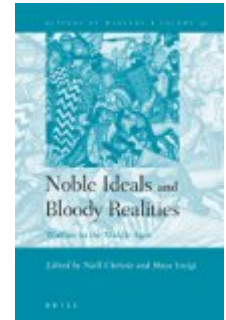


Niall Christie, Maya Yazigi, eds.. *Noble Ideals and Bloody Realities: Warfare in the Middle Ages*. Leiden: Brill, 2006. xx + 269 pp. \$145.00, cloth, ISBN 978-90-04-15024-9.



**Reviewed by** Peter Konieczny

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Brill Publishing has had a successful run so far with its History of Warfare series, which includes over forty volumes with many more to come. About half of their books are essay collections focused on a particular topic such as the First World War or aspects of amphibious warfare. This volume, however, is not as focused, as it covers medieval warfare ranging from England to the Red Sea, with little connection between the various essays. This lack of an overall topic or theme can be considered a negative, but with the strong sales of anything related to medieval military history it will probably be beneficial to the publisher.

Most of the articles were first given as lectures presented in 2003 at a University of British Columbia conference, organized by Niall Christie and Maya Yazigi, who edited the subsequent book. The twelve articles are arranged into three sections, but they do not relate to each other and have to be considered individually. Fortunately, most of them are quite good and offer the reader a useful and interesting story. David Hay begins by examining the role that chivalry played in re-

gards to limiting civilian casualties during war. The High Middle Ages saw two important developments in the treatment of prisoners, namely the decline of slavery (at least between Christian combatants), and the increased use of ransoming. This made warfare less dangerous for knights and those wealthy enough to buy their freedom, but the author correctly notes that it did nothing for the peasantry. Having no value either as candidates for ransom or as potential slaves, peasants and even poor merchants were often just slaughtered by contemptuous knights. Hay completes his article by examining how these knights behaved during the First Crusade, where pragmatism often outweighed religious ideals.

The prolific Kelly DeVries puts in the second article, where he examines three aspects of medieval warfare--armor, fortifications and military surgery--that he believes provide a counter-argument against those who see the Middle Ages as particularly bloody and uncaring towards human life. The next article is by Niall Christie and is one of the best in this volume. He looks at the reasons for the First Crusade given by contemporary Is-

lamic writers, and finds that several explanations were given. One Muslim historian believed that the Crusaders came to seek revenge because their pilgrims were prevented from going to Jerusalem years earlier, while another portrays it as simple greed for the riches of the Middle East. Christie focuses on the writings of 'Ali ibn Tahir al-Sulami, an early twelfth-century Damascene scholar who developed an insightful and highly accurate analysis of the causes of the First Crusade.

John France pens the next article, "Thinking about Crusader Strategy," where he attempts to explain the Crusaders' plans for achieving victory in the Middle East. France argues that the Papacy was usually eager to form an alliance with the Byzantine Empire, while he also notes that other players, like the King of Jerusalem, developed other ideas, including trying to conquer Egypt. The arguments over this paper are somewhat difficult to accept when one considers that the crusades spanned several generations, and many changes of regimes--it is hard to believe that the Popes who succeeded Urban II would have been aware of his strategic plan, let alone agree with it.

Piers D. Mitchell gives the fifth paper, which looks at the use of torture during the Crusades, and finds, somewhat unsurprisingly, that it was widely used. The paper does provide a useful summary of what torture techniques were used, but the almost total lack of sources from the Muslim side is disappointing. Mitchell is followed by Deborah Gerish, whose paper has the least relevance to military history. She finds that the royal consorts in the Kingdom of Jerusalem were mostly marginalized in contemporary accounts, and would usually only get mentioned when they could be blamed for things going wrong. This contrasts with the more important roles that queens and consorts had in European courts. Paula R. Stiles follows with an article about the military role of Muslims and Jews in the Crown of Aragon. While one might expect that the non-Christians would give little support to their Christian lords,

Stiles finds that they were both heavily involved in defending cities and towns, and that Muslim soldiers could be found in various armies.

The next two articles are the only ones of interest to those specializing in English warfare. David G. Sylvester looks at how the Cinque Ports worked together to advance their mutual interests. This included occasional forays into piracy and a long-standing bloody feud with the mariners of Great Yarmouth. The English kings were often willing to overlook these indiscretions, for they relied on the Cinque Ports to provide commercial and naval support in support of their wars. The next article, by Ilana Krug, is an overview of how corruption infiltrated the taxation, purveyance and other government operations used in England's war effort. Krug makes use of government documents and literary accounts as she shows the reactions of ordinary people towards corrupt officials and practices.

The final three papers return to the Middle East. Hugh Kennedy, perhaps the best western scholar on early Islamic warfare, offers a couple of explanations on why the Umayyad and Abbasid empires continued to be an effective military force for hundreds of years, namely the use of stirrups and the development of mounted archers. In "Byzantium, the Reluctant Warrior," Warren Treadgold discusses the kinds of wars that the Byzantine Empire fought during its existence, which the author dates from 285 to 1461. Treadgold finds that most of the wars fought by the Byzantines were defensive ones, or civil wars, and that wars of conquest were rare. He also makes the point that warfare was not viewed as a good thing in itself, and that the idea of Holy War had little or no influence in Byzantine thought.

The final paper, written by Marcus Milwright, examines an attempt by the Crusader lord Reynald of Châtillon to launch a campaign in the Red Sea in 1182-83. The author speculates that Reynald's aim was to exhume the bones of the Prophet

Muhammad, and gives some convincing evidence to show why the Crusader would want to do this.

Overall, this volume contains a good mix of papers, some of which look at specific events, with others tackling broader issues. Most of the papers are well written, and in terms of writing style, Treadgold's work was quite enjoyable to read. This book will mostly appeal to historians focusing on the Middle East, and offers nothing for those who are interested in places like Italy or Eastern Europe. Still, I would recommend *Noble Ideals and Bloody Realities* for any library shelf and for any medieval military historian who can afford to buy it.

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