

Carla Sodini. *Ercole Tirreno: Guerra e dinastia medicea nella prima metà del '600.*
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Like many other Italian and German princely dynasties, the Medici Grand Dukes desired that the military achievements of the dynasty should attract the attention of the great courts of Europe. As long as money did not lack, Tuscany was a smaller power to contend with in the peninsula. Grand Duke Ferdinand I (1587-1608) advanced Tuscany's interests by channeling money into the galleys of the Order of Santo Stefano, and by using Tuscan ships to wage war in the Mediterranean against the Turks and Barbary corsairs. He had raised a considerable number of troops (2000 infantry and 400 cavalry) under prince Giovanni de' Medici in 1594 to aid the emperor in his struggle against the Turks. By these exertions, Ferdinand was trying to create a new generation of expert military specialists who could support his throne at home, and support Medici claims to acquire the smaller fiefs on its frontiers from Spanish and Imperial protection. His successor Cosimo II contributed a Tuscan contingent to Spanish forces earmarked to uphold the Pax Hispanica in the peninsula. In 1613 Cosimo purportedly levied over 10,000 men to come to the aid of the duke of Mantua, whose Monferrato dependencies were

threatened by the duke of Savoy, Charles Emanuel I. Behind the troops were 50,000 peasant militiamen, ready for imminent war with Savoy and its Modenese ally.

The duchess regents (1621-1628), Maria Madalena of Austria and Christina of Lorraine, admitted military aristocrats to state councils and gave them a theatre on which to flaunt their newfound status and their military expertise. Under their direction, Florence mobilized once again in 1625 to send a Tuscan contingent to the Spanish and Imperial forces in Lombardy forestalling a French and Piedmontese invasion of Liguria. Ferdinand II upon his formal accession in 1628, mindful of the storm about him, channeled money into major fortification projects. What began as a policy of armed neutrality slid into one of lukewarm support for the Habsburg cause during the Thirty Years War. Tuscan military expenditures ate up about half the state revenues between 1625 and 1650. Madrid received almost 2 million scudi from Florence until the flow was cut off in 1642. Tuscany levied money for another expeditionary force to send to Lombardy against France in 1636.

More money and troops were directed to Vienna, to meet the resurgent danger from Protestant princes and their French allies in Germany.

This military activity was never divorced from dynastic ambitions. Each Medici duke sought to earn credits in Madrid and Vienna that they could trade for land and titles. In this they behaved no differently from princes elsewhere in Europe. To these interests one could add the Tuscan ambitions to incorporate all or part of the duchy of Urbino following a double marriage to the son and daughter of the reigning duke. The reluctance to raise troops and provide money for foreign powers without something concrete in exchange emerged with clarity during the Bohemian revolt, when Cosimo II delayed delivering on his promise to provide an expeditionary force, which finally consisted of some Tuscan officers and 500 German troops. Cosimo II ended his subsidy when it became clear that neither Elba nor Piombino would become part of the Grand Duchy.

As France and Spain edged closer to full-scale war in Europe, Italian princes floated the idea of creating a federal military force around Papal leadership to maintain peace in the peninsula. This Italian counterweight could only succeed if the military force it raised was a credible one. Ferdinand II proposed a combined force comprised of Papal, Venetian, Tuscan, Savoyard, Parmese, Modenese, Mantuan and Luccan forces totaling some 50,000 troops, 60 galleys 40 galleons. Such an army would have created a new political entity functioning through ambassadors. Unlike the Spanish Union of Arms, this Italian League never materialized, and any chance of it vanished in 1642 when Tuscany, Modena and Venice joined Parma to reduce the pretensions of the Papal States in what is called the Castro war. That war occasioned the creation of a real Tuscan army, however, that one relation pretends amounted to 30,000 troops, including mercenary corps hired in Germany. Even more modest troop figures of 10,000 men, exclusive of militias and garrisons,

represented a sizeable achievement for a state counting barely 800,000 inhabitants. The military aristocracy at home and serving in Germany rushed home to rally around the Medici throne.

Medici princes occasionally left Florence to lead foreign armies in wars enjoying the Grand Duke's blessing. Don Giovanni de'Medici served successively in Flanders, in Hungary, in Provence and in Flanders again, where he served at the epic siege of Ostend. The apotheosis of his career was his appointment in 1615 to command Venetian forces fighting the Austrian archduke along the Isonzo frontier, though military success eluded him. Don Giovanni could raise men from zones where Medici influence lay, especially in the Apennines and in a good part of Umbria and the Marches, as well as Corsica. To permit don Giovanni to raise troops in a district was a discreet mark of solidarity with the Grand Duke. Other Medici princes were prodded along this path by Cosimo II and his mother, with no lasting success.

The new opportunity came in the aftermath of Breitenfeld when Grand Duke Ferdinand II and his mother, Maria Maddalena of Austria promised 6,000 men to the Imperial cause, under the direction of two of his brothers, Francesco and Mattias. The large expeditionary force never materialized, and the princes joined Wallenstein's army as high-born volunteers drawing money from home. Francesco was an accidental hero at the battle of Lutzen, where the king of Sweden died, and he died not long after of plague at the siege of Regensburg. It was Mattias who would blossom over time as a fairly senior commander, alongside a host of Tuscan and Italian aristocrats in Imperial service. Their careers really blossomed after the murder of Wallenstein in 1634 marked a greater reliance on the Catholic party in Vienna. The majority of Tuscan officers served the Empire both because it was easier to rise in rank there, and because the Grand Duke was content to see them there. Many arrived in Vienna with letters of recommendation from the court in Florence. Mattias'

own career exposed him to all the dangers and indignities suffered by Imperial leaders in the declining period of the Thirty Years War when the lack of money, the indiscipline of troops and the fatigue of the population made glory an elusive commodity. The Medici prince was exhausting his revenues as his career frustrations multiplied. These were nevertheless the prince's formative years, and when he retired with the rank of general in 1639 at the ripe old age of 28, he left Germany with a stock of reminiscences he would draw upon until his death in 1666.

Sodini's book supplies us with more detailed information on Tuscan aristocrats and their soldiers in Germany than exists elsewhere, drawn from Medici state papers in Florence. Her notes on the soldiers known to have served there are limited to aristocrats, however. The book is well researched and well argued. We can hope that the author will explore the areas left in the dark, and for this it may be necessary to explore different archives. I find some of the troop numbers cited to be suspiciously high and insufficiently verified. Nor is it always clear where the troops were recruited in Europe. We need to know more about the soldiery in Tuscany, and learn something about the Tuscans who left to fight abroad. The Castro war in particular still awaits its modern historian attentive to the capillary operations around Tuscan frontiers. But what we have here is done well and we can applaud the author for it.

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