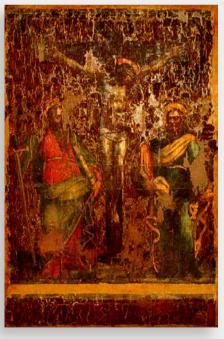


N. 6 2025

Fascicolo 23. Luglio 2025 Storia Militare Moderna (6)





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Nuova Antologia Militare

Rivista interdisciplinare della Società Italiana di Storia Militare

Periodico telematico open-access annuale (www.nam-sism.org)

Registrazione del Tribunale Ordinario di Roma n. 06 del 30 Gennaio 2020

Scopus List of Accepted Titles October 2022 (No. 597)

Rivista scientifica ANVUR (5/9/2023) Area 11, Area 10 (21/12/2024)



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(www.societaitalianastoriamilitare@org)

Grafica: Nadir Media Srl - Via Giuseppe Veronese, 22 - 00146 Roma

info@nadirmedia.it

Gruppo Editoriale Tab Srl - Viale Manzoni 24/c - 00185 Roma

www.tabedizioni.it ISSN: 2704-9795

ISBN Fascicolo 979-12-5669-174-6



N. 6 2025

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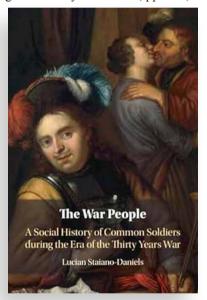
Stendardo di Lepanto (1570), Lati A e B, Museo Diocesano di Gaeta. Wikimedia Commons. Lo stendardi fu dipinto a tempera su seta da Girolamo Siciolante da Sermoneta (1521-1575), su incarico del Cardinale Onorato Caetani. L'11 giugno 1570 fu benedetto da Papa Pio V nella Basilica di San Pietro e consegnato a Marcantonio II Colonna ponendolo al comando della flotta pontificia. Partito da Civitavecchia e giunto a Gaeta il 22 giugno 1571, Marcantonio Colonna, fece voto di consegnare lo stendardo al patrono della città qualora fosse tornato vincitore. Il 13 agosto Pio V fece consegnare un secondo stendardo della Lega a Don Giovanni d'Austria, comandante generale della flotta cristiana che, riunitasi a Messina, salpò il 24 agosto verso Lepanto. Durante la battaglia del 7 ottobre i due vessilli sventolarono rispettivamente sull'Ammiraglia e sulla Capitana pontificia e non furono mai centrati dal tiro nemico. Nelle stesse ore il papa ebbe la visione della vittoria e in ricordo rifinì l'Ave Maria nella forma attuale, aggiunse le Litanie lauretane alla recita del Rosario e l'appellativo mariano di Auxilium Christianorum e consacrò il 7 ottobre a Santa Maria delle Vittorie sull'Islam, celebrato con lo scampanio al mattino, a mezzogiorno e alla sera in ricordo della vittoria. Papa Gregorio XIII trasferì poi la festa alla prima domenica del mese di ottobre intitolandola alla Madonna del Rosario. Al ritorno da Lepanto, Marcantonio Colonna sciolse il voto consegnando lo stendardo al vescovo Pietro Lunello. Il vessillo fu poi conservato presso la cattedrale dei Santi Erasmo e Marciano.

Lucian Staiano-Daniels

The War People.

A Social History of Common Soldiers during the Era of the Thirty Years War,

Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2024, pp. 228, ISBN 9781009428415



he Thirty Years' War represents a complex series of interconnected conflicts, for a long time seen through polarized interpretations and only in the last decades studied with more precision and critical tools¹. A more balanced view has emerged from the production of new research focused on sin-

NAM, Anno 6 – n. 23 DOI: 10.36158/979125669174626 Luglio 2025

¹ The bibliography is very extensive, for a recent overview with broad bibliographic references and multiple perspectives, see Claire Gantet, La Guerre des Trente ans, 1618-1648, Paris, Tallandier-Ministère des Armées 2024; Olli Bāckström, Military Revolution and the Thirty Years War 1618–1648. Aspects of Institutional Change and Decline, Helsinki, Helsinki University Press 2023; John Pike, The Thirty Years War, 1618–1648. The First Global War and the End of the Habsburg Supremacy, Havertown, Pen & Sword Books 2023; Peter H. Wilson, Europe's tragedy. A new history of the Thirty Years War, London, Penguin 2010; Geoffrey Parker, The Thirty Years' War, London, Routledge 1997.

gle aspects and series of events in many cases. From this point of view, the first monograph of Lucian Staiano-Daniels is not just a thoroughly researched volume, but one of the first to merge the perspectives of military history and microhistory. As again part of the lively international historiographic debate², microhistory is approached more as a tool, a perspective, rather than a specific field of studies. It could be argued that in the past it was already used by military historians, even though implicitly, because it is very close to the different levels of scale through which warfare can be studied. In this book, Staiano-Daniels uses the microscope to look at a precise regiment within well-defined chronological and spatial coordinates. As thoroughly explained in the doctoral thesis at the origin of this first monograph³, and in the different aspects explored in recent years⁴, the investigations take into consideration different approaches and sources to explore intensively a human collectivity. In the case of the book, the object of attention is the regiment mobilized by Wolf von Mansfeld in the service of the King of Spain, how it was composed, and its transnational life. To do so, the author also reflects on some of the elements considered central to the transformations of warfare historiographically described during these years, particularly the much-debated Military Revolution and the theory of the Fiscal-Military State, testing these hypotheses in the laboratory of the regiment and in the actual life of the soldiers⁵.

This research delves into the experience of the soldiers who composed this regiment (*Das Kriegsvolk*), a human collectivity that had specificities linked to its

² See, for example, the international debate on the special issue «Global Microhistories», *Journal of Early Modern History*, Vol. 27, Issue 1-2 (Mar 2023).

The thesis has been available online since 2018: as of May 2025, it has been viewed 7,612 times and downloaded 4,538 times from the website: Lucian Staiano-Daniels, *The War People: The Daily Life of Common Soldiers*, 1618-1654, UCLA, ProQuest ID: StaianoDaniels_ucla_0031D_16893. Merritt ID: ark:/13030/m5pc7ztc. Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3hr6185w.

⁴ One important contribution, for example, is the study of the demographics of the Saxon army during the 1630s and 1640s, which adds complexity to a phase in which armies tended to be smaller and more cavalry-oriented for various reasons: ID, «Determining Early Modern Army Strength: The Case of Electoral Saxony», *Journal of Military History*, Vol 83, Issue 4 (2019), pp. 1001- 1020.

⁴ Military changes not only had an impact on society in general, they had an impact on the society of soldiers. A soldier's daily routine would have changed. The way he interacted with his fellows would have been different. Since this contains a microhistorical argument, it can be investigated by microhistorical means». ID, *The War People. A Social History of Common Soldiers during the Era of the Thirty Years War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2024, p. 2.

role but was fundamentally normed and subject to formal and informal rules, as to some level every other collectivity of the time. The proposal of the author is that these aggregation dynamics must be studied from a closer perspective, because it is there that we understand the logic behind the actions and reasonings, or also their absence, eventually. In these assumptions, the 'history from below' current of studies is important, more generally the reflections of the Annales school and the Nouvelle Histoire, as affirmed by the author, and its connections to the War and Society perspective. The former is also visible in the variety of sources used in the book. Certainly, the administrative sources are the main asset of the study, in particular the Gerichtsbücher, «court books», that contain the bureaucracy produced by the regiment. Indeed, these organizations were legal entities, which had their own jurisdiction and were therefore well-ordered, not anarchic as often considered for the early XVII century⁶. As the author affirms, the first court book was already known and mentioned by Jan Willem Huntebrinker but had not been studied in depth. Subsequently, Staiano-Daniels was able to find two more court books (becoming the first to study them together) and many additional related sources in Dresden. These manuscripts contain not only information about rosters, payments, and the extensive paperwork produced by the regiment⁷, but also crucial judiciary and criminal proceedings: in essence, the entire internal life of the regiment.

Alongside these, the author also managed to utilize various sources spread across numerous archives in northern Italy, particularly ecclesiastical ones containing registers and data crucial for investigating the effects of the regiment's presence in those areas. As ego-documents are unavailable for these soldiers, the research relies largely on testimonies written by others, which either describe the Mansfelders or report their voices indirectly. This multi-layered archival work enables us to understand how the soldiers lived, how they were perceived by others, and how they perceived themselves. Crucially, these men viewed themselves as righteous—not merely as workers, but as individuals serving a duty that implied a code of honor. Civilians, however, often saw them as dangerous, lazy, immoral,

⁶ On this. ID, «Masters in the Things of War: Rethinking Military Justice during the Thirty Years War», *German History*, Vol. 39, Issue 4 (December 2021), pp. 497–518,

⁷ The author has also written a specific article based on these sources and the manuscript material that allows for the study of regiments of the period, particularly regarding accounting issues, while also exploring the level of literacy that soldiers may have required to function in an environment so saturated with written documentation: ID, «A Brief Introduction to Seventeenth- Century Military Manuscripts and Military Literacy», *Manuscript Studies: A Journal of the Schoenberg Institute for Manuscript Studies*, vol. 5, n. 1 (2020), pp. 142-163.

and rootless mercenaries with devilish behaviors. Lucian Staiano-Daniels thus presents an ambivalent view, neither inverting civilian perceptions nor justifying every action of the soldiers but rather offering the most complete picture possible of this collectivity and revealing how much more complex the reality was than often portrayed in historiography.

The book is structured around nine chapters and two 'scenes', a format that also narratively follows the formation of the regiment in Dresden, its descent into Italy in 1625, and the subsequent life and movements of the unit, along with the associated challenges. The initial mobilization aimed to intervene in the north of the Peninsula during the Valtelline War, in defense of Milan and its routes to Tirol. Many interesting elements emerge already during the regiment's formation. The author analyzes the origins of the soldiers, employing a methodology and data analysis approach established by Gregory Hanlon in his studies on the army of the Duke of Parma⁸. He investigates the reasons behind voluntary enlistment, particularly emphasizing regional ties and the social meaning of military service in comparison to contemporary employment. While financial incentives certainly played a role, other motivations such as the chance for social advancement, adventure, and personal ambition also contributed, always bearing in mind that soldiers (though not necessarily the society around them) perceived themselves as an honorable estate⁹. In this regard, Staiano-Daniels critically challenges, supported by ample evidence, the problematic past hypotheses of a 'proletarianization of the army' during this period, as previously argued for example (albeit with differing perspectives) by Peter Burschel and Erik Swart.

Particular attention is also devoted to how the soldiers actually lived and moved, showing how the regiment was divided into companies and further into smaller groups for marching and quartering in different areas, either to sustain themselves or to be resupplied by regimental logistics. All these situations are framed by the author to analyze the mechanisms of cohesion, exploring the social dynamics of

⁸ Gregory Hanlon, *The hero of Italy. Odoardo Farnese, Duke of Parma, his soldiers, and his subjects in the Thirty Years' War*, Oxford, OPU, 2019, pp. 66-78.

⁹ The author also engages in comparisons with the previous century and across different geographic areas. For example, regarding the sixteenth century, he reflects on Zoltán Péter Bagi, «The Life of Soldiers during the Long Turkish War (1593–1606)», *The Hungarian Historical Review* 4.2 (2015), pp. 384-417. While for the eighteenth century, he draws on the work of Ilya Berkovich, *Motivation in War: The Experience of Common Soldiers in Old-Regime Europe*, Cambridge, CUP, 2017.



Jacques Callot, *Les Petite Misères et Malheurs de la guerre* (1633), tab. 5, 'the peasants' revenge'. National Gallery of Art, Washington, Public Domain

primary groups, which he reformulates as 'small group cohesion'¹⁰. Staiano-Daniels examines how these dynamics functioned during daily life rather than in combat, engaging with previous theses applied to the seventeenth century by Geoffrey Parker and Gregory Hanlon, particularly concerning the structural phenomenon of desertion¹¹. The main thesis here is that such cohesion was strengthened primarily by friendship, or at least familiarity, and that it was not forged in battle but rather in the routine activities that enabled coexistence among many individuals (cooking, eating, sleeping, collecting firewood, etc...) and through dealing with one another daily within a framework of formal and informal norms¹².

This cohesion could obviously also have negative repercussions, starting from desertion, but possibly extending to collective crimes such as gang rape and atrocities. In one case examined by the author, cohesion was at the origin of the theft of fabric destined for the regiment. The fabric was stolen, and by tracing the net-

¹⁰ Lucian Staiano-Daniels, The War People..., p. 58.

¹¹ See, for example, Geoffrey Parker, «Mutiny and Discontent in the Spanish Army of Flanders 1572-1607», *Past & Present*, Vol. 58 (Feb. 1973), pp. 38-52.

^{12 «}This raises the possibility that primary group cohesion or the influence of social networks at the micro scale were more important for the activities of seventeenth-century soldiers that did not include set-piece battle, like looting, scrounging, or guerrilla fighting, than to performance in battle itself». *Ivi*, pp. 72-73. This compelling point deserves further exploration in any future study of early modern warfare.

work through which its different parts were disseminated, the author reconstructs the connections and ties within this social web. This investigation also leads to an expanded study of the networks involving women and their varied roles as integral parts of the military community, but also as agents in the formation of formal and, often, informal families with soldiers. The author therefore includes a gender perspective in examining various aspects of masculinity in this society, particularly its relationship to violence¹³, which was perceived by Mansfelders as a means of resolution. He also reflects on how this mentality influenced the experience of communal life. A more specific focus is devoted to a particular couple and the homicide of Victoria Guarde, committed by her husband Theodoro de Camargo, commander of Mansfeld's infantry.

On the other hand, the author also analyzes religious coexistence in practice, starting from the fact that the Mansfeld regiment was Protestant but served the Catholic King of Spain. Staiano-Daniels explores the many levels at which this coexistence took place: within the regiment itself, between soldiers and local populations, and on a strategic level between Mansfeld and his political patrons¹⁴. The author observes that for soldiers, religious motives were sometimes important for joining and for their commitment to the cause they served, but often other factors mattered more. Religion was a significant element shaping relationships with civilians: in some areas, confessional ties influenced contributions, while in others, they served either to integrate better with locals or to maintain separation. However, as is now generally accepted for the Thirty Years War, there was never a clearcut division between Catholics and Protestants, since the world, especially among soldiers, was far more interconnected and complex (as the personal trajectory of Peter Hagendorf, which runs parallel to that of the Mansfelders, also illustrates).

Particular attention is also given to the status of soldiers and the role of veterans, alongside other key aspects for which the author presents substantial quantitative and well-analyzed data. Especially significant is the study of the regiment's economy. Staiano-Daniels examines not only the pay system but also how it fit

¹³ In this case as well, the author emphasizes the importance of engaging in dialogue with Gregory Hanlon and his Neo-Darwinian approach: Gregory Hanlon, *Italy 1636. Cemetery of armies*, Oxford, OPU, 2016, p. 88.

¹⁴ In recent years, increasing attention has been paid the complex relationship between religion and war, with particular attention to the coexistence of soldiers belonging to different confessional backgrounds: Nikolas Funke, Faith in war. Religion and the military in Germany, 1500-1650, New York, Berghahn Books 2024.



Sebastian Vrancx (1573-1647), *Soldaten plündern einen Bauernhof* (1620), Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin. Wikimedia Commons

into the broader economic context of the early seventeenth century, revealing new insights into how warfare was conducted. The quantitative analysis includes 20,002 separate entries for pikemen, halberdiers, and musketeers, tracking not only soldiers but also repeated payments, highlighting how financial organization was handled centrally by the army, rather than the state, within specific regions. Another important point concerns military commissions and their impact on local labor markets. Soldiers often took on civilian jobs while marching or quartered, seeking extra income. The author also notes contrasting perceptions of wealth: Mansfelders preferred coins, which were easier to carry, whereas civilians favored objects and services. This detailed analysis is valuable in assessing the strengths and limitations of organizing warfare through public-private financial networks, an approach long viewed as inferior to the state-run model that eventually prevailed: not through linear development, but through conflict, adaptation, and experimentation by the century's end¹⁵.

¹⁵ As David Parrott has thoroughly explained in several outstanding works, the warfare econ-

Linked to this, the book also addresses the spatial dimension and the complex relationship between civilians, who were not always passive victims and were often familiar with violence and the Mansfelders. This relationship, though highly conflictual (due in part to the lack of proper quarters and the resulting forced cohabitation), was central to the experience of warfare¹⁶. As emphasized in a recent article by Peter Wilson, Katerina Tkacova, and Thomas Pert, civilians played an important role during the *Kleiner Krieg* waged by early modern armies¹⁷. Finally, the last chapter examines the factors leading to the regiment's disbandment in 1627. The immediate cause was a delay in payment due to Stefano Balbi and an administrative oversight: once the funds did arrive, they were redirected to new Spanish tercios for unclear reasons. Staiano-Daniels contextualizes this within a broader framework, incorporating earlier economic issues and political dynamics—such as Mansfeld's absence from Italy and his negotiations with Wallenstein, demonstrating how multiple, overlapping factors shaped the regiment's dissolution.

As is often affirmed in microhistory studies, this book explores the normal exceptionality of a case study, shedding light on extraordinary aspects of what was, in many ways, a common experience for the period. The case of unknown soldiers in a foreign land with confessional differences is one we can find in varying forms across early seventeenth-century Europe, making this study valuable for future comparisons. The microscopic lens used here reveals that the changes debated by contemporary elites, particularly regarding drill and military finance, were often not visible in actual practice. Staiano-Daniels argues that not only the

omy of this period was complex and integrated between public and private spheres, involving multiple factors to consider. However, the rise of the State, although significant, was neither the inevitable outcome nor always the most suitable arrangement in every case, see: David Parrott, *The Business of War. Military enterprise and military revolution in early modern Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2012. Staiano-Daniels' detailed and internal perspective thus offers valuable new insights on this topic.

¹⁶ On the interactions between early-modern armies and the surrounding populations, as well as the relationship between war and the environment, see Lucian Staiano-Daniels, «Two Weeks in Summer Soldiers and Others in Occupied Hesse-Kassel, 14–28 July 1625», War in History, 30 (2), pp. 97-121.

¹⁷ Peter H. Wilson, Katerina Tkacova, Thomas Pert, «Mapping premodern small war: The case of the Thirty Years War (1618-48)», *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 34, 6 (Jun 2023), pp. 1043–1071. On the interactions between armies and local populations, as well as the role of refugees beyond their essential military, see Thomas Pert, «'If you make the people run away, you will starve': the military significance of refugees during the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648)», *War & Society*, vol. 43, 3 (2024), pp. 237–252.

strengths but also the weaknesses of early fiscal-military mechanisms shaped the living reality of warfare. He also raises doubts about the widespread adoption of drills: despite the many activities recorded, drills are never mentioned, while the role of veterans in transmitting practical knowledge is emphasized. In this way, the book contributes not only to early modern military history but also to the general social and economic history of the period, offering new insights through fresh documentation and perspectives.

An ambivalent aspect of the book is its narrative structure, used to recount the life of the regiment. On the one hand, this approach enhances the accessibility of the book for a broader readership beyond specialists in the social and military history of a seventeenth-century regiment. However, in some sections, the boundary between source-based information and authorial interpretation is not always clearly defined (such as in the account of the stolen fabric or the homicide of Victoria Guarde). The author's efforts to render certain episodes more vivid for modern readers occasionally blur the distinction between documented fact and narrative reconstruction. On the other hand, one topic not addressed in the book is how the regiment was structured for combat. Although the regiment was never deployed in major operations (aside from one raid, which is analyzed) its organization was intended for warfare. As a result, readers who are unfamiliar with the period may find some passages challenging, particularly when trying to grasp the broader role of the regiment within the wider historical context of war. Nonetheless, as explicitly stated in the subtitle, this is "A Social History of Common Soldiers [...]", and thus does not aim to address all aspects of warfare at the time.

In conclusion, this is a book that should not be missing from the personal library of anyone interested in the military history of the early modern period. Staiano-Daniels' study offers a rare, finely detailed portrait of a regiment that never made it to the battlefield, but in doing so it reveals the everyday mechanics, tensions, and human dynamics that sustained early modern warfare. In choosing to look away from conventional topics and toward lived experience, the book reshapes how we understand the infrastructure of war. At the same time, it holds great value for military historians and scholars of War Studies approaching the subject from a broader, interdisciplinary perspective, a reflection the author hasn't directly addressed in this book but has explored in other works focused on public engagement and explaining contemporary events¹⁸. Stepping beyond a strictly

¹⁸ STAIANO-DANIELS proposed on Foreign Policy a couple of interesting analogies between

early modern historical interpretation, the book highlights the essential but often overlooked efforts that, while not always decisive, are fundamental to the functioning and sustenance of warfare. These dynamics, seen from a strategic angle, are shaped by political and military decisions taken by a range of actors operating at different levels of the war effort. They form part of a process of movement and negotiation rather than the straightforward execution of pre-defined war plans. Mansfeld recruited and mobilized a regiment for the Valtelline conflict, but shifting political circumstances derailed this plan. Soon after, he returned to Germany in pursuit of new political opportunities, effectively abandoning his men, who bore the consequences of these higher-level decisions. Was the movement of this regiment, therefore, 'useless'? Military history has often focused on the successful outcomes of transformation processes and the decisive elements of conflicts. This book, by contrast, reminds us that understanding the broader machinery of war also requires studying those episodes that did not culminate in victory or decisive action, but nonetheless reveal the structural logic of early modern warfare.

The absence of significant events can itself be revealing. Reflecting on these elements reminds us of the high degree of uncertainty underlying the decisions that shape the complex dynamics of every war: decisions made not according to fixed schemes but as responses to ever-changing developments. The Mansfeld regiment arrived in Italy too late to participate meaningfully in the conflict and disbanded prematurely, just a year before a new international crisis erupted there, directly involving Spain and France (the War of the Mantuan Succession). More broadly, considering how transformations in warfare are rarely linear, but instead encompass multiple, simultaneous possibilities (including the occasional futility of invested efforts) illustrates the coexistence of conflicting mechanisms within the same historical periods. This unpredictability is a constant that historical actors must navigate. Studying how these processes unfolded and affected lives in the early seventeenth century remains invaluable for understanding warfare.

Luca Domizio (University of Genoa)

diverse historical events and the current Russo-Ukrainian War: «Prigozhin Should Study Europe's Greatest Mercenary [Wallenstein]», *FP*, July 2 (2023); «How the Hundred Years' War Explains Ukraine's Invasion of Russia», *FP*, September 1 (2024).



Carle Vanloo (1737 / 1747), *Le Voeu de Louis XIII au siège de la Rochelle en 1628*, esquisse du tableau du Maître-autel de l'église de Notre-Dame-des-Victoires. Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris, P1912, CC0 Paris Musées / Musée Carnavalet - Histoire de Paris,

Storia Militare Moderna (6)

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- The Night in Early Modern Warfare: Risks, Opportunities, and Military Perceptions of Darkness, by Luca Domizio
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 di PIETRO TURATO
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