



JOURNAL OF
MODERN ITALIAN
STUDIES

Volume 22

Number 4

September 2017

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
ISSN 1354-571X

BOOK REVIEWS

Moderatismo e amministrazione nel granducato di Toscana: La carriera di Luigi Serristori, by Marco Lenzi, Florence, Leo S. Olschki, 2007, xvi + 246 pp., €28.00 (soft cover), ISBN: 9788822256713

La 'civile difesa': Economia, finanza e sistema militare nel Granducato di Toscana (1814–1859), by Daniela Manetti, Florence, Leo S. Olschki, 2009, xxxviii + 458 pp., €45.00 (soft cover), ISBN: 9788822258700

Italy's strong tradition of regional history continues even as new histories of nationalism have taken center stage. In particular, recent work on the administrative strengths and weaknesses of Italy's various pre-unification states has helped sustain interest in specialized regional studies. Both of the books under review contribute to our understanding of how the Grand Duchy of Tuscany was governed during the Risorgimento. Lenzi views the Grand Duchy through the lens of the moderate liberal Luigi Serristori, Manetti through that of government military expenditures. Both confirm a traditional portrait of political conservatism, whereby government leaders ignored or defeated a string of proposed reforms.

Just as literary criticism can benefit from the study of minor poets, historians would be wise to follow Lenzi's lead and pay attention to minor notables. For it is precisely the limits of Luigi Serristori's influence, and his frustrations as an aspiring reformer, that shed new light on Tuscan politics and society. Serristori was born in 1793 to a noble Florentine family and died in 1857, so his life and times center on the post-Napoleonic Restoration and the period of reform and revolution that followed in the 1840s. As a young man, Serristori traveled widely, working in Odessa as an engineer for the Russian army in the 1820s, and in Vienna as a budding scholar of statistics in the early 1830s. His varied interests reflected the era's fascination with scientific progress and liberal reform. He wrote about steam engines and railroads, pauperism and public charity, schooling and housing for the working classes. Lenzi's survey of the many articles Serristori published in leading Tuscan, Lombard and Piedmontese periodicals confirms the wide range and international scope of Italian reformers' concerns. But it is also true that most of Serristori's ideas remained on paper. In a region known for strong advocates of a *laissez faire* policy, Serristori promoted active state involvement in public education, poor relief, railroad construction, banking reform and disaster relief. As governor of Siena in the early 1840s, Serristori tried to make his ideal of enlightened administration a reality, but he met resistance at the local level and within the central government in Florence. He was a moderate liberal, not a radical, but he quickly gained a reputation for attempting too many reforms – and expensive ones to boot – and for acting more powerful

than he really was. There are more than a few hints that Serristori was not simply rebuffed but disliked by his peers.

Lenzi's most valuable source is the memoir Serristori wrote late in life. For many scholars, the main attraction of this memoir would be Serristori's reflections on the ill-fated revolution of 1848–1849, which he witnessed first hand, for a time as a member of the revolutionary government. Instead, Lenzi mines the memoir primarily for information on how the Tuscan government worked in the years leading up to the revolution. In contrast to accounts that emphasize the Tuscan state's repressive police practices, Lenzi finds, through Serristori's eyes, an insufficiency of government. Less than a year into his stint as governor of Siena, Serristori began complaining in letters to powerful friends in Florence that he was powerless to accomplish anything, thanks to a dysfunctional distribution of administrative powers and responsibilities. On the one hand, government-appointed auditors limited what governors were allowed to do; on the other hand, the true centers of political power in Florence, the council of government ministers and the cabinet close to the grand duke, failed to communicate effectively with other localities. In 1841, Serristori proposed a dramatic administrative reform: the creation of strong provincial governments, each led by an intendant who would work closely with a governing council while staying in direct and constant touch with the grand duke's government in Florence. The secretary of state, Neri Corsini, told Serristori that such a 'total reform' of the government and administration was not welcome. In Siena, Serristori angered leading aristocrats by pressing for a reform of the local Monte dei Paschi bank, to direct capital away from landed property to more dynamic forms of agricultural, industrial and commercial investment. Serristori employed a lighter touch as governor of Pisa, with slightly better results, but his efforts there were interrupted by the turn of events from reform to revolution.

Serristori's ultimately negative response to the revolution of 1848 is at once familiar and jarring. From the fall of 1847 through the winter of 1847–1848, Serristori served as minister of war and foreign affairs in the Tuscan government. But he felt ambivalent at best about the mounting public pressure for a Civic Guard, freedom of the press, a constitution, and even war against Austria. By the time he escorted Grand Duke Leopold II back from exile, in May 1849, and approved the occupation of Tuscany by Austrian troops, he had sealed his fate as a reactionary critic of the revolution. Was he just another moderate liberal whose bold talk of reform went out the window in the heat of political conflict? Perhaps Serristori's disdain for Tuscan democrats and republicans in 1848–1849 only seems surprising because Lenzi has effectively and patiently profiled Serristori the would-be radical reformer, right up to the pre-revolutionary events of 1847. Lenzi's relatively brief yet close study of this somewhat obscure Tuscan notable may only attract specialized readers, but it is a valuable addition to the history of the Risorgimento.

Daniela Manetti's fascinating book is harder to characterize, though it, too, offers a detailed portrait of government inertia in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. It is an expansive case study of the economics of military spending, which takes the reader beyond the seat of government in Florence, to trading depots in the port of Livorno, forts lining Tuscany's coastlines and islands, and sites of maritime conflict and diplomatic negotiation throughout the Mediterranean region.

Manetti begins with an enticing question: Why did a small state that sought to remain neutral and preserve free trade spend so much money on defense? After the defeat of Napoleon, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany happily followed the lead of its ally, the Austrian Empire, and agreed to maintain a relatively modest army of about 6000 individuals, which nevertheless ate up about one-fifth of annual government expenses. Soldiers' pay and uniform costs steadily rose, and the budgetary demands of mobile coast guards were significant. But inefficiency – in short, an unwillingness to modernize military planning and procurement – was also to blame for the elevated costs. Faced with budgetary pressures and shortfalls, the government tried to maintain its military on the cheap and on the fly, cutting pay and provisions, relying on inexperienced volunteers and impoverished recruits to fill the ranks of soldiers and seamen, and letting one political crisis after another shape policy and set off successive waves of extraordinary expenses. As for why the Tuscan government went on spending considerable money on defense, Manetti's attention to coast guards provides a clue: the government's primary concern was not military invasion but the disruption of trade. Coastal forts, troops and ships provided 'civil defense' against the introduction of contraband and infectious disease to the port of Livorno, and against attacks by pirates on Tuscan ships at sea. As sensible as this strategy may seem, Manetti makes clear that the result was a weak military and, by extension (quoting Machiavelli to this effect), a critically weakened Tuscan state. The Tuscan army lacked respect, alienated ordinary citizens, squandered money and incurred crippling debts (among the largest passed on to the united Kingdom of Italy).

Manetti's book is chock-full of valuable information, including a staggering 89 tables and seven graphs. The two chapters focusing on civil (II) and military (V) defense are especially rich. In the former, Manetti takes us well beyond Tuscany to the coast of North Africa, to assess the importance of the coral trade and the wishes of Livorno's considerable population of Jewish merchants, and to witness the diplomatic negotiations aimed at limiting Barbary pirate raids. In the latter, she pinpoints the many material effects of a stingy, ad hoc approach to military reform, as soldiers were called upon to use their own hunting rifles or to live at home most of the year instead of in barracks, or to forage for the wood needed to heat their shelters, and sailors were forced to make do without instruction in nautical mathematics or practice runs to gain experience.

Lenzi would no doubt agree with Manetti when she writes, in her conclusion, that the image of 'Toscana felix' needs to be revised. The government of the Grand Duchy made little effort to establish a positive and efficient presence in provincial communities, while failing to heed the often sound advice of reformers. By the time the revolution of 1848–1849 ended, and Austrian troops assumed their costly position as an occupying army in Tuscany, the writing was on the wall. There was plenty of disillusionment to go around before Italian unification occurred.

Steve Soper
The University of Georgia

© 2017 Steve Soper
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2017.1350028>

