

NUOVA **ANTOLOGIA** 
MILITARE
RIVISTA INTERDISCIPLINARE DELLA SOCIETÀ ITALIANA DI STORIA MILITARE

N. 4
2023

Fascicolo 15. Giugno 2023
Storia Militare Moderna

a cura di
VIRGLIO ILARI



Società Italiana di Storia Militare

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Nuova Antologia Militare

Rivista interdisciplinare della Società Italiana di Storia Militare
Periodico telematico open-access annuale (www.nam-sism.org)
Registrazione del Tribunale Ordinario di Roma n. 06 del 30 Gennaio 2020



Direzione, Via Bosco degli Arvali 24, 00148 Roma
Contatti: direzione@nam-sigm.org ; virgilio.ilari@gmail.com

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For the Journal: © Società Italiana di Storia Militare
(www.societaitalianastoriamilitare@org)

Grafica: Nadir Media Srl - Via Giuseppe Veronese, 22 - 00146 Roma
info@nadirmedia.it

Gruppo Editoriale Tab Srl -Viale Manzoni 24/c - 00185 Roma
www.tabedizioni.it

ISSN: 2704-9795

ISBN Fascicolo 978-88-9295-712-1

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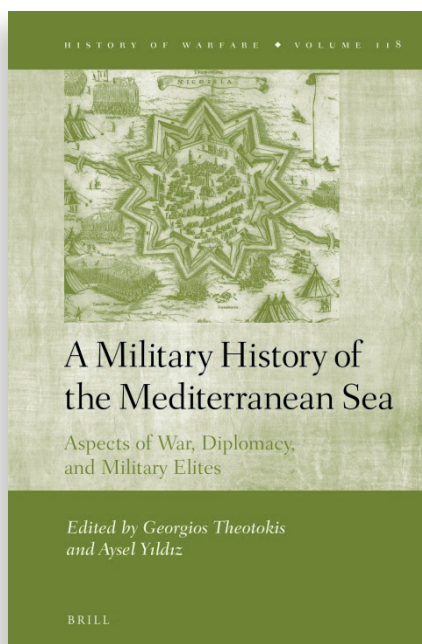
Ultima Ratio Regum (Estrema ragione dei Re) iscrizione su un cannone all'ingresso del Museo di Storia Militare di Budapest. Foto O. Mustafiri, CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication (Wikipedia commons).

Il celebre motto fu apposto sulle canne delle artiglierie francesi fuse dal 1650 al 1793, e anche su parte delle coeve artiglierie sabaude. La variante *ultima ratio regis* (estrema ragione del re) fu usata a partire dal 1742 sulle artiglierie prussiane e successivamente anche sui cannoni spagnoli, mentre l'analogo *regis ultima ratio* è tuttora il motto dell'artiglieria belga.

GEORGIOS THEOTOKIS AND AYSEL YILDIZ (EDS.)

A Military History of the Mediterranean Sea
Aspects of War, Diplomacy, and Military Elites

Leiden & Boston, Brill, 2018, pp. XV+473.



This volume focuses on the military history of the Mediterranean from the Early Middle Ages to the Early Modern Period. For thousands of years, the Mediterranean Sea had been the cradle of major political players, such as the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Spaniards, the Venetians and the Ottomans. The chronological period covered by this book is one where the legacy of Rome is still being felt, but with new elements constantly being introduced contributing to an ever-changing complex environment. War was undoubtedly a fundamental part of Mediterranean history during this time.

The volume is divided into five sections, each covering various aspects of the Mediterranean military history over time and includes the following essays.

Part 1 focuses on naval warfare in the centuries after the fall of the Western Roman Empire up to, and including, the Fourth Crusade. Tilemachos C. Lounghis, in his essay «The Byzantine War Navy and the West, Fifth to Twelfth Centuries» (pp. 21–43), focuses on the three successive reforms of the Byzantine navy that allowed it to keep abreast of defensive and offensive tactical developments throughout this era. The author also seeks to define the concept of the “Byzantine Southern Front” during the so-called “Dark Ages”.

Lilia Campana’s paper «The Defence of the Venetian *Dominio Da Mar* in the Sixteenth Century: Ship Design, Naval Architecture, and the Naval Career of Vettor Fausto’s *Quinquereme*» (pp. 44–78), which is based on archival research and includes important historical evidence, focuses on the personality of Vettor Fausto. The most important achievement of this erudite philologist was the *quinqueremis* (quinquereme) ship, which he built in 1529 based on plans of the Roman *quinqueremis* and on information drawn from ancient Greek manuscripts.

Elina Gugliuzzo’s essay, «Sea Power and the Ottomans in the Early Modern Mediterranean World» (pp. 79–91), focuses on the Ottoman navy, seeking to situate the Ottoman Empire as an integral part of the Mediterranean milieu. In doing so, the author challenges the prevailing view that, due to religious and cultural differences, the Mediterranean under the Ottomans constituted a vastly different, if not inferior, world compared to the West.

In his essay, «Conflict and Collaboration: the Spanish and Ottoman Navies in the Mediterranean, 1453–1923» (pp. 92–102), Wayne H. Browen compares the Ottoman and Spanish navies, arguing that there were important similarities between them. He also draws attention to attempts at fostering cooperation instigated by both states, possibly in their shared effort to limit the dominance of France and Britain.

Part 2 explores the representation of weaponry in Byzantine and post-Byzantine art. Raffaele D’Amato, in his paper, «A Sixth or Early Seventh Century Ad Iconography of Roman Military Equipment in Egypt: The Deir Abou Hennis Frescoes» (pp. 105–152), discusses the unique frescoes discovered in the Coptic Christian village of Deir Abou Hennis in the early twentieth century, which depict scenes from the childhood and life of Jesus Christ. He argues that the figures in



Ignazio Danti, *The Battle of Lepanto*, fresco in the Hall of Maps, in the Vatican Museums, Rome (Source: Wikimedia commons).

the frescoes are accurate representations of soldiers in full dress and equipment and recognises the frescoes as a valuable resource in our efforts to reconstruct military life in Late Antiquity.

Georgios Theotokis, in his essay, «Σῶκος: An Unusual Byzantine Weapon» (pp. 153–172), traces the history, origin and evolution of the lasso in the East and its possible uses by or against Byzantine soldiers from the fifth to the thirteenth centuries. Theotokis has drawn evidence from several different written and visual sources from the Byzantine, Iranian and Turkish folk traditions.

In his paper, «Post-Byzantine Art and Western Influences in Military Iconography: The Case of Staff Weapons in the Work of Michael Damaskenos» (pp. 173–183), Iason-Eleftherios Tzouriadis explores Western influences on military

equipment through illustrations in the work of Michael Damaskenos, one of the most important representatives of the Cretan School of post-Byzantine painting.

In Part 3, the essays focus on the strategy of the crusading movement. Alan V. Murray, in his paper, «The Middle Ground: The Passage of Crusade Armies to the Holy Land By Land and Sea (1096–1204)» (pp. 185–201), examines the logistical issues that the Crusaders faced on their journeys to the Middle East, as well as the strategies followed by their leaders in terms of army movements across southern Europe in an effort to understand the rationale behind them.

Cornel Bontea, in his study, «The Theory of the *Passagium Particulare*: A Commercial Blockade of the Mediterranean in the Early Fourteenth Century?» (pp. 202–219), explores the ideas of fourteenth-century military theorists set on weakening the Mamluks after the Fall of Acre (1291), placing an emphasis on the heavily unrealistic theory of the *Passagium Particulare*, i.e. the commercial blockade of the Mediterranean Sea.

In «Faith and Authority: Guy of Lusignan at the Battle of Acre (4th October 1189)» (pp. 220–234), Stephen Bennett reassesses Guy's strategy in the early stages of the Third Crusade, arguing that the evidence from primary sources suggests that he displayed a broader strategic vision and greater tactical ability than he has hitherto been given credit for.

In his essay, «By the Sword or by an Oath: Siege Warfare in the Latin East 1097–1131» (pp. 235–253), Ian Wilson challenges the view traditionally put forward by the literature regarding the intensity of Latin siege warfare. The author offers a new interpretation by demonstrating the willingness of the Franks to exhaust the possibilities of resolving issues through diplomatic channels in order to reduce the chances of conducting a siege.

Part 4 focuses on Byzantine military literature. Philip Rance's «Late Byzantine Elites and Military Literature: Authors, Readers and Manuscripts (c. 1050–c. 1450)» (pp. 255–286) examines whether Byzantine military literature, originating in ancient Greek and Roman treatises, and widely popular in the fifth and sixth centuries, continued to have an impact in the late Byzantine period. The author has made use of some hitherto untapped manuscripts from the Topkapi Library and is concerned with identifying the late Byzantine audience for military texts, as well as their distribution and context, in the hope that the insights offered in the essay may have wider relevance in the context of other, less widely studied cultures.

Nikolaos Kanellopoulos, in his paper, «The Byzantine Influence on the Military Writings of Theodore I Palaiologos, Marquis of Montferrat» (pp. 287–298), offers a new perspective on the military writings of Theodore I Palaiologos, second son of Andronikos II and Iolanta of Montferrat, and nephew of the Marquis of Montferrat, Giovanni I (1292–1305). The author attempts to overturn Aldo Settia's established view that Theodore's work reflects the reality of warfare in Italy in the first decades of the fourteenth century. Kanellopoulos highlights the influence of the Byzantine way of waging war on the work of Theodore I Palaiologos, concluding that the latter's treatise incorporates the experience of both worlds, i.e. the Byzantine and the Italian one.

Savvas Kyriakidis, in his study «Warfare in the *Histories* of John Kantakouzenos» (pp. 299–322), assesses the work of John Kantakouzenos as a source of military history. He also evaluates his knowledge of military tactics and explains the factors that shaped his descriptions of military conflicts, especially his personal agenda and the extent to which he consciously tried to adhere to established norms commonly found in military manuals.

Part 5, the final section of this volume, is entitled *Military Roles within Society* and consists of four essays. In his essay, entitled «*Stradioti, Cappelletti, Compagnie* or *Milizie Greche*: 'Greek' Mounted and Foot Mercenary Companies in the Venetian State (Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries)» (pp. 325–346), Stathis Birtachas investigates the origins, the national, social and cultural identity, as well as the recruitment methods and martial virtues of the light cavalry mercenary corps of Greek, Albanian and Slavic origin, the so-called *stradioti*, used by the Republic of Venice from the first Venetian–Ottoman war (1463–1479) until the end of the eighteenth century. He also explores the *cappelletti*, a more sophisticated kind of light cavalry corps than that of the *stradioti*, who offered their services to garrisons and camps of the Venetian hinterland and Dalmatia from the seventeenth century onwards; and, finally, the mercenary groups of 'Greek' infantry (*compagnie* or *milizie greche*), recruited by the *Serenissima* from the War of Gradisca against the Uskoks and Austrians (1615–1617).

Chrysovalantis Papadamou, in his paper, «A Secret War: Espionage in Venetian Corfu during the Construction of the San Marco Fortress» (pp. 347–370), examines the role of spies on the island of Corfu during the final quarter of the sixteenth century, exploring a possible conspiracy movement and a number of cases of espionage that took place on the island during the construction of new

fortifications between 1576 and 1588/9.

Jacopo Pessina, in his study «“Rather the Wealth to Support their Status than their Quality as Soldiers”: The Social Position of the Officers in Lucca’s *Ordinanze della Montagna*, 1550–1600» (pp. 371–396), examines the social composition of the officer corps of the militia in the outlying areas of the Republic of Lucca in the second half of the sixteenth century. The author’s aim was to shed light on the extent to which an individual’s economic power may have influenced their appointment as officers in this militia.

Finally, Aysel Yıldız, in her paper «Commanders of the Janissary Army: The Janissary Ağas, Their Career and Promotion Patterns» (pp. 397–462), turns our attention to the all-important military corps of the janissaries, a corps of the late medieval and early modern period, which survived from the fourteenth century to 1826 and which depended on the *devshirme* system, that is, a levy on young non-Muslims, in order to create a dehumanised, “socially absent” soldier, completely dependent and obedient to the Sultan through Turkification and Islamisation.

The main aim of the authors in this volume is to approach military history in a way that goes beyond the narrow study of specific wars and battles. Military tactics and strategies, troops, armaments and the conduct of operations remain the focus of interest, but their study is expanded as it is paired with three basic frameworks: (a) the political-institutional; (b) the socio-economic; and (c) the cultural. These richly detailed essays involve the in-depth (re-)evaluation of primary and secondary sources, and in some cases previously unpublished archival documents, images and charts. This carefully edited volume by Georgios Theotokis and Aysel Yıldız is a valuable contribution to the military history of the Mediterranean. Through its pages, new information is brought to light, as various aspects of Mediterranean military history are scrutinised anew. As a result, new perspectives on historical events, groups and individuals are offered, and traditionally entrenched views are challenged following closer inspection. For all these reasons, this collection of essays is and will remain a valuable tool in the hands of researchers and scholars specialised in military history and the history of Mediterranean in general during Middle Ages and Early Modern Era.

EIRINI D. VRETTOU



Storia Militare Moderna

Articoli / Articles

- Nuove fonti veneziane sulla battaglia di Mohács
di MÁRTON SZOVÁK
- Cultural and Knowledge Exchange between Dubrovnik and Livorno at the Time of Ferdinando I de' Medici,
by MIRELA ALTIC
- Dall'armata a cavallo all'arma di cavalleria. Trasformazione militare e mutamento sociale attraverso la trattatistica italiana della prima età moderna,
di LUCA DOMIZIO
- Vittorioso ad Alessandretta? L'«impresa navale» di Kenelm Digby fra autopromozione, miti nazionali e frammenti di realtà,
di VIVIANA CASTELLI
- Due dispacci cifrati al veleno nella guerra di Candia,
di PAOLO BONA VOGLIA
- Breitenfeld and Montecuccoli. How to learn from a battle,
by MARCO MOSTARDA
- Guerre de course dans l'Empire des Habsbourg d'Espagne (1621-1697). Corsaires flamands, italiens, majorquins, basques et autres. Essai de synthèse,
par ROBERTO BARAZZUTTI
- La mobilitazione dei cittadini di Pavia in occasione dell'assedio del 1655,
di FABIO ROMANONI
- «Con questo candido, et ordinario stile dà soldato». *Il Diario dell'Assedio di Valenza* dell'ingegnere Gaspare Beretta,
di MARCO GIUSEPPE LONGONI
- Informazioni e spie negli stati sabaudi tra Seicento e Settecento: dinamiche, studi e prospettive di ricerca,
di FRANCESCO BIASI
- L'Ordine di Malta nella Seconda guerra di Morea attraverso i diari di viaggio del cavaliere fra' Afranio Petrucci, maggiore dei vascelli (1715-1717),
di MAURO DIFRANCESCO
- La battaglia di Petrovaradino. 1716,
di ADRIANO PAPO e GIZELLA NEMETH
 - «Una nazione assai ardata et azzardosa». Le forze navali inglesi nel bacino alto tirrenico al tempo della guerra di Successione austriaca,
di SAMUELE VIRGA
- Uomini che scrivono e parlano come operano, e come sentono. Eloquenza politica e retorica militare nelle riflessioni di Francesco Algarotti,
di DENISE ARICÒ
- People at arms and soldiers in Lefkada during the Septinsular Republic (1801-07),
by SEVASTI LAZARI
- La difficile mise sur pied des Tirailleurs du Pô,
par BRUNO PAUVERT
- Le gendarmerie dei principati di Lucca e Piombino e di Benevento e Pontecorvo,
di PIERO CROCIANI

Prospettive. • Nelson and the Naval Crisis of 1790s, by JEREMY BLACK

Recensioni / Reviews

- BÉATRICE HEUSER, *War A Genealogy of Western Ideas and Practices*
(by LUCA DOMIZIO)
- JEREMY BLACK (ed.), *Global Military Transformations: Change and Continuity, 1450-1800*
(di COMESTOR)
- MARK FISSEL (Ed.), *The Military Revolution and Revolutions in Military Affairs*
(di FEDERICO MORO)
- ALEXANDER QUERENGÄSSER, *Before the Military Revolution. European Warfare and the Rise of the Early Modern State 1300-1490*
(by MARK CHARLES FISSEL)
 - GIAMPIERO BRUNELLI (cur.), Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica, 2/2022. Sezione monografica: *La rivoluzione militare dell'età moderna*
(di MARCO MOSTARDA)
- SVANTE NORRHEM & ERIC THOMSON, *Subsidies, Diplomacy, and State Formation in Europe, 1494-1789. Economies of Allegiance*
(di STEFANO CATTELAN)
- GHEORGIOS THEOTOKIS and Aysel YILDIZ, *A Military History of the Mediterranean Sea*
(by EIRINI VRETTOU)
- ALEXANDRE JOUBELIN, *Par le fer et par le feu. Combattre dans l'Atlantique (XVIe-XVIIe siècles)*
(di STEFANO CATTELAN; par ROBERTO BARAZZUTTI)
- FRANCESCO FRASCA, *Il sorgere delle potenze atlantiche. Mercantilismo e guerra*
(di ANTHONY CISFARINO)
 - ANTONIO VIOLANTE, *Giovanni Caboto. El gran armirante verso il sogno del Catai*
(di COMESTOR)
- OLIVIER CHALINE, *Apprendre la mer. Au temps de la voile en France XVIIe-XVIIIe*
(par ROBERTO BARAZZUTTI)
 - ALESSANDRO METLICA ed ENRICO ZUCCHI (cur.), *La res publica di Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato (1606-1678)*
(di CHIARA SILVAGNI)
 - MARIA DEL PILAR MESA CORONADO, *Fuerzas Terrestres del Reino de Sicilia 1665-1700*
(by CHRISTOPHER STORRS)
- BRUNO MUGNAI, *Armies of the Italian States 1660-1690*
(di COMESTOR)
 - CARLA BENOCCI, *L'ultima Lega Santa 1683-1691. Dalla liberazione di Vienna alla Transilvania e alla riconquista cristiana della Morea e dei Dardanelli nel Diario romano di Carlo Cartari*
(di ANTHONY CISFARINO)
- STEFANO SANTAGATA, *I Montecuccoli. I Successioni feudali e patrimoniali*
(di PAOLO CARRARO)
- FABIO FIORENTIN, *Luzzara 1702. La battaglia di Ferragosto*
(di FRANCESCO BIASI)
 - RODOLFO TERRAGNO, *Maitland & San Martín - Cesáreo Jarabo Jordán, El fin del imperio de España en América. El imperio inglés contra el español*
(por ISRAEL VIANA)
- JESÚS CHAPELA REY, *Medallas y órdenes de las guerras napoleónicas y revolucionarias 1792-1815*
(by JONATHAN IACOBO BAR SHUALI)
- PAOLO PALUMBO, *Da Venaria a Saumur. Gli ussari piemontesi e il 26° Cacciatori a cavallo*
(di VIRGILIO ILARI)
- AAVV, *La cartografia italiana in età napoleonica (1796-1815). Mappe atlanti e manuali per il disegno del territorio*
(di SIMONETTA CONTI)
- LUCA GANDINI, *Rivoli e il suo duca. André Masséna*
(di COMESTOR)
- LUCA GANDINI, *Rivoli Storia di un Monumento*
(di COMESTOR)