



**Gregory Hanlon.** *The Twilight of a Military Tradition: Italian Aristocrats and European Conflicts, 1560-1800.* New York: Holmes & Meier, 1998. xii + 371 pp. \$24.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8419-1388-2; \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8419-1387-5.



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**Published on** H-Italy (September, 1999)

Professor Hanlon studied at Bourdeaux University and has published on French social, religious, and military history. His present book adds a necessary Italian counterpoint to the growing literature on military change in early modern Europe. Rather than blazing a new trail, however, the book—in his words, a summation of Italian and “foreign” literature—is more a pause to scan the lay of the land before marching forward.

*The Twilight of a Military Tradition* traces Italian military fortunes from galley warfare on the sixteenth-century Mediterranean to Napoleon Bonaparte, discussing political and military background with specific attention to the activities of Italian aristocratic officers. Dozens of prominent officers are discussed in some detail. With few exceptions Italian military nobles sought their fortunes in Spanish and Imperial Habsburg service, and though they were thought by the Spanish to lack “resilience” (p. 73), they excelled in artillery and engineering. Because the attraction of foreign service reduced the numbers of noble officers and mercenaries on the peninsula, the Italian states could not easily mobilize for war. The thorough destruction of the Po valley in the mid-seventeenth century also rendered it difficult for Italian princes to retain officers and troops, and thus that period saw a downturn in Italian military fortunes.

Venice, with its wealth and access to an overseas em-

pire, however, was able to maintain military power including light cavalry (made up of Greeks, Corsicans, Albanians, and Bosnians), a peasant militia, strong fortifications, “military specialists” who contracted to raise experienced forces quickly, and fleets to transport, feed, and supply troops well into the eighteenth century. The greatest threat to Venetian power was the Ottoman Empire, which attacked Venetian territories in 1645, causing Venice to seek manpower in Dalmatia, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, and France. Hanlon’s discussion of the 1647 siege of Candia illustrates very well the strengths and weaknesses of Venetian military power. By the eighteenth century Venice no longer considered war a viable option and withdrew from European conflict; it surrendered to the French in 1796. In general, Italy remained peripheral to events in Europe and its military contributions were therefore minimal in the eighteenth century.

The more important chapters, from the standpoint of understanding early modern Italian officers, profile their careers and describe the broader culture in which the Italian military profession was embedded. To discuss careers, Hanlon relies primarily on several biographical encyclopedias compiled during the Fascist era (1940s). Though he questions the reliability of the encyclopedias (and admits that other primary sources do not entirely corroborate them), the author draws from them gen-

eral conclusions about Italian officers as a social group. He observes that most military nobles came from autonomous urban centers in the north and central regions, especially Venice, and from the region around Naples and from Sicily. Most military nobles came from families with a history in government, though they did not necessarily serve their own princes. Before 1650, most served the Spanish king, and after 1660 the Holy Roman Emperor. In pursuit of better positions, early modern officers frequently departed from service in one army for another, but the Italians tended to remain in service to one of the two Habsburg houses, or to the French. A general decline in aristocratic military service can be traced from the late seventeenth century; for example, 563 Italians in Spanish service in the fifty years prior to 1660 dwindled to 98 in the subsequent fifty years. The casualty rate among Italian officers was higher than other itinerant mercenaries as well; Redlich indicates slightly more than 14 percent of the 1,500 military enterprisers in his study died in battle or subsequent wounds, whereas the encyclopedias suggest that 17 percent of Italian officers died on campaign.

Following Fritz Redlich, Hanlon concludes that the principle motivations for entering military service were to obtain wealth (through sacking and plundering, selling commissions, safe-conducts or leaves, levying contributions from locals, and stealing soldiers' wages) and honor. Successful Italian military enterprisers had powerful families to support them; many were princes from dynasties such as the Medici, Della Rovere, Este, and Gonzaga. A significant proportion of officers wealthy enough to own multiple regiments in the Imperial forces between 1625 and 1640, for example, were Italian. When states gained greater control over warfare the opportunities for wealth and advancement remained open only to a few, and military service became a financial burden for officers and cadets who had to equip themselves and provide for their regiments. Very few officers became wealthy and these were only the highest ranking; pay for captains decreased throughout the latter half of the seventeenth century. Economic hard times forced families in the seventeenth century to concentrate their estates under a single heir, and junior branches were unable to marry unless they attained success in a profession such as medicine, diplomacy, administration, or the military. More than wealth—illusory and unattainable for most young Italian warriors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—honor was the primary motivation

for entering military service. Service could remove the stigma of a criminal record, or earn a title or place at court, or even the devolution of landholdings on the officer's family. Military discipline was considered to be the "foundation of every office and every honour" (p. 265). The military profession declined in Italian society, in part, because the officers had fewer heirs and found wealth and advancement more scarce than in other avenues of service, such as the church.

The final chapter discusses the heavily militarized culture surrounding Italian military officers up until the end of the seventeenth century. It was composed of chivalric images, martial pageantry, real and fictitious genealogies, bellicosity and competitiveness as an expression of aristocratic cultural aspirations, public evocations in print and the visual arts of military reputation in history, jousts ("battle-theatre"), and popular games that glorified war. Hanlon, following others, argues that aristocratic values in Italy gradually shifted away from "military virtue" toward a "knightly virtue" that emphasized a "resolute defence of one's good reputation" through such media as the duel, thus threatening the stability of society and the capability of the military (p. 342). An important response to the decay of discipline and waste of talent represented by the practice of dueling was the academy, which gave young officers invaluable career training and made them professionals who studied and practiced scientific warfare: mathematics, architecture, and engineering were central. Military professionalism was defined by the officer's ability to inspire confidence in his troops and control them through military drill and group esprit de corps (fostered by innovations like the uniform). This return to discipline was characteristic of the broader "disciplinary society" that developed in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as armies across Europe became more and more extensions of state authority and power. In Italy, Piedmont was the only example of this trend of any significance because, as military service became more professional, Italian society became correspondingly demilitarized; fewer nobles participated in war. In his concluding remarks Hanlon calls for a team of historians to spread out and canvass the archives of Europe, surveying all likely documents in order to come at and evaluate "the presence not only of individuals in military careers, but also of military dynasties" (p. 358). A noble vision, revealing the depth of his scholarly roots in French academic soil.

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**Citation:** W. M. Reger. Review of Hanlon, Gregory, *The Twilight of a Military Tradition: Italian Aristocrats and European Conflicts, 1560-1800*. H-Italy, H-Net Reviews. September, 1999.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=3452>

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