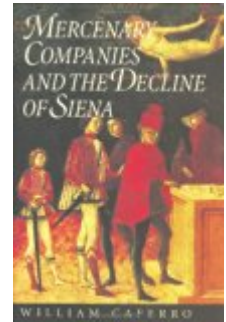


William Caferro. *Mercenary Companies and the Decline of Siena.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998. 251 pp. \$43.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8018-5788-1.



Reviewed by Carla Sodini

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In this book, William Caferro ably connects his interests in economic history with his studies of mercenary companies during the fourteenth century in Italy. The result of this methodological approach proves very interesting, especially compared with the enduring attitude of many historians to link the phenomenon of mercenaries in Italy primarily with the military enterprises of the great soldiers of fortune of the medieval and early modern age. See, for instance, the new volume edited by Mario Scalini dedicated to Giovanni delle Bande Nere (Florence: Banca Toscana, Silvana Editoriale, 2001).

During the fourteenth century, Italy was a favorite field for mercenary companies because of its political fragmentation and the institutional instability of its governments. William Caferro's book examines the impact of mercenary raids on the Tuscan city of Siena during the years 1342-1399 (thirty-seven raids) and provides evidence of the key role of the impact of these repeated raids on the decline of the city--raids which culminated in the subjugation of Siena to Giangaleazzo Visconti of Milan. The City, a very

easy prey for companies of adventure and also for its geographical position, tried to defend itself both by opposing attacks with military resistance and also by paying the companies to deter them from encroaching on its borders.

The commune, whose territory was also devastated by plague and famine, was obliged to take a wide variety of actions to meet the expenses of the mercenary raids. Caferro, through accurate archival research, examines not only the impact of the repeated depredations on the Sienese economy but also investigates the political consequences and the institutional mutations connected with this succession of negative conjunctures. For example, he underlines the exhaustion of Siena's countryside which led to the abandonment of villages and the phenomenon of the proliferation of administrative offices to acquire large sums of money (such as the new office named the "Condotta").

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