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## Shaping a Maritime Empire: The Commercial and Diplomatic Role of the American Navy, 1829 - 1861

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Schroeder, John H. *Shaping a Maritime Empire: The Commercial and Diplomatic Role of the American Navy, 1829-1861*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985. 229pp. \$35

John Schroeder is a professor of history at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee and the author of several previous works about the antebellum U.S. Navy. In this study his central thesis is that although the U.S. Navy's role expanded greatly between the inauguration of Andrew Jackson in 1829 and the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861, this expanded role was not part of a conscious policy shift, but was an *ad hoc* response to growing American commercial interests and diplomatic responsibilities. Despite the Navy's expanded role, he writes, "traditional American assumptions and attitudes about the professional military, in general, and the navy, in particular, remained in place."

In the 1840s, proto-Mahanians like Matthew F. Maury and Secretary of the Navy Abel P. Upshur urged upon Congress the idea that a nation's navy should be comparable to its commercial interests. Such views were out of step with the mainstream of American thought about the proper use of an American Navy. Nevertheless, expanded commercial interests and diplomatic ties during the next two decades dictated an expanded role for the Navy. U.S. naval vessels were the most visible American presence in areas where Americans traded, and captains of those vessels almost automatically assumed a diplomatic role—often as

negotiators, occasionally as combatants. The absence of a clear national policy defining this expanded role meant that there was virtually no coordination between American diplomatic representatives and the Navy Department. As a result, Navy captains did not feel bound to honor requests, however urgent, from American diplomats, and at no time did an American administration use the Navy as part of a systematic strategy to expand American interests abroad.

Schroeder illustrates his thesis clearly with a number of specific examples that make the book as much a history of American naval activity as of American naval policy. He does a much better job, for example, of explaining the political significance of antebellum U.S. Navy scientific expeditions than does Vincent Ponko in *Ships, Seas, and Scientists* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1974), and he provides an excellent, if brief, overview of the diplomatic activities of U.S. Navy captains like Lawrence Kearney and Matthew C. Perry in the Far East.

Another particular strength of the book is Schroeder's explanation of the connection between naval policy and the growing sectional crisis in the 1840s and 1850s. For example, during the Oregon border dispute with England in the 1840s, many southerners supported naval expansion out of fear that British naval forces in the Caribbean might raid the southern coast of the United States and incite a slave rebellion. Thus it was concern for the security

of their peculiar institution rather than an ambition to possess Oregon that motivated them. Similarly, southerners advocated the construction of small steam vessels (as opposed to larger warships) in the 1850s, at least in part because they saw them as potentially useful for penetrating South American rivers and spreading U.S. influence in areas where southern filibusters might take the next step toward eventual American annexation and the further expansion of the southern slave empire. Northerners were suspicious, quite naturally, of southern motives in both cases and voted accordingly.

This book is an excellent survey of antebellum naval policy and a must for naval historians of the 19th century.

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Lewis, Archibald R., and Runyon, Timothy J. *European Naval and Maritime History 300-1500*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985. 192pp. \$22.50

This small volume is a welcome addition to the literature on medieval warfare. There are several volumes readily available on land warfare, but this is the first which attempts to give a broad general survey of the development of naval and maritime history. The authors have tried to present the story at a popular level and they have succeeded in giving us a very broad overview of more than a thousand years. Quite rightly, they

have chosen to see naval history in this period as one which includes maritime and commercial relationships, rather than as simple listings or descriptions of fights on the water. For indeed, war at sea in this period had not developed into the rather specialized form of state-controlled activity that we understand today.

In presenting this overview, the authors have also provided the reader with a very useful list of books for further reading and, at the same time, surveyed the literature for the key pieces of interpretation. The text itself is unencumbered with details that so often dominate the work of medieval historians. Instead we have a refreshing synthesis that brings together the main points that we know, not only from traditional means of research, but also from the exciting new developments in underwater archaeology. For the medieval period, much of naval development remains obscured in the "Dark Ages," and this volume shows clearly where these gaps are. At the same time the authors have successfully outlined the transition from naval battles fought like land battles to true naval battles fought offshore. One also sees the development of characteristically naval tactics for such battles, as well as the simultaneous development of early forms of amphibious warfare, convoy, and raids. In the broadest aspect, one can see the relationship of naval power to the development of a nation's overseas influence and power as well as its clear connection to financial, commercial, and maritime interests. Most importantly, the