

**Book Review**  
**The Story of the Sforzas**

**L Collinson-Morley**

**Pallas Armata, 1994, ISBN 1 85778 595 5**

My current interest is with the Italian Wars and the late fifteenth century. Consequently, I was looking forward to reviewing this book as it deals with the famous Italian Sforza family, their rise to power in Milan and, of course their eventual fall. The story begins in 1369 with the birth of Muzio Attendolo whose nickname, Sforza, gave the dynasty its name. It ends in 1535 with the death of Francesco Sforza the last Duke of Milan.

The Story of the Sforzas was first published in 1933 and I had a four volume Pallas Armata edition to review. Pallas Armata is run by Gareth Simon in the UK. They reprint important period memoirs and historical works of interest to wargamers. The reprints are produced from photocopies of the original works.

The book contains 312 pages split into four A5 booklets and includes a bibliography, index, an indispensable map of the Italian states during the period and a dozen illustrations. Each booklet, or volume, has a soft card cover and contains seventy or more pages. I found this an easy format to read and much easier to carry around.

A significant part of the book deals with the court life, politics, and characters of the time including Leonardo Da Vinci, the Medicis, and the Borgias. There is a good description of Italian, and especially Milanese, politics from the early condotterie period through the high renaissance to the Italian Wars. In this aspect the author gives a good impression of the social changes behind the evolution of condotta warfare and the resultant shock of the French invasion in 1494.

I found the book easy to read and only occasionally became bogged down by the complexities of the interactions between the various City States and major powers of the time. The map proved indispensable in untangling some of the passages. In some sections the author has clearly assumed a reasonable level of knowledge of the period.

The military aspects are few and far between and there is no feeling of the tremendous changes in warfare underway at the time. The Italian wars are covered but only briefly in the final pages. The main part of the book deals with Ludovico Il Moro and his duchess Beatrice d'Este who ruled in the period preceding the French invasion. The author is clearly of the opinion that the French invasion ended a golden period in Italy.

This is a well written book that tackles an interesting dynasty living through complex times. Given the high political content and there is much to recommend the book as background reading and for someone looking for inspiration for campaign scenarios. On balance those interested in either a general overview of this period of Italian History or specific military matters should look elsewhere.