Fighting Businessmen: The Social and Monetary Economy of Mercenaries in Northern Italy (1368-1559)

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Introduction

War is the conflict of groups, and usually undertaken by states, but it is the participation of individuals which drive it forward. One of the most pressing concerns of any individual or group is defense. The central question of defense is: who will defend the life, property, and ambition of the individual or group. In Medieval and Renaissance Italy, warfare was primarily conducted by mercenaries called *condottiere*, and they represented a middle-ground between the production of defense by state and by private entities. While the relationship between the rulers of the Northern Italian city-states and their subjects was characterized by certain common forms of political and monetary coercion, such as taxation and governmental edicts, the relationship between *condottiere* and their employers was remarkably non-coercive.[1]

Condottiere were essentially self-employed private military contractors or small business owners engaged in the production of defense. In fact, "contractor" is likely the most the appropriate word to describe these men, as the Italian term was *condottiere* is based off of the root *condotta*, for contract. As further evidence of the term *condottiere* emphasizing the contractual nature of those who served in this role, during the same period, residence permits were referred to as *condotte* and renewed every five years.[2] *Condottiere* were private entities, or represented a private company, which negotiated individual contracts with a city-state or the individuals with the largest share of power in a city-state, and were free from the strict contractual requirements and chains of command present in a formalized and hierarchical military. *Condottiere* were free to walk away from negotiations or a contract if the employing party failed to uphold their part of the agreement, allowing them to seek employment with any other city-state. In addition to this, as contractors and not uniformed officers beneath the command of a higher officer, they could voice disapproval with their employers and publicly disagree with operational planning and/or war policy. In one instance, the *condottiere* Gianfrancesco Gonzaga and other contracted associates on-site at the siege of Citta de Costello were so displeased with Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere, who was nominally in charge of the operation at the behest of their employer, the Pope, that they publicly requested he be replaced with Bishop Lorenzo Zane, whom they estimated to be better at handling military matters.[3] It would be extremely hazardous to the career of an enlisted or commissioned soldier to publicly call for his superiors to be replaced, and yet *condottiere* did it without too much fear of losing their employment, both on a specific job and in the future.

Condottiere prioritized their city-states' strategic and economic objectives over straightforward battlefield dominance. As described by historian Ryan McMacken, the defense and security which was produced by *condottiere* served the interests of the city-states. It was only private "in the same way that a city government might privatize road building. The government hires a private firm to perform the services — but it's all paid for with taxpayer

[1] Northern Italian in this study refers to Rome and the regions and city-states north of it, including Milan, Florence, and Venice.
[2] Niall Ferguson, *The Ascent of Money: A Financial History of the World* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 41 .
[3] Gianfrancesco Gonzaga to Ludovico Sforza, Rome, 6 August 1474, quoted in David Chambers, "A Condottiere and His Books: Gianfrancesco Gonzaga (1446–96)," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 70 (2007): 50.

money."[4] However, the freedom the *condottiere* enjoyed was matched by the utility provided to their employers, as they allowed their employers to keep their own human capital and resources safe and available for other things, such as the magnificent achievements of architecture and finance which exemplify the Renaissance, while also reducing public expenses, as the *condottiere* stored and maintained their own equipment.

Despite appearing "private," the Renaissance *condottiere* more closely resembled today's private military contractors than the medieval mercenaries of earlier centuries. Specifically, I argue that they had more in common with modern military contractors than the Routiers or mercenaries of the 12th and 13th centuries. However, despite this similarity, they had an even larger utility and impact, as they were not an auxiliary to an already established military juggernaut or solely dedicated to a specific proxy war or conflict in a developing nation. In fact, when the Italian-employed *condottiere* are compared to the established militaries of the time, either in a conceptual manner, or in the truest comparison which the battlefield itself provides, *condottiere* did not fare well in their ability to kill the enemy. However, if we accept that the fundamental purpose of an army is not to kill the enemy but rather to fulfill the goals of the state they serve, as long as the goals of the Northern Italian city-states in the Renaissance were not simply to survive or to completely destroy their rivals, *condottiere* served their purposes extremely well.

Whether they were described as no better than bandits by intellectuals at the time, or exalted as dukes, *condottiere* were continuously relied upon as the primary fighting force of Northern Italian merchant cities from the late 14th to mid-16th centuries.[5] This has not prevented the frequent criticism of *condottiere* in secondary literature since the 16th century, but this criticism is ideologically motivated and not based in an understanding of the actual function of *condottiere*. Influential 16th century authors wanted to revive a Roman-style military of masses of civilian soldiers, as attested to in Machiavelli's *Art of War* and *Provision for Infantry*.[6] Furthermore, 19th century authors such as Giuseppe Canestrini and Ercole Ricotti wrote their histories during the *Risorgimento*, or Italian Unification, and sought to reinforce this nationalist project.[7] The true nature of the *condottiere* phenomenon was marginalized by those seeking to reinforce state power and fight larger, more decisive wars, which were two goals that ran against the grain of the rationale behind the use of *condottiere*. This is not to state these authors lied, as it is true that *condottiere* could not stand against the more powerful armies of Europe, but their function was not to fight large and decisive battles.

The *condottiere* phenomenon was caused by the particular social and monetary economic modes of relationship in late medieval and Renaissance Northern Italy and represented a contracted and careful methodology of warfare as a means to advantage, and not war as a means to the annihilation of the enemy. This meant significantly lower risks to capital for both the victors and the defeated, which was the primary intention, and result of, the widespread usage of *condottiere*. Witnessing the war between Milan and Florence in 1390, the diplomat Francesco

[4] Ryan McMaken, "Mercenaries: A 'Privatized' Army Is Still an Army," *Mises Institute*, September 13, 2018, https://mises.org/wire/mercenaries-privatized-army-still-army.
[5] The Sforza dynasty of Milan was founded by Francesco I Sforza, a *condottiere*.
[6] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Art of War*, trans. and ed. Christopher Lynch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).; Niccolò Machiavelli, "A Provision for Infantry (a selection)," in *The Chief Works and Others*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Allan Gilbert (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), 1–4.
[7] Hannah Rebecca Edgerton, "The Apotheosis of the Quattrocento Condottiere: Art, Power and Identity in Fifteenth-Century Italy" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2017).

Dombellinghi directly stated "neither side wishe[d] to put itself to the test in combat because in battles one runs risks" and so resorted to military posturing and economic gamesmanship.[8] Despite the sensibility of this approach to conflict, this form of warfare was phased out starting in the 1490s due to external forces like the French invasion, and the ambitions of Northern Italian leaders to carve out larger territories for themselves through coercion and force. In this sense, some of the people who had benefited most from this capital-preserving institution were instrumental in its downfall. This is a recognizable pattern in social and economic history, as people seek to freeze socioeconomic relationships in place after having climbed to the top.

While there has been a great deal of scholarship in the fields of economic and social history concerning the relationships present in Renaissance Italy and their dynamics, as well as in the strict field of military history regarding *condottiere*, their organization, and their achievements, there has not been a dedicated analysis of *condottiere* as economic and social actors themselves. [9] William Caferro's "Warfare and Economy in Renaissance Italy" is the closest thematically, and shares many conclusions with this analysis, such as "Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italian warfare was fundamentally economic in its aims."[10] However, he does not specifically focus on *condottiere* and does not analyze Northern and Southern Italy as two separate regions, giving a broad overview of military activity and its motives on the entire peninsula. An analysis of *condottiere* specifically as an economic phenomenon is a worthy and relevant topic because war always affects social and economic relationships, even indirectly, and warriors are members of the same web of relationships which are present in any society. In addition to this, some of the particular and recognizable political and economic forms of the modern world originate in Northern Italy during the Renaissance, with Jacob Burkhardt identifying this region and time as the beginnings of modernity in his *Civilization of Renaissance Italy* (1860).[11] For such a well-studied time period, to have an analytical gap between the socioeconomic and military historical scholarship is strange, and this study will attempt to bridge the gap using modern terms and concepts to analyze sources from the time *condottiere* and their companies reigned in Italy as the primary fighting unit. This study is not a biography of certain *condottiere*, and is even less a study of their battle strategy and organization, although I will use the lives of several to illustrate relevant social and economic dynamics at play. Instead, I make the argument that the *condottiero* allowed a city-state to compete in small-time disputes while protecting its citizens as human capital and mitigating any potential economic damage while also allowing Italian men to climb the social ladder and their families to garner wealth and reputational benefits. This is the story of the Northern Italian *condottiero* from the latter half of the 14th century to the 16th century as a social and economic phenomenon: the fighting businessman.[12]

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[8] Francesco Dombellinghi, quoted in William Caferro, "Warfare and Economy in Renaissance Italy, 1350–1450," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 39, no. 2 (2008): 174.

[9] Examples of 20th- and 21st-century work in social and economic history include Harry Miskimin's two-part *The Economy of Early Renaissance Europe* and *The Economy of Late Renaissance Europe* (1975); Richard Goldthwaite's *The Economy of Renaissance Florence* (2009); and Paolo Malanima's *The Economy of Renaissance Italy* (2022), as well as several other works cited in this analysis. Examples of military history scholarship include Philippe Contamine's *La guerre au Moyen Âge* (1986); Michael Mallett's *Mercenaries and Their Masters: Warfare in Renaissance Italy* (1974); and David Parrott's *The Business of War: Military Enterprise and Military Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (2012), along with works by Finer, Tilly, Redlich, Verbruggen, and others.

[10] Caferro, "Warfare and Economy in Renaissance Italy," 174.

[11] Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1860), 4.

[12] Singular of *condottiere*.

Figure 1. Leonardo da Vinci, Il Condottiere, 1472–1480, silverpoint on prepared paper, 285 × 207 mm, British Museum, London.

When and Where

The *condottiere* phenomenon took place in Northern Italy from the late 1300s and began to decline in the late 1400s. While the Italian peninsula shared linguistic and religious tradition, there were significant differences between the two. For example, here were certain cultural differences, like appropriate behavior when grieving a spouse. When Isabella d'Este wrote to Marchese Francesco of Mantua regarding the death of the retired *condottiere* Gianfranceso Gonzaga, she made special note that Gianfrancesco's wife, Antonia, screamed and tore her clothes "in the Neapolitan (Southern Italian) manner".[13] Differences such as this paled in comparison to the difference between the structures of power and the economy in Northern and Southern Italy, and this affected the way in which war was fought and who fought them.

In Southern Italy political authority was highly centralized, and it was the battleground of rival dynasties like the Staufens and Angevins, and the Papacy.[14] The result, as noted by historian Norman Housely, was that "battles could be decisive."[15] As a principle, the stronger the state, the more compulsory power it can exert at one time, fielding larger armies and resulting in larger engagements for the purpose of absolute victory and removal of the enemy army as an obstacle to dominion. In addition to this warfighting character, "the South's economy depended largely on the exchange of agricultural products and raw materials and not on the exchange of money, industrial goods, and commercial services."[16] This affected the power structures of the South, as the lack of economic diversity and ease in which agricultural societies may be controlled by the state reinforced the central nature of power, just as it meant less individual economic activity per capita. Importantly, this means that more individuals could be removed

[13] Isabella d'Este to Marchese Francesco, Mantua, 28 August 1496, quoted in Chambers, "Gianfrancesco Gonzaga," 78.; Isabella d'Este, also known as "The First Lady of the Renaissance," is an important figure deeply involved in the *condottiere* phenomenon, and will be mentioned several times.

[14] Norman Housley, "European Warfare, 1200–1320," in *Medieval Warfare: A History*, ed. Maurice Keen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 113–35.

[15] Housley, "European Warfare, 1200–1320," 113–35.

[16] John M. Najemy, *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance: 1300–1550* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 134.

from the workforce to serve in an army or just as civilian casualties without seriously disrupting the ordinary character of the economy, as they were mostly engaged in the same type of labor and easily replaced.

However, in Northern Italy, the opposite was generally true regarding the structures of the economy and political power. The economy of Northern Italy, with the four main urban centers of Milan, Florence, Venice, and Rome, could be described as having a distributed manufacturing economy. There was an astounding level of economic participation from each individual, in both the production of goods and their exchange.[17] On the production side, "textiles, building construction, and shipbuilding, the making of weapons and armour, the processing of skins and leather, papermaking and book production" all required the collaboration of many individuals with different skills.[18] These specialists synthesized their knowledge to create manufactured goods, but there was no centralization of said manufacturing. Many goods were produced at home or in small workshops, but even on larger projects like construction, the different tradesmen would individually negotiate separate contracts and terms of employment with the foremen and master builders, who would then delegate tasks to the aforementioned tradesmen.[19] The distributed nature of the economy and power of individual workers to negotiate individual contracts allowed the economy to be able to maintain a high level of growth and integration.[20] This is because the economy allowed for goods and services to be exchanged, as well as naturally calculating their prices according to the combined inputs of economic actors like producers and consumers.

In addition to the web of interactions comprising the distributed network of manufacturing, people relatively far-removed from manufacturing still had extremely high levels of economic activity and contributed to important functions of any mercantile economy, such as monetary velocity and investment. The surviving mercantile letters of Alessandra Strozzi, a widow, indicate through exercising authority as head of household, Renaissance matriarchs or patriarchs could direct family members to invest in raw or manufactured goods by buying them at low prices and selling them for higher prices elsewhwere. More than ten of the seventy-two translated letters published in *Letters to Her Sons* discuss this sort of economic activity, but the fifth letter provides a summation of how this sort of investment worked. Alessandra wrote to her son Filippo degli Strozzi: "I asked you for flax… because what I want to do is resell it and deduct the cost… when you can lay your hands on some good quality flax at a favorable price, please get me at least a hundred libbre."[21] Alessandra then continues to direct economic activity by instructing Fillipo to purchase two hundred libbre of flax for her half-sister, Ginevra, but address it to Andrea Bizera in Rome, where Filippo's account will be credited and his part in the transaction will end.

These transactions demonstrate a level of financial complexity which was abnormal compared to the rest of Europe, save for Bruges, which benefited from the same Italian banking

[17] Rome is somewhat of a special case due to being governed by the Pope, but it is not unique. The Papal States employed *condottiere* just like the other Northern city-states and many of the Popes from 1350-1600 were drawn from the powerful merchant/banking families in Northern Italy, tying them together through money and blood.
[18] Najemy, *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance*, 137.
[19] Najemy, *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance*, 137.
[20] The exception to this is the Black Death, but this negatively affected the whole continent, and the focus of this study begins in the decades after it devastated Northern Italy.
[21] Alessandra Strozzi to Filippo degli Strozzi, 8 February 1450, in *Letters to Her Sons (1447–1470)*, trans. Judith Bryce (Toronto: Iter Academic Press; Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2016), 48–51.

conglomerates and guild practices.[22] This complex market activity meant that the loss of a member of the population, be they a laborer, craftsman, or unemployed investor, could have a more detrimental impact on the economic health of the city-state than the loss of, say, an agricultural laborer in other European nations at the time. In addition to this, the Northern Italian system of fractional reserve banking allowed for the creation of credit and money "by their lending and investing activity as effectively as if they had been given the privilege to issue notes."[23] The relatively unimpeded ability to contract, invest, and loan exemplified an early example of capitalism, and arguably in a purer form than many modern examples due to the absence of laws which restrict freedom of association.[24]

Some may argue the presence of slavery, taxation, and exile in Renaissance Italy detract from the capitalistic and voluntary nature of the economy, and they are certainly correct. Slavery, especially domestic slavery, was an involuntary economic arrangement present in Italy at the time, and the aforementioned Alessandra Strozzi discussed her Spanish slave, Cateruccia, in another letter to her son Filippo.[25] In addition to this taxation was also a significant issue. So significant, in fact, that Alessandra directly discussed matters of taxation in fifteen of seventy-two translated letters. In addition to being a general reality of economic life, taxation was also applied unfairly as a political tool, as all of the leading Florentine families had their taxes reduced in 1465, but not the Strozzis, with Alessandra exclaiming "all the benefit will go to those who are better able to pay than I am".[26] This certainly interfered with normal free-market operations and economic calculation, but taxation was the most common way in which city-states generated revenue. Since much of tax revenue was spent on employing contractors to accomplish government projects so the city-state did not have to pay to store equipment and manage the projects themselves, the similarities are greater still; as an example, the execution of road construction in the US during the 21st century is comparable to this arrangement. In addition to the purely economic side of a state hiring contractors to accomplish a project more efficiently than they themselves could, it was a relatively common occurrence for those who make decisions on behalf of the state to be socially related to those they bestow contracts onto, be that through blood, marriage, education, or charity. This familial and reputation-based aspect of contracting was crucial.[27]

The last involuntary and anti-free market socio-political issue was exile. Exile was common for the losers of political disagreements in Renaissance Italy whereas large-scale incarceration or execution were not, as they were shocking and would harm the reputation of the victors.[28] Consequently, this meant there were large groups of political exiles scattered across the peninsula; a Sienese ambassador to Rome commented that "they flock together like starlings, and they are discontented, and they have spread many rumours, as those who have been turned out

[22] Raymond de Roover, "Money, Banking, and Credit in Medieval Bruges," *Journal of Economic History* 2, suppl. (1942): 52–65.
[23] de Roover, "Money, Banking, and Credit," 64.
[24] This fact is significant because many families operated only to benefit themselves or a faction within a city-state and always had an eye to both monetary and social advantage.
[25] Alessandra Strozzi to Filippo degli Strozzi, 6 December 1450, in *Letters to Her Sons*, 57.
[26] Alessandra Strozzi to Filippo degli Strozzi, 14 June 1465, in *Letters to Her Sons*, 164.
[27] This discussion of reputation is a significant portion of the greater analysis and will be resumed later.
[28] Christine Shaw, *The Politics of Exile in Renaissance Italy*, Cambridge Studies in Italian History and Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 6.

do."[29] Despite this, the widespread use of exile, and later repatriation, could actually be considered a shrewd way to preserve the economic and political value of the city state. Instead of incarcerating or killing politically disadvantageous members of the citizen body, victors could minimize (although not eliminate) the influence of exiles while exiles preserved their economic networks and net worth as they maintained economic involvement from another location. They would do this for their own benefit, but a Florentine exile living in Pesaro who still participated in the Florentine economy remotely would also benefit the Florentine state. Then, when the political situation improved, they could be repatriated and contribute even more. This is evidenced by the fact that Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi and her family were all political exiles themselves from 1422 to 1435.

The purpose of discussing the general workings of the Northern Italian pseudo-capitalist economy during the Renaissance and its less capitalistic aspects is to provide a conceptual understanding of its dynamics. This is necessary to explain the *condottiere* phenomenon because there is insufficient primary source evidence to explain why it began, as opposed to the wealth of sources on its end. Therefore, a conceptual explanation must be posited based on the general dynamics of the monetary and political economy, and from drawing inverse assumptions from the reasons from its end.

Explaining the Condottiere Phenomenon

The *condottiere* phenomenon was essentially a logical extension of the distributed manufacturing economy and general goal of the ruling classes of the Northern Mercantile cities to manage risk to human capital to preserve future economic growth. Human capital is not merely an analytical concept applied to this economy, but certain mercantile letters hint at an intuitive understanding of the worth of people as an economic unit. In one letter, Margherita Datani speaks of a warehouse "managed by two people who might be said to be worth less than half a person."[30] The artisans and workers involved in the manufacturing economy all negotiated separate contracts with their supervisors, who then contracted with the customers to manufacture goods or build structures. The *condottiere* system is no different. *Condottiere*, or mercenaries, negotiated separate contracts with higher-level *condottiere*, who then negotiated contracts for their company with the same Northern Italian ruling classes. It is an example of the same distributed manufacturing economy, but the product being manufactured was defense and security. Since *condottiere* independently negotiated contracts with employers meant they frequently changed said employers, and many were employed by several of the Northern Italian powers: Milan, Venice, Florence, and the Papacy. For example, Gianfrancesco Gonzaga (1446-1496) was a relatively unimpressive *condottiere* compared to some of his peers, but served many masters and made well for himself. He started his military career by serving in southern Italy, but made his way North and was placed on retainer by the Pope for 7,000 Venetian Ducats annually.[31] After the Pope failed to make payment, Gonzaga went to Florence and personally negotiated with Lorenzo de' Medici the Great, but failed to come to an agreement.[32] Despite this, seven years later he would be under contract with Florence, as attested to by Lorenzo de' Medici

[29] Archivio di Stato di Siena (ASS), Concistoro 2457, 90: Guidantonio Buoninsegni, 21 March 1484[5], Rome, quoted in Christine Shaw, *The Politics of Exile in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.
[30] Margherita Datini to Francesco Datini, 20 January 1385, in *A Corresponding Renaissance: Letters Written by Italian Women, 1375–1650*, trans. Lisa Kaborycha (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 102.
[31] "Depositarius" to Ludovico Sforza, 26 January 1469, in Chambers, "Gianfrancesco Gonzaga," 45.
[32] Gianfrancesco Gonzaga to Barbara, Cesena, 26 September 1470, in Chambers, "Gianfrancesco Gonzaga," 47.

himself in one of his letters, and ended his career under contract with Ercole d'Este, the Duke of Ferrara.[33]

One may reasonably ask how it is possible a soldier could have a career several decades long and serve multiple different, and rival, masters, and yet preserve his life and maintain good social standing. The simple answer is death tolls in battles between *condottiere* were remarkably low. The words of the *condottiero* Braccio da Montone, provide insight into this peculiarity. Braccio had bragged earlier in his career to Alfonso V of Aragon that the (Northern) Italian methodology of warfare was more technical than the Spanish "bad war", as it was better "to use a small number of well-trained soldiers, than a malpractice multitude."[34] This is because the "Spanish war" in his terminology, or wars fought elsewhere in Europe, represented war as a means to remove the enemy's ability to fight again, and to definitively win the contest. This is exemplified not only by individual battle strategy in much of Europe, that of the cavalry charge and clean-up of the rout, but also by war strategy aside from pitched battles, like the *chevauchees* launched by the English in France during the Hundred Years' War. These chevauchees were "raids sometimes involving armies of over 10,000 men, which had the aim of laying waste the enemy's land, destroying his means of production, securing booty for the raiders and undermining the authority of the French king."[35] This was largely a foreign attitude to Northern Italian warmakers and warfighters, and this kept the combatant and noncombatant deaths relatively lower than in other parts of Europe, at least until the *condottiere* phenomenon ended in the 1500s.

The technicality of Italian warfighting methods is well-established in the literature and correspondence of the time, as war was increasingly described as a science and treated as a serious field of study. Italian fencing masters published the most well-regarded and widely circulated fencing manuals of the Middle Ages. Giovanni da Legnano's *Tractatus de bello, de represaliis et de duello* and the much more famous *Flos Duellatorum* by Fiore dei Liberi constitute the most significant examples of this.[36] Indeed, the *Flos Duellatorum* is such an important and masterful work of instruction in longsword dueling, dagger and poleaxe fighting, and even wrestling, it is still the main resource used by practitioners of Historical European Martial Arts, or HEMA.[37] Italian masters shared their expertise with younger *condottiere* in person and through these works, as they were solely concerned with matters of war and had no other occupation unless they were also the lord of an estate. Dei Liberi himself had been trained

[33] Lorenzo de' Medici, *Lettere*, ed. Nicolai Rubinstein (Florence: Giunti-Barbèra, 1977), quoted in Chambers, "Gianfrancesco Gonzaga."; Letters sent by Gianfrancesco Gonzaga, September–January 1483–1484, quoted in Chambers, "Gianfrancesco Gonzaga," 58.

[34] Pompeo Pellini, *L'Historie et Vite di Braccio Fortebracci detto da Montone, et di Niccolò Piccinino perugini* (Venice, 1572), quoted in Chiara Morosini, "The Body of the Condottiero: A Link Between Physical Pain and Military Virtue as It Was Interpreted in Renaissance Italy," in *Killing and Being Killed: Bodies in Battle—Perspectives on Fighters in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jörg Rogge (Mainz: Mainzer Historische Kulturwissenschaften, 2017), 175.

[35] Christopher Allmand, "War and the Non-Combatant in the Middle Ages," in *Medieval Warfare: A History*, ed. Maurice Keen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 263.

[36] Morosini, "The Body of the Condottiero," 168.; A scan of the surviving version of the *Flos Duellatorum* currently held at the Getty Museum is easily found online on the website for The Association for Renaissance Martial Arts, as well as a short overview of the work and its author. Fiore dei Liberi, *Flos Duellatorum* ("The Flower of Battle," c. 1410), in *The ARMA Online Manuals*, accessed August 5, 2025, https://www.thearma.org/Manuals/Liberi.htm.

[37] This fact is illustrated by numerous online communities and popular HEMA content creators like Matt Easton of ScholaGladiatora. Fiore dei Liberi also wrote the *Flos Duellatorum* while being employed as the resident master swordsman at the estate of Niccolo III d'Este, Duke of Ferrara.

by several different German masters, before having many students of his own. This demonstrates the technical aspects of warfighting were a serious field of study, but some sources go so far as to call it a science. In addition to this, Italian warfighters were more steeped in the dueling tradition, helping to delineate the Italian "technical" style of warfighting and its comparatively low death toll from the rest of Europe, whereas battles like Poitiers (1356), Grunwald (1410), and Towton (1461) exemplified an astounding level of engagement and carnage compared to the small skirmishes of Northern Italy in the same period.[38]

Christine de Pizan stated in her *Book of the Body Politic*, written in 1404, "anything which has correct rules of order and measure that ought to be kept can be called science… and there is nothing in the world in which it is more necessary to keep measure and order than military activity."[39] This sentiment is repeated in a letter written by Chiara Matraini, a Lucchesi poet born right as the *condottiere* phenomenon was coming to an end (1515). In this letter to Maria Cardonia, Marchesa of Padula and Countess of Avellino, Matraini asks: "are not the sciences the basic foundation and ruling principal of the entire military art?"[40] It is important to note even though the word used by these Italian authors is *scienze*, for science, but at this time in history, studies of the natural world, as well as philosophical inquiry, constituted "science." This is even evidenced directly by Matraini citing Marcus Aurelius and Aristotle in her argument about the war goals and methodology applied in the Italian Wars (1494-1559).[41] Despite "science" in the modern sense and *scienze* not translating directly as perfect synonyms, the fact that warfare was considered by Italian combatants and non-combatants alike as a serious matter of inquiry and technical discovery indicates that in the Italian context, war was as much a field of study and analytical challenge as it was fighting. This sentiment also parallels the increasing specialization within the military sciences, as in Italy, not every battle was settled by a charge of heavy cavalry. In a letter written during one protracted battle, Gianfrancesco Gonzaga complained about not having any sappers, or a carpenter with the engineering skills to make a chain over the river.[42]

Despite this technical sophistication, respect between warfighters as professionals within the same field of study, and comparatively low death toll, the aforementioned Braccio da Montone did die from wounds sustained in battle.[43] However, the circumstances surrounding his death illustrate his passage was largely a personal choice, and warfare in Northern Italy was remarkably "friendly" for a physical contest with lives on the line. After being captured, Braccio refused all food, drink, and medical care, and also refused to speak even a single word to his opponents. This is despite being granted the ability to take advantage of this hospitality by the *condottiere* who captured him, Jacapo Caldora, and the other captains on Caldora's side.[44] Even beyond this hospitality which was offered, but not taken, since there was no active battle,

[38] Michael Mallett and Christine Shaw, *The Italian Wars, 1494–1559: War, State and Society in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2018).
[39] Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Body Politic*, trans. Kate Langdon Forhan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 70.
[40] Chiara Matraini to Maria Cardonia, 1595, in *A Corresponding Renaissance*, 241.
[41] Chiara Matraini to Maria Cardonia, 1595, in *A Corresponding Renaissance*, 241.
Important note about Chiara Matraini's letter: even though the date is stated as 1595, this is because the letter was published by Matraini much later in her life as part of a revised volume of collected letters and essays. The letter itself was most likely written around the 1550s, as the addressee, Maria Cardonia, died in 1563.
[42] Gianfrancesco Gonzaga to Federico, October-January 1483-1484, in Chambers, "Gianfrancesco Gonzaga," 58.
[43] Morosini, "The Body of the Condottiero," 184.
[44] Morosini, "The Body of the Condottiero," 184.

Monotone's own soldiers and allies "were seen to go in the enemy pavilion" and express their admiration and grief.[45] Braccio da Montone died three days after his capture, but his death demonstrates two significant aspects of warfare between *condottiere*.

The first is that even in defeat, a captured *condottiere* could expect to be treated well by his peers, and the second is that there were no "hard feelings" between two hosts of *condottiere*. The hospitality extended to captured *condottiere* may be due in part to mutual respect for each other as fighting men of honor, but similar hospitality was not usually shared by other fighting forces throughout history. Therefore, this hospitality was most likely extended because *condottiere* and their employers were conscious to not waste money and human capital, and it is entirely possible if Braccio had not refused all aid and aliment, him and Jacapo Caldora could have been under contract by the same authority and therefore a member of the same host of *condottiere* come next campaigning season. The relative absence of "hard feelings" between *condottiere* is demonstrated by Braccio's soldiers being let into the camp to visit him "during the night… and during the day" and "when they came out from the pavilion, they covered their heads and cried, and made the enemies cry as well."[46] This indicates the threat of assault or subterfuge was so low that armed "enemies" were allowed to come and go from the camp at all hours to visit their captured captain. There were notable exceptions to these norms, such as with Sigismondo Malatesta and his lifelong arch-rival Federico di Montiferio, who accused each other of cowardice and threatened to disembowel each other in a meeting organized by Borso d'Este.[47] Importantly, this rivalry is due to being lords of neighboring territories prior to and during their careers as *condottiere*[48] Since they were rival lords in the same fashion as elsewhere in Europe, their comportment towards one another was anomalous to the general Italian model of *condottiere* conduct.

The low risk of death to *condottiere* is understandable as just another risk-management tool used by Northern Italian city-states, which had demonstrated an extraordinary degree of asset diversification to prevent overnight collapses.[49] In the early 1340s, a few decades before the *condottiere* phenomenon began, the three main Northern Italian banking families were wiped out in the 1340s as a result of defaults by two of the principal clients, King Edward III of England and King Robert of Naples."[50] They were replaced by the Medici family, which diversified both their investments by dealing in currency exchanges, transactions, investing based off of a fractional reserve model enabled by revolutionary bookkeeping and double-entry ledgers and by structuring each branch of the bank as a separate entity run by a junior partner.[51] These advances in finance and corporate structure, combined with the introduction of the decimal system to Europe by Fibonacci is why authors like Burkhardt, and John Najemy more recently, identify the Renaissance as sowing the seeds of the modern world.[52] The Medici family themselves maintained control over the bank by holding a "controlling interest in the capital of

[45] Pompeo Pellini, quoted by Morosini, "The Body of the Condottiero," 184.
[46] Pompeo Pellini, quoted by Morosini, "The Body of the Condottiero," 185.
[47] Pierantonio Paltroni, *Commentarii*, ed. Walter Tomassoli (Urbino: Accademia Raffaello, 1966).
[48] Morosini, "The Body of the Condottiero," 186-187.
[49] Many still died, as they fought wars for a living, and the death toll radically increased later in the era of the condottiere (the 1500s) because of gunpowder weapons and foreign invasion, which will be discussed later.
[50] Niall Ferguson, *The Ascent of Money: A Financial History of the World* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 41.; These were the Bardi, Peruzzi, and Acciaiuoli families.
[51] de Roover, "Money, Banking, and Credit," 64; Ferguson, "Ascent of Money," 44.
[52] Ferguson, "Ascent of Money," 32-33, and Najemy, "Age of the Renaissance," 82.

each affiliate", and the junior partners who managed each branch "were not paid a fixed salary, but received a share in the profits of their agencies."[53]

This system of banking, which enabled the astounding economic growth, and thus cultural achievements of the Renaissance, worked so well because it managed risk. It allowed the Medici family to reap the rewards of their financial powerhouse, and thus attain political dominance in Florence and significance elsewhere, but prevent the collapse of any one branch or trouble with local authorities from affecting the main center of financial and political power (in this case, Florence) past a certain degree. It is akin to how a ship is compartmentalized so in the event one chamber is flooded, bulkheads can be sealed so the water does not spread. Having learned risk-management techniques in the realm of economic competition and investment to prevent a massive loss in financial capital at one time, and structuring an entire financial system around this diversification, it makes sense that these banking and mercantile elites would have wanted to manage risk in the realm of physical competition as well. By fielding a small army made almost entirely of independently contracted mercenaries, the Northern Italian mercantile elites ensured their population base, especially small-time manufacturers and guild artisans, would be insulated from the outcome of any specific battle. In addition to this, if their *condottiere* died in battle, it was only a monetary loss on whatever they had already paid the *condottiero*, and if he lived, he may be re-employed or released to negotiate with different parties, thus ensuring competition and leaving options open for the employer.

The use of *condottiere* cannot be fully explained in economic terms, as befitting the intent of this analysis. But this holds true only if one strictly considers the economy as the realm of finance, goods, and services. If the Northern Italian merchant elites and their city-states were so interested in protecting their capital, both monetary and human, then why fight wars at all? Wars are necessarily detrimental to the economy, as money is extracted from the economy, and then spent on people and materials which will be destroyed. It is always wasteful in purely economic terms. However, just as important to the economy of Renaissance Italy as the Florins and Ducats which acted as mediums of exchange, was social reputation. By analyzing the economy of reputation and social standing, a complete picture of the *condottiere* phenomenon may be illustrated, and the final explanatory piece laid out.

The Importance of Reputation and A Mercenary Career as a Means to Reputation

Reputation and social capital was just as important in Renaissance Italy as physical property and funds. The cause of this was mostly political, but had huge effects on the economy and individual and family finance. Reputation was so important because it facilitated new relationships and strengthened existing bonds, allowing for more possibilities to acquire even more social and financial capital. This is true in any society, but during the Renaissance, the complicated web of employment, marriage, government and bureaucracy, and financial agreements was magnified by the relatively unencumbered right to contract and fierce competition for capital. Reputation could prevent the political rulers of a city from targeting an individual or family with unfair taxation or interference, as Alessandra Strozzi was forced to sell some of her properties to pay off tax debts.[54] If one's reputation fell, one might suffer the misfortune of exile, as the Strozzis did. In Northern Italy, "the tradition that those who held power in a commune had the right to exclude and expel their rivals was widespread and firmly

[53] de Roover, "Money, Banking, and Credit," 54.
[54] Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi to Filippo degli Strozzi, Naples, 27 July 1459, in *Letters to Her Sons*, 48-51.

rooted", and exile could befall any individual or family who fell too out of favor.[55] However, an increase in reputation could mean repatriation, and an invitation back into the wealthy or ruling class of one's city state, as the Strozzis were fortunately granted. Even aside from political disagreements and a lack of popularity causing attacks on an individual by the government, it was rare in Northern Italy that an individual could not assemble a coalition of friends and social allies "to assist in the quest for office, tax relief, legal aid, and so forth; rarer that a man could not be influenced by this means." [56] Reputation allowed for more money to be made, but it also provided economic and political utility in ways currency could not, and it was just as important as the financial aspects to Renaissance society and warfare. Given the importance of reputation, it follows many would choose, or their parents would encourage, careers bringing as much reputation and social capital, and thus financial capital as well, to the family as possible. One had much to gain from becoming a banking executive, cardinal, or a captain of a *condottiere* company.

This means *condottiere* were far from just faceless soldiers who happened to individually contract with their employers. Some of them, no matter if they were born as commoners or as nobles, became real movers and shakers in Renaissance society. The courtier Baldesar (Baldassare) Castiglione, author of the monumental *Book of the Courtier*, spoke of a *condottiere* named Niccolo Piccinino (1380-1444), who served under and married the niece of Braccio da Montone.[57] This man was of such humble birth he was given the surname Piccinino in mockery of his small stature, and yet Castiglione attests several courtiers would "narrate the sayings" of Piccinino, as he was known for his sharp wit, and the translator's annotation for this section of the *Book of the Courtier* says Piccinino shared "with Francesco Sforza the fame of being the first *condottiero* of his day."[58] Francesco Sforza himself was such a successful *condottiere* he became Duke of Milan, and established the Sforza Dynasty there. Piccinini is a classic rags-to-riches story, but even nobles had room to grow their reputation.

Although he was a noble whose parents had the resources to send him to study in Germany as a boy, Gianfrancesco Gonzaga was still the third son, and had limited chances to inherit his father's estate. If he wanted to accumulate any sort of reputation and renown, his options were to enter the clergy or become a *condottiero*. He chose the latter, as his brother was already a cardinal, and there were diminishing returns for the family if Gianfrancesco chose that career as well. In addition to this, by the late 1300s, the Crusades (1095-1291) had come to an end, and martially inclined sons with no inheritance could not vent their frustrations and seek new land and titles elsewhere. Thus, they turned towards becoming mercenaries, at least in the Italian peninsula. At the beginning of his career as a *condottiero*, though, Gianfrancesco excused himself from participating in a military review because he lacked the sufficient trappings and equipment of a successful *condottiere*.[59] At the end of his career, in contrast, he had become wealthy enough to have accumulated a massive personal library of more than 190 books of comedy, ancient philosophy and science, and religious works at his castle at Bolozzo, also

[55] Shaw, *Exile in Renaissance Italy*, 6.
[56] F. W. Kent and Patricia Simons, "Renaissance Patronage: An Introductory Essay," in *Art, Patronage, and Society in Renaissance Italy*, ed. F. W. Kent and Patricia Simons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3.
[57] Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. Leonard Eckstein Opdycke (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), book 2, 2, 77.
[58] Leonard Eckstein Opdycke, note 150 on page 77, in *The Book of the Courtier* by Baldassare Castiglione, trans. Leonard Eckstein Opdycke (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 355.
[59] Guido de Bagno to Barbara of Brandenburg, Naples, 21 March 1466, quoted in Chambers, "Gianfrancesco Gonzaga," 41.

earned late in life.[60] Gianfrancesco's social circle also became those in the highest echelon of Renaissance society, as when he died, it was Isabella d'Este (his niece by marriage) who wrote the letter informing (her husband) Marchese Francesco Gonzaga of the death of his uncle.[61]

It is unclear if Gianfrancesco died while visiting Isabella d'Este or vice versa, but the importance of his death being reported by the "First Lady of the World", a woman related by blood or by marriage to many of the most important figures of the Renaissance, cannot be understated. In addition to being married to Gianfrancesco's nephew, the Marchese of Mantua, her brother Alfonso married Lucrezia Borgia, and her sister married Duke Lucovico Sforza. [62] Isabella was so well-regarded and cultured, she personally suggested subjects for Leonardo da Vinci to paint.[63] Da Vinci himself was known to associate with *condottiere*, as he worked as a Florentine representative with the Sforza dynasty of Milan, which was founded by the *condottiero* Francesco I Sforza, from 1482 to 1499. Furthermore, he personally arranged the wedding celebrations for the *condottiere* Galeazzo Sanseverino, who served Duke Ludovico Sforza until his downfall, and afterwards was made Grand Equerry of France.[64]

Condottiere becoming members of high society was not without issue. There was some friction as the nature of their profession made their character seem distasteful. The two common negative opinions about mercenaries, present throughout history, is that mercenaries are disloyal, unreliable, unsavory characters who enjoy bloodshed and destruction. Their disloyalty and unreliability were discussed by Titus Livius (Livy) more than a thousand years before the *condottiere* phenomenon, and his criticisms were taken up by authors within the age of the *condottiere*. These include authors such as Christine de Pizan in her *Book of the Body Politic* and Machiavelli in several of his works, including his massive *Discourses on Livy*.[65] As for mercenaries being considered generally violent and impolite, this mainly stems from the connection that because mercenaries made their money by fighting wars, and did not reluctantly fight out of a sense of duty and honor, they must naturally desire war and do everything in their power to start or continue them. This is a common theme in literature and poetry concerning mercenaries. Although outside of the *condottiere* phenomenon, an anonymous English poem from 1646 artfully imagines the mindset of the mercenary as, "Proceed yee brethren, doe each other hate / And fight it to the last, *I wish the Wars* / *May ever untill doomsday properate*."[66] In addition to this, genetic testing of remains has confirmed the legendary *condottiero*, who

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[60] "Postmortem Inventory of Gianfrancesco Gonzaga's Castle at Bolozzo," trans. D. S. Chambers, C. Burnett, A. Canova, M. Davies, J. Kraye, and M. McGrath, August–October 1496.

[61] Isabella d'Este to Marchese Francesco Gonzaga, Mantua, 28 August 1496, quoted in Chambers, "Gianfrancesco Gonzaga," 78.

[62] Lisa Kaborycha, introduction to the translated letter "Isabella d'Este to Leonardo da Vinci, Mantua, 14 May 1504," in *A Corresponding Renaissance: Letters Written by Italian Women, 1375–1650* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 215; The names of Borgia and Sforza will become much more significant at the end of this study, as Lucrezia's brother Cesare Borgia, and Duke Sforza of Milan largely caused the downfall of the whole *condottiere* system.

[63] Isabella d'Este to Leonardo da Vinci, Mantua, 14 May 1504," in *A Corresponding Renaissance*, 216.

[64] Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, Book I.24, page 34.
Opdycke's large translator's note also contributes to the listing of Sanseverino's employment.

[65] Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Body Politic*, trans. Kate Langdon Forhan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 72; Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Chief Works and Others*, trans. and ed. Allan Gilbert, 3 vols. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989).

[66] *The Mercenary Souldier* (London, 1646),
https://ezproxy.library.arizona.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/mercenary-souldier/docview/2240949040/se-2.

famously made a show of his leg amputation, and by some accounts, refused to be held down and requested his severed leg be brought to him in a silver bucket, Giovanni dalle Bande Nerre (Giovanni de' Medici) possessed the "*MAOA* 2-repeat *Low*-activity allele... Males with the 2-repeat allele show levels of violence approximately twice greater than males with any of the other *MAOA* variants (Guo et al., 2008)." [67] This demonstrates that the general opinion of mercenaries as brutish and prone to violence is not completely without basis, despite their usual professionalism. However, it did cause some problems when advertising their services.

A *condottiero* was usually hired by the elites of a city state, but as previously discussed, many of them became part of the elite and ruling class. This means they would have to display their military virtue and willingness to fight in the company of other elites, and at functions where that might not be appropriate. Essentially, because of who their potential customers were, *condottiere* would have to advertise their services in killing at balls, court sessions, and other high-society functions, especially if they hoped to move up the social ladder by earning more money and reputation. In one instance discussed by Baldesar Castiglione in his *Book of the Courtier*, the *condottiero* Caspare Sanseverino, brother of the more famous Galeazzo Sanseverino, refused all entertainment and a dance with Lady Caterina Sforza because "such silly trifles were not his business."[68] When Caterina Sforza asked him what his business was, he replied "with a sour look, 'to fight.'"[69]Catarina Sforza then replied in frustration "Now that you are in no war and out of fighting trim, I should think it were a good thing to have yourself well oiled, and to stow yourself with all your battle harness in a closet until you be needed."[70] This interaction demonstrates that due to both personality and having to advertise their services at formal events, social events could present challenges, resulting in a biting response from a lady. This interaction is made even more ironic and emblematic of this phenomenon due to the identity of Caterina Sforza herself. As previously mentioned, the Sforza dynasty was founded by the *condottiere* Francesco I Sforza, Caterina's grandfather, many of its men were *condottiere* in the late 1400s when this interaction took place, and Caterina herself was the mother of Giovanni de' Medici, the legendary Giovanni dalle Bande Nerre (Giovanni of the Black Bands).[71] Even when someone like Caterina had been exposed to and socially engaging with *condottiere* her whole life, their interactions could still be strained. Despite this, *condottiere* achieved and maintained their place in high society - until they did not.

The End of the *Condottiere*

The small-scale and professionalized methodology of warfare undertaken by the *condottiere* was predicated on the existence of a balance of power and war only being a means to advantage, and not a matter of conquest or survival. When the balance of power was upset and war became large-scale, conflict became about survival, not economic or social advantage. This is due to Northern Italy becoming a battleground for other, greater European powers, as well as the ambitions of some of its own figures, notably Ludovico Sforza and Cesare Borgia. After the death of Lorenzo de' Medici the Great of Florence died in 1492, Northern Italy was

[67] Morosini, "The Body of the Condottiero," 186–87; Pellegrini et al., "Did Giovanni dalle Bande Nere," 218–20.
[68] Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, book 1, §17, 26.
[69] Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, book 1, §17, 26.
[70] Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, book 1, §17, 26.
[71] Chiara Morosini, "The Body of the Condottiero: A Link Between Physical Pain and Military Virtue as It Was Interpreted in Renaissance Italy," in *Killing and Being Killed: Bodies in Battle—Perspectives on Fighters in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jörg Rogge (Mainz: Mainzer Historische Kulturwissenschaften, 2017).

destabilized.[72] The French king also had a claim on the throne of Naples. Seeking to protect himself and his city-state from the anticipated chaos and recover lands lost to Venice, Ludovico Sforza encouraged the French to invade the Italian peninsula, and let them use the port of Genoa to stage the army.[73] The French invasion was also encouraged by the retired *condottiere* Ercole d'Este, father-in-law of Ludovico Sforza and father of Beatrice and Isabella d'Este, for the same reasons.[74] This French invasion, carried out in 1494, was the beginning of forty years of conflict on the peninsula commonly referred to as "The Italian Wars."

Due to foreign powers getting involved, war became too large-scale for the *condottiere* to handle, and for their services to be a reasonable answer to. Even when most of the Northern Italian states, including Ludovico Sforza and Milan, banded together to oppose the French, the pressure was too great. In 1509, after the French army crushed the (relatively) small force of *condottiere* the Battle of Agnadello, "nearly the entire terraferma dominion of the Venetian Republic was lost" within a matter of days.[75] Referring to the same battle, Niccolo Machiavelli, who was a diplomat and correspondent as well as philosopher, said "In one battle they lost what in eight hundred years they had won with so much effort.''[76] Some *condottiere* began to serve the French. The "Great Captain", Cesare Borgia, was the most notable. As the illegitimate but openly recognized son of Pope Alexander VI, Cesare resigned his position as a cardinal to pursue a military career and was appointed by his father as Duke of Romagna.[77] Although he was a *condottiere* and had others in his service, Cesare Borgia exemplifies the last gasp of a dying profession. The letters reporting on Borgia and his movements by Machiavelli in his capacity as a diplomat serving Florence shine light on how Borgia, rather than revitalize the *condottiere* profession, facilitated its end.

In one letter, Machiavelli claims Borgia possessed six thousand infantry and "as much artillery, and in good order, as almost all the rest of Italy." [78] At the same time as this, "increasingly expensive artillery trains, which none but princes could afford to maintain" were becoming more essential to warfare.[79] Borgia had such resources because the King of France was sending him troops and artillery and the Pope (his father) was supplying him with money.[80] In response to this overwhelming threat to the survival of their realms, the ruling elites began to commit the one act which would forever end the *condottiere* phenomenon: they started conscripting civilians, including up to one man from each household in certain regions.[81] If a state further centralizes its power to extract more obligations from its citizens, like taxes or conscription, all nearby states are naturally incentivized to follow their lead as a matter of survival. Cesare Borgia himself would begin conscripting Italian civilians, and as the Habsburgs

[72] Michael Mallett and Christine Shaw, *The Italian Wars, 1494–1559: War, State and Society in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2018), 17.
[73] Mallet and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 17; This fact is also discussed by Baldasar Castiglione.
[74] Mallet and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 17.
[75] Edward Muir, "Was There Republicanism in the Renaissance Republics? Venice after Agnadello," in *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State*, ed. John J. Martin and Dennis Romano (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 138.
[76] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, in *The Chief Works and Others*, 1:50.
[77] Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. Charles S. Singleton (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), book 2, §74, 147.
[78] Machiavelli, "Legations, 11.40," in *Chief Works and Others (Volume I)*, 130.
[79] Michael Mallett, "Mercenaries," in *Medieval Warfare: A History*, ed. Maurice Keen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 229.
[80] Machiavelli, "Legations 11.24," 128.
[81] Machiavelli, "Legations 11.14," 126.

and the Holy Roman Empire got more involved in Italy due to their rivalry in France, Borgia scrambled to make allies with other city-states like Florence (the Medici), Mantua (the Gonzagas), and Ferrara (the d'Estes) because "they would be forced by necessity to defend him in order to defend themselves."[82] Ultimately, Borgia's ambitions were unfulfilled as his state collapsed and he was killed in battle, and Italy continued to be the battleground of France and the Holy Roman Empire until 1559. The French invasion and domestic response to it definitively ended the *condottiere* phenomenon, although it took a few decades after the initial invasion of 1494.

Many authors have blamed the misfortune of the Italians during the Italian Wars on their use of *condottiere*. As mentioned in Section One, Machiavelli is the most notable, as most of his philosophical and historical works like *A Provision for Infantry*, *The Prince*, *Discourses on Livy*, and *The Art of War* were written after the death of Cesare Borgia in 1507 and offer innumerable references to and critiques of the use of mercenaries and *condottiere*.[83] In addition to him, Giuseppi Canestrini and Ercole Ricotti argued "Italy's lack of 'native' infantry set Italy behind the rest of Europe and that 'medieval' mercenary use during the Renaissance was the root cause of the peninsula's military failures," and they were some of the most important Italian historians and helped shape Italian identity and national mythology, reinforcing a centuries-long negative perception of *condottiere*.[84] While this is certainly valid to a degree, the use of *condottiere* was never meant to produce internationally competitive armies of scale: it was meant to allow a state to compete in small-time disputes for the purpose of obtaining a competitive advantage while keeping the human capital and civilians of all parties involved safe so the economy would not be too damaged by the dispute. It also allowed for Italian men to climb the social ladder, and for families to garner wealth and reputation. The fact the *condottiere* could not withstand the assault of the great powers of Europe was unfortunate for the peninsula, but the relative weakness of the *condottiere* was a feature, not a flaw. If there is ever again a region with developed, capitalistic city-states who are isolated from exterior threats, the fighting businessman may return.

[82] Machiavelli, "Legations 11.40," 130.
[83] All of these works are translated in Allan Gilbert, ed., *The Chief Works and Others of John Locke,* 3 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000).
[84] Edgerton, *The Apotheosis of the Quattrocento Condottiere*, 2017.