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Historical Dictionary of the Crimean War (review)

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Ireland's part in the Crimean War 1854–56, based on his doctoral thesis at Trinity College Dublin, demolishes some cherished myths. Irishmen were proportionally over-represented in the British armed forces of the mid-nineteenth century; and from their own accounts they did not volunteer from hunger or reluctantly, but in the hope of a military career. Both elite and mass popular enthusiasm for war against Russia was considerable, sustained through to the war's successful conclusion, and commemorated in pageants, ballads and memorials afterwards. In fact the Irish presence in the Crimea was so ubiquitous, and the response of Ireland was so much like that of the rest of the United Kingdom, that Murphy's book raises questions about the nature of Irishness in this period, as opposed to Scottishness, Welshness, or Englishness. In his search for Irish nationality, Murphy also sometimes stretches too far (under some of his criteria, Robert E. Lee would be called English); social class divisions and upbringing were much more significant at the time, and famous Crimean figures such as General Sir George De Lacy Evans and William Howard Russell of the London *Times* are better understood as "Anglo-Irish." Correctly, Murphy does not treat Lord Lucan as Irish, any more than Lord Cardigan and Lord Raglan were Welsh.

Murphy provides good chapter-length accounts of Ireland both on the outbreak of the war and at its conclusion, and chapters on the Crimean theatre and on the critical naval operations. His emphasis on the Royal Navy in the Baltic is unfortunately less original than he realises: despite impressive wider reading he has somehow missed the most influential recent revisionist account, Andrew Lambert's *The Crimean War* (1990), which deals comprehensively with the naval war issue. His failure to read Hew Strachan's equally revisionist works on the British Army also causes him to repeat some discredited opinions. His strongest and most interesting chapters deal with wider neglected issues such as the Irish role in the support services in the war, including the Royal Irish Constabulary contingent in the Mounted Staff Corps, and Irish "navvies" or labourers. The chapter on the experiences of Irish surgeons, nurses, and chaplains is fascinating, including the well documented records of two Jesuits in the Crimea (Catholic chaplains had been allowed in British service in 1836), and the virulent clashes between the Dublin nursing Sisters of Mercy and Florence Nightingale. This book makes an important contribution both to a neglected aspect of Irish history and to the wider history of the war.

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Historical Dictionary of the Crimean War. By Guy Arnold. Historical Dictionaries of War, Revolution, and Civil Unrest, No. 19. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2002. ISBN 0-8108-4276-9. Maps. Bibliography. Pp. xxvi, 179. \$49.00.

The Crimean War, 1854–56, encompasses much more than a catalogue of unprecedented maladministration and unimaginable soldier privation juxtaposed with tremendous military heroism. It can be considered a case study in diplomacy and crisis management, as the major European powers—Great Britain, France, and Russia—and their efforts to maintain or destabilize the balance of power in Europe through their policies and war over the “sick man of Europe,” the Ottoman Empire, paved the way for the First World War. More importantly, the Crimean War marked a watershed between the Napoleonic way of war and, the result of advances in technology and weaponry, a new and evolving tactical and operational paradigm.

Guy Arnold, who has written extensively on Africa and international organizations, wrote the *Historical Dictionary of the Crimean War* to “highlight the different aspects of the war that newcomers to the subject might wish to pursue while also giving a clear picture of its many different facets” (pp. vii–viii). This volume begins with three generally adequate maps, followed by a four-page chronology, which is very general and neglects to note naval and land operations in the Baltic and White Seas and Pacific Ocean. An eight-page Introduction follows, providing an overview of the “Causes of the War,” “The Course of the War,” “The Battles of Alma, Balaclava, and Inkerman,” “Political Changes in Britain,” and “The Treaty of Paris.” Selected terms and names are boldfaced in the Introduction, which indicates cross-referencing to a separate and more detailed entry in the “Dictionary” portion of the book.

The 153-page “Dictionary” is the meat of this work. It contains almost 160 relatively detailed and cross-referenced, although generally Anglo-centric, entries on persons, “places, events, battles, sieges, armaments, and auxiliary services” (p. vii). One can always question an author’s criteria for inclusion of a specific entry, such as “Gordon, General Charles George,” who was only a subaltern in the Crimea, and a major general, not a general, when he was killed in 1885—a distinction that needs to be made for a historical dictionary to be authoritative. While Gordon is included, Lieutenant General Sir Richard England, commander of the 3d Division, is not. With entries frequently shorter than one page in length, a number of myths are perpetuated, such as the exaggerated role of Florence Nightingale in Crimean War nursing. In another example, while properly emphasizing the upper class social status of most British Army officers, it is incorrect to state “the leading officers were all titled” (p. 30). In general terms, most entries are informative and helpful. The twenty-three page “Bibliography,” divided into categories, provides general references, including a number of foreign language sources, for further reading and research.

The *Historical Dictionary of the Crimean War*, while rather high-priced, is a useful tool for the neophyte Crimean War student or researcher.

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