



2015–029

Phillip Williams, *Empire and Holy War in the Mediterranean: The Galley and Maritime Conflict between the Habsburgs and Ottomans*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014. Pp. xvii, 359. ISBN 978–1–84885–985–2.

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Ferdinand Braudel's *La Méditerranée et le monde Méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*¹ has inspired many novel approaches to world history, including systems theory, the Atlantic triangle, environmental analysis, and the close study of aspects of the Mediterranean itself and its littoral—maritime cultures, ecology, climatology, and the movements of peoples and ideas.² Recent scholarship has been reassessing the assumptions underlying Braudel's sweeping view of the east-west, Muslim-Christian divide. Particularly controversial has been his stress on the shift in the struggle for sovereignty away from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic Ocean with the rise of the maritime powers of northern Europe.³ Current work on the battle of Lepanto and the triumphal turning point model reflects renewed interest in Habsburg-Ottoman rivalries, emerging sovereignties, the development of political elites and cultural divergences across ideological boundaries.⁴ Despite this revisionist trend stressing more ecumenical, cross-imperial interpretations, the “clash of civilizations” argument still persists.

In *Empire and Holy War in the Mediterranean*, historian Phillip Williams (DPhil, Oxon.)⁵ has drawn extensively on the evidence of Ottoman records to produce a closely argued reassessment of galley warfare in the Mediterranean. He elucidates the impact of associated negotiations, compromises, and concessions as they affected the Ottoman and Habsburg pursuit of sovereignty over Mediterranean societies. The result is a complex tale based on contemporary writings, including those of the larger than life Venetian, Ottoman, and Habsburg admirals of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Williams makes three essential points: one, the Mediterranean maritime system was essentially a costly business enterprise dependent on confederative systems of manpower and finance; two, the function of galleys and galliots was principally to protect coastlines and seaborne commerce and to ensure the delivery of supplies; and three, both Habsburgs and Ottomans had to rely on privateers—respectively, the Hospitalers on Malta and the Algerian *corso*—to meet their manpower needs (256). The microecologies and extreme diversity of Mediterranean polities forced the two imperial powers to reinstate what Williams calls the “medieval programme of the Apostolic See of Rome and the template of the Abbasid Caliphate” (xiii). In this context, holy war and jihadist rhetoric served to justify the behavior of the curious bedfellows of the imperial powers—Ottomans and the French, Spain and Italy. Thus, the Spanish pursued a policy of prudence and valor as they were required to wage war in the Atlantic and, using the same galleys, to battle Protes-

1. Paris: Colin, 1949; 3rd ed. 1976. English edition: *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds (1972; new ed. Berkeley: U Calif Pr, 1995).

2. See, e.g., Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000); David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 2011); John Julius Norwich, *The Middle Sea: A History of the Mediterranean* (NY: Doubleday, 2006); Faruk Tabak, *The Waning of the Mediterranean, 1550–1870: A Geohistorical Approach* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U Pr, 2008); Palmira Brummett, *Mapping the Ottomans: Sovereignty, Territory and Identity in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (NY: Cambridge U Pr, 2015).

3. See Gabriel Piterberg, Teofilo F. Ruiz, and Geoffrey Symcox, eds. *Braudel Revisited: The Mediterranean World, 1600–1800* (Toronto: U Toronto Pr, 2010).

4. See, e.g., Stephen O'Shea, *Sea of Faith: Islam and Christianity in the Medieval Mediterranean World* (NY: Walker & Co, 2006), with chapters on Istanbul (1453) and Malta (1565). Cf. Ian Almond, *Two Faiths, One Banner: When Muslims Marched with Christians across Europe's Battlegrounds* (Cambridge: Harvard U Pr, 2009). On Lepanto: Niccolò Capponi, *Victory of the West: The Great Christian-Muslim Clash at the Battle of Lepanto* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2007). To be avoided are works like Anthony Pagden's *Worlds at War: The 2,500 Year Struggle between East and West* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 2009).

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tantism at the behest of Rome. Similarly, the Ottoman strategic neglect of the sea, generally put down to incompetence in maritime affairs, especially after 1550, was determined by the struggle with Safavid Persia.

Between the truce of 1580 and the expulsion of the remaining Muslims from Spain in 1609, Habsburg-Ottoman maritime operations in the Mediterranean were directed more to shoreline protection and crusader posturing than to fighting actual sea battles. But, as Williams notes, citing the mobilizations in 1596–1606, the combined fleets of the two imperial powers averaged 140 warships, manned by a minimum of 22,000 men, with another 60 ships for officials and soldiers, manned by ca. 10,000 men. These estimates exclude the galleys of the corsairs and the squadrons of Genoa, Venice, the Holy See, and Nice (236).

Williams argues that neither the Habsburgs nor the Ottomans could gain sole control of the Mediterranean, owing to the nature of the sea and its coasts, the dearth of defensible ports, vagaries of seasonal weather, the difficulty of keeping galleys at sea for long periods, and the susceptibility of inexperienced oarsmen to disease and physical exhaustion. And, too, the Ottomans had without fail to provision Constantinople, the largest city of the (European) Mediterranean till the mid-seventeenth century.

The most informative and gripping chapters of the book constitute what Williams calls a “biography of the galley” (16), the most intensely human weapon ever invented. Though most of his evidence comes from western sources, the author is intimately familiar with the available Ottoman primary sources as well. We learn, for instance, that battles were often fought with “either too few good galleys, or too many bad ones.” Strategic objectives were seldom clear; the fighting had an air of futility and “a sense of charade clung to most major enterprises” (43). While the Habsburgs sought to preserve their fleet and its crews from year to year, the Ottomans often assembled large new flotillas with fresh recruits. The sultan valued prestige over expertise. More than battle losses, a combination of corruption, lack of nutrition, and disease caused a staggering 50 percent mortality rate on both sides, and new recruits were invariably sick for their first two seasons.

Habsburg observers assumed the Ottomans enjoyed an endless supply of men—convicts, slaves, captives—and took a casual approach to conserving them between campaign seasons. But in the years when the Ottoman armada was not at sea, Christian corsairs constantly raided the shores of the eastern Mediterranean with devastating effects on local populations, both Christian and Muslim. One telling sign of desperation: the Khan of the Crimea—the chief slave trader—was asked to supply twenty thousand peasants to row Ottoman galleys in 1613 (151). The jury is still out on the effects that international maritime laws, the gradual elimination of the slave trade, and the establishment of Russian-Austrian-Ottoman borders had on the Ottomans’ management of their military and naval forces, especially after 1650.

Clear and convincing distinctions between Christian and Muslim, slave trader and liberator, friends and foes were elusive in the early modern Mediterranean world.⁶ Phillip Williams’s dense study does not always succeed in clarifying the grand strategies of Habsburgs and Ottomans in the sprawling, intricately intertwined world of galley warfare that he so effectively evokes. But he certainly provides a salutary alternative to conventional turning-point narratives of the Christian victory at Lepanto or the enduring enmities of the permanent crusade.

6. See, esp., Molly Greene, *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants: A Maritime History of the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Princeton: Princeton U Pr, 2010).