

Anne de Mathan, Pierrick Pourchasse et Philippe Jarnoux (ed), *La mer, la guerre et les affaires. Enjeux et réalités maritimes de la Révolution française*, Rennes (Presses universitaires de Rennes) 2017, 357 S. ISBN 978-2-7535-5897-7, EUR 24.

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This book emanates from an international conference of the same name which was held in Brest, the Atlantic *port de guerre*, back in 2014. It contains a substantial, stimulating introduction, followed by eighteen papers which explore different aspects of the relationship between the French Revolution and a maritime history that encompasses naval and colonial as well as commercial perspectives, ranging from the eighteenth century until the end of the Napoleonic period. Modestly priced but, as always, handsomely produced by the Presses universitaires de Rennes, it contains a series of superbly produced figures, tables and illustrations, though some additional maps would not have gone amiss, given its broad geographical sweep.

It represents a most welcome addition to the literature, because the 'global turn' in historical studies has highlighted both the significant gaps in economic history, which once spawned a magnificent series of monographs on the great French ports, and the consequent neglect of its maritime aspects, without which the more general development of the Revolution cannot be fully comprehended. The particular contribution of this collection of essays is to consider the varied and complex intersection of trade and politics in a period dominated by war, which was inseparable from the great end-of-eighteenth century upheaval and fundamentally influenced its nature and impact. To be sure, the closing years of the old regime had already witnessed significant naval conflict but, notwithstanding the politics of the War of American Independence, the so-called Second Hundred Years War between France and Britain now became an ideological struggle, as well as one waged on an unprecedented scale. The outbreak of war in 1792, and more importantly its extension the following year, not only emphasized the vital role of the French navy in the country's defence, but also underlined the necessity of protecting maritime trade. The war at sea would have a far greater economic impact than the events of 1789.

The essays are split into half a dozen sections, thematic and geographical, beginning with some British and Spanish naval history, launched by a magisterial overview of the former's long-term domination of the waves by Patrick O'Brien (which appears in English as well as French). The focus then switches to the impact of the Revolution on the French navy, which brutally disrupted the service through the wholesale loss of its aristocratic officer corps and widespread indiscipline among sailors and dockyard workers, inevitably at the price of operational efficiency. Subsequent



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attention turns to the theatres of war in the Mediterranean, Manche, Atlantic and outre-Atlantic, with some fascinating discussion of the ways in which smaller ports like Landerneau or Gravelines grappled with the closure of trading opportunities, while competitors sought to capitalize on French disarray. The colonial dimension, much to the fore in current historiography, is also considered, with a look at the lesser known example of Guadeloupe, where slavery was to be maintained, as well as a case study from Saint-Domingue, where it was famously abolished. The volume ends with some micro-history which explores this maritime conflict through the eyes of a French naval officer as he rose through the ranks and an educated inhabitant of Le Havre reflecting on wars with Britain past and present. The overall conclusion is one of adaptability and even innovation in the face of tremendous adversity.

A brief overview cannot do justice to the splendid contents of this volume, but a few of these essays can serve as representative examples. Silvia Marzagalli, for instance, has drawn upon American as well as French documentation to show how the United States benefited from its neutrality to supply markets in France that were closed to indigenous shipping. Hapless French colonists naturally looked towards America, and Guy Saupin's examines how one sugar plantation in Saint-Domingue was able to survive the slave insurrection of 1792, and then come to terms with both British occupation and the regime of Toussaint Louverture, but finally succumbed to a fresh uprising when the French tried to reimpose their control (and slavery) in 1802.

Meanwhile, in the Mediterranean, the French were badly hit by internal rebellion as well as the enemy presence. Indeed, the revolt of Toulon in 1793 would have catastrophic consequences for their Mediterranean fleet, and Virginie Martin demonstrates the role that manipulation of the Italian grain trade, on which the Midi was increasingly dependent, played in this notorious episode. The British who had occupied the naval base were forced out by the energy of a youthful Bonaparte, but they quickly sought to exploit disaffection on his native island by setting up a an Anglo-Corsican government in a daring adventure, admirably analysed by Denis Jouffroy, that was abandoned in 1796.

In sum, this volume reveals the huge potential yielded by integrating maritime and naval perspectives into the history of the Revolution and its aftermath, not least by studying specific coastal and insular spaces in a comparative context. Transnational dimensions require more consideration, since a great deal of borrowing was occurring where the respective navies were concerned, but it is only touched on briefly in the transfer of ship technology between the two Bourbon powers, France and Spain. There are inevitably limits to what a single conference can achieve, but the rich collection of papers this one has produced will surely inspire scholars to pursue the fascinating questions that arise from these path-breaking, cross-cutting investigations.



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