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Ideologies of Western Naval Power, c. 1500-1815 provides the first study dedicated to naval ideology, conceived as ‘the mass of cultural ideas and shared perspectives that justified the creation and use of naval forces in early modern Europe’. The contributors, all renowned subject specialists, examine a broad range of themes, periods and geographical regions, covering Venice, the Netherlands, France, Great Britain, Spain, Sweden, Russia, and the United States. The volume also deals with the transversal themes of piracy, religion and neutrality. Its publication follows recent major publication projects in the fields of maritime history and naval history¹. As a starting point, the editors evoke military historian Michael Howard’s assessment of the relative isolation and neglect of naval history as a research field, which is often perceived as too specialistic and narrowly focused on strategic military studies². The editors juxtapose two seemingly opposed trends: the recent explosion of mainstream

¹ See, among others, Buchet, (Ed.), *The Sea in History/La Mer dans l’histoire*; Lambert, *Seapower States: Maritime Culture, Continental Empires and the Conflict that Made the Modern World*; Harding, *Modern Naval History: Debates and Prospects*.

² Davies, James & Rommelse, *Introduction: The Ghost at the Banquet: Navies, Ideologies, and the Writing of History*, in *Ideologies of Western Naval Power, c. 1500-1815*, 1-3. Cf. Howard, ‘Military History and the History of War’, in *Past as Prologue: The Importance of History to the Military Profession*, Murray & Hart Sinnreich (Eds.), 15; Hattendorf, ‘*Ubi Sumus?* Reflections by a Veteran Maritime Historian’, keynote address to the international conference on ‘The State of Maritime Historical Research’, University of Greenwich, 9 September 2017 (published in *Topmasts*: <https://snr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Topmasts-special-issue-rev.pdf>).

historical interest in the sea and the equally recent broadening of naval history beyond its traditional boundaries³.

In this context, the book aims to investigate the development of navies during the progressive strengthening of the early modern states and their central institutions, exploring the systems of beliefs that made the human and material factors interact in the complex organisations that are navies. The editors identify the danger of anachronism in the use of the term ‘ideology’, which indeed is usually reserved for describing the fully developed political systems of the 20th century. However, they specify that the book refers to ‘ideology’ in a flexible way, as the ‘mass of cultural ideas and shared perspectives that helped to create that ‘common sense of purpose’ of those ‘shared interests’ upon which navies depended. It refers to the social, cultural, and political environment out of which war aims and naval strategy emerged’⁴.

Christopher Storrs in his contribution on Hapsburg Spain’s ‘turn to the sea’ defines ideology in two distinct but connected ways: first, as a value system— as culture or mindset, [...] which underpinned, and thus explained how a system or institution was perceived, and ‘worked’, and second, ‘as a means of justifying to others, sometimes in a propagandistic manner, the diversion of resources, to support the fleet’⁵. Richard Harding in his contribution on 18th century Britain adds that: ‘Ideologies are not easy to pin down. [...] Ideologies will not be static. They are constantly reconstructed in reaction to changing environmental realities, modes of discourse, alternative explanations, and the interests, or even the identity, of the group’⁶. The editors argue that the considerable collective efforts that were demanded to create and deploy fully functioning navies could only be possible if ‘an intellectual or even emotional, case could be made which responded to people’s concerns, always those of political and economic elites, but also, to an increasing extent in the 18th century, of the wider population’⁷. Thus, in the editors’ words, the main purpose of the volume is to investigate ‘the nature of the political decisions which drove the evolution of navies given the extraordinary political, financial, material, and human commitment they

³ Ibid., 4.

⁴ Davies, James & Rommelse, *Introduction: The Ghost at the Banquet: Navies, Ideologies, and the Writing of History*, cit., 6.

⁵ Storrs, *Fleets and States in a Composite Monarchy, Spain c. 1500-1700*, ibid., 86.

⁶ Harding, *Naval Ideology and its Operational Impact in Eighteenth Century Britain*, ibid., 262.

⁷ Davies, James & Rommelse, *Introduction: The Ghost at the Banquet: Navies, Ideologies, and the Writing of History*, cit., 6.

entailed. The editorial premise is that this can only be done effectively by considering the ideological origins of naval power⁸.

The editors clearly explain that they chose to emphasise ‘ideologies’ in the plural not only as a reference to the various national traditions but also because the Early Modern Age did not experience any single coherent ideology in the modern sense, instead there were always diverse ideological influences on naval strategies. Indeed, navies and the quest for sea power reflected a wide range of historical circumstances and conditions and revealed the effect of different perceptions, interests, national/local identities and ideas of political legitimacy. More in general, the Early Modern Age with its wave of long-range explorations, colonisation and expanding global trade progressively changed the way in which international relations were conceived, with naval strength becoming a deciding factor⁹. Thus, this collection of essays shows that ideologies of western naval power could only be extremely variegated, among different states but also within the same polity. On the one hand, they were required by central authorities to mobilise their populations for service at sea and strengthen their own legal presence through the expansion of naval bureaucracies. On the other hand, political oppositions or economic interest groups, corsairs and even pirates elaborated competing naval ideologies¹⁰.

The volume is structured in four main sections containing 15 contributions coupled with an afterword by naval historian Andrew Lambert. The sections form a coherent logical path for the reader. The first one, entitled ‘Navies and National Identities’, deals with the role played by ideologies, identities and foundational myths in the cases of Venice, the Netherlands, Bourbon Spain and France. Luciano Pezzolo’s contribution on Venice rightly opens the volume since the Lagoon Republic was allegedly the first European polity to develop a permanent navy and maintained a symbiotic relationship with the sea up to his fall in 1797¹¹. The second section, ‘Monarchical Projects’, focuses on the role played by the ambitions of sovereigns in Hapsburg Spain, Stuart England and Bourbon France in developing strong navies. Rulers often build their reputations around powerful and extravagantly decorated fleets,

⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰ Ibid., 7-8.

¹¹ Pezzolo, *The Groom of the Sea. Venetian Sovereignty between Power and Myth* in *Ideologies of Western Naval Power, c. 1500–1815*, cit., 23-27. Cf. Cattelan, ‘The Defence of Venetian Dominion over the Adriatic Sea: Situating Paolo Sarpi c 1600–1625’, 177-207.

designed not only as a military tool but as the personification of their prestige for internal and external uses. Nonetheless, below the rulers, a number of alternative motivations and understandings of naval power also operated among the wide range of individuals and social classes involved in running a navy. The third section, 'Communities of Violence', instead focuses on 'extra-national' phenomena such as piracy, privateering and Calvinist cooperation at sea, which existed side by side, and sometimes in opposition, to the tentative efforts by states to build national navies and centralise the use of violence at sea¹². The final section, 'Constructing Strategies', points out that navies after all were built to defend specific interests and to fight wars whenever deemed necessary. Governments formulated strategies to serve these interests, taking into consideration the human, material and financial resources at their disposal. Such strategies were invariably influenced by collective identities and heated political debates.

Undoubtedly, *Ideologies of Western Naval Power, c. 1500-1815* succeeds in providing a refreshing perspective on naval history by focusing on the systems of beliefs that made possible the development of navies in the early modern period, more than on single wars or events, or the naval hardware and personnel involved. The essays in this volume, when combined, convey the wider role that navies played in shaping early modern history, notably seafaring states' societies and international relations. Furthermore, the volume has the merit of tempering the 'Britanno-centrism' common in the field since the foundational works authored by Alfred Thayer Mahan or Julian Corbett¹³. The analysis of naval affairs from the 17th century to the World Wars has often been described as the background for the emergence of Great Britain as a hegemonic naval power. The well-balanced four sections of the book contextualise the, indeed extraordinary, rise of Great Britain while investigating the equally strong bonds with the sea nurtured by other seafaring states. For instance, Steve Murdoch's contribution on Scandinavian neutrality highlights the role played by Scottish privateers

¹² References could have been made to recent scholarship on the topic by Louis Sicking. See Sicking, 'God's Friend, the Whole World's Enemy': Reconsidering the Role of Piracy in the Development of Universal Jurisdiction', 176-186; idem, 'The Pirate and the Admiral: Europeanisation and Globalisation of Maritime Conflict Management', 429-470.

¹³ See Geissler, *God and Sea Power: The Influence of Religion on Alfred Thayer Mahan*; Widen, *Theorist of Maritime Strategy: Sir Julian Corbett and His Contribution to Military and Naval Thought*.

as distinguished by their English counterparts, showing the yet non-monolithic nature of British sea power in the late 17th century¹⁴.

The editors openly acknowledge the non-exhaustive nature of the volume and position it as an invitation to scholars to expand on their approach¹⁵. Considering the timeframe taken into consideration (1500-1815), the exclusion of the Republic of Genoa is understandable, since its days of maritime glory as a foremost sea power in the Mediterranean were already gone by the 16th century, and its merchants, captains and bankers mostly operated within the broader Spanish Hapsburg system. However, in my opinion, more attention should have been devoted to the Dano-Norwegian navy, especially concerning the period 1500-1650. It would have been the perfect complement to Lars Ericson Wolke's insightful contribution on Swedish naval ideology, which was initially shaped largely in opposition to Denmark-Norway's naval superiority and longstanding claims of *dominium maris baltici*¹⁶.

The Dano-Norwegian navy was one of the first state-owned fleets to be built at the end of the Middle Ages. Under kings Frederik II (r. 1559-1588) and Christian IV Oldenburg (r. 1588-1648) it became one of the best equipped and organised navies of the time, enjoying widespread respect among contemporaries¹⁷. Moreover, the navy consistently proved to be the linchpin of the Dano-Norwegian geo-strategy. First, it was essential to maintain control of the Sound, the strategic strait connecting the Baltic and North Seas. Second, it served to secure the sea lanes connecting the various parts of the Oldenburg composite monarchy (Denmark proper, the then Danish provinces in what is now southern Sweden, the German Duchies, Norway, Iceland and dozens of islands scattered across the Baltic Sea, the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean). Third, it provided the last line of defence for the island of Zealand, with the capital Copenhagen, from amphibious attacks¹⁸. Besides, the control of the navy played a pivotal role in the

¹⁴ Murdoch, *Neutrality at Sea: Scandinavian Responses to 'Great Power' Maritime Warfare, 1651–1713*, *ibid.*, 244-261.

¹⁵ Davies, James & Rommelse, *Introduction: The Ghost at the Banquet: Navies, Ideologies, and the Writing of History*, *ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶ Ericson Wolfe, *Kingship, Religion, and History: Swedish Naval Ideology, 1500–1830*, *ibid.*, 229-243. Cf. Oakley, *War and Peace in the Baltic, 1560-1790*.

¹⁷ A topic I examined elsewhere, see Cattelan, 'Claims of Dominion and the Freedom of the Sea: Diplomatic Tensions between England and Denmark-Norway in the late Tudor Period', 29-42; *Idem*, 'Cristiano IV di Danimarca-Norvegia (r. 1588-1648): potere navale e diplomazia nell'Europa del Nord', 195-228. Cf. Bjerg, *A History of the Royal Danish Navy, 1510-2010*.

¹⁸ See Glete, *Amphibious Warfare in the Baltic, 1550-1700*, in Trim & Fissel (Eds.), *Amphibious Warfare, 1000-1700: Commerce, State Formation and European Expansion*.

internal politics of the dual kingdom, notably concerning the precarious power balance between the monarch and the Danish Council of State (*Rigsråd*) controlled by the high nobility¹⁹. What would have been even more relevant for the volume is that under Christian IV a veritable ideology of sea power was developed to support an ambitious foreign policy and projection of power. The king often had himself represented as Neptune, the god of the sea, in allegorical paintings and on festive occasions. He personally led the fleet, both in peace and in war, seeing reflected in it his prestige as a ‘marine’ monarch. This happened, for example, during Christian IV’s visit to his brother-in-law James I of England (1606) when he was escorted by the eight most imposing vessels in his fleet.

In conclusion, *Ideologies of Western Naval Power, c. 1500-1815* provides new insights into the polymorphous growth of western naval power in the Early Modern Age. With its focus on naval ideology, it succeeds in conveying to the reader pointed analyses of political, cultural and religious aspects that intersected with naval developments. As a legal historian focusing on the maritime dimension of the early modern law of nations (international law), I certainly see the volume as a solid bridge between naval history and neighbouring subjects such as mine. If in the first pages of the volume the editors lamented the isolation of naval history, the essays they collected instead make apparent the potential for interdisciplinary and innovative research in the field. Lastly, a better understanding of the naval ideologies of the past can enlighten the present historical conjecture, marked by a new wave of naval ideologies. As Andrew Lamberts points out in his afterword, the US Navy remains very active on this front, Russian navalism, although based on an autocrat’s whims reinterprets a supposedly glorious past. China instead, in the process of greatly expanding its navy, is building an entirely new naval ideology based on questionable historical evidence²⁰.

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¹⁹ For a detailed analysis, see Bellamy, *Christian IV and his Navy*. See also Lockart, *Denmark, 1513–1660: The Rise and Decline of a Renaissance Monarchy*; Probst, *Christian 4.s flåde. Den danske flådes historie 1588-1660*; Barfod, *Christian 3.s flåde. Den danske flådes historie 1533-1588*; Heiberg, *Christian 4. Monarken, Mennesket og Myten*.

²⁰ Lambert, *Afterword*, in *Ideologies of Western Naval Power, c. 1500-1815*, 311-312. Cf. Gresh, *To Rule Eurasia’s Waves: The New Great Power Competition at Sea*.

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