5 CITIZENS, SOLDIERS AND CIVIC MILITIAS

One of the world's best-known works of art from the early modern period depicts a group of Amsterdam citizens – in a very specific role. The subject matter of Rembrandt's *Night Watch*, painted between 1640 and 1642, is the civic militia: the figures in the *Night Watch* are performing a whole range of military activities, even though it is quite clear that they are citizens, not professional soldiers. In the painting we see the officers of an Amsterdam civic militia company on their round, depicted against the dark shape of a town gate.[1] In seventeenth-century Amsterdam, civic militias patrolled the city at night; one of their duties was to shut the gates and take the keys to the home of the presiding burgomaster. In the centre of the picture is the company's commanding officer, Frans Banningh Cocq, who, as the son of a German immigrant, was understandably proud of the status he had achieved in his home town. He and his fellow officers paid Rembrandt 100 guilders each to have their portraits included. The painting was to be displayed in the *doelen*, or militia hall, where it could be viewed by the members of their own and other militia companies, as well as ordinary passers-by.[2] A hundred guilders, i.e. the equivalent of six months of a labourer's wages, for a portrait that would not become private property, was a substantial amount of money, suggesting how much importance was attached to the public presentation of one's person in a militia context.

In between the officer portraits, Rembrandt painted imaginary figures busy loading their weapons. These underlined the military role of the militias, as a civic defence force. Somewhat surprisingly, two little girls are also included in the picture, one actually caught in a spotlight

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316219027.007 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and therefore quite visible. She is the company's mascot, but her presence has also been interpreted as symbolising the connection between the militias and the chambers of rhetoric, the amateur literary societies for the urban upper middle classes.[3] In this interpretation, the girl invokes a social and cultural context for the militia company, and immediately puts the military activities of those portrayed into a civic perspective. To fully appreciate that context, it is important also to realise that in the towns of the provinces of Holland and Zeeland alone, 135 such larger-than-life canvases have been preserved from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[4] Having one's portrait painted and displayed in a militia environment was obviously no mean thing. But then, of course, neither was the tradition that Rembrandt invoked in the *Night Watch* merely imaginary.

'War made the state, and the state made war', American sociologist Charles Tilly famously wrote.[5] The volume of essays he published in 1975 argued that European state formation was the result of military competition and that European states had developed their institutions in response to the challenges of this military competition. Taxation, and the bureaucracies necessary to collect those taxes, were portrayed by various authors in the book as the pivotal instruments in state-making.[6] This analysis of the process of state formation dovetailed nicely with another Big Idea about early modern Europe: the Military Revolution.[7] Launched by Michael Roberts in a lecture in 1955, the Military Revolution thesis captured a number of major changes in European warfare and its financing. The basic idea, which only caught on in the 1970s, was that in the early modern period, European armies, which had previously been composed overwhelmingly of temporary citizen-soldiers, became permanent professional forces, and therefore more effective, but also hugely more expensive. As a result, states were forced to increase taxes and raise loans. This in turn caused states to expand their scale and scope.[8]

Together, these two master narratives of the early modern history of Europe have pushed citizens as military actors into the side wings. One implication of the fiscal-military state thesis is that after the late Middle Ages citizens were no longer directly involved in the business of violence. Through the tax mechanism they presumably left this to the professional soldiers in full-time employment – often misleadingly labelled 'mercenaries' – and only with the *levée en masse*, in the wake of the French Revolution, was the idea of the citizen-soldier revived.[9] In

this chapter I argue that this chronology is wrong. The popularity of the Military Revolution thesis among historians and historical sociologists has led to an emphasis on standing armies and a neglect of the mutation of the role of the militias. Contrary to this currently dominant version of early modern history, this chapter seeks to demonstrate that both the idea and practice of the citizen-soldier remained a vital ingredient of the sociopolitical structures of society.[10] Influential political theorists in the 'republican' tradition worried in their writings about the military dimension of citizenship, a dimension that remains significant even today in some Western countries, most notably the United States.[11] This chapter discusses three key texts from the European tradition of republican political theory, before turning to the practices of citizen-soldiering. These are analysed in two sections: one dealing with the Middle Ages, i.e. the era before the Military Revolution, and another addressing the role of civic militias after professional soldiering became the dominant form of interstate violence. I argue that although civic militias became less important as military forces, they remained significant as political forces throughout the early modern period. Citizen-soldiers, in other words, were not so much made redundant by the Military Revolution, but forced to shift from one foot to the other.

Debates about Citizens as Soldiers

Armed citizenship and civic militias have an impressive pedigree in Europe. They go back to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and before that to Greek and Roman antiquity. But as far as the civic militias are concerned as a political issue, the story really starts with Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527). Machiavelli was, in his works and active life, very much concerned with the militias.[12] *The Prince*, composed in the 1510s, includes a diatribe against professional troops, which had come to dominate Italian battlefields (pp. 42–44).[13] Machiavelli portrays mercenaries, and their *condottieri* leaders, as unreliable forces, unreliable because they were only in it for the money. Their military effectiveness, according to Machiavelli's persuasive logic, was mainly limited to peacetime. For the mercenaries military service was, after all, a way of making a living. Moreover, because their interests were exclusively financial, the enemy could easily buy them off, leaving one's own state denuded of protection. To avoid such painful experiences, Machiavelli strongly recommended the use of civic militias, i.e. troops consisting of

citizens, people with a real stake in the fighting. Citizens were protecting their own homes, families and property. In Greek and Roman antiquity such citizen militias had worked well; Machiavelli cited several examples of their military effectiveness.

At the same time, Machiavelli was of the opinion that civic militias were good for the polity: 'It is impossible to have good laws if good arms are lacking, and if there are good arms there must also be good laws' (pp. 42–43). The reader is left in no doubt that 'good arms' means an army composed of citizens (p. 51).[14] What is more, a prince who conquers certain lands and finds his new subjects unarmed should start arming them: 'For when you arm them, these weapons become your own' (p. 72). On the other hand, 'if you disarm your subjects, you begin to offend them, for you show that you do not trust them, either because you are weak and cowardly or because you are too suspicious. And both these reasons cause you to become hated' (pp. 72–73). A wise prince, in other words, creates loyalty in his subjects by demonstrating his trust in them, and the best way to achieve this is by giving them arms.

Italian ideas were revived and reshaped during the English Civil War. It was in particular James Harrington's *Oceana*, first published in 1655, which created this 'Machiavellian moment'.[15] Harrington found his inspiration among the Classics (as Machiavelli had), as well as among the Florentines. For Harrington, however, the citizens were not so much urbanites as rural folk. In Harrington's ideal state, citizens were defined by their ownership of property, i.e. land. His citizenship, as with almost all republican authors, was gendered in the sense that females did not come into consideration. And all citizens were supposed to contribute to the defence of the realm. States that relied on 'servants' for their defence could only afford to do so if they lay outside the reach of their enemies, like Venice, and would anyway never be great.[16]

Harrington's opinions should be read, obviously, against the background of England's recent political history. The Parliamentarians in the Civil War were convinced that Charles I had abused the army to eradicate all opposition against his policies. Unfortunately, the New Model Army that Parliament had employed to prevent Charles from executing his designs had subsequently evolved into an oppressive force in its own right. All of this could demonstrate only one point: professional soldiers were dangerous and better avoided altogether. Hence the debate over 'standing armies', which continued for decades in the British Isles.[17] Scottish author Andrew Fletcher (1653–1716) was a late

entrant into this debate. His *Discourse of Government with Relation to Militias* was first published in 1697, and again in revised form in 1698.[18] Fletcher was familiar with Machiavelli's work, even though he does not quote Machiavelli in his *Discourse*.[19] He was a firm believer in the feudal system, for 'this constitution of government put the sword into the hand of the subject' (p. 3). The feudal barons' way of life had been altered fundamentally by the Discoveries, as these bred a demand for new luxuries among the upper classes. Because their estates did not produce the cash to buy those luxuries, they converted the military service of their tenants into monetary rents. The government then used the money to hire soldiers. Thus the barons lost their monopoly of the sword. To make matters worse, the rise of gunpowder caused a major shift in the ways wars were fought. Soldiering became an occupation, and professional soldiers were in the pay of the sovereign. Thus, 'the power of the sword was transferred from the subject to the king' (p. 7). And as the barons were now serving in the king's standing army as officers – and earning good money in the process – they became the monarch's most loyal supporters (p. 7).

Fletcher was convinced that standing armies were completely unnecessary for the British Isles, protected as they were by the sea. He argued that they were an innovation, a break, in other words, with a long militia tradition (p. 12). But what good would it do, he asked, to prevent the risk of foreign conquest, when 'standing armies will enslave us' (p. 19)? Whilst mercenaries were a pest and a threat, militiamen 'would always preserve the publick liberty' (p. 21). To have a militia was not merely beneficial from a military point of view, but could also create the best possible society. The Swiss were proof of that, according to Fletcher, as they were 'the freest and happiest' people of Europe (p. 22).

In the 1780s the debate on the relative merits of standing armies and civic militias also emerged in the Dutch Republic. Fletcher's *Discourse* was published in a Dutch translation in 1774.[20] As we will see in what follows, the Dutch had a long and significant militia tradition, and it was precisely this tradition that was invoked, in proper Machiavellian fashion, to demonstrate the desirability of citizens in arms. A 'call to arms' was included in an anonymous treatise that was distributed in the night of 25 September 1781 in towns throughout the Dutch Republic. *To the People of the Netherlands* read the provocative title of the seventy-page pamphlet.[21] Its author was later discovered to be Joan Derk Baron Van der Capellen tot den Poll (1741–84), who also

happened to be the translator of Fletcher's *Discourse*. He claimed that the original inhabitants of the Netherlands, the Batavians, had been a free people who took decisions in general assemblies, 'where the whole people met in arms and every Batavian was equally important' (p. 3).[22] By the time of the Dutch Revolt such general assemblies had disappeared, mainly for practical reasons. However, the citizens' representatives in the guilds, civic militias or common councils still made sure their voice was heard in the council chambers of the towns throughout the Republic.

Unfortunately, Prince William of Orange, leader of the Revolt, had already managed to suppress such popular consultations in the province of Holland in 1581, and under his descendants things had gone from bad to worse. The Orange stadholder were not merely the most important nobles in the country, as well as its most powerful politicians, but also commanders-in-chief of the Republic's army and navy. They had abused their position by steadily replacing Dutch officers with foreigners, who would be loyal only to them (pp. 16, 41). Through a constant repositioning of the garrison regiments, Van der Capellen argued, the Oranges had prevented the soldiers from taking root in the towns where they were billeted (p. 57). As a result, the army had developed from an instrument to fight foreign foes into one of domestic oppression.

To the People of the Netherlands also referred to other nations that had fared badly under princes who were not accountable to any representative institution. It was therefore an obvious conclusion that 'a people that wants to behave sensibly and prudently, should make sure to be the strongest at all times' (p. 19). Van der Capellen conceded that professional soldiers are necessary to fight proper wars, also because citizens have other things on their minds. But in order not to be suppressed by those same troops, citizens must have a rifle at home and make sure they are trained to use it. Preferably they should exercise every Sunday, under the command of officers elected by the companies. This might look far-fetched, but in fact it was not, as the Americans and also the Swiss did exactly the same, according to Van der Capellen. It was not even an innovation, as the Union of Utrecht, the Dutch Republic's informal constitution from 1579, had already announced the creation of such a civic militia (pp. 19–20).[23] Therefore, *To the People of the Netherlands* concludes, arming the citizens and training them to use their arms would help restore civic freedom and thus the prosperity of the country as a whole.

The foregoing discussion has sampled three items from a rich literature in three different political contexts and from three different centuries, but it should already have demonstrated a number of things. First of all, throughout the early modern period, civic militias played a central role in some of the significant contributions to the debate about the best possible forms of government. The three authors discussed here agreed that militias were a vital ingredient of any healthy constitution. Whereas professional armies were likely to become instruments of oppression in the hands of the government, civic militias would allow citizens a 'voice' in the business of the realm.[24] This agreement of opinions is no coincidence, of course. The writings by Machiavelli, Fletcher and Van der Capellen were all part of the same tradition of republican theory and discourse.[25] At the same time, our authors differed over who should be armed. Machiavelli seemed to want to limit this to the propertied classes, but Fletcher and Van der Capellen were less restrictive; in their system all males could, and indeed should, serve as militiamen. Machiavelli and Fletcher were also convinced that militia forces were in fact superior from a military point of view to professional standing armies. Fletcher seemed to take into account the extraordinary situation of Great Britain as an island state. Only Van der Capellen acknowledged, albeit in passing, that amateur soldiers were probably no match for professional opponents. A third aspect all three authors agreed on was the low cost of militia forces and the impact this could have on levels of taxation. Replacing professionals with militias would strike a blow against this second weapon in the hands of central government: its cash reserves. Note how, in this respect as well as in relation to the preservation of the constitution, the debate on militias was much more a debate concerning domestic rather than international politics.

In one aspect, however, the authors connected the militia issue in very different ways to the structure of society as a whole. For Machiavelli and Van der Capellen militias were typically urban institutions. They were both at ease with commercial society. Van der Capellen, in *To the People of the Netherlands*, actually compared Dutch society to the East India Company, and portrayed the people of the Netherlands as 'shareholders' in their society (p. 21). Fletcher, on the other hand, was deeply suspicious of commerce. In his argument militia service would bring back the sobriety of feudal society.

Amateur Soldiers in the Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages there was very little debate about militia forces, for the simple reason that they were ubiquitous. Every state relied primarily on temporary units composed of amateur soldiers. Urbanites were expected to serve just as much as rural folk. For medieval princes, towns provided three resources for their military advantage. They were strongholds that could ward off enemies, they were a financial source to be tapped for military as well as other purposes and they were a source of manpower.[26] Urban populations, or at least the male part of it, had to organise their own defence, as well as follow their sovereign into battle. How did they do this?

All medieval European towns had some form of compulsory military service for able-bodied men. The precise conditions varied from place to place, but men could expect to be called upon to perform their military duty. On one hand, citizens were expected to defend their own town, by manning the gates and ramparts when the town was under siege or otherwise threatened. On the other hand, citizen units were supposed to perform police duties, usually in the form of a night watch.[27] On top of this, and more contentiously, citizen-soldiers were asked to follow their lord, or their local government, on offensive campaigns beyond the perimeter of the town and its direct hinterland.

Early references to urban militias date from the twelfth century, even though they must have existed earlier.[28] For the towns of Brabant, Boffa has proposed the following chronology. From the twelfth to the mid-thirteenth century a *levée-en-masse* forced all able-bodied men to rally to the town's defence whenever there was an emergency. The well-off would appear on horseback; the rest acted as foot soldiers. From the mid-thirteenth to the early fifteenth century, the guilds in Brabant's towns took over as the framework for recruitment. Citizens marched under the banner of their guilds; the guilds raised their admission fees to cover the costs of equipment. The first half of the fifteenth century saw the introduction of a new phase with the creation of militia guilds, elite units whose members trained regularly and held shooting competitions. And finally, in the second half of the fifteenth century the new Burgundian lords of Brabant introduced the possibility of transforming personal service into a monetary contribution used to pay permanent, professional soldiers to do the job.[29]

This chronology is not necessarily applicable everywhere else in Europe, but it helps highlight a number of important elements of the civic militias of the late Middle Ages. Firstly, there is the context of recruitment. Two models seem to have dominated: a geographical model and a corporate model. In the geographical model, the town would be divided into a number of militia precincts and men would march under the banner of their precinct.[30] This model was applied in Paris, for example, where in the seventeenth century militia precincts would be closed off with the help of heavy chains hung across the entry routes, to mark their boundaries.[31] In Utrecht the eight militia precincts, introduced after 1528, had remarkably romantic names: Turkey, Popish Standard, Fortune, Blood Pit, Black Journeymen, Orange Trunk, Tar Pitches, Arbalest. They each had a strong identity to match these names, much like the urban districts in Siena that were similarly used for the recruitment of the militiamen – and still compete in the *Palio* horse race in the twenty-first century.[32]

The alternative model used the guild system to bring men together for military service. In Utrecht until 1528, when Charles V took over the city and broke their power, twenty-two craft guilds had not only dominated the political life of the town, but also its military organisation. They were responsible for raising local troops, as well as for the maintenance of the ramparts; each guild had been assigned a specific part of the physical defences.[33] There does not seem to have been a consistent pattern in the application of either the geographical or guild model, other perhaps than that the guild model was more likely to be preferred in those towns where the guilds were also politically influential. It was no coincidence that they became the foundation of recruitment in Flanders and Brabant exactly during the time of what has been termed the 'guild revolutions' of 1302 and subsequent years.[34] The absence of a consistent pattern was reinforced by the fact that some towns switched between systems. In many German towns, for example, the geographical system was transformed into the corporate.[35] In Cologne, however, the corporate system was abandoned again in 1583 in favour of the geographical.[36]

A second issue is training. How were all these butchers, bakers and blacksmiths to make a useful contribution on the battlefield? We have to remember that they were not considered absolutely vital. During much of the Middle Ages battles were dominated by cavalry. Insofar as cavalrymen were not recruited from the nobility, they came from the

circles with more leisure time and hence more opportunity to develop their riding skills.[37] Civilian infantry forces would travel with their precinct's wagon, the *carroccio*, that not only carried the supplies, but also served as a rallying point on the battlefield. Equally important for sustaining cohesion in such amateur units was their occupational or neighbourhood solidarity.[38] These factors actually allowed urban infantry troops to win some notable battles against the regulars employed by princes. For example, those of Milan, together with militias from Lodi, Verona, Vercelli, Piacenza and the Marche towns, were victorious in 1176 against Frederic Barbarossa.[39] In 1302, Flemish urban militias won a similarly remarkable victory against the French king. This latter victory also marked the emergence of the infantry as a more permanently significant military force.[40]

These changes were partly the result of the superior organisation of citizens, for example in craft guilds, and partly due to technological changes such as the emergence of a new type of bow. This gave infantry troops superior fire power – and caused wars to become much bloodier in the process.[41] It also required citizen-soldiers to become better trained. Such training was already provided by town governments in the early fifteenth century, but it was set on a regular footing by the creation of shooting guilds (*schuttersgilden*).[42] In Northern Europe the first of these shooting guilds emerged in Flanders and Brabant in the late thirteenth century.[43] They quickly spread to adjacent regions, first in the Low Countries and France. Around 1400 shooting guilds were already being established in the Rhineland, and from there they spread further, to the Hansa towns in the Baltic area, as well as the eastern and southern parts of the Holy Roman Empire. By the end of the fifteenth century they had reached the Austrian lands and in that same century they appeared in Burgundy, through its contacts with the Low Countries. In the sixteenth century English towns finally adopted the same institutions; in 1537–38 the Guild of St George in London was patented by Henry VIII.[44]

Shooting guilds were created with a military purpose in mind, but they were not, in themselves, military entities.[45] Their objective was to train civilians in the use of arms, to prepare them for military service. Particularly the rise of the arbalest contributed to the dissemination of the shooting guild, because the foot bow was difficult to handle unless one was properly trained in its use. Shooting guilds provided training grounds – those of the London Guild of St George were located at

St Martin-in-the-Fields – and once a year there was an opportunity for the members to demonstrate their skill in a competition, by shooting at a wooden bird, normally a parrot, raised on a large vertical pole. The man who managed to hit the parrot would be the guild's 'king' for the next year. In the Tyrol such competitions are recorded in the fifteenth century.[46]

Women were not by definition excluded from shooting guilds, but they did not, as far as we know, participate in competitions. Female heads of households were expected to contribute to militia service – but only financially.[47] It is therefore no coincidence that the only female in Rembrandt's *Night Watch* is very much an outsider to the action taking place around her. Civic militias created a male world, built around arms and drink, and underlined by specific rituals and gestures. The toasts to 'friendship' that were a regular feature of militia meals had a gendered implication, as did the references of loyalty, which concerned the urban community as a whole, but especially the male confraternity of the militia. In the Dutch militia paintings we see males shaking hands and pledging loyalty with their hands on their hearts. Equally in evidence are numerous 'Renaissance elbows' pointing towards the viewer, a popular reference to male boldness and control.[48]

For males, the shooting guilds exercised exclusivity; as in the craft guilds, only those with full rights of citizenship were accepted as members.[49] This immediately suggests a potential for shooting guilds to position themselves as representatives of the citizen community. Shooting guilds had around two dozen members, perhaps 150 at most. This was small compared to the number of militiamen that major towns could field at times. Florence raised 1,400 cavalry and circa 4,000 foot soldiers in 1260 from among its citizens.[50] Bruges supplied 1,254 men for a military campaign in 1303.[51] Basel could raise around 1,900 militiamen in 1421.[52] These were all significant proportions of the male population in such towns. The members of the shooting guilds would constitute but a fraction of these forces.

However, citizen troops would almost never fight alone; they would be accompanied by regulars.[53] One of the other things that the Military Revolution debate has obscured is that professional soldiers were already a feature of the Middle Ages. Italian towns used professional units from the earliest recorded instances. Alongside the Milanese citizens in 1260 fought 200 mounted mercenaries.[54] They are recorded in Venice in the tenth century, while in the north the Duke of Anjou

employed professionals in 991, as did the German emperor Frederick Barbarossa during his Italian campaigns of the 1160s.[55] What happened over the course of time – relatively early in Italy, later in the rest of Europe – was that these professional troops became an increasingly prominent part of a sovereign's armed forces.[56] As a result, the role of civic militias as an offensive weapon declined.

Citizen-Soldiers after the Military Revolution

Paradoxically, we are much better informed about various aspects of civic militias of the early modern period, even though it is usually assumed that by then they had been marginalised as a result of the rise of professional soldiering. Most great powers of the early modern period maintained a reserve army, to be called up in times of war. Louis XIV's defence minister Louvois created a royal militia of 25,000 men. In the 1740s as many as 80,000 French militiamen served in the War of the Austrian Succession. Brandenburg-Prussia reformed its militias in 1693, and Spain revived its militias in the eighteenth century.[57] But only in seventeenth-century Britain and Switzerland were the militias still the backbone of the military establishment – even though the British also had a professional army. It is perhaps no coincidence that both countries were favoured by natural circumstances, which provided them with borders that were relatively easy to protect. In both countries the militias' role was that of a home guard; it was not assumed that they would act as offensive forces.

The English militias were a feudal force, reformed under Elizabeth I in 1558. These reforms were inaugurated by the double threat emanating from enemies within (Mary Tudor's supporters) and from outside (Philip II's Spain). Their feudal origins are clearly visible in the conception, in 1558, of the militias as temporary forces, springing to life in times of military crisis. They recruited on a compulsory basis. It was soon evident, however, that amateur forces would be useful only if properly exercised. Hence in 1573 so-called trained bands were set up, special militia units that received additional training and were rewarded for their trouble with a small allowance.[58] Militia service could be fulfilled by a replacement and the upper classes seem to have been eager to let their inferiors do the dirty work for them.

German towns, at least the imperial cities, were in the unique position that they were more or less independent states in their own

right. As result, their civic militias were and remained more military in nature than those of other continental countries.[59] Augsburg, for example, employed its own professional soldiers for the defence of the city, but citizens were expected to make a contribution as well. The Augsburg civic militias performed police duties and paraded on official occasions. Citizens were required to supply their own arms, but these were kept in the city's arsenal, the *Zeughaus*. Later, a payment to the *Zeugamt* made the private ownership of firearms superfluous.[60] Militia service itself could be fulfilled by a replacement, which led increasingly to the proletarianisation of the militias' membership.[61] Besides companies of foot soldiers, the civic militias of Augsburg also consisted of artillery and cavalry companies.[62]

In 1610 the civic militias of Utrecht received new statutes, which give a fair idea of what their role in society was supposed to be. Article 5 defined it as: 'to protect the city of Utrecht, and all its citizens and inhabitants, against all violence, disturbance and violation from within and without, everything for the security, quiet and peace of everyone, as will be commanded by the Colonel, under orders of the sovereign and the local magistrate'.[63] An elucidation of these statutes from 1619 indicated that there would be eight companies, of 150 men each.[64] In the eight militia districts the officers were involved in much more than just the night watch, or military defence organisation. From private notes kept by David Jan Martens as commanding officer of Utrecht's Turkey Company during the 1780s, we learn that no collections, including tax collections, could be held in the district without him announcing these to the inhabitants. Martens was asked to give his opinion on all citizenship applications from his district. The Turkey district was subdivided into twenty smaller neighbourhood units, each with its own neighbourhood sheriff. These sheriffs were required to register newcomers and to check the taverns, as well as the fire pumps, fire ladders and sewers in their area. They should also warn the neighbours to clear their part of the sidewalk of snow during the winter. The sheriffs were responsible for ensuring a sufficient number of neighbourhood participants in any funerals from their district.[65] The neighbourhood sheriffs executed these (unpaid) chores under the supervision of militia officers like Martens.[66] These were not mere formalities. In February 1752, for example, the commanders of all eight districts advised Utrecht's burgomasters to continue refusing the right of citizenship to Catholic newcomers, unless the applicant proved vital to the community.[67]

The militias in Nantes were called out during riots. Especially in times of food scarcity, the militias were notified to be vigilant and in case of disturbances called upon to restore public order. In 1630, with local elites divided about political issues, taxes rising and epidemics playing havoc on the population, the militia was called out to protect the meetings of the town council, while all other inhabitants were expressly forbidden to carry arms inside the town's perimeter. In 1675 taxes were again rising sharply, due to the war against the Dutch Republic begun in 1672 (the so-called *guerre d'Hollande*), and in April of that year the militias had to quell a popular uprising, which at one point saw the bishop of Nantes taken hostage by disaffected crowds.[68]

The British equivalent of the urban militias found in Dutch and French towns was the so-called watch. Watchmen could be called up in times of military crisis, but they also paraded on festive occasions and performed the night watch, as their name suggests.[69] They were, in other words, police forces. In Hooker's *History of Exeter* (late sixteenth century), for instance, the task of the 'watchemen and wardesmen' is described as: 'to serve by night and the other by Daye'.[70] They operated from the town hall and were to make sure that the town gates were properly shut at night, and generally to supervise their respective districts 'that their [*sic*] be no misrule kept'.[71] In Bristol, the watchmen paraded the streets of the city during a civic ceremony in 1571; London's 'marching watch' would do the same on similar occasions.[72] The city of Edinburgh had its town guards, with an identical role to play.[73]

As military forces the militias' qualities were not very impressive. This was true even in Britain, where the militias retained more of their military character than in most continental countries. Lack of training cannot have been the only cause of this underperforming. In London, the Guild of St George acted as one of those shooting guilds that were also found on the continent.[74] It was an institution mainly for militia officers in the London companies. Other towns followed London's example and set up similar guilds. All captains of the London trained bands were enrolled as members in 1614. The Guild, by then known, after its training grounds, as the Society of the Artillery Garden, was quick to adopt the Dutch methods of drill and other innovations pioneered by Maurice of Orange.[75] The English militias' theatre of operations was England itself, and civil conflict hardly ever amounted to a pitched battle. This was true even during the Civil War. The London-trained bands were said to have performed honourably in

the face of professional opponents, and at Turnham Green even sustained casualties, but they never really had to demonstrate that they were fireproof.[76]

Civic militias in the Dutch Republic received only limited drill practice.[77] After 1600 Utrecht was safe from Spanish attacks, but in the spring of 1672 the French overran substantial parts of the country. The Utrecht militias' performance was disappointing, to say the least. The Dutch troops under William III were refused shelter in the city, while just a few days later Utrecht was handed to the French without a shot fired! In other Dutch towns the militias proved equally hopeless as military forces.[78] In Paris, a commentator had already observed in 1595: 'They are just like dogs that only bark and bite on their own doorstep'.[79] In Utrecht even that would prove too optimistic a description.

All of this underscores the point: civic militias of the early modern period were first and foremost police forces. They did, at the same time, retain elements of their former role as military units. They were called upon to help defend their own towns, and sometimes even required to venture outside their own turf. This sustained a self-image that was supported by military paraphernalia and historical tales of past bravery, just enough to maintain the credibility of republican arguments about citizens-in-arms.

Although technically every able-bodied male was required to serve in the militia, the Utrecht regulations of 1702 limited participation to those who could afford to bring their own weapon.[80] Moreover, in practice it was households rather than individuals that were the units of recruitment: every household was supposed to supply one militiaman.[81] In actual fact, the number of men was much smaller than the number of households. According to a survey in July 1786, the Turkey district of Utrecht had 539 households, but its militia company came to only 174 in June 1784. In other words, a mere 32 per cent of all households were involved in the militia. This figure is slightly higher than the percentage for the city as a whole, which came to 29 per cent; as a percentage of the total population, the strength of the eight Utrecht militias, 1,793 men in total, amounted to 7.3 per cent.[82] The Nantes militia had a membership of approximately 2,000, i.e. 10 per cent of the population. In the eighteenth century, when the population increased, the militias remained at the same strength, reducing the percentage to about 5 per cent.[83] In the diocese of Albi around 1,800 were on active service in 1694, 2 per cent from a population of 90,000, but that comprised a substantial rural area

as well.[84] In 1703, fourteen Augsburg militia companies numbered a total of 2,800 men. That was about 10 per cent of the urban population at the time. However, 1703 was a year of high military alert, due to the War of the Spanish Succession. In September 1673 a mere 900 men had been drafted into four militia companies.[85]

In terms of social background, the Utrecht militiamen, at least at the end of the eighteenth century, belonged overwhelmingly to the solid middle classes. D. J. Martens' Turkey Company in 1785 had several journeymen in its ranks, but most of the members were independent artisans, practising such trades as bookbinder, sculptor (two), wigmaker, tailor (five), pharmacist, merchant, hat maker, shoemaker (four), carpenter (four) and shopkeeper (five).[86] Evidence from 's-Hertogenbosch suggests the same pattern.[87]

Social equality was reinforced by rituals and sociability. The Utrecht regulations of 1619 already stipulated that only those who actually consumed drink during the night watch would be required to pay for the company's alcohol consumption.[88] Drinking and eating were important aspects of militia life.[89] After Martens gained his command in May 1781, he immediately invited his fellow officers to his home, where toasts were raised 'with the use of the Company's goblet'.[90] Many Dutch militia companies owned highly elaborate (and quite expensive) silver drinking vessels, which were passed round the table on solemn occasions for all the officers to share, symbolising the bond of company membership.[91] After the annual muster, Martens received his fellow officers for the 'captain's meal'.[92] On such occasions 'harmony' and 'friendship' were key words in the speeches and compulsory toasts, underlining the unity of the community that the militia represented and was bound to maintain.[93] The Haarlem portrait painter Frans Hals set his famous militia pieces around a table.[94] Another expression of the same intention was the presence of militiamen at the funeral of their colleagues.[95]

English militias were organised on a regional basis. Individual counties, or a combination, were required to raise the number of militiamen assigned to them and make sure that these troops were properly trained. The counties were also financially responsible for their own units. Because those called up could send a replacement, a proletarianisation of the militia units was almost inevitable.[96] Data from eighteenth-century Exeter demonstrate this. A town of 11,000 inhabitants in the late seventeenth century, and 16,000 at the end of the eighteenth, Exeter

was a county in its own right.[97] The Borough Militia was recruited from four precincts within the city, with their prosaic names East Within, West Within and so on, as well as four precincts *extra muros*, with the equally predictable names East Without, West Without etcetera. Each precinct was supposed to muster ten men. The roll of 1770 was, however, a depressing fifty-two names short of full strength.[98] The majority of the twenty-eight men actually serving were indeed substitutes, like Thomas Gall, whose name already appears on the list as substitute for Thomas Wilson, but two years later took the place of Matthew Cosseraty the Younger. Most of the Exeter substitutes were unable to sign their name.[99]

With many working-class substitutes serving in the English militias, the urban middle classes had reason to be suspicious of their loyalty. This may have been why Exeter's city council, the Chamber, chose to rely on the city watch, rather than the local militia, during the troubled times of the Civil War. On 23 January 1642 the Chamber made the first moves to prepare the city for whatever was to come. It was decided that forty inhabitants, 'men to be confided in', would be added to the officers and volunteers who would take turns at the watch. 'Disaffected persons', on the other hand, were to be disarmed, while a muster of men and arms, as well as 'trayners', i.e. members of trained bands, and volunteers would be undertaken.[100] In August it was decided that 'there shall be 32 persons charged to warde everie day and 32 persons to watch everie night'.[101] As these watches turned out to be on almost permanent duty, the watchmen were temporarily taken into the pay of the community.[102]

Civic militias thus continued to recruit substantial numbers of men throughout the early modern period. At any one time, around 7.5 per cent of the urban population – and by implication a much higher percentage of the adult males – participated in the militias. Their social composition varied, without any clear pattern emerging from the available information. Many towns had a preference for middle-class militiamen. These acted as the propertied forces keeping the working classes in check.[103] There were, however, other places where replacements were acceptable and that led to an influx of lower-class recruits. This served the interests of middle-class men reluctant to spend a night out patrolling the town, but it also created political anxiety in those same circles about the loyalty of the force. Such anxieties were entirely justified.

Militia Politics

As organisations composed of citizens, of whatever social background, the civic militias were almost inevitably caught up in local politics. Machiavelli thought this was one of the main purposes of having civic militias. It is therefore not surprising to find militiamen using their organisations as a platform to voice political claims, and reinforcing those claims by the fact that they were armed. Shooting guilds were, for example, consulted by Dutch urban governments in times of crisis, as happened in Amsterdam in 1542.[104] Their great opportunity came with the Dutch Revolt in the second half of the sixteenth century. Local authorities were desperate to establish legitimacy for their decisions, which one way or another were bound to be controversial. In Leiden this happened on the very first day of the Revolt, when the support of the militia was required to restore order after a wave of iconoclastic rioting. Whereas normally the militia would be ordered out by the burgomasters, it was now considered better to consult first, not only the officers but also the regular members. In Haarlem in September 1566, during a technically illegal meeting, militiamen volunteered their advice on how the most important posts in the city should be filled. In Delft it was the council who summoned the militiamen to a meeting on 6 October, referring to them as 'members of the town'.[105] In Amsterdam, where the city council had taken the side of the Habsburg government up to 1578, it was a coup by the local militias that finally forced the Catholic council to make way for a Protestant successor, which was elected by representatives of the militia. One of its first acts was to organise a huge dinner for the revolutionary militiamen, 'to plant and let grow once more the love and unity among the citizens'.[106]

During the 1580s, the civic militias in the rebel territories were completely overhauled. Instead of the former guild structure and voluntary participation, William of Orange introduced compulsory service for all able-bodied men between the ages of eighteen and sixty, recruited by district. The former 'shooting guilds' became 'burgher companies', but in practice they retained their colloquial name of *schutterij*.[107] They thus inherited the shooting guilds' position of spokesmen for the community.[108] In the 1780s there were complaints about the decline of the Dutch civic militias.[109] These complaints concerning the militias' military capabilities – or rather the lack of them – should be read in

conjunction with Van der Capellen's appeal to revive the militias as military units, capable of substituting for, or at least providing a counterweight against, the professional troops commanded by the Orange stadholder. As Van der Capellen had recommended, military exercise societies were set up to drill militiamen several times a week. The participation in these exercise societies was voluntary, and a demonstration of one's adherence to the anti-Orange camp. Utrecht was one of the towns where the militia companies set up such exercise societies. Those of the Turkey Company were looking for training grounds in early 1783.[110] During the following four years the militias, and more particularly the exercise society *Pro Patria et Libertate*, recruited from the ranks of the militias, were the backbone of the revolutionary Patriot movement in Utrecht.[111] Once again they claimed to be the spokesmen of the civic community. In a Draft Constitution, published in 1784, the militias were even put in charge of organising local elections.[112]

In Paris, during the summer of 1648, militias barricaded their districts with the help of the chains provided to defend these districts.[113] Apart from their police duties and contribution to local defence, the Parisian *milices bourgeoises* were generally seen as institutions representing the community as a whole.[114] The militias of Paris had been reorganised in 1562, exchanging an essentially corporative for a territorial model. The reorganisation did not, however, fundamentally alter the militias' social composition, which remained middle class, and more specifically dominated by craftsmen – at least insofar as the rank and file were concerned.[115] As in other towns, in France and elsewhere, the militias of Paris were inspired by egalitarian ideals so dear to early modern citizens. (These ideals notwithstanding, the Parisian militias as elsewhere were of course exclusively male institutions.) The citizens, however, found militia service more attractive to support in theory than to sustain in practice, and as a result there were innumerable conflicts over absenteeism, and a permanent pressure to permit replacement by social inferiors who would be financially rewarded for their trouble.[116]

In mid-seventeenth century London, trained bands played a decisive role in swinging the support of the City to the Parliamentary side. In January 1642 they mobilised spontaneously, against the express wishes of the Lord Mayor, who was their formal commander. The Committee of Safety, also known as the Militia Committee, dominated City politics during the early stages of the crisis. The Militia Committee expanded the trained bands from 6,000 to 8,000 men, on a voluntary

basis. Significantly, apprentices who signed up were promised the freedom, i.e. citizenship, of the City after their tour of duty.[117]

All these examples show not only how the militias could be a significant political force in their communities, but also in many places served as the main vehicle for citizen agency. In that sense, Machiavelli was right: arming citizens almost automatically implied that local authorities had to listen to those same citizens, and pay attention to their concerns.

Conclusions

The evidence presented here therefore suggests a number of broader conclusions. First, and perhaps most importantly: the monopoly of violence in the hands of early modern national governments remained very incomplete, even after the Military Revolution. On the contrary, national governments were keen to encourage their citizens to bear arms and contribute supplementary military services, at low cost to the public treasury. Secondly, with the rise of professional soldiering, civic militias became increasingly irrelevant as military forces. Only the Swiss Confederacy and England, favoured by natural conditions, could continue to rely on militias for military purposes. Thirdly, even though their military role became less significant, civic militias continued to play an important role in early modern town life. Scattered figures from the Dutch Republic and France suggest that between 5 and 10 per cent of the population, that is as much as a quarter of all households, was involved in the militias at any one time, and that by implication a much larger segment of the population must have been involved in them during their life cycle. Fourthly, through the discourse of classical republicanism, as first articulated in Renaissance Italy but subsequently developed and adapted in other parts of Europe, civic militias provided a significant dimension to conceptions of citizenship. As such, they not only felt compelled to defend their community against military enemies but also acted as the defenders of the political integrity of that community. They were simultaneously forces of public order and disorder. Therefore, fifthly and finally, as institutions encompassing significant sections of the urban community, militias shaped the ritual and political lives of medieval and early modern towns, providing at one and the same time identity and voice to that community.

The militiamen in Rembrandt's *Night Watch* may have been unique in the way they were captured on canvas, but their ambition to be portrayed while serving with their fellow citizens would have appealed to men in similar positions everywhere in premodern Europe. Through its inclusion in the American constitution it continues to do so today.[118]

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316219027.007 Published online by Cambridge University Press