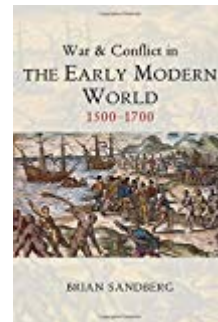


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**Brian Sandberg.** *War and Conflict in the Early Modern World, 1500-1700.* War and Conflict through the Ages Series. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016. 304 pp. \$26.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7456-4602-2; \$28.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-7456-4603-9.



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**Published on** H-Diplo (November, 2016)

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Is it possible to cover the entire range of violent conflicts that occur in the era between 1500 and 1700 across five continents (Australia is not mentioned) in three hundred pages of text? Brian Sandberg's book, the second volume in Polity's War and Conflict through the Ages series, presents a strong case for a positive answer. The essential issue in the book is whether the concept of the "military revolution," proposed by Michael Roberts in his 1967 article, "The Military Revolution, 1560-1660," and amended by Geoffrey Parker in *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800* (1988), Jeremy Black in *A Military Revolution? Military Change and European Society, 1500-1800* (1991), and others, is adequate to explain the vast range of violent conflicts that occurred across the world in the era examined.[1] These historians have deemed that the changes in warfare wrought by gunpowder weapons and a new style of fortification were profound enough to warrant the use of the term "revolution." Sandberg certainly does not deny that there were vast changes in warfare but questions whether they were restricted to European states; he argues that much of the warfare across the globe owes little to the European developments.

Sandberg's first chapter, "Innovative Warfare 1450-1520s," sets the format for the rest of the book. It ex-

plores new methods and technology largely in Europe but ranges widely across Muslim societies, China, and West Africa. An intriguing aspect is his discussion of the extensive circulation of war news and propaganda, again mostly in Europe, but also in Muslim societies. The next chapter on maritime conflicts and colonial expansion necessarily concentrates on European activities but also examines the expansion and use of the Ottoman fleet in the waters surrounding the Middle East. It includes a succinct, first-rate section on the creation of the global slave trade.

The remaining ten chapters follow a largely identical pattern. The author selects a type of violence and shows how it has occurred in societies usually across the five continents. In perhaps the best chapter, "Raiding Warfare 1580s-1640s," Sandberg makes the case that raiding needs to be studied as a form of true war, not as "little more than burglary" (p. 171). This chapter is impressively far ranging in the societies covered. Under maritime raiding, he covers piracy and slaving in the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, and the China Sea. His category of borderland raiding encompasses the Atlantic coast, the Great Lakes, and the badlands of North America; the steppes of Russia and the deserts of the Middle East; the grasslands of South Amer-

ica and Africa; and the tropical forests of Africa and Asia. Sandberg examines the devastation caused by persistent raiding and shows how states responded to it by building small fortifications equipped with cannons.

The rest of the chapters—on schism and social conflict, dynastic war and state development, noble violence, sectarian violence and religious warfare, peasant revolt and rural conflict, ethnic conflict, rebellion and civil warfare, mercantile war, and territorial war—show that these types of violence occurred across a broad range of societies but fewer than raiding. Europe, of course, is featured in all of them, and the Ottoman and Chinese empires warrant extensive coverage; but the Kongo kingdom of central Africa, as one example, is also frequently discussed.

This is an admirable work in the sweep of global events it examines and its demonstration of how European colonization was responsible either directly or indirectly on so much of the violence that occurred outside of Europe in the era under study. It gives proper consideration to the impact of the long period of cold across the world called the Little Ice Age on societies, especially in respect to peasant revolts and conflicts. Sandberg also understands the role of religion and belief in fomenting violence across a wide diversity of societies.

One can hardly criticize a book that covers so broad a span of societies and time in a relatively modest number of pages for slighting a few topics, but an issue that requires more consideration is the edging of military superiority away from the nomadic horse-archer peoples on the Eurasian steppes toward the settled societies, a process that was well under way by 1700. Another difficulty is that there is some repetition as the same events

serve as examples of several types of violence. More problematic is a number of minor mistakes and dubious statements in the coverage of European events; for example, Charles V inherited the county of Burgundy (the Franche-Comté), not the duchy (p. 103); Francis I of France was not wounded at the Battle of Pavia (p. 112); Catherine de Medici did not serve as regent for her son Francis II, since he was already fifteen when Henry II died (p. 143). While not serious problems in themselves, they do raise the issue of how many similar errors are present in the sections on non-European societies in which the author, and I, are not as well versed.

Although Sandberg regards the term “military revolution” as too Eurocentric, it remains true that by 1700 if not earlier, the Europeans were clearly superior to every other culture in waging war. Whether one wants to use a different term or none at all to describe the developments that created that superiority (and to call developments over two centuries a revolution is certainly stretching the sense of the term), it does not change the fact that they occurred mostly in Europe and were being adopted across the world. Nonetheless this is a must-read book for anyone interested in warfare in a global framework in the early modern era.

#### Note

[1]. Michael Roberts, “The Military Revolution, 1560-1660,” *Essays in Swedish History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967), 195-255; Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Jeremy Black, *A Military Revolution? Military Change and European Society, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1991).

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**Citation:** Frederic J. Baumgartner. Review of Sandberg, Brian, *War and Conflict in the Early Modern World, 1500-1700*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. November, 2016.

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