



## Newsletter No. 7, December 2025

*Welcome to the seventh 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, updates on special projects, and meet a member.*

### European Labour History Network (EHLN) Conference 2026

It won't be long before we will be meeting at the University of Barcelona in Spain for the 6<sup>th</sup> ELHN conference (16-19 June 2026)! While the organisers have not yet released the program, we are expecting to have five panels, a roundtable, and a book launch.

Two of the panels are joint ones: Labour, Coercion and the Military with the Labour and Coercion Working Group, and Indigenous Military Labour with the Arctic and Indigenous Labour Working Group. The others are Social Constructions and Divisions of Military Labour and two on Organising Soldiers (one focussing on Unionisation, Collective Bargaining, and Activism and the other on Varieties of Resistance). The Roundtable is related to one of our ongoing projects led by Pratyay Nath (see more in this issue) on 'What is Military Labour?' The launch will focus on a discussion of our forthcoming edited collection, "Military Labour History from the Early Modern Period to the Twentieth Century – Imagery and Visuality", being published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2026 (more in this issue). Finally, we will also have our biennial in-person Working Group meeting to discuss past achievements, present projects, and future goals, and to elect the coordination team for the next two years.

The conference organisers are the Research group "Trellat, Institucions i Gènere" (TIG) (Labour, Institutions and Gender) of the University of Barcelona (<http://www.ub.edu/tig/qui-som>), in collaboration with the "Red Española de Historia del Trabajo" (REHT) (Spanish Labour History Network) (<https://www.um.es/reht/>), and with the support of the Department of History and Archaeology, the Faculty of Geography and History, and the University of Barcelona.



Watch out for more updates from us, and you can find out more on the conference website:

<https://barcelonaehln.ub.edu/>.



## 2025 MLHWG Workshop and Edited Book Update

*Our edited volume on imagery and visuality in military labour history is almost ready to go to the publisher!*

2025 has been a busy year of writing, rewriting, reviewing and editing all eleven chapters in our edited book, “Military Labour History from the Early Modern Period to the Twentieth Century – Imagery and Visuality”. We have been fortunate to engage a wonderful international group of expert readers to review each chapter, without whom this book would be all the poorer.

In January we welcomed a new contributor, Habib Moghimi of the University of Sydney, who is contributing a chapter on the militarisation of everyday life in post-revolutionary Iran as seen through the documentary filmmaking of Morteza Avini. Habib presented a workshop on his chapter to the Working Group earlier in the year. Thanks to all who attended to give Habib their feedback and support. Habib’s chapter joins our others on topics such as the early modern Mughal Empire and Mediterranean, World War One, the Allied Occupation of Japan, and the Korean and Vietnam Wars, using photographs, film, posters, and artwork, and through lenses such as gender, coercion, and (de)visualisation.

Speaking of workshops, Habib’s was the only one held in 2025 due to attention being given to completing the edited text. We are hoping to resume the workshops in 2026, so if you are working on any research-in-progress and want feedback from the Working Group, get in touch. We are also hoping we might hear from some of the contributors to our other special projects – read about these in this issue of the newsletter.

We plan to send the final book manuscript to the publisher, Palgrave Macmillan, early in 2026, for late 2026 publication. We will talk about the book at the Barcelona conference, so if you are going, come along to the session to hear all about it. And watch out for further announcements during the year about its completion. This has been the biggest project our Working Group has worked on collaboratively, so it will be exciting to see the project finally come to fruition.





## Working Group Project Report: What is Military Labour?

led by Pratyay Nath

Since the germination of the idea last year, the Working Group of Military Labour History has brainstormed about the possible directions that a volume addressing the question ‘what is military labour’ can take. Fia Cottrell-Sundevall and Christine de Matos have now joined Pratyay Nath as co-editors of the prospective volume. The volume will bring together a set of essays by scholars working on military labour for different time periods and regions. The aim of the essays will be to investigate the nature of labour involved in the work and service of different types of military participants, ranging from commanders and soldiers to logistical workers and war-animals.

The editors hope that the articles will interpret the category of military labour from various angles and probe the politics, scope, and use of the category. They have agreed on an edited volume with an international academic publisher as the ideal platform for a collection of essays around this theme since this will offer flexibility in terms of the nature and number of essays. They have planned a roundtable for the ELHN conference 2026 as a launchpad for this volume. The roundtable will have Julia Heinemann, Martina Berggren, Jeongmin Kim, and Lawrence McDonnell as speakers. They will share their views about meanings and ramifications of the category of military labour in different contexts. Pratyay and Fia recently participated in a conference in Stockholm titled ‘Animals and War’, where the idea of military labour came up during the discussions regarding nonhuman participants of war. Preparations are now afoot for



the execution of the ELHN roundtable. Following this event, the editors will invite potential contributors for their essays for the volume.

**Want to know more? Please contact Pratyay Nath via [militarylabourhistory@gmail.com](mailto:militarylabourhistory@gmail.com).**

## Member Research Reports

### New publications

**A. Jorge Aguilera-López** (2025), “Naval Administration and Expertise: The Superintendents of the Royal Shipyard of Barcelona (1500–1640)”, *Management & Organizational History* 20 (3): 355–391 ([open access](#)).

This article presents the first prosopographical study of the officials who oversaw the Barcelona arsenal, tracing their shift from treasury clerks to military specialists. It shows how expertise, administrative literacy, and practical knowledge shaped shipbuilding labour, resource management, and naval logistics during a century of Mediterranean warfare and state-building. I presented part of this research at the 5th ELHN meeting in Uppsala in June 2024.

**A. Jorge Aguilera-López** (2025), “Gian Andrea Doria and his Real: Mediterranean Shipbuilding Complexities and the Construction of the New Spanish Flagship Galley (1586–89)”, *Renaissance Quarterly* 78 (3): 732–772 ([open access](#)).

This study examines the construction of the flagship galley built in Barcelona for Gian Andrea Doria. Drawing on extensive archival sources, it explores the labour, expertise, and logistical challenges involved, and reframes the Real as not only a military vessel but

## Military Labor and US Empire Group

*From WG member Holger Droessler*

*Reminder and Invitation:* I am a historian of the United States in global perspective at [Worcester Polytechnic Institute](#) in Massachusetts, USA. [My first book on workers in Samoa](#) was published in 2022, and 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**. We meet 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](mailto:hdroessler@wpi.edu)





also a tool of diplomacy, hierarchy, and political display in the late sixteenth-century Mediterranean.

Together, these two articles highlight the interplay between technical knowledge, labour organisation, and the political economy of naval power in the early modern Western Mediterranean.

Cara Cross and **Christine de Matos** (2025), “Becoming the Occupier: Power reversals in the Asia-Pacific War and Australian occupied Japan”, invited paper for special issue of *The International History Review* on ‘The Age of Metamorphosis: Role Reversals during and after the Global Second World War’. Early online, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2025.2568585> (open access).

The paper makes observations on the integral role of labour in the performance of power, disempowerment and empowerment in relation to the military and military occupation. It focusses on the experiences Australian POWs of the Japanese who joined the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) in Japan, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who also joined BCOF, moving from being the colonised in their homeland to occupiers in another’s, and back again.

Alma Persson & **Fia Cottrell-Sundevall** (2025), “Making Room for Women: Gender and Space at Work in the Swedish Armed Forces”, *Gender, Work, and Organization*, 32 (5): 1875–1886. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13235> (open access).

The study highlights how everyday spatial arrangements have structured gender relations in military work in Sweden since the 1980s. Focusing on “gender-mixed rooms”, it shows how practical questions about toilets, showers, and barrack layouts became central to integrating women into the soldier collective. Drawing on interviews and archival material, the article demonstrates how gender-mixed rooms both facilitated participation and conditioned it, reinforcing institutional norms of cohesion and equal treatment.

**Alkazi Zaen** (2025), “The Militarization of Labour Politics in Interwar South Asia: Paramilitaries and Claims-Making among Bombay’s Textile and Dalit Workers, c. 1920-1940”, *International Review of Social History* 70 (2): 311–336 ([open access](#)).

Nationalist historiography portrays interwar protest in South Asia as predominantly Gandhian, non-militaristic, and non-violent. This article asks how South Asia’s interwar labour movement was shaped by a world marked by the experience of World War I and its aftermath. Using a unique source base of the speeches and writings of labour leaders, publications of volunteer movements, workers’ court depositions, Marathi-language memoirs, strike enquiry



committees, and newspaper material, it unearths a world of militaristic ideas and action seldom explored in the context of interwar South Asian labour.

## New Doctoral Dissertations

**Jaakko Björklund**, *“Masters of War: Military entrepreneurship and foreign soldiers in early seventeenth century Sweden”*

On 9 May 2025, Jaakko Björklund defended his doctoral dissertation “Masters of War: Military entrepreneurship and foreign soldiers in early seventeenth century Sweden” at the University of Helsinki. The dissertation examines the crucial role that military entrepreneurs and foreign soldiers had for Swedish warfare, state formation, and imperial expansion at the start of the seventeenth century. It looks at how and why the Crown used private entrepreneurs and military labourers, who were employed, what was their role, and how the Crown sought to control and manage them. Besides the top-down perspective of the Crown, the study explores the motivation and operational practices of these private agents and place them within the social and political context of the emerging Swedish state and transnational fiscal-military networks.

The six articles that comprise this work investigate various aspects of the early modern military profession. These include patterns of military migration, questions of motivation and loyalty, developments in the terms of recruitment and service, composition of the labour force and questions of labour relations, among others. Besides well-known groups such as Scottish and German soldiers fighting for Sweden, the dissertation looks at minority groups in Swedish service, including French and Spanish professionals, and their integration within the Swedish military community.

This dissertation concludes that the use of private suppliers and foreign professionals proved to be an effective and crucial resource for the Swedish military in early seventeenth century Sweden. In particular, the period 1605-1618 is identified as a key moment, when Swedish authorities started to employ foreign professionals in ever greater numbers. This had an enormous impact on the Swedish state, society, and military, setting a precedent and building experience for further outsourcing later in the century.

The dissertation is available to download at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10138/594718>.



***Teresa Peláez-Domínguez, “El gobierno de la chusma: trabajo y coerción en las Galeras de España”***

In 2025 Teresa Peláez-Domínguez defended her doctoral dissertation on forced labour in the galleys during the sixteenth century. In her work, she explored how the rowing crews of the royal galleys were formed within the military context of the early modern Mediterranean. She addressed topics such as the introduction of forced labour into rowing, the recruitment of oarsmen, forms of coercion and resistance, and the role of labour as a vector of inequality and a producer of social hierarchies within the army.

PhD dissertation was completed at the Universitat de València, and can be accessed here: <https://roderic.uv.es/items/24b1dd16-7c3f-4f74-9357-4561ecc9ce9c>



***Congratulations to all our members for their research achievements in 2025! We look forward to hearing more from you all in 2026.***





## Early Modern Military Labour History Project Report:

led by by Jaakko Björklund

### **Forthcoming Special Issue: Military Labour History in Early Modern Europe**

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were crucial periods of change in European labour relations. The monetarisation and internationalisation of commerce, increased specialisation in production, urbanisation and the slide from feudalistic practices to capitalist ones had a profound impact on society. At the same time the growth and extension of state power in emerging nation states meant that labour relations became increasingly regulated and systematized – controlled from both above and below through a combination of socio-economic, cultural, and legal practices.

The increasing scale and scope of warfare meant that ever greater amounts of manpower were needed for rapidly expanding national militaries. At the same time, the art of war was in flux, with new technologies and tactics putting a premium on skilled and specialised professionals within the military. Armies developed from temporary campaign forces to permanent institutions, and soldiering (fighting for wages) became the primary occupation for hundreds of thousands.

The significance of this shift went beyond professional soldiering. In many respects the military acted in a pioneering role in developing standards and practices for labour relations more generally. The rapidly expanding military developed recruiting practices and contractual standardisation, and showed the way towards the formation of corporate entities and identities. The military introduced formalised career paths, job requirements, and the division





of labour based on ranks and hierarchies, which became the model for other professions. The employment of large permanent forces also raised questions over how this labour force was to be managed. Labour relations became a pressing issue, as soldiers were amongst the first professional groups that learned to use collective action and bargaining effectively and systematically. Internationalisation and development of the transnational fiscal-military system meant that these patterns and practices spread, becoming the norm in a rapidly expanding international military market.

To tackle these themes, we have drawn together a team of five researchers exploring various facets of this development in early modern Europe. Assistant Professor Martin Neuding Skoog (Swedish Defence University) focuses on Swedish recruitment agents on the German military market in 1543. This article represents a case study of how the sixteenth-century Swedish state operated in order to recruit military labour and provides new insights into the mechanisms of the complex early modern military labour system. Dr Teresa Peláez Domínguez' (Universitat de València) article shifts attention to the use of forced labour on Spanish galleys of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It traces the construction of the legal and social status of convicts and king's slaves, interrogates forms of power and governance within the navy, and seeks to understand how forced labour was introduced into the galleys, the social processes this reveals, and what role coerced labour played within the fleets of the sixteenth century.

Dr Jack Abernethy's (University of Edinburgh) article "Rewarding Experience: Promotion and Patronage in the Anglo- and Scots-Dutch Brigades during the Eighty Years' War, 1568-1648" looks at career paths of officers and the considerations that dictated military promotion in the early modern period. In his article Abernethy challenges perceptions that early modern armies were by nature corrupt, mostly led by inexperienced nobles, and that rank was essentially ad hoc or uncompetitive. It argues that the authority to promote was contentious and bounded by a number of military, political, and diplomatic deliberations.

In his article, Dr Jaakko Björklund (University of Helsinki) explores tensions in military labour relations by providing a systematic analysis of the numerous mutinies and other known incidents of mass disobedience suffered by the Swedish 1605-1617. By placing the disorders in their military and labour historical context, this study seeks to provide a synthesis of their common causes and mechanisms, and the objectives and agency of the various groups involved. Finally, Associate Professor Gülay Yilmaz' (Akdeniz University) contribution "Forced Labor in the Palace Gardens of the Ottoman Empire and the Transformation of the Agricultural Production" examines the role of coerced labour in the palace gardens of the Ottoman Empire. This study investigates who these labourers were, from where they were recruited, how many boys were employed in different gardens, and what their salaries and working conditions were.



Work on these articles continues apace, and we expect to be ready to submit the special issue for editorial review in early 2026.

**If you want to know more about this project, contact**  
[militarylabourhistory@gmail.com](mailto:militarylabourhistory@gmail.com).

## Getting to know our Working Group members

*We asked one of our recent members 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](mailto:militarylabourhistory@gmail.com) if you would like to share your research story.*



### **Marina Tsirtsikou, University of Ioannina, Greece (PhD candidate)**

My name is Marina Tsirtsikou and I am a PhD candidate in Contemporary History at the Department of History and Archaeology of the University of Ioannina (Greece). My interest in the military labour of civilians involved in the production of military uniforms developed through my own personal engagement with garment construction. My first research publication examines the uniforms of the Evzones of the Presidential Guard – one of the most emblematic corps of the Hellenic Army – at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, highlighting their connection

with key wartime periods in modern Greek history.

As part of my postgraduate studies, I explored the shift towards the “new military history,” an approach that moves beyond the operational analysis of war and incorporates social, economic and cultural perspectives. My interest in the Military Clothing and Footwear Factory of Piraeus emerged through my work as a historian at the Hellenic Army History Directorate (HAHD).

During my archival research on Greek military uniforms, I realised that the production site of the military uniform remains largely unexplored, despite its decisive role for more than a



century. My previous training in garment construction – pattern making, cutting and sewing – together with my professional experience in women’s clothing and military garment production, provided me with a strong practical foundation. This technical knowledge enables me to approach the military uniform not only as a symbolic object but also as a material artefact with specific production processes and technologies, in dialogue with the concerns of the new military history.

My doctoral dissertation, titled “The Military Clothing and Footwear Factory (700 MF) in Piraeus (1909–1999),” is being carried out under the supervision of Professor Leda Papastefanaki. My aim is to bring together my technical expertise in garment production with the historical study of military organisation. I examine the government military factory as a key institution of military logistics, responsible for manufacturing and supplying the army with clothing and footwear.

Drawing on military, state and private archives, as well as the local press, I examine the state economic policies that shaped the establishment and operation of the factory, along with the labour of its civilian workers – women and men – who worked in production. I focus on the organisation and gendered characteristics of this labour, analysing the factors that produced or reinforced gendered divisions. I also study the transition of women’s work from home-based piecework to waged employment within the government military factory, situating this shift within the social and local history of Piraeus in the twentieth century. Through the analysis of gendered civilian labour in the factory, I aim to highlight a form of military labour that often remains invisible and to contribute to contemporary debates on what constitutes “military labour.” My approach is interdisciplinary, examining war and the military system “from below,” through the lenses of gender, local history, production, and the material conditions of military infrastructure.

My work has been published in edited volumes and academic journals. I am currently continuing my doctoral research and presenting findings from my ongoing project at national and international conferences. I am also a member of the Working Group “What Is Military Labour?” led by Pratyay Nath, seeking to contribute to the international dialogue on the concept and approaches to military labour.

*Good luck with your research, Marina!*



## **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 or letting us know about your research achievements.

To be added to the mailing list, please e-mail: [militarylabourhistory@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:militarylabourhistory@gmail.com)

## **Current Coordinators:**

Christine de Matos (The University of Notre Dame Australia)

Jeongmin Kim (University of Manitoba)

Olli Siitonen (University of Helsinki)

Alexandros Touloumtzidis (University of Patras)

# **See you in 2026!**