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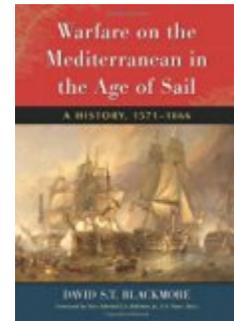
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David S. T. Blackmore. *Warfare on the Mediterranean in the Age of Sail: A History, 1571-1866*. Jefferson: Mcfarland, 2010. 402 pp. \$45.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-4799-2.

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David S. T. Blackmore intends to study the strategic and technological framework of naval wars in the age of sail (1571-1866) following a strict chronological order. It is not written as a scientific book; but rather it seems intended for a general audience interested in military history. The author does not reveal his sources and he uses endnotes in order to provide further explanations. There is a four-page long bibliography at the end of the book; all works are in English. There are ten appendices; while some give relevant information regarding naval battles, European navies, tactics employed, and the sailing ordnance, others are less revealing: correspondence between Nelson and Tsar Paul I, Queen Caroline and Lady Hamilton, Nelson's Last letters and Wishes and excerpts from the 1827 Treaty of London. Instead, more detailed treatment of technical details would be more useful if included among the appendices.

The book starts with an explanatory introduction that gives detailed information, trying with mixed success to provide the nonspecialist reader with what he or she should know in order to understand the book. Even though the first chapters cover periods when naval warfare was conducted with oared sailing vessels, the concentration remains on sailing ships and the gunpowder technology that accompanied them. Therefore little space is given, justly, to galley warfare such as the Battle of Chioggia between the Venetians and the Genoese. However, even in this small space there is an imbalance: most of the space allocated to naval technology before the age of sail is restricted to the ancient period and tells us very little about the medieval ages, which should be more important for studying the development of sailing ships during the early modern and modern era. For instance, a subchapter titled "Byzantine and Ottoman

Warships" is only two short paragraphs long. While this situation likely stems partly from the concentration of author's knowledge, it also reflects his indifference to the gradual development of naval technology and strategy through ancient and medieval times. He strongly believes in a radical break in naval technology during the closing decades of the sixteenth century. According to him, while a seaman from the fifth century BCE. would have been comfortable with galleys and tactics at Lepanto, a problematic assertion, had he lived seventeen years longer, he would have found himself facing an "alien and mysterious" Spanish armada in 1588 (pp. 50-51).

The book is loosely structured, listing one battle after another in an effort to demonstrate the evolution of naval technology from oars to sails. The introduction of gunpowder on warships is meticulously delineated by focusing on important battles. The author chooses to focus on strategic and technological issues, giving little relevant political context and relying on clichés and an outdated bibliography. He occasionally falls short of the reader's expectations as he shies away from engaging in an exhaustive study of sources and a thorough analysis of tactical and strategic details of military battles. His account of naval battles, most of the time superficial, sometimes as short as two paragraphs offering no details, remains dwarfed by similar general works on naval warfare, one example being John Francis Guilmartin's chapters on the Battle of Prevesa, the Battle of Djerba, the Siege of Malta and the Battle of Lepanto in his four-decade-old classical treatment of galley warfare in the Mediterranean, *Gunpowder and Galleys: Changing Technology and Mediterranean Warfare at Sea in the Sixteenth Century* (1974)). Succinct accounts of one battle

after another without sufficient political context or a *fil rouge* that would keep the book as well as the reader's attention intact are doomed to remain uninteresting and confusing. Fortunately, the book includes some useful figures that help the reader understand the details of the battle; still these are very few. It would be better if the book included more graphs and figures explaining detailed technical information without which a non-professional reader would have trouble in properly visualizing several types of ships mentioned in the book.

The author studies naval technology along the lines of European nations, making interesting observations on the differences in technology, ordnance, and strategy of British, French, and Dutch navies. This strength quickly becomes a weakness as the author's treatment is explicitly Eurocentric, paying little attention to similar technological and strategic developments outside Europe. Even though European nations were the ones that contributed to and benefited most from developments in sailing ships, they were not the only ones to experiment with them. Blackmore's failure to engage the non-European context precludes the possibility of making interesting comparisons between European and non-European navies and arsenals and denies him the opportunity to explain how Europeans preserved their strategic and technological dominance for such a long time, a key issue for explaining their global military and political success. The author should have done better than trying to engage issues such as "Ottoman decadence" in only four paragraphs, half a page. Then his conclusions would be more up-to-date with current historiography than this: "By European or Russian standards, eighteenth-century Ottoman ground forces were equipped with second rate, obsolescent and unstandardized materiel" (p. 105). Based on a diligent study of archival sources, Gábor Ágoston has recently made a very strong case against such Eurocentric and dismissive claims based on no primary research. If Blackmore's take on Ottoman land forces is so superficial, one should not expect a better treatment of the Ottoman navy during this period of "Ottoman decadence": "The once-invincible navy was in even worse shape. There was a substantially fleet-in-being, but its combat readiness had declined dramatically. It was poorly designed, ill-maintained, inadequately armed, badly officered, and incompetently crewed. Ships of the line were antiquated and obsolete rowing galleys remained in active service." Reading these lines, one wonders how this empire survived for another two centuries and kept most of its eastern Mediterranean possessions until the very end. Even though there is a growing literature on the Ottoman navy

and arsenal, mostly produced by Idris Bostan of Istanbul University and a number of his students, for now such literature remains in Turkish. As long as it does so, the history of the Ottoman Empire will remain vulnerable to such a priori assertions.

The author's limited linguistic capabilities and consequently his narrow source base not only affects his treatment of non-European contexts. Even regarding the history of naval warfare in Europe, he could have done a better job with the help of French and to a certain extent Spanish and Italian sources, both primary and secondary and long available in print.

There are several mistakes throughout the book. I will just mention just a few of those in order to give a broad idea. Don Juan, the Habsburg prince and the commander of the Allied Fleet at the Battle of Lepanto, is mistaken for the famous literary character (p. 15). The two sentences that form the first paragraph on p. 18 contain several crucial errors: the Gulf of Valencia is west and not the east of the Balearic islands; the Gulf of Genoa lies to the east and not to the west of the Gulf of Lion; and the gulf into which the Rhône River flows is not the Gulf of Lyons, but the Gulf of Lion; its name derives not from the nearby city of Lyon as the author seems to have assumed, but from the scary noise that the northerly mistral makes, resembling the lion's roar.[1] Scalaccio is misspelled on p. 34. The Portuguese Cortes is not a Council of State, but rather an assembly of representatives from different "estates," i.e., clergy, nobility, and commoners (p. 43). Despite the important roles they played for the Ottoman navy, Kemal Reis and Kara Hoca were never made pashas (pp. 45 and 55). The official bearing the Ottoman title "grand admiral," Kapudan-ı Derya, was not necessarily a pasha and the title "pasha" was not at all a civil rank, as claimed on p. 353. The author erroneously refers to the graduates of the Ottoman palace school, Enderun, who took part in naval expeditions as *reis*, i.e., the captain of a ship, a title which the Ottomans mostly reserved for corsairs in their employ. Neither Piyale, nor Müezzinzade Ali Pasha was a professional seaman or a captain; they were educated as members of the sultan's household in the Ottoman palace and mostly in land warfare rather than naval (pp. 56-57). Uluch Ali was not the dey of Algiers; this title began to be used later in the seventeenth century (p. 55). He was rather the governor-general, or *beylerbeyi*, of Algeria. It was not Selim I (d. 1520), but rather his son, Süleyman I, who "ordered the entire city illuminated in celebration" of the Ottoman victory at Prevesa (1538) (p. 49). In 1540, it was not Barbaros Hayreddin Pasha who sacked Gibraltar, but one

of his lieutenants whom he left in his stead in Algiers (p. 111). There was never a clear-cut organization of Ottoman navy, divided into four navies as the author claims on p. 105. And finally, the first paragraph after the subtitle “Design Considerations” on p. 66 is almost identical to the fifth paragraph after the subchapter “Sailing Ship Architecture” on p. 51.

It is to my great chagrin, as a student of Mediterranean privateering, to see that a book on naval warfare fails to make the necessary distinction between a pirate and a privateer, another sign of the book’s amateur treatment of historical phenomena. The author also fails to pay attention to the gradual development of the landscape and the Mediterranean topography over the centuries. For instance, the fact that Corinth has direct access to the Adriatic and is connected by a canal to the Aegean Sea (p. 21) is not only irrelevant, as this canal was only built in the last decade of the nineteenth century, but also misleading in a book that deals with naval

strategy and tactics. Similarly, in what way sentences such as “Although Ashdod is mentioned thirteen times in the Bible, its port was not developed until the 1950s. Today its accounts for sixty percent of Israel’s import” (p. 22) will contribute to our understanding of Mediterranean topography and naval strategies and tactics remains uncertain.

In short, while the book sporadically provides some interesting information, it offers experts and scholars very little. Its narrow source base, outdated bibliography, Eurocentric worldview, occasional factual errors, and loose structure are major weaknesses that disturb the reader.

#### Note

[1]. John H. Pryor, *Geography, Technology and War: Studies in the Maritime History of the Mediterranean, 649-1571* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 19.

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