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The Development of the Komnenian Army: 1081-1180 (review)

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The Mediterranean story continues later in chapter six, covering the Venetians, Genoese, and Turks from 1300 to 1500. Use is made of the rich Genoese and Venetian archival records to explain the motives and methods of naval warfare. The rivalry between Venice and Genoa over control of the lucrative eastern trade routes caused four wars between 1253 and 1381. Conflict with Turkish fleets culminates in the 1499 Battle of Zonchio.

The focus returns to the north in chapter four on the Channel powers England and France in the fourteenth century and in chapter five on northern waters in the fifteenth century. Sea power is examined under the headings of ships as auxiliary forces, major encounters at sea, and raids on commerce and coastal towns. Commerce raiding and raids on coastal communities are effective uses of naval power, especially by the French during the Hundred Years' War. Changes in ship design are significant in this period. The story of the failure of six English balingers to arrest and board a large Genoese carrack illustrates the superiority of a large vessel with high wooden walls. The carrack loomed over the smaller attackers, which she covered with a hail of missiles. Merchants and princes built cogs, carracks, and other vessels of four hundred tons and greater, blurring the distinction between merchantman and warship. The placement of artillery aboard ships demanded the greater size and stability of a big purpose-built ship. Henry VII's *Regent*, for example, carried 151 iron serpentines and 29 brass cannon.

This tightly written volume concludes with a chapter on the literature on medieval naval warfare. Vegetius's *De Re Militari* provided material for numerous commentaries on naval warfare. Commentators credited him with suggesting that divers use augers to drill holes in enemy ships and that battering rams be suspended from the rigging. Those interested in command and control will find this chapter of value.

This volume is an important contribution to the history of warfare at sea. Firmly based on a good selection of source material, both primary and secondary, this author has produced a thoughtful survey of medieval naval warfare.

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The Development of the Komnenian Army: 1081–1180. By John W. Birkenmeier. Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2002. ISBN 90-04-11710-5. Maps. Tables. Glossary. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xxii, 263. \$91.00.

This work is volume 5 in Brill's History of Warfare series and is designed to examine the use of the Komnenian army in restoring the Byzantine military position in the Balkans, Asia Minor, and the Levant; in other words, this is a tactical study, and not a general military history. The author examines the textual sources for twelfth- and thirteenth-century history in the first chapter, and follows this with an historical overview of eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantium.

The heart of the book is a detailed analysis of the campaigns of the Komnenian emperors Alexios I, John II, and Manuel I, which draws heavily on contemporary histories. The author readily acknowledges the pitfalls in relying on these narrative sources, and points out that there are no tactical manuals for this period. In spite of the obstacles presented by the extant primary sources, the author does an excellent job in attempting to piece together the profound changes that beset the Byzantine army in the period of the Komnenian emperors. All three reigns were characterized by defensive warfare. In the case of Alexios I, the army that he inherited had been ruined by over fifty years of political chaos and neglect. It fell to this emperor to oversee the retraining of his force, which underwent a painful baptism through defeats by the Normans, Pechenegs, and Turks. However, by the end of his reign, his army had adopted the tactics of the Pecheneg raiders, and used these tactics successfully against the Normans and the Pechenegs themselves. John II inherited a professional and well-trained fighting force, as well as politically stable borders. John developed fixed defensive points in southern Asia Minor and began campaigning aggressively in northern and southeastern Anatolia. Siege warfare played a prominent role in his campaigns, and open battle was avoided, if possible. Manuel's campaigns were characterized by more open battles, and fewer sieges. However, problems in equipping and paying the force developed during his reign.

In the final three chapters, the author offers a fascinating look at the role of logistics, Komnenian siege warfare, and the Komnenian army in battle. In each chapter, an assessment of the sources is offered, and the author explains his methodology in arriving at his conclusions. In dealing with how the army was supported, the author summarizes the debate over recruiting, financing, and the use of *pronoia*, and ably sorts out the differing views among historians, convincingly arguing that the "Komnenian system of maintenance . . . was a hodge podge of systems" (p. 156). In the final chapter, the author attempts to categorize the types and rates of wounds encountered in battle, as well as the medical treatment available to the soldiers. While the author readily acknowledges the weaknesses inherent in this type of analysis, given the sources available, his summary nonetheless adds significant detail and attention to a neglected topic. The author also reminds us of just how difficult and bloody premodern warfare was, and the impact it had on the common soldier.

Overall, this is a well-researched book, as the extensive bibliography and well-annotated footnotes will attest. The author carefully builds upon existing knowledge while always acknowledging the limitations of his sources; he clearly states the goals for this book, and more than adequately meets those goals and expectations. This work is eminently suitable to fill the gap between Eric McGeer's work on Byzantine warfare in the tenth century and Mark Bartusis's work on the late Byzantine army. The book is definitely worth buying, however the numerous editing errors make the \$91.00 price tag a bit steep.

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