

**Books for captains and captains in books:  
Italo-German conference on the training  
and image of the military leader during the  
Renaissance**

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The aim of the conference was to address the subject of the training, the political role and the image of the army commander in the Renaissance, with a view to casting light on the numerous artistic, literary and political expressions generated by this figure. Considerable changes took place on the stage of battle towards the end of the sixteenth century: the war of movement made way for static warfare, professionalism was consolidated, new types of weapons were introduced and specialised soldiers joined the ranks. In this context both new writers and new readers emerged, and there was an intensive flowering of artistic and literary production in the form of both specialist treatises and political precepts. Treatises inspired by Machiavelli's *The Art of War* and collections of precepts based on the model of classical and modern authors offered lessons and advice destined to the training of the good soldier and the good commander. These works are not concerned only with military tactics or logistics, but also with the definition of the political role of the *condottiere*. The purpose of the conference was to focus on the social and cultural image of the army commander through an analysis of certain specific works and the editorial context underlying them.

In addition, the conference focused on certain undervalued aspects of the relations between Italy and Germany in the Modern Age. Interrelations in both artistic and religious spheres have been extensively explored by scholars, but there is still much study to be done on the reciprocal influences of literary genres, editorial circuits and cultural exchanges between the two countries. Through-

out the Modern Age both have experienced an endemic state of war: religious, social and political conflicts were the order of the day and became part of the collective imagination, with a massive influence on literature and the arts. In Italy as in Germany, the figure of the military commander played an important role in this process, and his *Institutio* knitted together military and civil virtues, assuming religious and political connotations. We have tried to find out whether a sort of *Kulturtransfer* between Italy and Germany took place in this specific sphere and whether and how the literary models exerted an influence on the representation of power and on the definition of a new social model.

In fact, while the identity of the military leader in the Communal Age was quite clearly defined – an exponent of the militia, he set up a vassal power relationship with an authority (cathedral chapter, abbot etc.) and in turn could be granted the power to invest vavasors – in the Modern Age the commander or captain became a multi-faceted figure which needs to be grasped in all its complexity. The commander is one of the key figures of modern Europe which – alongside those of the knight, the courtier and the secretary – contributed to define European identity. He could be a soldier of fortune, in a position to pay and maintain an army, or even the head of a state, but he might also be an officer, a figure with a specific role within the ranks of a structured army. In the Modern Age, the captain can apparently be identified with a range of figures, with at one end the emperor – the ultimate embodiment of military leadership – in the centre the officer-soldier and at the other end the mercenary.

The captain, who held not only military but also moral authority, was the subject of an extremely vast and largely unexplored cultural production which, from the second half of the sixteenth century and for at least the next hundred years, sought to describe and establish the traits of the good, perfect and even sacred commander. The aim of our conference was to focus on the manifold universe of this phenomenon in Europe through the analysis of portraits, descriptions, *institutiones*, translations, biographies, treatises, and by presenting both representative examples and special

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cases.

The conference was broken down into four sessions: 1. Comparison of ancient and modern models: the classical sources and their uses; 2. The library of the army commander: treatises, historiography and technical manuals; 3. Literary representations of the military chief; 4. Artistic representations of the military chief.

In the first session GASTONE BRECCIA (Pavia) presented his research on the new challenges of military commanders on the battlefields from a technical point of view through a series of case-studies. In Early Modern Europe the battlefield gets deadlier, more extended in space and far more complex, overcrowded with men and weapons, which asked for a radically new kind of leadership. As a matter of fact, not many captains of the age were able to meet the needs, and make the best use of their resources, caught as they were between ancient *exempla*, new technologies, often unwieldy armies and cumbersome tactics. Breccia's stimulating paper confronted the issue of the clash between modern warfare and the courtly conception of war as a battle among *gentiluomini*, thus investigating the rise of the captain as a representative of a new ethic and of new social virtues.

WOLFGANG E. J. WEBER (Augsburg) analyzed Johann Nicolaus Flämitzer's *Politico-militärischer Staats-Minister oder Prudentia politico-militaris* (1688, 1730). Flämitzer, who was himself a captain, studied history and law. He is the author of a number of works, mainly political, which Weber briefly analyzed and discussed before focusing on his main work. This most interesting treatise suggests the importance, if not the necessity, of a military constitution as the best government. Flämitzer dealt extensively with the creation of a well-ordered army, facing financial, political, and technical problems. Needless to say, a large part of his work is dedicated to the selection and training of soldiers and of their commanders. Flämitzer's work is of the utmost interest as it raises the issue of the relations between nations in the European space. While excluding the very possibility of alliances with enemies like the Turks, this work addresses the controversial issue of the exis-

tence of a military state in the heart of Europe.

ALBERT SCHIRRMESTER (Paris) spoke about the historiographic and ethnographic representation of military leaders, with special attention to the way the foreign military mores and skills are characterized in contrast to the own rules. Schirrmeister resorted to the German humanistic historiography and ethnographic literature as sources and brought as examples Sigmund von Herberstein's work about the Russians (1526 and later), Johannes Böhm von Aub's *Omnium gentium mores* (1521), but also 17th-century authors like Julius Zinzgref and Justus Lipsius. He investigated how those authors managed cultural differences and how they described the task of a military leader before the conflict and in a conflict, successfully describing the cultural patterns used to legitimate their opinion and the context of their works.

In the second session, MERIO SCATTOLA (Padova) spoke about the military leaders in the *Beichtvaterspiegel*: The *Beichtvaterspiegel*, also known as *Summulae confessoriorum*, were a popular literary genre in the Middle Ages and in the early modern age, which has made a significant contribution to the collection and systematization of knowledge of moral philosophy and theology. Such works are structured as series of cases and situations that a confessor might be confronted with, set in alphabetical order. Among these cases were also those related to war and military life, and particularly those concerning the captain and the difficult conditions he could face. Thanks to these works, one can analyse some of the main questions connected to the exercise of military power in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Scattola's paper analysed in depth, from this peculiar perspective, the dilemmas and the philosophical, theological and moral solutions of the captain on the battlefield.

VALENTINA LEPRİ's (Warsaw) paper focused on *Il cavaliere* by Domenico Mora, which was published in Vilnius in 1589. Mora was an Italian writer and military leader who had lived twenty years in Poland working at the service of two kings of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Stephen Báthory and Sigismund III Vasa. In the course of his career, he wrote several works on military ed-

ucation, a subject – as he put it – which is a better choice if compared to literary and humanities studies. Among his works *Il cavaliere* is a very interesting case because it also acts as a sort of mirror of Mora's cultural contacts. Lepri's paper had two main goals: first of all, to shed light on the features of military education proposed by the author. Secondly, to assess the influence exerted on his work by two contemporary leading Italian and Polish figures: Antonio Possevino and the powerful king's counsellor Jan Zamoyski.

MARIA ELENA SEVERINI's (Florence) intervention concerned Marcantonio Gandino's Italian translation of Frontinus' *Stratagemata*. Sextus Julius Frontinus' *Stratagemata militari* were widely read and appreciated in the late Renaissance. The Italian version, published by the humanist Marcantonio Gandino in Venice in 1574 and dedicated to the general Giacomo Soranzo, enriches the text, learnedly annotated, with *exempla* of military strategies drawn from contemporaries – such as Biondo, Giovio, Guicciardini – in order to provide the captains „con gli esempi di consiglio et providenza [...] acciò che, paragonati i moderni et gli antichi insieme, se ne potesse trarre maggior frutto“, and defines, through the comparison with the ancient leaders and a mixture between the war register and the political doctrine, the figure of the modern commander.

The third session concerned the literary representations of the military chief. MARCO VERSIERO (Naples) analyzed „a lost book for a *condottiere* by Leonardo da Vinci“. In 1584, Lomazzo mentioned a sketchbook Leonardo had compiled for the „condottiere“ Gentile de' Borri, a fencing master in Milan at the time of his long stay at the Sforza court (1482–1499). This lost manuscript, whose only surviving pages have been tentatively identified with a couple of sheets preserved in Venice, was focused on the theme of the most reliable military techniques, to be followed by both infantry and cavalry in battle. In Lomazzo's description (fitting also with other comparable sheets), such draft would have featured consistent references to the political context (mainly, Sforza's military alliance with the German Emperor), together with a peculiar comparison between the human and animal identities, almost as a pre-

lude to Machiavelli's *Art of War*.

The „holy captain“ was the subject of MARCO FAINI's (Cambridge, UK) presentation. His paper focused on a particular aspect of the military commander: his sacredness. Starting from the Middle Ages, preachers compared Christ to a captain. But it was only in the years of the Council of Trent that in different sources – collections of precepts, technical treatises, epic poems – foundations were settled for a new definition of the commander as sacred or holy. The archetypical battle of Michael against the rebel angels provided the pattern for this new definition. Faini explored these sources in order to define what a sacred commander was expected to be and what his symbolic and ceremonial features were.

TEODORO KATINIS (Baltimore) spoke about Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* from the point of view of the practice of the military leadership. His paper explored the crusaders and their chief Goffredo di Buglione as the 'members' and the 'head' of the same body. Luigi Firpo, Sergio Zatti and David Quint – to mention some of the major Tasso scholars – proposed different interpretations of the poem from a political point of view. Following some of their suggestions, Katinis read Tasso's epic poem as a *mise-en-scène* of the dramatic relationship between Goffredo and the knights. During the war many factors, such as pagan sorcery, the power of Satan, the temperament and the rhetoric of Argillano challenge Buglione's ability to rule and his authority. Looking at the alternate fortune of Goffredo's leadership, we can experience a political reading of Tasso's poem as a work addressed to whoever wants to be a chief on an epic quest.

VITTORIO TRANQUILLI (Urbino) spoke about the heroism of jests in Francesco Andreini's *Le bravure del Capitano Spavento*. The *Commedia dell'Arte*, the Italian artistic phenomenon which founded the modern theatre, was enormously successful in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. One of its most famous masks was that of the Captain. Francesco Andreini, the acclaimed performer of Captain Spavento, proposed this character even in the collection of dialogues *Le bravure del Capitano Spavento* (1607–09/1618), a

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book also translated in France and Germany. In this typically baroque work, generally regarded as disengaged literature, the author, rather than resolving heroism into parody, he assigns to the protagonist the task of dealing comically with the myths of poetry and, therefore, of dissolving the values of traditional culture.

In the last session, BORIS DJUBO (St. Petersburg) considered the participation of Axel Oxenstierna in the German school reform program in the Thirty Years War. Djubo explored the influence of Axel Oxenstierna (1583–1654) who was a Swedish ambassador to Germany, on the reform of education in Germany. Djubo's point was that Wolfgang Ratke's educational programme was pursued even during the Thirty Years War. In Ratke's view, the German language had to be improved, particularly through a system of popular schools. Oxenstierna was a member of the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* who contributed to the development of Ratke's cultural programme, and founded a number of schools. Djubo's paper successfully highlighted the persistence of a lively cultural scenario in a time of war, while also showing the complex relations between Germany and Sweden in those crucial years.

ILARIO MANFREDINI (Pisa) cast light on the image of the 'soldier prince' in Florence and Turin in the second half of the sixteenth century, when Italian courts displayed their power through literature and visual arts. Manfredini's paper dealt with such self-representation from an interdisciplinary point of view, taking into account literary works as well as frescoes and paintings. As a matter of fact, the Medici and Savoy families planned a politic of prestige marked by the reconstruction of their own familiar history, with particular attention to their major military exploits. The Savoy fashioned themselves as princes of the Empire at the service of the Catholic religion, especially, as Manfredini showed, in the literary works of Filiberto Pingone and Giovanni Botero, while Cosimo I aimed to be represented as a new Augustus, able to build the Grand Duchy of Tuscany.

Finally, MARKUS MEUMANN (Gotha) put the topic and the papers of the conference into a wider context, thereby triggering the fi-

nal discussion. The participants agreed that the conference provided an extensive insight into an understudied, if not neglected, subject. The rise of the captain has been investigated in early modern Europe through a wide variety of sources: treatises, poems, books of precepts, translations from the classics, and visual sources. While the focus was mainly on Italy, the papers stressed the relevance of cultural transfer to and from Germany, while also taking into account other countries such as Sweden, France, and Spain. The interdisciplinary approach allowed us to successfully reconstruct the figure of the captain, to understand the reasons of its rise, and to explain its multifarious representations. One could also add that the conference enabled us to investigate from new perspectives some of the most crucial historiographical questions concerning early modern Europe, such as the role of the Counter Reformation.

#### Conference overview:

##### 1. *Comparison of Ancient and Modern Models: The Classical Sources and their Uses*

Gastone Breccia (University of Pavia), *Virtus Under Fire. Leadership in a deadlier battlefield, XVI-XVII c.*

Wolfgang E. J. Weber (Institut für Europäische Kulturgeschichte, Augsburg), *Analysis of Johann Nicolaus Flämitzer's „Politico-militärischer Staats-Minister oder Prudentia politico-militaris“ (1688, 1730)*

Albert Schirrmeister (EHESS Paris), *Remarks on historiographic and ethnographic representation of military leaders*

##### 2. *The library of the army commander: treatises, historiography and technical manuals*

Merio Scattola (University of Padova), *Der militärische Führer in den Beichtvaterspiegeln des XVI. Jahrhunderts*

Valentina Lepri (University of Warsaw), *Military strategies versus „Humanae Litterae“: the rules of Domenico Mora, chief of the army in 16th-century Poland*

Maria Elena Severini (National Institute for Renaissance Studies, Florence), *Marcantonio Gandino's Italian Translation of Frontinus'*

Stratagemmi militari

3. *Literary representations of the military chief*

Marco Versiero (Istituto Italiano di Scienze Umane SUM, Naples), „Risistere alla furia de' cavagli e degli omini d'arme". A lost book for a „condottiere" by Leonardo da Vinci

Marco Faini (University of Cambridge, UK), The holy captain. Military command and sacredness in early-modern age

Teodoro Katinis (Johns Hopkins University), Goffredo and his Army. The Art of Leadership in Tasso's Gerusalemme liberata

Vittorio Tranquilli (University of Urbino „Carlo Bo"), The heroism of jests in Francesco Andreini's „Le bravure del Capitano Spavento"

4. *Artistic representations of the military chief*

Boris Djubo (Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg), Die Mitwirkung des Leiters des Kriegswesens Oxenstierna am deutschen Schulreformprogramm in der Zeit des Dreißigjährigen Krieges

Ilario Manfredini (University of Pisa), The image of the „soldier prince" at Florence and Turin in the second half of the sixteenth century

Markus Meumann (Gotha), General commentary on the conference

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