the sixteenth century, in order to show how the families and/or the men who were at the political, social and economic forefront in the communities of the Lucchese state controlled the militia. Lucca is a neglected but relevant case study because from the Middle Ages on its subjects had been part of a long-lasting and uninterrupted military tradition. Lucchese “attempts at economic centralization” were ineffective and the merchant oligarchy granted broad autonomies to the *contado*, where there was a form of ‘indirect rule’. Although the Lucchese *contado* comprised no important towns having traditions of independent statehood, such as Pisa or Siena (both of which by the second half of the sixteenth century had come under Florentine rule), the Republic possessed territories which included ‘semi-urban’ communities dominated by a proper local elite of artisans, small traders and landowners. This chapter focuses on three cases, taken as a sample, which were very different with regard to their political, social and economic conditions: the communes of Borgo a Mozzano and Camaiore, and the vicariate of Montignoso. Concerning the

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2 The ‘indirect rule’ had many advantages for early modern states. The ‘indirect rule’ was “more economical and often more efficient then extreme centralization” because the government used “local men as intermediaries, whether or not they were technically office-holders”. Aylmer, “Centre and Locality”, p. 66.
sixteenth-century militias, Italian historiography commonly underlines the fact that the desire for special privileges on the one hand and the dangers of war on the other meant that principally ‘miserable’ people decided to enlist in the militia whereas the rich looked for other trajectories, as in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany.\(^4\)

Although researchers have analysed relations between local elites and militias’ fighting men for the most important Italian states (mostly for the seventeenth century), there is a lack of studies focusing on the militias’ social position in small states in the sixteenth century. The Florentine case is the most studied. In 1506, Niccolò Machiavelli created the Florentine *ordinanza* in the *contado* to support Soderini’s regime against its enemies. This institution was suppressed and recreated many times, until Duke Alessandro de’ Medici re-established it permanently in his dominions (1534) in order to create regional bonds, as a counterweight to the oligarchies of the subject cities. The Florentine militia was one of the largest army formed of subjects to be found in Italy, and indeed by the early seventeenth century, about 17 to 22 per cent of all Italian militiamen were enlisted in it. Between the mid-sixteenth century and the 1630s, this militia was mostly composed of society’s weakest members, who were attracted by the privileges offered to those who enlisted. Officers were often poor: the *alfiere* (ensign) for Empoli in 1627 was described as a ‘*mendico* (mendicant)’.\(^5\) At the beginning of the seventeenth century, local families of many communities such as Poppi changed their career strategies and abandoned their activities as artisans or notaries. They sought to protect and enhance their wealth and status by investing in landed properties and gaining prestige through the militia. For the elites, office in the militia became “the opportunity for locally based upward mobility and for new positions of leadership within the community”. For example, between the 1630s and the early eighteenth century, the twelve most important families of Poppi saw their members become officers in the *ordinanza*.\(^6\)

The Papal State’s militias (called *battaglie*) were reordered in the second half of the sixteenth century in order to protect the coasts from raids by Barbary corsairs. As in the case of Florence, inhabitants were persuaded to enlist by the privileges they would gain, and recruitment was principally attractive to the poorer people. In 1628–9, in the 145-men urban militia company of Orvieto, 38 per cent of the infantrymen were described as ‘without property’.\(^7\) During the

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\(^6\) Benadusi, “Career Strategies”, 89-90, 96, 99, the quote is on page 99.

\(^7\) Brunelli, “Poteri e privilegi”, 106-7, 110-3.