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Joshua Meeks, *France, Britain, and the Struggle for the Revolutionary Western Mediterranean*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. 212 pp. \$109.99 U.S. (hb). Notes, bibliography, and index. ISBN 9783319440774.

Review by Matthias Middell, Leipzig University.

While the entire series on the effect of wars on culture and society, edited by Rafe Blaufarb, Alan Forrest, and Karen Hagemann, deals with the longer period between the mid-18th and mid-19th centuries, Joshua Meeks's dissertation, submitted to Florida State University, is limited to a much shorter period of three years, namely 1793-1796. During this period, dominance over the Western Mediterranean changed several times and can therefore be easily analyzed as an example of the global conflict between England and revolutionary France. However, Meeks also quite rightly points out that the two great powers were not the only players involved: Spain as well as the many Italian states were also trying to assert their interests emphatically.

The guiding question of the book centers around a fundamental change in the international system that led to an early version of total war. This change involved the replacement of the balance of power strategy that had dominated in the eighteenth century by a conflict between revolutionary powers and a broadly understood counterrevolution. However, the author would like to challenge this central thesis of the growing importance of ideology for the formulation of war aims and for the culture of warfare by pointing out, on the basis of his regionally limited investigation, that France at times certainly acted as a stabilizing force, while the British questioned stability in the name of their political and military strategy. The Western Mediterranean is particularly well suited to prove such a thesis, because here the enemies of war were almost from the beginning imprisoned in a stalemate, since Great Britain dominated at sea and France retained hegemony on land. Thus, allies were considered more likely to be found through diplomatic efforts than through military force in order to shift the balance in their own favor. In this context, ideological firmness of principle in favor of or against the principles of the revolution was less important for entering into alliances than the opportunity to increase one's own room for maneuver (in the case of the small Italian powers) or to maintain a dwindling international weight (as experienced by the Spanish Empire). With all due caution, Meeks distances himself from the idea of the "First Total War" being controlled solely by ideologies.[1] It is also thanks to this rather pragmatic perspective of the opponents of war that the author takes a closer look not only at national war aims but also at local and regional configurations and acknowledges their effect on the change of alliances. This provides the reader with a more complex picture of the various actors--not only governments and their diplomats but also local governors and military leaders--and their different forms of agency.

The result is a dense description of the ups and downs of the fortunes of war, which is spread out in six chapters. Chapter two, after the introduction, offers a brief description of the pre-revolutionary situation. Chapter three focuses on Corsica during the first four years of the revolution since 1789 and observes the growing estrangement between the island and Paris. Chapter four follows the discussion that took place in London regarding the formation of the first coalition and the question of whether to go to war against France or against the revolution, which in turn had to have consequences for the formulation of objectives and the determination of the time when the British government could consider its goals achieved and envisage a peace agreement. However, since this question remained open in the end and was heavily controversial among the coalition participants, no consensus was reached, and action remained contradictory. The fall of Toulon and the British turn towards the establishment of a new state with the Anglo-Corsican Kingdom, which enabled them to remain in the region until 1796, is the focus of chapter five. Chapter six deals with the French campaign in Italy and the competition with Spain in the region, culminating in the rapprochement between Paris and Madrid, which isolated London with the peace of San Ildefonso (examined in more detail in chapter seven) and enabled Napoleon to extend French influence over the Italian Peninsula. With the failure of the Italian states in their quest for neutrality (especially evident in the case of Tuscany) and with the reestablishment of French dominance over Corsica, the war chapter in the Western Mediterranean closed. Conflict continued for almost two decades in many other places of Europe and the world.

Whether, as the author writes, the Western Mediterranean can be regarded as such a center of conflict, which allows us to decide its overall character, or whether it remains a secondary theater of war, can hardly be decided on the basis of his study. The author limits himself to the impressively thorough analysis of the archives in Paris, in La Courneuve, and in Kew Gardens as well as those of the Department of Corsica, but he keeps the other theaters of war largely hidden, except for cases when they do show up directly in the consulted diplomatic correspondence. In this way, this very reliable regional study—assuming one can conceive of a part of the Mediterranean as a separate region—attempts to establish references to more general controversies in revolutionary historiography in the introduction and the conclusion. The author refers both to the older idea of the Atlantic revolution and to the (newer) global model of the crisis of empires, both of which, while focusing on the connection between metropolis and colonial upheaval in very different ways, have hardly looked at the Mediterranean periphery in any detail.

The arguments that Joshua Meek collects to prove that both England's and France's foreign policy elites learned crucial lessons for their understanding of future international politics in the early conflicts in the Western Mediterranean cannot be dismissed, but they need to be further substantiated by an examination of later conflicts and the debates that they provoked. However, the comparison of Napoleon's and the British government's dealings with Corsica and Malta, which is spread out on the last pages of the book, already provides important keywords for this. In the final analysis, the integration into a French model of statehood and constitution was short-lived, just as the Anglo-Corsican Kingdom was not destined to exist for long.

The decade of Revolution not only firmly anchored the idea of national sovereignty in the cultural repertoire of the next generation, but it also opened up a future horizon for those who did not want to accept integration into such a national unit. This repertoire of a fight for autonomy and sovereignty was quite different from past efforts but was also reminiscent of old anti-imperial habits.

The great powers responded to the crisis of empire with a new kind of imperialism, which also stood in the way of complete decolonization during the nineteenth century and during considerable parts of the twentieth century. This new imperialism was in many places only now able to enforce efficient colonial rule. The concept of combining democratic nationalization at home with undemocratic colonization abroad (or to run a mix of both as in the case of domestic colonizations as experienced by the American West or Russia's large territory in the East) and establishing nation-states with large imperial extensions proved to be a successful model for an unexpectedly long period of time, but it also showed a porosity already right in its beginnings that Joshua Meeks made recognizable in his regional study for the Western Mediterranean.

The success of the Italian campaign impressed Napoleon's contemporaries to the point of admiration, but French imperialism on the Peninsula was nevertheless not long-lasting and the international system was not so much based upon the opposition of revolution and counterrevolution but one where competitors used the contradictions inherent to the opponent's national-imperial configuration for driving a wedge into its power block and possible alliances.

NOTES

[1] David A. Bell, *The First Total War. Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007).

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