



PROJECT MUSE®

---

Medieval Naval Warfare, 1000-1500 (review)

Timothy J. Runyan

The Journal of Military History, Volume 67, Number 1, January 2003, pp. 221-222 (Review)

Published by Society for Military History

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jmh.2003.0071>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/40497>

typographical error are the only faults in an otherwise attractive, affordable book which will inform an audience of not only specialists in Roman history and intelligence studies but also the casual reader of military history.

Rose Mary Sheldon

Virginia Military Institute  
Lexington, Virginia

*Medieval Naval Warfare, 1000–1500.* By Susan Rose. New York: Routledge, 2002. ISBN 0-415-23976-1. Maps. Illustrations. Glossary. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xvi, 155. \$80.00.

This slim volume is packed with information and insight. Author Susan Rose is known to students of medieval maritime history for her work on the English navy of the fifteenth century. She has also edited the accounts of the keeper of the king's ships for 1422–27. Her work is firmly rooted in the primary sources held by the Public Record Office and other repositories. In this volume she expands her range to include “the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the so-called Western approaches and the North Sea” (p. xv).

The definition of naval warfare between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries is explained with a stress on the common structural elements of ships used in war and trade. Some readers will want to see this expressed through the archaeology of medieval ships and perhaps a reference to the twelve-volume Conway's *History of the Ship*, especially the volume edited by Richard Unger, *Cogs, Caravels, and Galleons* (1994). But the author makes clear that the construction and design of ships is not the main consideration. The purpose is to demonstrate “the way in which ships and mariners were drawn into the service of rulers, to serve their ends in war” (p. xvi). The focus is on strategy and tactics, and the employment of seapower. Rose carefully defines the concept of control of the sea, explaining that medieval fleets could not stay on station to form blockades or maintain regular patrols.

The volume is organized in an effective manner. The opening chapter on “Dockyards and Administration” focuses on the logistics of medieval fleets. The sweep is across a range of examples drawn from the Mediterranean, principally Italy, to the Channel and Atlantic waters—mainly France and England. Chapter Two, “Invaders and Settlers,” examines the Channel and North Sea from 1000 to 1250. The discussion of warfare begins with the Vikings and includes conflicts fought in longships and those by Western Europeans in sailing ships. Tactics include the use of galleys, the use of missiles of all sorts—stones, arrows, lances, and grappling and boarding. A fine example is the account of the sea battle resulting in the capture and beheading by the English of the “pirate” Eustace the Monk.

The third chapter examines naval warfare in the Mediterranean during the Crusades. Particular use is made of the War of the Sicilian Vespers initiated in 1282. Admiral Roger of Lauria commanded the Catalan-Aragonese fleet in several sea battles, employing successful tactics.

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.

Timothy J. Runyan

East Carolina University  
Greenville, North Carolina

***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.