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N. 4  
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Fascicolo 15. Giugno 2023  
**Storia Militare Moderna**

a cura di  
VIRGLIO ILARI



*Società Italiana di Storia Militare*

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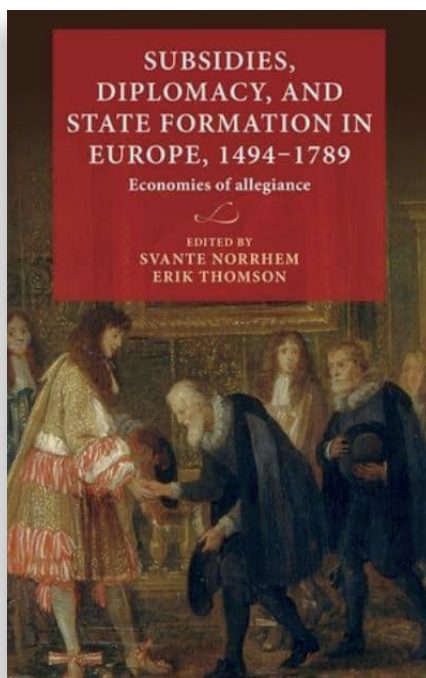
*Ultima Ratio Regum* (Estrema ragione dei Re) iscrizione su un cannone all'ingresso del Museo di Storia Militare di Budapest. Foto O. Mustafiri, CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication (Wikipedia commons).

Il celebre motto fu apposto sulle canne delle artiglierie francesi fuse dal 1650 al 1793, e anche su parte delle coeve artiglierie sabaude. La variante *ultima ratio regis* (estrema ragione del re) fu usata a partire dal 1742 sulle artiglierie prussiane e successivamente anche sui cannoni spagnoli, mentre l'analogo *regis ultima ratio* è tuttora il motto dell'artiglieria belga.

SVANTE NORRHEM & ERIK THOMSON (EDS.)

*Subsidies, Diplomacy, and State Formation in Europe, 1494–1789. Economies of Allegiance*

Lund, Lund University Press, 2020, pp. 296



**I**n *Subsidies, Diplomacy, and State Formation in Europe*, editors Svante Norrhem and Erik Thomson provide a selection of chapters examining the crucial role played by subsidies in European diplomatic relations between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. The editors propose a broad definition of subsidies, conceived primarily as ‘the payment of money by one sovereign to another in return for military and political aid, typically agreed upon

by means of a formal agreement and even treaty'<sup>1</sup>. Norrhem and Thomson avoid defining 'subsidiaries' too narrowly, since 'early modern statesmen could use many different words including pensions, gratifications, gifts, favours, and other terms relatively loosely to refer to obligations to furnish money or other resources in return for political considerations or military co-operation'<sup>2</sup>. France, being one of the major providers of subsidies throughout the Early Modern Age, constitutes the – non-exclusive – focus of the volume<sup>3</sup>. During the sixteenth century, the kings of France developed a strategy based on the payment of subsidies in the context of their rivalry with the House of Habsburg. From the 1530s onwards, the latter could count on American silver to finance its own war effort and subsidies. France instead counted on its comparatively advanced state apparatus and the vast tax base ensured by a numerous population. Later, in the long eighteenth century, the United Provinces of the Netherlands and Britain became the main competitors of France with regard to subsidies. On their part, the Hapsburg Emperors could offer much in terms of symbolic capital, prestige and titles to win the support of the princes of the Empire to their cause<sup>4</sup>.

On the one hand, the editors argue that a 'New Diplomatic History' approach, with its close cultural reading, cannot reconstruct the broader picture of 'how powers made fundamental choices about how to relate with others over time'<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, they consider that historians have traditionally shown only limited interest in subsidies and the transfer of resources between polities as 'distinct and central problems of early modern diplomacy'<sup>6</sup>. Older scholarship addressed the issue with a moral judgement attached<sup>7</sup> or, even though of excellent quality<sup>8</sup>, still

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1 Svante NORRHEM & Erik THOMSON, *Introduction*, in idem (Eds.), *Subsidies, Diplomacy, and State Formation in Europe, 1494–1789. Economies of Allegiance*, Lund, Lund University Press, 2020, p. 3.

2 Ibidem.

3 Ibid., p. 4.

4 Anuschka TISCHER, *The role of subsidies in seventeenth-century French foreign relations and their European context*, *ibid.* p. 31.

5 Norrhem & Thomson, *Introduction*, p. 10.

6 Ibid., p. 9.

7 For instance, reference is made to Max BRAUBACH, *Die Bedeutung der Subsidien für die Politik im spanischen Erbfolgekriege*, Bonn-Leipzig: Kurt Schroeder Verlag, 1923, pp. 41, 71, 186-190.

8 For instance, reference is made to Ragnhild HATTON, 'Gratifications and Foreign Policy: Anglo-French Rivalry in Sweden during the Nine Years War', in *William III and Lou-*

left room for new research based on present-day methodologies and interactions with adjoining fields<sup>9</sup>.

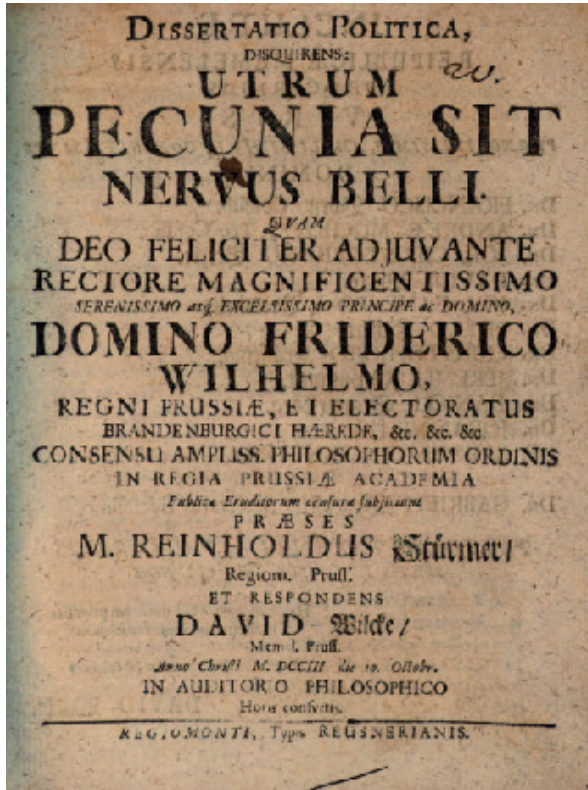
The volume's structure is as follows: the introduction explains the editors' aims and angles of approach (pp. 1-24). Chapter one, by Anuschka Tischer (pp. 25-42), studies France's use of subsidies during the seventeenth century, mostly in the context of the French-Habsburg struggle. Tryntje Helfferich in chapter two (pp. 43-67) examines how French subsidies to German states during the Thirty Years' War were understood by the recipients. Chapter three, by Peter H. Wilson (pp. 68-92), places subsidies in the broader context of what he terms 'fiscal-military instruments', or varied ways in which resources needed for war were transferred among states, by state officials or by private entrepreneurs. Chapters four and five, respectively written by Svante Norrhem and Erik Bodensten (pp. 93-117, 118-145), focus on Sweden, one of the primary and long-standing receivers of French subsidies. They delve into the complex relationship between giver and recipient and the impact of subsidies on the Swedish state and society. Philippe Rogger in chapter six (pp. 146-171) deals with the case of the Swiss Confederation, and its political elite, as recipients of subsidies and pensions in the sixteenth century. Andreas Flurschütz da Cruz in chapter seven (pp. 172-187) zooms in on the minor German principality of Waldeck, showing how even tiny European states could profit significantly from subsidy deals, with the ambition of improving their positions within the intricate web of the 'society of princes'. Tilman Haug (chapter eight, pp. 188-212), addresses the challenges encountered by small German princely states when obtaining subsidies from the great powers, focusing on three case studies. This chapter also looks beyond the state, focusing on the role played by 'cross-border networks'. The last two chapters, by Erik Thomson and Marianne Klerk (pp. 213-233, 234-258), focus on the role played by non-state actors in procuring and transferring resources during the Thirty Years' War.

The volume has the merit of uncovering the nuanced and complex impact that

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*is XIV: Essays 1680-1720* by and for Mark A. THOMSON, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1968, pp. 68-94; Andrew Lossky, 'La Picquetière's Projected Mission to Moscow in 1682 and the Swedish Policy of Louis XIV', in Alan D. FERGUSON & Alfred LEVIN (Eds.), *Essays in Russian History: A Collection Dedicated to George Vernadsky*, Hamden: Archon Books, 1964; Janine FAYARD, 'Les tentatives de constitution d'un tiers party en Allemagne du Nord 1690-1694', *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, 79 (1965), pp. 338-372.

9 NORRHEM & THOMSON, *Introduction*, p. 13.



Reinhold Stürmer, *Dissertatio politica disquirens utrum pecunia sit nervus belli* (1703)

of subsidies, and on Sweden and various German states as recipients. Perhaps, more references could have been made to Denmark-Norway, another key recipient of foreign subsidies, often in competition with its longstanding rival, Sweden<sup>11</sup>. Such analysis would have benefitted from references to Éric Schnakenbourg's substantial scholarship on Nordic international relations and the significant place

the payment of subsidies produced on the state formation processes of small and medium powers. Two of them, Piedmont-Savoy and Brandenburg-Prussia, proved particularly successful in acquiring resources from the great powers, shifting their allegiances when they deemed it necessary or convenient, without losing their independence and margin of autonomy, ultimately reaching great power status<sup>10</sup>. The picture appears more problematic for other states such as Sweden, Denmark-Norway and most German principalities.

As already mentioned, the volume is centred on France as a major provider

<sup>10</sup> Erik BODENSTEN, *The problems with receiving subsidies: Sweden and the lesser powers in the long eighteenth century*, *ibid.*, p. 132. See also Christopher STORRS, *War, Diplomacy, and the Rise of Savoy, 1690–1720*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999; Gregory HANLON, *The Twilight of a Military Tradition. Italian Aristocrats and European Conflicts, 1560-1800*, New York: Holmes & Meier, 1998, pp. 275-302.

<sup>11</sup> A brief reference is made by Erik Bodenstein in his chapter, he correctly compares the different geostrategic situations of Denmark-Norway and Sweden, in *The problems with receiving subsidies*, p. 139.



therein played by neutrality in the Early Modern Age<sup>12</sup>. For instance, during the Nine Years' War (1688-1697), Christian IV of Denmark-Norway first accepted to provide soldiers to the Anglo-Dutch allies in exchange for subsidies (1689), then entered into secret negotiations with the French envoy Hyacinthe Guillaume Foullé, seigneur de Martangis (1691) whose limited objective was to maintain Denmark-Norway neutral and to stop the flow of Danish recruits to enemy armies<sup>13</sup>. In the meanwhile, Christian IV continued to negotiate with William III<sup>14</sup>.

In conclusion, *Subsidies, Diplomacy, and State Formation in Europe* succeeds in providing different perspectives on the role played by the payment of subsidies in forging alliances and in allowing sovereigns to pursue ambitious goals in the international arena as well as within their own territories. In other words, the book should be included in the library of all those interested in early modern warfare, state formation processes, international relations and diplomacy.

STEFANO CATTELAN<sup>15</sup>

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12 Éric SCHNAKENBOURG, *Entre la guerre et la paix. Neutralité et relations internationales XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires, 2013; idem, (ed.) *Neutres et neutralité dans l'espace atlantique durant le long XVIIIe siècle (1700-1820): une approche globale = Neutrals and neutrality in the Atlantic world during the long eighteenth century (1700-1820): a global approach*, Bécherel: Editions Les Perséides, 2015; idem, *La France, le Nord et l'Europe au début du XVIIIe siècle*, Paris: Champion, 2008; Pierrick POURCHASSE & Éric SCHNAKENBOURG; 'La France et la Scandinavie aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: aperçu historiographique et tendances actuelles de la recherche', in *Histoire, économie & société*, 29(1) (2010), pp. 7-12; Éric SCHNAKENBOURG & Jean-Marie MAILLEFER, (Eds.) *La Scandinavie à l'époque moderne*, Paris: Belin, 2010.

13 'Négociations en cette cour de 1690 à 1698 par Usson the Bonrepaus, ambassadeur extraordinaire du Roi à Copenhague', Archives des affaires étrangères (AAE), Correspondance politique (CP), Danemark, vol. 36, fol. 19; see also vol. 37, fol. 193-194, Louis XIV à Martangis, 31 August 1691. Cf. SCHNAKENBOURG, *Entre la guerre et la paix*, pp. 132-133.

14 M. LANE, 'The relations between England and the Northern Powers, 1689-1697. Part 1, Denmark', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5, 1911, pp. 157-191; Holger C. REEDTZ, *Répertoire historique et chronologique des traités conclus par la couronne de Danemarck, depuis Canut-le-Grand jusqu'à 1800*, Göttingen, Dieterich, 1826, pp. 147-149.

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UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI  
DI GENOVA



# Storia dei Mediterranei

*Passi, culture e scoperte dal tardo Medioevo al 1870*

Edizioni di storia e studi sociali

Aula Magna della Scuola di Scienze Umanistiche (Via Balbi 2)  
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# Storia Militare Moderna

## Articoli / Articles

- Nuove fonti veneziane sulla battaglia di Mohács  
di MÁRTON SZOVÁK
- Cultural and Knowledge Exchange between Dubrovnik and Livorno at the Time of Ferdinando I de' Medici,  
by MIRELA ALTIC
- Dall'armata a cavallo all'arma di cavalleria. Trasformazione militare e mutamento sociale attraverso la trattatistica italiana della prima età moderna,  
di LUCA DOMIZIO
- Vittorioso ad Alessandretta? L'«impresa navale» di Kenelm Digby fra autopromozione, miti nazionali e frammenti di realtà,  
di VIVIANA CASTELLI
- Due dispacci cifrati al veleno nella guerra di Candia,  
di PAOLO BONA VOGLIA
- Breitenfeld and Montecuccoli. How to learn from a battle,  
by MARCO MOSTARDA
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par ROBERTO BARAZZUTTI
- La mobilitazione dei cittadini di Pavia in occasione dell'assedio del 1655,  
di FABIO ROMANONI
- «Con questo candido, et ordinario stile dà soldato». *Il Diario dell'Assedio di Valenza* dell'ingegnere Gaspare Beretta,  
di MARCO GIUSEPPE LONGONI
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di FRANCESCO BIASI
- L'Ordine di Malta nella Seconda guerra di Morea attraverso i diari di viaggio del cavaliere fra' Afranio Petrucci, maggiore dei vascelli (1715-1717),  
di MAURO DIFRANCESCO
- La battaglia di Petrovaradino. 1716,  
di ADRIANO PAPO e GIZELLA NEMETH
  - «Una nazione assai ardata et azzardosa». Le forze navali inglesi nel bacino alto tirrenico al tempo della guerra di Successione austriaca,  
di SAMUELE VIRGA
- Uomini che scrivono e parlano come operano, e come sentono. Eloquenza politica e retorica militare nelle riflessioni di Francesco Algarotti,  
di DENISE ARICÒ
- People at arms and soldiers in Lefkada during the Septinsular Republic (1801-07),  
by SEVASTI LAZARI
- La difficile mise sur pied des Tirailleurs du Pô,  
par BRUNO PAUVERT
- Le gendarmerie dei principati di Lucca e Piombino e di Benevento e Pontecorvo,  
di PIERO CROCIANI

*Prospettive.* • Nelson and the Naval Crisis of 1790s, by JEREMY BLACK

## Recensioni / Reviews

- BÉATRICE HEUSER, *War A Genealogy of Western Ideas and Practices*  
(by LUCA DOMIZIO)
- JEREMY BLACK (ed.), *Global Military Transformations: Change and Continuity, 1450-1800*  
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(by MARK CHARLES FISSEL)
  - GIAMPIERO BRUNELLI (cur.), Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica, 2/2022. Sezione monografica: *La rivoluzione militare dell'età moderna*  
(di MARCO MOSTARDA)
- SVANTE NORRHEM & ERIC THOMSON, *Subsidies, Diplomacy, and State Formation in Europe, 1494-1789. Economies of Allegiance*  
(di STEFANO CATTELAN)
- GHEORGIOS THEOTOKIS and AYSYL YILDIZ, *A Military History of the Mediterranean Sea*  
(by EIRINI VRETTOU)
- ALEXANDRE JOUBELIN, *Par le fer et par le feu. Combattre dans l'Atlantique (XVIe-XVIIe siècles)*  
(di STEFANO CATTELAN; par ROBERTO BARAZZUTTI)
- FRANCESCO FRASCA, *Il sorgere delle potenze atlantiche. Mercantilismo e guerra*  
(di ANTHONY CISFARINO)
  - ANTONIO VIOLANTE, *Giovanni Caboto. El gran ammirante verso il sogno del Catai*  
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- OLIVIER CHALINE, *Apprendre la mer. Au temps de la voile en France XVIIe-XVIIIe*  
(par ROBERTO BARAZZUTTI)
  - ALESSANDRO METLICA ed ENRICO ZUCCHI (cur.), *La res publica di Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato (1606-1678)*  
(di CHIARA SILVAGNI)
  - MARIA DEL PILAR MESA CORONADO, *Fuerzas Terrestres del Reino de Sicilia 1665-1700*  
(by CHRISTOPHER STORRS)
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(di COMESTOR)
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(di PAOLO CARRARO)
- FABIO FIORENTIN, *Luzzara 1702. La battaglia di Ferragosto*  
(di FRANCESCO BIASI)
  - RODOLFO TERRAGNO, *Maitland & San Martín - Cesáreo Jarabó Jordán, El fin del imperio de España en América. El imperio inglés contra el español*  
(por ISRAEL VIANA)
  - JESÚS CHAPELA REY, *Medallas y órdenes de las guerras napoleónicas y revolucionarias 1792-1815*  
(by JONATHAN IACOBO BAR SHUALI)
  - PAOLO PALUMBO, *Da Venaria a Saumur. Gli ussari piemontesi e il 26° Cacciatori a cavallo*  
(di VIRGILIO ILARI)
  - AAVV, *La cartografia italiana in età napoleonica (1796-1815). Mappe atlanti e manuali per il disegno del territorio*  
(di SIMONETTA CONTI)
- LUCA GANDINI, *Rivoli e il suo duca. André Masséna*  
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