H-France Review Vol. 23 (November 2023), No. 187

Benjamin W.D. Redding, *The English and French Navies, 1500–1650: Expansion, Organisation and State-Building*. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2022. xviii + 233 pp. Tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. $115.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781783276578; $29.95 U.S. (pdf). ISBN 9781800103993; $29.95 U.S. (epub). ISBN 9781800104006.

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An alternative title for this book could have been *The Rise and Fall of the English and French Navies, 1500–1650*. The publisher understandably eschewed that Paul-Kennedy-esque framing, but it would have captured the essence of the work. Like Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, Redding tells a story of ebbs and flows, of peaks and troughs.[1] Like Kennedy, Redding is interested not in the movements of ships at sea but in the sinews of naval power. Like Kennedy, Redding emphasizes structural factors in explaining naval fortunes, especially geography. Finally, like Kennedy, he examines how the competition and interaction between the two navies led to innovation and growth.

Redding, of course, is his own scholar and he has not written a blow-for-blow prequel to *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*. Nevertheless, the comparison should help potential readers understand the kinds of questions that animate Redding's scholarship. Each chapter discusses a different aspect of naval organization, meaning that this is not a book of sea stories and fleet battles.

Redding begins with a look at how senior leadership in each navy evolved over time, concluding that the English navy's growing administration shifted the position of Lord High Admiral from a fleet commander to a more ceremonial role, while the French navy tended to depend much more on the personalities and characteristics of both the monarch and his naval ministers. A second chapter asks whether the growth of the fleet led to the growth of shore-based infrastructure. It seems to have done so in England but not in France, for reasons Redding attributes to the existing state organization and how state power interacted with geographic constraints. For example, John Hawkins's appointment as treasurer of the English navy in 1577 marked a simple but significant change in the importance of naval finance within the administration. Hawkins steadily gathered power and, since his single office controlled naval finance, his reforms had effects that outlasted his tenure. In contrast, in France, the distributed nature of naval administration—each fleet had its own treasurer and staffs—limited opportunities for transformative bureaucratic reforms. There was a central admiralty, but France's geography tended (all else being equal) to push bureaucratic power towards the periphery compared to the London-dominated English navy.

Chapter three examines how the greater power and wealth of the French state meant that it had less need to experiment with novel ways of funding naval activities. The French monarch decided taxation rates without relying on a parliament. A direct tax, the *taille*, provided more than fifty percent of the state's revenue. England, by contrast, relied on what Redding calls "atypical income," meaning indirect taxation such as customs duties (p. 76). While the English system struggled to respond to crises, and constrained the ambitions of the Stuarts especially, it did have the benefit, from a naval perspective, of directly connecting England's overseas trade with its state revenues. The origins of what N.A.M. Rodger has called the "fiscal-naval state" of the eighteenth century can be found at the turn of the seventeenth century.[2]

Redding then connects interstate competition and monarchical egos to warship design, showing how ambitions generally ran ahead of capabilities for the largest warships. Henry VIII's personal interest in the construction of the massive *Henri Grâce à Dieu*, for example, ensured that the ship would have elaborate ornamentation but little actual naval value. Monarchs also played an erratic but central role in the rise and fall of naval power in both countries. Henri II made a point of maintaining France's galley fleet in the Mediterranean to support his involvement in the ongoing Italian Wars of the 1540s and 1550s. Yet he had little interest in France's naval power in northern European waters, and France soon fell behind its rivals in the development of deep-water sailing vessels.

Each chapter rests on a solid archival foundation. Or more accurately, each chapter that can rest on a solid archival foundation, does. One of Redding's great challenges has been to recover the French side of the story from fragmentary surviving evidence. In doing so, he demonstrates that French naval forces survived the Wars of Religion for longer than scholars had previously assumed--at least until 1573, and likely with some limited capabilities beyond that. The appendix shows the size of the French fleet across the century and a half, which is a remarkable and valuable resource. Financial data is less evenly distributed because of the archival issues, so that the English naval accounts extend from 1563 to 1642 compared to 1604 to 1641 for the French.

The greater accessibility of English archives allows Redding to revise our understanding of the establishment of the Council of Marine Causes (later known as the Navy Board) in 1545–1546. Previous scholars have focused on the changes in those two years, but Redding argues we need to situate that story in a broader two-decade sweep, to 1564, to understand fully how and why the English state established an administrative body tasked with managing naval infrastructure. He pushes back on C.S.L. Davies's argument that the Council emerged inevitably from the growth of the size of the English navy in the 1540s.[3] It may have done so, but whether the Council could survive a war with France from 1557 to 1564 was more important. Only by meeting the test of war did the Council establish itself as the foundation of English sea power.

Redding has therefore added new knowledge to our understanding of both navies. Books on the French navy in English are immensely valuable to scholars who do not have the time, ability, or inclination to read deeply in the French historiography. It can be difficult, however, to grasp exactly what Redding has achieved. His introduction is rather too modest. His argument, in his own words, is that "the advancement of both kingdoms' political and financial apparatuses provided the means for larger standing navies to emerge" (p. 10). Note the deliberate choice of weak words. State structures *advanced*: why is not clear. Those structures *provided means*—always and everywhere?—for navies to *emerge*. Surely growing a navy requires a few more active verbs?

On the one hand, Redding's hesitation to make grand claims or to draw clear causal arrows should be applauded. It is a rare doctoral dissertation that does not claim to overturn bookshelves of existing scholarship. On the other hand, it can make it difficult to discover exactly where Redding falls in relation to the great historian of navies and state growth, Jan Glete, as well as to the older historiography of the military revolution. In his seminal two-volume 1993 book, *Navies and Nations: Warships, Navies and State Building in Europe and America, 1500–1860*, Glete argued that naval power could be sustained only when the state was able to bind interest groups to invest in the administrative, financial, and physical structures necessary to put ships and men and guns together at sea.[4] Interest groups varied from state to state and time to time, but Glete emphasized the tension between elites at the center of state power and local interests at the periphery. For Glete, sustaining naval power was one of the most difficult tasks the early modern state could undertake. Equipping itself for that task contributed to the growth of state power.

As best as this reviewer can tell, Redding sees the rise and fall of naval power in relation to state power, but he would stop short of committing fully to the argument that naval competition drove state formation, nor does he want to argue that state formation created standing navies. As states (or really, monarchs and their ministers) recognized the need for larger and more powerful naval forces to compete internationally, they sought the means of funding and building those forces. That tended to create a demand for a bureaucracy to manage that revenue and spending, and that is one way in which naval competition could spur state formation. But Redding also presents evidence that the opposite happened: administrative structures created in particular circumstances and with particular personalities involved influenced naval power long after they had served their initial purpose. Redding's humility in the face of the available evidence tends to dissuade him from resolving the chicken-and-egg/navies-or-states paradox.

What his research does show clearly is that, whichever way the causal arrow pointed, state building was never a linear process, nor was it the same in England as in France. It depended heavily on the personalities and circumstances involved, and in both countries, it was influenced by factors outside of ministers' and navies' control, including geography and competition with other European states. Redding could have been bolder in suggesting a revision to Glete's great work, which, by looking through the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, encountered states that had much more robust financial and administrative tools at their disposal than did sixteenth-century princes. Interest groups may have been the key to sustained naval power in later periods, Redding could have said, but in the early modern period, navies were (as Redding regularly reminds his readers) the personal property of the monarch. That was where naval power came from.

Those points should not detract from the overall value of the work. Redding has opened new frontiers in the administrative and financial histories of two early modern navies. He has recovered what he can from challenging French archives, and he has advanced our understanding of the complex relationship between the growth of the state and the deployment of naval power.

NOTES

[1] Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: A. Lane, 1976).

[2] N.A.M. Rodger, "From the 'military revolution' to the 'fiscal-naval state'," *Journal for Maritime Research* 13, no. 2 (2011): 119–28.

[3] C.S.L. Davies, "The Administration of the Royal Navy under Henry VIII: The Origins of the Navy Board," *The English Historical Review* 80 (1965): 268–88.

[4] Jan Glete, *Navies and Nations: Warships, Navies and State Building in Europe and America, 1500–1860*, 2 vols. (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1993).

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ISSN 1553-9172