

11-2015

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Recommended Citation

Wivell, Brian (2015) "Review of Warfare at Sea, 1500–1650: Maritime Conflicts and the Transformation of Europe," *Armstrong Undergraduate Journal of History*. Vol. 5: Iss. 2, Article 10.

DOI: 10.20429/aujh.2015.050210

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/aujh/vol5/iss2/10>

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Warfare at Sea, 1500–1650: Maritime Conflicts and the Transformation of Europe

By Jan Glete. London: Routledge, 2000. ISBN: 978-0415214551.

In his work *Warfare at Sea, 1500-1650: Maritime Conflicts and the Transformation of Europe*, Jan Glete makes a convincing case for the role that naval strength plays in the greater European balance of power. Glete successfully supports the notion that control of the seas is essential to ensuring economic prosperity and military dominance. The changes of sea power in history led to the gradual shift of political and economic focus from Southern Europe and the Mediterranean to Northern Europe.

Glete organizes the book into two parts, the first handling theoretical discussion of the role of naval warfare and the second examining case studies. This division is frequently violated but exclusively to the benefit of the reader. This book is intended for an audience of primarily academics or interested naval enthusiasts, eschewing popular stories for scholarly citations. In fact it is this reliance on citations in the earlier part of the book that may leave the piece inaccessible as a piece of popular history.

Glete works towards two different ends which assist in fostering a greater understanding of the role of warfare at sea. He explains both the theoretical approaches to naval warfare and the developments in technology that made them possible. No better application of this convergence exists than the example of the military revolution. Glete obsesses over the literature surrounding the Military Revolution, a rapid development in military technology and organization that occurred following the France's invasion of Italy in the 16th century. Glete lists several historians on the military revolution, including Michael Roberts, Geoffrey Parker, and Jeremy Black, but notes that they stand united in silence on the role that naval power had in the military revolution

(9). For Glete, the military revolution that those authors spoke of ignored the very dynamic nature of sea power. It was Jeremy Black, among others that noted the correlation between the rise of state power and the simultaneous rise in military power controlled by the state (10). It is this idea that Glete later ties his notions of dynamic sea power to.

What separates Glete from the rest of the literature is his work on the interdependent interactions of the rise of states, the rise of navies, and the rise of commerce. The author notes that prior to his efforts, the military revolution literature had noted some interplay between commerce and the military-state apparatus, mostly pioneered by Frederick C. Lane (12). In his model, states sell protection as a product, the more efficiently they sell this product the more they are able to expand and dominate. This relationship was due in part to the cost of protecting trade and the benefits of plunder. A militarily robust state could both successfully prevent other states from ransacking their trade and engage in beneficial plunder. Thankfully, the author critiques many of the unfortunate assumptions of Lane. The most important one being the lack of an open state-market for protection. States have effective regional monopolies on protection, with only consumers at the periphery eligible for competition. Despite this major shortfall, Glete is able to take Lane's ideas on the efficient use of violence and bring them to powerful conclusions. States that effectively and efficiently use force at sea will be able to dominate both the commercial and political spheres.

Glete eventually lists five major developments in the selected period as being critical for comprehension of naval warfare (5). The first development is the formation and integration of territorial states. As mentioned previously, Glete heavily focuses on the interaction between state formation, the military revolution, and the development of state naval capacity. The second is the rise and decline of political and economic empires. This stage is largely focused on during the

second half of the book where the author addresses some of the preeminent naval powers that existed during this time. The third critical development was the expansion and restructuring of interregional seaborne trade. This helps connect the author's ideas for why such large state naval apparatuses became necessary and commonplace. The fourth development was the European expansion overseas. His fifth and final crucial development of the period was the technical transformation of warfare at sea. These developments all form the causal basis for Glete's theoretical approach to the era.

Following Glete's identification of major developments during the period he begins his analysis of the existing literature on naval organization. He notes that in the past most literature has focused on the navy as an organization. This entails the rise of organizational forces like professional officer corps and their role in creating modern navies (71). Related to the organizational study of navies, Glete examines the command structure of navies during this era and points to the command shift as a source of great strength and innovation. During this time period, command of the navy and accompanying armies were segmented leading to potential conflicting interests and orders. This was replaced with a unified command that made the fleet's captain the *capitan de mar y guerra*, in control of both seamen and soldiers (51). It was also during this period that the organization of navies within the state were given the credence and recognition befitting a modern military force. States formed on-shore bureaucracies that would help supply and manage the growing navies (53). This is where Glete begins to postulate that states that were unable to keep up with the evolution of navies would become irrelevant powers in the naval revolution.

Glete notes that while professional armies could exist outside of the state apparatus, typically in the form of religious orders or mercenary forces, private navies posed separate

challenges. Navies have costs that dwarf those of professional armies, creating large barriers for any potential mariners of fortune. This means that states were the only potent forces for enforcing a monopoly on violence at sea (68). Glete does note that states, even those of the large and powerful variety, did not possess a total monopoly on violence at sea. Powerful trading networks of private enterprise did exist, most notably the earlier Hanseatic League cities (113). Though these trade empires could not withstand the imperial might of rising empires, like the Swedes in the case of the former Hanseatic League. Glete also makes the careful distinction of clarifying the role of private state-controlled corporations, like the Dutch East India Company, which had the navy capacity of other empires but still existed as a private enterprise. These entities were augmentations and complements of the state and acted as such (43). They had their own interests outside of the state but were not fully private forces for hire like the medieval Swiss mercenaries. The mercenary aspect of naval power usually came in the form of experienced seamen or gunners, whom Glete notes were often purchased by declining and static naval powers to augment their depleting ranks (56). The author also makes sure to clarify the role of privateers and pirates during this era, as they seem to directly challenge the state naval monopoly model. Their use seemed to act as a sort of irregular warfare taken on by smaller powers engaged in asymmetric warfare. The author lists the examples of the nominally Ottoman corsair states of the Maghreb and the Knights of St. John (107). These were hardly threats to the great sea powers but served as significant nuisances. Theories on efficient naval use of violence and private violence undoubtedly contribute to the literature but often at the cost of simplicity. Glete's handling of privateers, non-imperial navies, and private traders is messy and requires some acrobatic efforts of reconciliation.

Glete hints at an ultimate goal of naval dominance when discussing the example of the Nordic states during the 1570's and 1580's. With Sweden as the premier Baltic power, naval dominance was secured and ushered in a period of peace and economic prosperity to the region (125). This allowed for naval development to grind to a halt and ships were now being designed for trade. Smaller crews were required thus allowing the cost of trade to decrease. This naval dominance ushered in greater prosperity. Though never explicitly stated Glete hints at this being one of the ultimate goals of the state in regards to naval policy.

The author focuses strongly on the role of technology, citing the innovation of cheap cast iron cannons as a decisive advantage in firepower (27). Glete also helps to eliminate the false historical narrative that the galley era and large-cannoned sailing era lacked overlap. Glete notes that galleys were actually armed with cannons during the late era of galley warfare, while still reminding the reader that their tactics were wholly separate from those of sailing ships (28).

Glete's approach to case studies remains uncontroversial. He analyses the examples of several regions and their power shifts through the lens of innovation. Unsurprisingly, he concludes that regions that held stagnant powers would soon be taken over and dominated by innovative powers. His prime example of naval hegemony shifts would be in the Mediterranean. He notes that the Ottomans and Venetians, due to their insistence on galley warfare, yielded control of the region to the English and Dutch (111). In Western Europe, Glete cites the Portuguese as the waning power unable to keep up with the pace of change. The author ends his case study analysis with what he calls "The First Global War at Sea". Such an event would certainly serve as the prime evidence of the legitimacy of his work. In the global naval war between the Dutch and Hapsburgs, though truly multiple wars in short succession, his thesis holds and the Dutch dynamic powers reigned supreme (185).

Dynamic naval powers will remain naval powers while those that refuse to adapt are doomed to future obscurity. The ever changing nature of warfare at sea ensures that no power will endure unless they continue to expend resources on their naval infrastructure. The Royal Navy of one era may become the Venetian Galleys of the next era. States seek to efficiently use violence in order to expand and maximize their naval power. Glete's identification of this trend is hardly revolutionary, adaptive powers often rise while stagnant powers fall, but his application of these theories to the naval realm is crucial. This piece pacifies the potentially stormy state of naval warfare literature and provides a stable platform for future historians to build on.

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About the author

Brian Wivell is a junior at the George Washington University studying Political Science and History. He is interested in naval history and the courses of empires.