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Essays in Naval History, from Medieval to Modern

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BOOK REVIEWS

NOT JUST A BRITISH POINT OF VIEW

Rodger, N. A. M. *Essays in Naval History, from Medieval to Modern*. Variorum Collected Studies Series. Surrey, U.K., and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2009. 346pp. \$135.90

N. A. M. Rodger is well known around the world as Britain's foremost naval historian and the author of the three-volume *A Naval History of Britain*, currently in progress. He is an author whose writing is always a pleasure to read, and a volume of his collected essays is a welcome addition to the literature. Like other such collections, these essays were previously published in either specialist academic journals, other volumes, or other languages. They range in date of original publication from 1988 to 2004 and provide a range of themes that expand in detail upon aspects that Rodger has also simultaneously been dealing with in his multivolume history in a more summary manner. Thus it is of particular value to have these pieces brought together where they can be easily found, even though some specialists may have already read them. However, the highly worthy object of bringing such essays together in a single volume has been largely thwarted by the publisher, whose insistence on selling the books in this series at such high prices has made it impractical for most interested

readers to buy them. The publisher's practice of maintaining the original typography and page numbering is also disputable. This reviewer certainly prefers the alternative of revised essays, newly set in a consistent typeface to create an even more cohesive and useful work. To his credit, however, Rodger has made brief additional comments on many of the pieces in light of more recent scholarship; also, this volume includes a general index.

Like the author's multivolume history, the seventeen essays collected here all reflect the laudable view that naval history is not a backwater of specialist interest but rather a central theme in general history, both British and global. The works cover a selection of interesting topics that range over ten centuries of naval history. While written from a consciously British point of view, they are founded in a much broader context. As the author writes in his preface, "I do not consider that naval history can ever be written from a narrowly national standpoint. The sea links different nations, in peace and war, and there can be no true naval history which is

not informed by international comparisons, and based on the sources from all relevant countries and languages.” True to his word, Nicholas Rodger has produced essays here that fully reflect that view, the hallmark of the effectiveness and originality of his work.

Among the several important and broad-ranging essays are “The New Atlantic: Naval Warfare in the Sixteenth Century”; “Form and Function in European Navies, 1660–1815”; and “Navies and the Enlightenment”—broad overviews of the changing nature of warfare at sea and the differing types of navies that characterized those periods. Rodger’s essays “Cnut’s Geld and the Size of Danish Ships,” “The Military Revolution at Sea,” and “The Development of Broadside Gunnery, 1450–1650” show consideration of specific general issues. “Weather, Geography and Naval Power in the Age of Sail” should be basic reading for everyone approaching the age of fighting sail for the first time.

Other selections deal with interpretations of specific aspects of British history, such as “The Naval Service of the Cinque Ports,” “Queen Elizabeth and the Myth of Sea-Power in English History,” and “Mutiny or Subversion? Spithead and the Nore.” A number of such essays neatly summarize the state of knowledge on topics that deserve much greater, in-depth research, and analysis than they have received.

Among these are two essays on naval medicine in the light of broader medical development, one on naval chaplains, and another on the broad development of naval education. To these Rodger has added his own detailed research contribution to a neglected topic—a statistical analysis of commissioned officers’ careers between

1660 and 1815. Previously published in an electronic journal, having this article readily available in print is most welcome, despite the absence of some of the original graphs.

All in all, this book is recommended to every naval historian. While the price is sadly far beyond reason for individuals, librarians should make a point of acquiring it for their permanent collections.

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Dietl, Wilhelm. *Schattenarmeen: Die Geheimdienste der islamischen Welt (Shadow Armies: The Secret Services of the Islamic World)*. St. Pölten: Residenz Verlag, 2010. 300pp. \$31.90

This is a timely book, given the current revolutions unfolding across the Middle East and North Africa, where local intelligence and security services have been a major focus of public anger, fear, and resentment. Across the region, in regimes of all ideological stripes, the secret police agency (the dreaded *mukhabarat*) has long served as a pillar. These services have a well deserved reputation for brutality, sometimes even effectiveness, yet their murky operations have long remained shrouded in whispered myth. The fall of the secret police services, especially in Egypt, where the pervasive *mukhabarat* had long been the stoutest defender of the Mubarak regime, has begun to open the door on what the spies have been up to.

Dietl, who promises to reveal secrets about what has really been going on, has the right credentials to do so, knowing both the region and the world of espionage; yet he himself is the subject of