

David Plouviez. *Défense et colonies dans le monde atlantique, XVe - XXe siècle.* Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2014. 316 pp. EUR 20.00, paper, ISBN 978-2-7535-3467-4.



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Atlantic history is *à la mode* these days, and historians excavate farther and deeper into the world that emerged around the Atlantic Ocean since the fifteenth century. An ever-growing number of publications explore the nature of transatlantic immigration, the history of slavery and the slave trade, the characteristics of settler colonialism, and the mechanisms of the European-based Atlantic empires. In spite of this growing interest among scholars, the military dimensions of the Atlantic world have gone almost unexplored.[1] The impact of military demands on colonial states and societies—politically, economically, socially, culturally—was profound, but remain largely unknown. The collection of essays edited by David Plouviez, *Défense et Colonies dans le monde Atlantique XVe-XXe siècle* is therefore a welcome contribution to the field of Atlantic history, and will prove to be of great value to military historians more broadly.

Défense et Colonies is the product of two *journées d'études* that took place in 2012 and 2013

at the Centre de Recherches en Histoire Internationale et Atlantique at the University of Nantes. This collection sets to examine afresh the history of colonial defenses and the structure of imperial military systems in the Atlantic world from the fifteenth through the twentieth centuries. It does so by favoring a transnational approach and by paying a close attention to the multilayered structure of the imperial military edifices. As Plouviez puts it in the introduction, “la défense des colonies doit être envisagée de façon globale, prenant en compte simultanément les dispositifs terrestres et maritimes ... l'historien doit analyser toutes les composantes qui permettent de sécuriser un espace ou d'y mener la guerre, ce qui prolonge notre propos sur la nécessaire prise en compte de la diversité des acteurs de la défense coloniale” (p. 15).

Défense et Colonies consists of three parts. The first and greater of these addresses two inter-related topics: the place of colonies within imperial geopolitical strategies, and the role of colonial forces within the imperial military structures. The

second part engages with questions of circulation and representation of information, and part 3 discusses matters of logistics and infrastructure. The articles collected here successfully present a textured, original view of colonial defenses, and open up routes for further investigation. However, the aspirations of the editors to present the study of colonial defenses within broad temporal and geographical spans—from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries, throughout the Atlantic world—remain unsuccessful. Out of a total of eighteen articles, only three address modern, postrevolutionary histories, and only four examine non-French related topics. Thus we are left with an enlightening collection, but one that is ultimately narrowly focused on the early-modern French Atlantic.

The book opens with Mathieu Mogo Demaret, who analyzes how Portuguese and Dutch geopolitical concerns shaped the region of Luanda during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. After an initial period of conquest the Portuguese turned in 1603 to secure their occupied territories and develop them economically. Having failed to find precious metals, they undertook to develop slave trading in their newly formed colony. To that end, they built a chain of fortifications in the African hinterland that had little military value, but significant symbolic power as markers of the European front line. In the 1620s the Dutch started encroaching upon the Portuguese colony in order to take a share of the slave trade. Slaves were crucial for the success of the Dutch colony in Brazil. According to Demaret, the confrontation between the two European powers fostered *territorialisation* of colonial spaces, a process that had two aspects: (1) bolstering territorial defenses and (2) developing cartography as a tool of territorial control. Demaret's insightful study illustrates how Dutch imperial considerations in Brazil unraveled in the African hinterland, and how the clash between the two empires promoted scientific progress. And yet, it is to be desired that Demaret explored more closely the interaction between

European and African actors, and not presented us with a one-dimensional, Euro-centric history of colonization in Africa.

Also on cartography, Caroline Seveno in a thoughtful article compares the evolution of French, English, and Spanish cartographic practices in the Caribbean during the early-modern Atlantic. She recognizes a three-staged development of map making that reflects the changing needs of the Atlantic empires. At first, maps depicted an entire, single island in an attempt to locate the strategically important points that needed to be fortified. Then, around the turn of the eighteenth century, cartographers focused on analyzing single forts in an attempt to pinpoint their weaknesses and thus allow administrators to fix their flaws. Finally, toward the end of the eighteenth century, maps became offensive tools utilized by the emerging state, mostly for espionage on nearby enemy islands. Seveno demonstrates how imperial military needs were a motor for the evolution of map making, thereby successfully tying colonization, colonial defenses, the rise of the modern state, and the history of science all together.

Françoise Lejeune offers an original approach to an old military question: what were the causes for the French defeat in the Seven Years War, specifically the loss of France's North American territories to the English? Contrary to scholars who underscore the superiority of the British military or navy—she explicitly challenges Gilles Havard and Cecile Vidal—Lejeune argues that different administrative structures stood at the heart of the disparity between the two empires. In an intriguing argument, Lejeune explains that the French thought of their North American possessions as a frontier outpost in the middle of the British colonies, but not as colonies to be developed. Furthermore, the French failed to comprehend the unique character of their North American colonies, and to devise a comprehensive strategy for them. *Au contraire*, since 1754 the British

had one governor general in charge of all military affairs in North America, and he was able to design and implement a strategic plan. Lejeune's original interpretation born of a transimperial comparison is a truly intriguing one.

Also on the Franco-British rivalry, Djigautte Amédé Bassène discusses the French defenses of the island of Gorée off the Senegal coast. Gorée was strategically located both to protect the colony of Senegambia as well as to promote the slave trade. Unsurprisingly, Bassène finds out that the French had tremendous difficulties upholding Gorée, especially in face of recurring British attempts to occupy it.

Historians interested in the military powers of the Atlantic empires traditionally focus their attention on naval might or the size of armies. A number of scholars in this volume, however, underscore the importance of paramilitary, semi-professional forces in the imperial defense structures. Philip Hrodej traces the evolution of Saint Domingue's defenses during the second half of the seventeenth century. He argues that an equilibrium was gradually reached between means of defense static (fortifications and artillery) and dynamic (privateers). This process corresponds to the socioeconomic and demographic development of the colony. Patrick Villiers also stresses the significance of privateers to the protection of Martinique during the War of Austrian Succession (1740-48). He shows that Martinique's privateers managed to break the British naval blockade and supply the island with necessary goods, thereby allowing Martinique to survive the war. Many of these supplies came from attacking British ships carrying out trade between the Caribbean and North America.

François-Xavier Jeanne probes into the conduct of the French-Canadian militia during the Seven Years War. Jeanne follows the militia raids against British forts and its conduct as an auxiliary to the regular army during the war years. He argues that the Canadian militia was a small, mo-

bile, and highly competent force that was particularly skilled in guerrilla warfare thanks to the close relations between the French colonists and the local Amerindians. Jeanne concludes that "La milice constitue le pilier principal de la défense du Canada.... La guérilla s'avère efficace et constitue le seul obstacle valable aux renforts de troupes régulières que William Pitt envoie en nombre à partir de 1757" (pp. 108-109).

Roberto Barazzutti explores the maritime defensive policies of the Dutch colonies during the seventeenth century. He asks what role the different actors in the Dutch colonies—the West India Company (WIC), East India Company, the Dutch state, and private interests—played in the defense of the colonies, focusing on the WIC in Brazil and the Caribbean. In Brazil the company was charged with offensive operations meant to consolidate the Dutch colony there, while in the Caribbean it was responsible for the protection of the Dutch settlements. The United Provinces did very little, as a state, to assist their colonies militarily. Under the circumstances, the WIC had to rely on semi-private defenders, mostly privateers, to protect the West Indies colonies. Eric Roulet explores similar themes in his study of French colonial defenses under the *Compagnie des Îles* (1626-48). The company was commissioned to occupy and populate the French Caribbean islands of Saint Christophe, Martinique, and Guadeloupe, among others. Roulet studies the mechanisms by which the company protected the islands: ensuring regular shipments of arms and munitions and supporting the construction of fortifications. Both Barazzutti and Roulet, then, accentuate the importance of the semi-private charter companies within the imperial military structures, and together with Hrodej, Villiers, and Jeanne, the scholars all point out the central role of paramilitary forces, such as militias and privateers, in colonial defenses. This is an important shift in the scholarship from the traditional attention accorded to navies and armies, toward centralizing the role of mili-

tias and privateers, and thereby of “creole” military forces vis-à-vis metropole ones.

Sébastien Martin and Arnaud Orain both explore issues of imperial logistics. Martin, in a fascinating article, traces the history of the French naval arsenal in Rochefort under the Old Régime. The Atlantic colonies were dependent on the importation of victuals, water, and other materials from France. All of the operations involved in procuring and distributing these resources were handled in Rochefort. Martin skillfully uncovers the structure of the arsenal and the complex operations taking place there. He shows that the volume of shipments leaving Rochefort to the colonies increased constantly until the Seven Years War, when the volume of exportations grew so much that the arsenal in Rochefort was no longer able to handle it all. Consequently, in the postwar years Rochefort became a secondary base, losing the primacy to the arsenals in Brest and Lorient. The logistic concerns uncovered by Martin were not uniquely French, as all of the Atlantic empires in the postwar years had to overcome similar challenges.

Arnaud Orain also addresses provisioning issues, in this case the challenges involved in supplying the French Indian Ocean colonies during the War of American Independence. The Indian Ocean colonies suffered great shortages in food, naval supplies, medications, and in almost every kind of merchandise during those years, since the monarchy prioritized the American war efforts. Although an interesting article in itself, it remains to be asked what a study on supplying Indian Ocean colonies does in a collection on Atlantic history. There is, of course, a long-standing debate whether or not the Indian Ocean should be considered within the framework of Atlantic history. And yet, this article feels out of place in this collection.

A number of scholars in this volume argue that the Atlantic colonies had great strategic value to the metropole, more than is regularly accorded

to them by historians. Thus, Guillaume Hanotin in a study of the Franco-Spanish Bourbon alliance during the War of Spanish Succession (1701-14), argues that even though no notable battle took place in America during this conflict, the American theater was of central importance to the Bourbon kings. He claims that “les possessions américaines, loin d’être oubliées ou négligées, ont constitué en réalité l’un des cœurs stratégiques du conflit” (p. 70). In a similar vein, Michel Catala analyzes the geopolitics of the “Méditerranée atlantique,” a region in which Morocco and Spain are the two principal states. Within the context of this region, Catala investigates France’s colonial policies in Morocco, 1936-40. Until 1936 Morocco was securely held by the Franco-British coalition, but the rise of Franco at the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 forced France to revisit its Moroccan situation. “Mais la France n’a pas de stratégie globale de défense en Méditerranée atlantique,” argues Catala (p. 142). France’s only interest in Morocco was in the colony’s ability to protect the metropole, and all attention given to that colony was in order to use it to block attacks against the metropole.

Likewise, Christopher Griffin analyzes France’s investment in Algeria, 1940-62. He argues that during this period Algeria filled three different functions in the French defense system. At first, during World War II, Algeria served as a rear base of operations. Then, since 1942, it was used as springboard for offensive operations against Nazi Germany, and during the Cold War against the Soviet Union. And finally, during the 1950s Algeria was seen as a vital outpost protecting the French Hexagon against enemy invasions. However, once tensions in Algeria and Indochina mounted in the middle of the century, France was compelled to rethink its colonization policies. Consequently, De Gaulle ordered the modernization of the French armed forces, with a particular focus on modern weaponry. As part of this process, France developed nuclear capabilities that reduced the strategic importance of Algeria,

thus leading the way for the French retreat from there in 1962.

Nadia Varfgaftic uncovers the process by which the Portuguese dictator António de Oliveira Salazar propagated a colonial vision among his populace to secure his standing at the top of the Portuguese state in the early twentieth century. She argues that the civilian Salazar had to find ways to harness the support of the military elites, who were strongly interested in promoting colonization efforts overseas. This sentiment was also widespread among the general populace. Therefore, Salazar disseminated plans for Portuguese colonization as part of his efforts to build up his image and consolidate his rule. This is a meritorious study, but one that feels out of place in a volume concerned with Atlantic colonial defenses.

Finally, the last two chapters of this volume present enlightening interdisciplinary contributions. Agueda Iturbe-Kennedy presents a material culture study of colonial cities' gates. She articulates how these gates corresponded to the cities' contradictory needs of projecting closeness (in face of possible threats) and openness (to promote circulation with the hinterland) at the same time. Iturbe-Kennedy's is a wonderful exploration of the fruits one can bear from an interdisciplinary approach to military questions. Tristan Yvon shares the findings of an archaeological excavation conducted in Guadeloupe's Grande Anse de Trois Rivières. The excavation uncovered a redoubt built there in 1779 during the American war, in preparation for possible British retaliatory attack against the French colonies. This is an insightful study, even if some historians will find themselves overwhelmed by the extensive technical discussion to which they are not accustomed.

Overall, *Défense et Colonies* is a welcome contribution to the growing literature on Atlantic history, a field that is short of explorations in military history. Military historians on their side will appreciate the sophisticated analyses of the impe-

rial military structures. The transnational, multi-layered, and interdisciplinary methods presented in this volume are commendable. I find in *Défense et Colonies* three particular historiographical contributions. First, it shifts the focus in questions of imperial military might from the bigger and heavy (state finances, naval operations) to the smaller and the local (militias, privateers, chartered companies), thus stressing the important place of creoles within the imperial edifices, while providing a more textured view of the Atlantic empires. Second, a number of studies in this volume demonstrate the high strategic value of the Atlantic colonies to the European imperial courts, thereby helping to shift the focus of military historians from European theaters overseas. Finally, the transnational, interdisciplinary approach to questions of military history is commendable, even if not always successfully executed here. It nevertheless should show the way for future scholarly endeavors.

Its many merits notwithstanding, *Défense et Colonies* also suffers from serious shortcomings. Most of all, it puts forward a white, Euro-centric, male study, in complete disregard to questions of race, slavery, subalterns, or social history. Thus, important questions that should be at the heart of the articles published here, remain unasked and thereby unanswered. For instance, what role did slaves and freed blacks play in the imperial defense structures? Slaves were crucial for the construction of fortifications, for transporting needed materials, and at times were recruited as sailors and soldiers. But in this volume the reader reads none of that. And where are the Africans in the narratives unfolded in this collection? We are presented with a comprehensive study of Atlantic history with almost no mention of Africa and Africans. Also, what was the social significance of the colonial militia? And how did the imperial military needs shape social structures in Europe? Did the arsenal in Rochefort or the expansion of navies have nothing to bear on European societies? Leaving out such important issues detracts

considerably from the value of this volume. Atlantic history is more than merely transnational history; it takes into consideration the complex racial and multiethnic structures that emerged around the Atlantic Ocean and highlights the impacts of the newly formed connections between Europe, Africa, and America. It is unfortunate that the authors and editors did not take advantage of the advances Atlantic history has brought to the scholarship. There is no doubt that the military dimensions of the Atlantic world have been sidelined in the historiography and therefore a collection like *Défense et Colonies* is greatly appreciated. Ultimately, in spite of its shortcomings, this a truly interesting book that opens routes for further research and which I am confident many a scholar will find stimulating and beneficial.

Note

[1]. Notable exceptions include Arnaud Balvay, *L'épée et la Plume: Amérindiens et Soldats des Troupes de la Marine en Louisiane et au Pays d'en Haut (1683-1763)* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006); Evelyn P. Jennings, *Slaves of the State: Urban Slavery, Imperial Defense, and Public Works in Colonial Havana, 1763-1840* (PhD diss., University of Rochester: 2001); Stewart R. King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001); John K. Thornton, " 'I am the Subject of the King of Congo': African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution," *Journal of World History* 4, no. 2 (1993): 181–214; and Ben Vinson III, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press: 2001).

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