



Newsletter No. 5, December 2023

Welcome to the fifth issue of the MLHWG newsletter! In this issue you can find out what some of our members have been up to over the past year and meet some new members.

2023/24 MLHWG Workshops and Edited Book

Our edited volume project on “Visual and Material Histories of Military Labour” is underway!

The MLHWG has been working on a collaborative publication on “visual and material histories of military labour.” For those who have recently joined the Working Group, please see our call for proposals that was circulated earlier this year [here](#). After receiving and reviewing the proposals over the last few months, we are very pleased to have formed the team, which has great thematic breadth and spatio-temporal diversity. From the experiences and visual memories of black and white American female nurses recruited for the Spanish-American War, to different representations of military and domestic masculinity in Allied-occupied Japan, to US war veterans visualising their soldiering experience and violence during the Vietnam War, the edited volume brings together chapters that offer fresh analyses of visual sources on military labour history as well as new theorisations of the materiality and visibility of military labour from critical gender, race, and decolonial perspectives. Integral to the collaboration are a series of workshop meetings we are organising where contributors share their work-in-progress and get feedback from the team. We had the first meeting on November 16/17, 2023, where the team introduced each other and made plans for upcoming meetings. Our next workshop will take place on **Jan 25/26, 2024**. If you are interested in contributing a chapter (we have room for 1-2 more chapters) or in taking part in the workshop to provide feedback and ideas, please contact the organisers at militarylabourhistory@gmail.com. The meetings will be open to any Working Group members interested in the project, even if you are not a contributing author. Look out for further updates via our mailing list and Facebook page.



From top left: Olli, Jeongmin, Alex, Christine, Hannah, Bettina, Cody and Laura at the November workshop



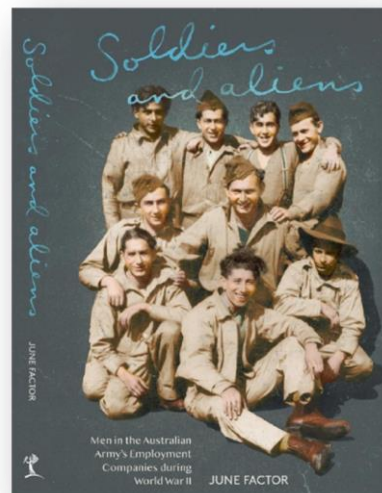
European Labour History Network (EHLN) Conference 2024

We are looking forward to the next [ELHN conference](#) to be held from 11-13 June 2024 at Uppsala University in Sweden. Covid impacted the 2021 conference, both in the feasibility of presenters to travel to Vienna and in it being three years between conferences instead of the usual two. While the Uppsala conference is also hybrid, we expect that many more people will be able to attend face-to-face. We have an exciting lineup over four panels, these being Visual sources, material artefacts and military labour, Military labour in the early modern era, Nations, states and empires: Military labour, gender, race and identity I, and Recruitment and refusal in military labour: Gender, race and identity II. We also have a joint panel with the Maritime Labour History Working Group on Military and Maritime Recruitment, to which we are contributing two papers. The program has not yet been completed by the conference organisers, but we will share it as soon as it is available.

Remember we will also be having our Working Group meeting at the conference. At this meeting we will be able to discuss future projects and ideas, and elect the team of coordinators for the next two years. It is also at the conference that the next chairs of the ELHN Network Committee are decided. We hope to see you there, whether in person or virtually!

June Factor Wins Award

MLHWG member June Factor won The Anzac Memorial Trustees Military History Prize in the [NSW Premier's History Awards 2023](#) for her book *Soldiers and Aliens: Men in the Australian Army's employment companies during World War II* (Melbourne University Publishing). Well done, June!





Member Research Reports

New publications



Julia, Fia and Anders in Vienna

Julia Heinemann, **Christine de Matos, Fia Sundevall, Anders Ahlbäck** have published their special issue of *Labor History* on [Gender War and Coerced Labor](#). The issue was connected to the COST Action project Worlds of Related Coercions in Work (WORCK) as part of its [Intersecting Marginalities](#) Working Group. It includes papers by **Gülay Yılmaz** on janissaries in the Ottoman empire, Karen Agutter & Catherine Kevin on displaced mothers and teens from war torn Europe who migrated to Australia post-WWII, Alexis Henshaw the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, Emily Brooks on coercive patriotism in New York City during WWII, and Deborah Barton on women on Eastern Front. The introduction by the editors, "[Unpacking coercion in gendered war labor](#)", is available as an Open Access article.

New Military Labor and US Empire Group

From member Holger Droessler

I am a historian of the United States in global perspective at [Worcester Polytechnic Institute](#) in Massachusetts, USA. After publishing [my first book on workers in Samoa](#) in 2022, I am currently at work on my second book, *War Workers*, which will tell the global story of foreigners working for the US military in non-combat roles from the Civil War to Iraq. So far, I have done research on Solomon Islanders during the Battle of Guadalcanal in WWII, on sex workers during the Vietnam War, and on security workers from Sierra Leone in US-occupied Iraq. As part of my research, I have recently co-founded, together with Ruth Lawlor (Cornell), a virtual working group on Military Labor and US Empire. Since the summer, we have been meeting once a month to workshop works-in-progress and read recent articles in our shared field of research. We're also using the group to network and plan collaborative projects, such as conference panels and publications. If MLHWG members are interested, we'd be happy to organise a meeting to get to know each other and share our research across the Atlantic. Contact: hdroessler@wpi.edu



Getting to Know our Working Group Members

Two of our newest WG members are Marco Vito and Matteo Ronchi, so we asked them to introduce themselves and share something about their research. We are always happy to introduce new members, both in here and on our Facebook page. Get in touch militarylabourhistory@gmail.com if you would like to share your research.



Matteo Ronchi, University of Naples – Federico II (PhD student in Medieval History)

Matteo Ronchi (Vimercate, 1993) is a PhD student in Historical Studies at the University of Naples “Federico II”, under the guidance of Professor Francesco Storti. Since the attainment of his Bachelor in Medieval History (2016) and his Master’s Degree in Historical Sciences (2019) at the University of Milan, under the supervision of Professor Maria Nadia Covini, he has devoted himself to the study of the military institutions of the 15th century duchy of Milan, with a focus on the concrete aspects of Milanese warfare.

The writing of his master’s thesis “Item siano contenti de la dicta conducta. Assoldamenti di truppe svizzere a Milano, 1495-1499” gave him an opportunity to focus on a

topic that had been left almost uninvestigated by the historiography available on the duchy of Milan in the 15th century, ie the hiring of Swiss and German mercenary companies and the detailed aspects of their organisation and integration in the ducal army in the 1490s. The major focus of this work was on providing a personal and professional portrait of the mercenary soldiers enrolled in these companies: for each captain, the author tried to reconstruct their geographical provenance, family origin, social status, whether they were literate or not and, in some cases, which civilian occupations they performed before becoming professional soldiers. This work, therefore, has given interesting insights not only on the history of warfare, but on the history of military labour too; the most important results have been summarized in the paper “Serano lanzaroli et el resto sciopateri. Le compagnie mercenarie svizzere assoldate da Ludovico il Moro tra il 1495 e il 1499” (2021), published in the journal *Studi di Storia Medioevale e di Diplomatica*.

His current PhD research (2021-present day) is focused on artillery and firearms production in 15th century Lombardy. From his first days as duke of Milan, Francesco Sforza re-organised the structure of Milanese military institutions, thus creating the officium munitionum et laboreriorum; this office gathered architects, engineers and gunsmiths – hired both in Lombardy and abroad – who supervised the maintenance of the fortresses of the dominion, the



construction of bridges and public buildings, the logistics of the Milanese army and the casting of heavy and light artillery. The aim of this research is to provide a reconstruction of both the profiles of the professionals and the gunsmithing techniques used in late-15th century Lombard artillery production; findings about these themes will be placed in a broader frame, which encompasses historiographical themes such as military labour, history of military technology, technological exchange between Milan and Europe and its military, political and diplomatic implications.

Welcome Matteo!

Marco Vito, University of Salerno and University of Vienna (PhD student in Historical Studies)

My name is Marco Vito, and I am a Scholarship holder for the International PhD in Historical Studies, co-tutored at the University of Salerno and the University of Vienna. I served as a lecturer in the seminar course at the University of Vienna for the Winter semester 2022 and summer semester 2023. Additionally, I have organised the workshop “Power on Writing – Spaces of Power – Florence and the World”, on communication in politics and knowledge, held at the University of Vienna (2 July 2022) and presented at conferences such as “Geheimschriftenzoom III” at Bergische Universität Wuppertal and l’Università degli Studi della Tuscia.



One of my notable academic achievements includes obtaining a second-level postgraduate Master’s degree in popularisation of history outside the academies, also known as “Public History”, at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia (UNIMORE) (in 2018) with honours. The thesis from this program was published in an international scientific journal, *Didactics of History*.

My primary research focus lies in the late Middle Ages, with additional interests including studies on the Renaissance and early modern age to the concluding centuries of the Middle Ages. The heart of the research roots into the origin of medieval cryptography, with a specific focus on Florence. Through the analysis of a single case study, particularly the correspondence of Lorenzo de Medici, known as the Magnificent, I deciphered and decrypted numerous letters using cipher keys and frequency analysis. To date, my investigation has revealed over one



hundred Florentine ciphers associated with various diplomatic envoys, including those of Piero Capponi, renowned for his dual role as a military leader during and ambassador.

The evolution of cryptography in Italy and beyond during the 15th century is a pivotal aspect of my study, highlighting the emergence of monoalphabetical ciphers with homophones. This development formed the foundation of a complex ciphering system based on frequencies, a system that has endured through various forms and is still in use with contemporary software.

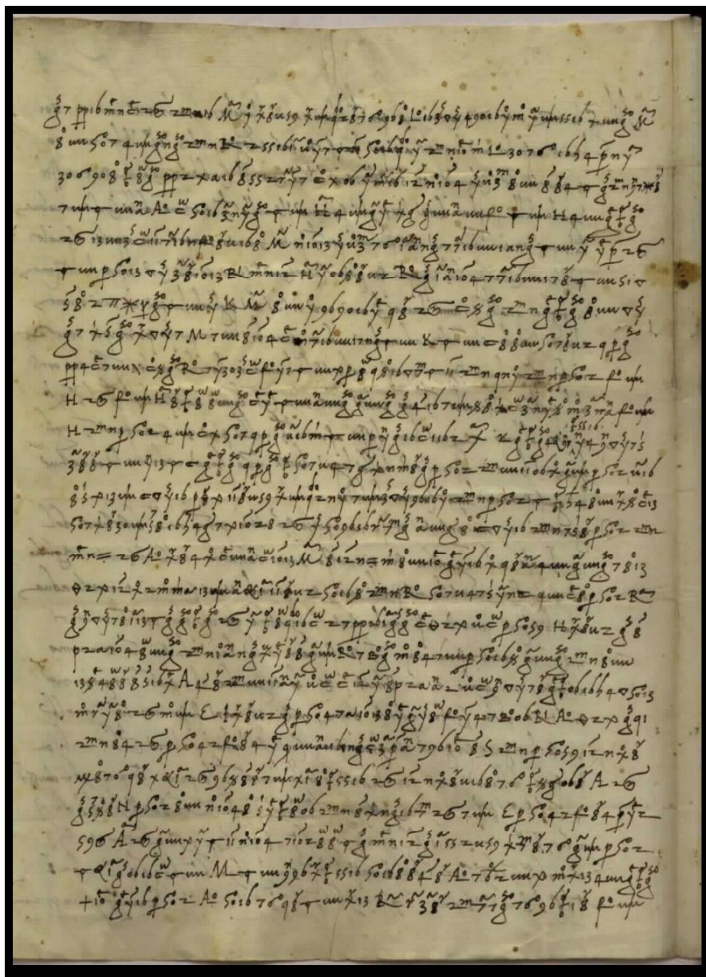
The roots of late medieval cryptography lie in the dynamics of war and military activities. During times of war, a surge in cipher correspondence occurred, with many ciphers concealing key

words to the language of war.

Ambassadors and leaders on the battlefield utilised these ciphers, while opposing forces specialised in decrypting intercepted letters to gain strategic advantages. The innovation of cryptography in the 15th century paved the way for the establishment of the “segretario delle cifre” in Rome in 1540 during the early modern age.

Although my research, which involves at least sixty diplomatic envoys with ciphered correspondences, is still ongoing, the unprecedented value of the research uncovered, especially concerning a prominent figure like Lorenzo de’ Medici and Florence, raises questions about the potential wealth of historical information concealed in ciphered messages that could significantly contribute to the scientific community’s understanding.

Welcome Marco!



Example of cipher letter, 15th century (partial) - Filza 43 c. 26v by concession of the Ministry of Culture-Archive of State of Florence



Mailing List and Facebook Group

We would like to remind everyone receiving this newsletter that the Working Group has a mailing list and a Facebook group for communication. Please feel free to use these channels of communication, for example distributing calls for papers for workshops and conferences within the field of military labour history.

To be added to the mailing list, please e-mail: militarylabourhistory@gmail.com.

To join the Facebook group, make a request here:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/militarylabour/>.

Working Group email

Please feel free to contact the coordinators at any time if you have any questions:
militarylabourhistory@gmail.com

Current Coordinators:

Christine de Matos (The University of Notre Dame Australia)

Olli Siitonen (University of Helsinki)

Jeongmin Kim (University of Manitoba)

Alexandros Touloumtzidis (University of Patras)