

Review of Georgios Theotokis & Aysel Yıldız (eds.), A Military History of the Mediterranean Sea. Aspects of War, Diplomacy and Military Elites, Leiden, Brill, 2018, pp. XV+473.

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Abstract

Review of the book by GeorgiosTheotokis&AyselYıldız (eds.), *A Military History of the Mediterranean Sea. Aspects of War, Diplomacy and Military Elites*, Leiden, Brill, 2018, pp. XV+473.

Keywords: Military History, Byzantium, Ottoman Empire, Early Modern Europe.

The enormous expansion of Europe, started in the XVI century, was mainly allowed by the technological development: thanks to “guns and sails» (Cipolla, 1996) some European countries were able to colonize entire continents and build huge overseas empires. The expansion was simultaneous to a great evolution in the military field.

Technology and new tactics, in fact, deeply changed the framework of warfare. According to the thesis formulated by Michael Roberts (1956) and later developed by Geoffrey Parker (1996), a “military revolution» arose in Europe between XV and XVII centuries, provoking great changes, among which: the replacement of spears and pikes with bows and muskets (and, consequently, the reduction of the role of cavalry); the greater impact of armies on societies; the more ambitious strategies. In short, the military art was deeply modified. Suffice it to say that the size of the army increased tenfold in many countries between the XVI and the XVIII century. The origin of such a revolution must be found in the Middle Age and in the innovations developed in the military field after the fall of the Roman Empire.

This new book about the military history of the Mediterranean, edited by GeorgiosTheotokis&AyselYıldız, deals with some little known aspects of the centuries preceding the military revolution. In other terms, the book

highlights some aspects of the path that drove Europe to achieve a clear military and technological superiority.

The book collects scholars coming from different countries and different academic backgrounds, whose essays concerns diverse topics, thus offering a wide panorama of military art in the post-Roman Mediterranean.

The Middle Age was, as is known, a very conflictual period, during which the conflicts between Byzantium and the European powers, the emergence of Islam, the reaction of Christendom through the Crusades, etc. provoked continuous fights.

The legacy of Rome – the editors write in the introduction - was still one of the most unifying elements that connected the historical traditions of the Byzantine, Islamic and Western European worlds. The basic characteristic of post-Roman Mediterranean is the shattering of the political unity of the Mediterranean under the rule of Octavian (p. 4).

The fight, however, did not prevent the different civilizations living on the Mediterranean shores to interact and had fruitful exchanges. Think, for example, to the relation between Charlemagne and the Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd in the VIII – IX century, to the Arab domination in Spain and Sicily, or even to Crusades, which certainly were a moment of bloody confrontation between West and East, but they also allowed different civilizations and peoples to interact and “meet» each other. Therefore, military history must be understood as a part of a more general framework, which involves economic, social, political and cultural aspects.

The book pays attention to several topics. A first part (contributions by TilemachosLounghis, Lilia Campana, ElinaGugliuzzo and Wayne H. Bowen), focuses on naval activity, highlighting the development of the Byzantine and Ottoman navy and their conflict with the European powers, first of all Venice. Other essays are dedicated to weapons and armours (works by Raffaele D’Amato, GeorgiosTheotokis, Iason-EleftheriosTzouriadis), shedding light on the development of armaments and their iconography. The third section (contributions by Alan V. Murray, Cornel Bontea, Stephen Bennet and Ian Wilson) deals with strategy and command, describing tactics and movements of troops during the Crusades and after. Another section (articles by Philip Rance, NikolaosKanellopoulos, SavvasKyriakidis) takes into consideration the military literature, showing how the war was told by late medieval and early modern authors. Finally, the last section of the book (articles by

StathisBirthachas, ChrysovalantisPapadamou, Jacopo Pessina and AyselYıldız) focuses on the relation between military roles and society, describing social position and careers of some officers.

Most topics of the book are almost unknown, even within the scholars, as the contributions are based on archival and other little studied sources. The reader, in such a way, is involved in an ideal travel, which moves him from Byzantium to the Holy Land and to the Modern Europe, as well as from the Middle Age to the verge of the modern world.

The common thread of the book is “to examine the mutual influence and interaction of war with societies and study the effects of war on societies in general bringing the cultural analysis of wars and warriors to the front stage” (p. 6).

In essence, the book is interesting not only for researchers specialized in military history, but also for other scholars and “common” readers interested in the history of the Mediterranean.

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