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David Parrott, *The Business of War: Military Enterprise and Military Revolution in Early Modern Europe*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012. Pp. xvii, 429. ISBN 978-0-521-73558-2.

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In 2004, David Parrott (Oxford Univ.) gave the Lees Knowles Lecture at Cambridge University on the subject of “War, Armies, and Politics in Early Modern Europe: The Military Devolution, 1560–1660.” His topic—military outsourcing in the early modern period—was timely, given world media attention to the US government’s use of private military contractors, such as Blackwater and KBR, Inc. (formerly Kellogg Brown & Root), in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. These modern military enterprisers, backed by slick public relations teams and often photographed wearing their trademark baseball caps and sunglasses, are a far cry from the small groups of mercenaries who ventured into Africa and Latin America during the Cold War, let alone their rapacious, marauding predecessors during the Thirty Years War. The resurgence of military outsourcing in the twenty-first century may have come as a surprise to many, but, as Parrott demonstrates in his splendid study *The Business of War*, private military contractors have a long history in the West.

Following up his 2004 lecture, Parrot illuminates the prevalence and persistence of public-private military partnerships in Western Europe from 1450 to 1794, with emphasis on the “key decades” (1550–1650) that Michael Roberts specified as encompassing the early modern military revolution.<sup>1</sup> Parrott’s chronology and evidence (for instance, the influence of star fort or *trace italienne* fortifications) reflect the work of his fellow Knowles lecturer Geoffrey Parker (1985), who locates the revolution in the period 1500–1800.<sup>2</sup> Whereas Roberts and Parker stress *revolution*, Parrott is more interested in *devolution*, notably the early modern states’ reliance on military contractors to recruit, maintain, and supply their armies and navies. Though others<sup>3</sup> have studied the business of war in the period, Parrott has now written the first comprehensive and very likely the definitive work on this fascinating subject.

The book is divided into two parts, each comprising three chapters. The first part, “Foundations and Expansion,” offers a history of various private military contractors from 1450 to the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648. The second, “Operations and Structures,” looks more closely at the reasons why states were forced to rely on the business of contracting, both in the period 1450–1650 and in the century and a half leading up to the French Revolution. Parrott is quite precise in marking 1794 as the death of early modern military enterprise, citing the creation of the French Revolutionary armies as the cause of its demise. The book addresses warfare on land and at sea, but its scope is limited to Western and Central Europe, particularly France, Spain, Sweden, and Hapsburg Austria. While peripheral states like England, the Dutch Republic, and Italy receive some coverage, the bulk of the work is dedicated to the business of war in the core European states. Owing to restrictions of space and to the linguistic challenges of covering all of Europe, the author has chosen not to discuss military enterprisers in eastern or southeastern Europe. *The Business of War* is a synthesis of existing historiography, contemporary printed military manuals, and biographies of great captains; this is hardly a criticism, as Parrott has written a refreshing work, replete with evidence that may be new to many readers of early modern military history.

1. “The Military Revolution, 1560–1660” [1956], rpt. in Michael Roberts, *Essays in Swedish History* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota Pr, 1967) 195–225.

2. *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500–1800*, 2nd ed. (NY: Cambridge U Pr, 1996).

3. E.g., Fritz Redlich, *The German Military Enterpriser and His Work Force: A Study in European Economic and Social History*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1964–65); William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000* (Chicago: U Chicago Pr, 1982); and Jurgen Brauer and Hubert van Tuyl, *Castles, Battles, & Bombs: How Economics Explains Military History* (Chicago: U Chicago Pr, 2008).

In chapter 1, “Military Resources for Hire: 1450–1560,” Parrott advises care in defining the word “mercenary,” cautioning that its common association with terms like “foreign” or “self-interested” obscures rather than clarifies the nature of early modern military enterprise. He stresses the multilayered character of military service in the period, noting differences in lengths, terms, and types of contracted service in Italy and Central Europe. He distinguishes well known fourteenth-century condottieri like Urslingen and Hawkwood from the increasing numbers of home-grown Italian contractors like the Malatestas and the Sforzas who followed. Also noted is the evolution of mercenary forces on the peninsula from loosely organized fourteenth-century contingents “intensely vulnerable to military setbacks” (41) to ones that “proved a far more prominent and lasting presence” (43), owing to the regularity of warfare after 1494.

Parrott finds much greater cohesion and esprit de corps among the successors of the condottieri, the Swiss and (German) Landsknechte infantry that dominated European battlefields in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Swiss effectiveness stemmed from localities that “depended on groups of men who could not easily be reabsorbed into civilian life and for whom military professionalism was both a choice and a necessity” (50). The confidence of the Landsknechte, on the other hand, was born of a guild-like corporatism; their distinctive “slashed” uniform and unit democracy gave them an air of respectability. Their commanders were nobles who undertook military service for financial rewards; this predated the military enterprisers of the seventeenth century and suggests considerable continuity between late medieval and early modern contracting. Parrott stresses that contracted naval forces could be equally diverse, as Uskok, Ottoman, French, Spanish, and English privateers plied the waters of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, either independently or as part of larger fleets, risking their lives and fortunes for a possible payoff in prizes or booty.

In chapter 2, “The Expansion of Military Enterprise, 1560–1620,” Parrott focuses on the century before the outbreak of the Thirty Years War. Here we find his book’s main thesis—that the “revolution in military affairs” grew out of the great political struggles of the day (Hapsburg-Valois/Bourbon, Catholic-Protestant, Hapsburg-Ottoman) just as the spread of critical technological advances like *trace italienne* fortifications and heavy-gunned sailing ships were making “military growth harder to reverse” (76).

From a modern perspective, to suggest that waging war will become evermore costly is such a truism that it is easy to forget long periods of history when either the scale of warfare or the levels of military technology remained stable, or the costs of technological progress—improvements in the quality of armour or the breeding of superior warhorses, for example—were largely borne by individual warriors. But from the end of the fifteenth century, European states moved into a period when both the scale and expense of waging war increased exponentially, and equally importantly, when the possibility that this warfare would last for a series of continuous campaigns also became far greater. (73)

Because states found it difficult to raise the revenues to maintain these larger armies, princes drew “elite subjects into active financial partnerships” (78). Even when the stop-start wars of the early sixteenth century gave way to long struggles after 1560, states continued to rely on privately contracted armed forces, whether the galley fleets of Genoa’s Andrea Doria or German enterprisers hired to fight with Spain’s army in the Low Countries.

Parrott describes the development of military contracting in early modern Europe as an evolutionary process. Since there was “no single model for the organization of military force” (135), we should reject the notion that the state slowly but surely secured control over armies and navies at the expense of enterprisers. In chapter 3, “Diversity and Adaptation,” Parrott addresses the diversity and adaptability of military enterprise during the Thirty Years War; though Albrecht von Wallenstein has come to represent the epitome of military enterprise during the war, Parrott stresses that hundreds of other contractors, some more independent than others, were employed during the conflict. Bernhard von Saxe-Weimar and Ernst von Mansfeld were commanders capable of raising large, independently controlled armies, but Parrott singles out Maximilian of Bavaria as a prince who placed limits on his contractors and closely supervised their activities in the field. He also correctly downplays the importance of Sweden’s conscripted army (which primarily manned garrisons along the north German coast) and argues that Gustavus Adolphus and Axel Oxenstierna, like their imperial enemies, turned to enterpriser-colonels to recruit and lead their regiments.

Chapter 4, “The Military Contractor at War,” disputes Roberts’s thesis that a tactical revolution in the period triggered broad improvements in the command and control of armies that eventually led to decisive battle. Instead, he finds “no single right answer to battlefield deployment” and therefore “no ‘revolutionary’ solution to winning battles” (145), observing that sieges and strategic stagnation stifled the possibility of definitive victory. But this did not preclude ferocity; the scorn that contemporaries like Machiavelli and Lipsius heaped on soldiers of fortune notwithstanding, Parrott shows that contract soldiers were often well compensated, committed to their units, and willing to die for their comrades and commanders. The evidence “does not closely fit the stereotype of the brutalized and socially marginalized man so frequently seen as the material of recruitment” (163). Nor does Parrott see religion as motivating either enterprisers or their men, discovering instead “a remarkable degree of de facto tolerance and religious cohabitation” in the armies that waged the continent’s bitter confessional struggles (167). Where operations are concerned, experience was the bond that held early modern armed forces together, be they infantry companies or ship crews. Recruits learned more from long-serving veterans over a number of years than from any book. Parrott later contends that the “perfect captain” genre of military manuals was badly flawed by inattention to the true business of war—the raising, supplying, paying, and maintaining of armies in the field.

Chapter 5, “The Business of War,” considers the integral role of the manufacturers, producers, and distributors of military wares in supporting early modern armies. Parrott recognizes the growth of state administration in the areas of shipbuilding, munitions production, and provisioning of armies and navies, but sees that development as uneven right to the end of the eighteenth century. The state had to rely on private partnerships, especially when revenues to the treasury slowed. Like military enterprisers, financiers and industrialists also sought out the rich rewards that these partnerships yielded. Parrott identifies the contributions of, among others, the Trip and De Geer families, Dutch financiers whose interests extended to shipbuilding and arms and powder production for the Swedes, and Hans de Witte’s highly successful partnership with Wallenstein. This part of the book is especially useful, since few Anglophone historians have charted the networks of arms dealers and manufacturers in early modern Europe. At the same time, Parrott cautions that states did not fully control the *munitionnaires* and *proviantmeister* who supplied their armies; such honorific titles were given to grasping contractors likely to overcharge governments while providing their troops with stale bread and sour beer. But, Parrott emphasizes, enterprisers, whether soldiers or suppliers, were not always motivated by financial rewards; many engaged in self-fashioning to improve their social, political, and cultural status with the concomitant benefits.

The sixth and final chapter, “Continuity, Transformation and Rhetoric in European Warfare after 1650,” challenges the notion that the rise of the state after 1648 led to the decline of the military enterpriser. Parrott instead argues for continuity and against the “strident rhetoric of ‘absolute’ authority”; he stresses that contracting flourished as well in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, because the private sector eagerly continued to supply easy credit to the state (260). Even in France, the model of absolutism, the state’s administrative apparatus could never fully manage the massive task of supplying Louis XIV’s army and navy and continued to rely on partnerships with foreign enterprisers or “internal venality”—the sale of commissions. Even though the state was seeking to control more of the administrative machinery of war, command and supply remained firmly in the hands of those who could pay the price or had ready credit. At sea, the development of “line ahead” tactics and the building of first- and second-rate ships in royal dockyards suggested greater state power, but the construction of smaller vessels remained in the hands of contractors, and privateering persisted as a viable option for those who could afford it.

*The Business of War* includes extensive endnotes and bibliography; it is stocked with maps, illustrations, and charts that will serve readers well. The book will surely spark much debate about military contracting and the rise of the fiscal-military state, and will likely lead to new avenues of research. For example, historians of Eastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire will test Parrott’s thesis where armies in these regions are concerned. As we approach the sixtieth anniversary of the military revolution thesis in 2015, one wonders if the next sixty years will be dedicated to the study of military devolution.