

Introduction to volume II

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It would not be very much of an overstatement to say that modern academic writing about medieval warfare – in English, at least – began with Sir Charles Oman, whose first essay on the subject was written in 1884 and later expanded into his *History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages*, which went through two editions (1898 and 1924). Oman's brisk narrative weaving together weaponry, military institutions, and exemplary battles is typical of the pioneering generation of literature on the subject – and not just in English, as attested by such works as Hans Delbrück's *Geschichte der Kriegskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte* (three editions between 1900 and 1920) and Ferdinand Lot's *L'Art militaire et les armées au Moyen Age en Europe et dans le Proche Orient* (1946). Another characteristic shared by all of these early surveys is their lack of interest in the world beyond Europe, except to the extent that Europeans came into contact with that world through encounters such as the Crusades (as suggested by the wording of Lot's title). Although not entirely neglected, the military history of non-Western societies received much more scattershot treatment from Western specialists in quite narrowly focused works, often dealing primarily with weapons and armor.¹ Broader studies, such as Quaritch Wales's *Ancient South-East Asian Warfare* (1952), were extremely rare and did not attempt to draw comparisons with medieval Europe or locate their subjects within a global context.²

1 For examples of this genre, see Hugo Theodor Horwitz, "Die Armbrust in Ostasien," *Zeitschrift für historische Waffenkunde* 7 (1915–17), 155–83; E. T. C. Werner, *Chinese Weapons* (Shanghai, North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1932); Ralph Payne-Gallwey, *A Treatise on the Construction, Power and Management of Turkish and Other Oriental Bows of Mediaeval and Later Times* (London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1907); and Alfred von Pawlikowski-Cholewa, *Heeren des Morgenlandes* (Berlin, W. de Gruyter and Co., 1940).

2 H. G. Quaritch Wales, *Ancient South-East Asian Warfare* (London, Bernard Quaritch, 1952).

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Studies of medieval European warfare, meanwhile, were becoming not only ever more numerous, but also richer and more varied in their contents from about the middle of the twentieth century. An early example is J. F. Verbruggen's *De Krijgskunst in West-Europa in de Middeleeuwen (IXe tot begin XIVe eeuw)*, first published in Belgium in 1954, which gave medieval armies more credit for organization and strategy than earlier authors had allowed.³ Other works reflected the rising influence of social history (and by the 1970s, the emergence of a "new military history" emphasizing "war and society" rather than battles and leaders). To pick only one prominent example, Philippe Contamine's *La Guerre au Moyen Age*, published in France in 1980 and in English translation in 1984, covers much of the same ground as the earliest surveys but also includes more quantitative data and has chapters dealing with "War, Government, and Society," "Juridical, Ethical, and Religious Aspects of War," and even the history of courage itself.⁴ There has also been a proliferation of specialized studies on a vast range of topics covering every European country and region, including specific wars and battles, Crusading warfare, naval warfare, siege warfare, finance and logistics, knighthood and chivalry, the role of religion, the influence of ancient military authors such as Vegetius, and the military institutions of almost every time and place, from early Anglo-Saxon England to fourteenth-century Byzantium. In addition to social history, these works have come to be informed by many other disciplines and perspectives, with archaeology, anthropology, and even "history and memory" studies prominent among them.⁵

The study of warfare in the "medieval" world beyond Europe saw significant advances during the same period, especially from the mid 1970s onward, as the military history of non-Western societies began to attract serious scholarly attention. A comprehensive survey of all of the major works would be beyond the scope of this brief introduction, but a few prominent examples should be mentioned. In 1974 the publication of *Chinese Ways in Warfare*, a conference volume edited by Frank A. Kierman, Jr. and John King Fairbank, established a new baseline for English-language scholarship on the

3 A partial English translation was published in 1977, and an enlarged edition twenty years later: *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, trans. Sumner Willard and Mrs R. W. Southern (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1997).

4 Philippe Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, trans. Michael Jones (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1984).

5 This aspect looms large, for example, in Georges Duby, *The Legend of Bouvines: War, Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Catherine Tihanyi (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1990).

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military history of premodern China, and was followed in due course by book-length studies of particular periods by Ch'i-ch'ing Hsiao, Edward L. Dreyer, and a coterie of younger historians including Peter Lorge and David Graff.⁶ The military exploits of the Mongols, once the domain of fabulists (such as Harold Lamb) and enthusiasts (such as Basil Liddell Hart), has received attention from linguistically competent professional historians such as John Masson Smith, Jr., David Morgan, and Timothy May.⁷ Setting aside the numerous books by Stephen Turnbull that were aimed at a popular audience, serious studies of medieval Japanese warfare date only from the 1990s, with the field dominated by the work of just three scholars: Karl Friday, Thomas Conlan, and William Wayne Farris.⁸ Michael Charney's survey of Southeast Asian warfare, the first to appear since Quaritch Wales's, was published in 2004.⁹ General surveys of South Asian warfare have been available since at least the 1940s, but there have been important recent contributions to the genre by Pradeep Barua (2005) and Kaushik Roy (2015).¹⁰ In addition, particular aspects of the military history of medieval northern India (the Delhi sultanate) have received monographic treatment by scholars such as Peter Jackson and Iqtidar Alam Khan.¹¹ Because of its

6 Frank A. Kierman, Jr. and John King Fairbank (eds.), *Chinese Ways in Warfare* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1974); Ch'i-ch'ing Hsiao, *The Military Establishment of the Yüan Dynasty* (Cambridge, MA, Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1978); Edward L. Dreyer, *Early Ming China: A Political History, 1355–1435* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1982). Lorge's first book, *War, Politics and Society in Early Modern China, 900–1795*, was published by Routledge in 2005, three years after the same publisher issued Graff's *Medieval Chinese Warfare, 300–900*.

7 John Masson Smith, Jr., "Ayn Jälüt: Mamlūk Success or Mongol Failure?" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 44.2 (December 1984), 307–45; David Morgan, *The Mongols* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2007); Timothy May, *The Mongol Art of War* (Barnsley, UK, Pen & Sword, 2007).

8 William Wayne Farris, *Heavenly Warriors: The Evolution of Japan's Military, 500–1300* (Cambridge, MA, Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992); Karl F. Friday, *Hired Swords: The Rise of Private Warrior Power in Early Japan* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1992); and *Samurai, Warfare and the State in Early Medieval Japan* (London and New York, Routledge, 2004); Thomas D. Conlan, *State of War: The Violent Order of Fourteenth-Century Japan* (Ann Arbor, Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2003).

9 Michael W. Charney, *Southeast Asian Warfare, 1300–1900* (Leiden, Brill, 2004).

10 Pradeep Barua, *The State at War in South Asia* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2005); Kaushik Roy, *Warfare in Pre-British India, 1500 BCE to 1740 CE* (London and New York, Routledge, 2015). An example of the earlier literature is Jandunath Sarkar, *Military History of India* (1960; rpt. New Delhi, Orient Longman Ltd., 1970).

11 Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999); Iqtidar Alam Khan, *Gunpowder and Firearms: Warfare in Medieval India* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2004). An earlier monograph worth mentioning is Simon Digby, *War-Horse and Elephant in the Delhi Sultanate: A Study of Military Supplies* (Karachi, Oxford University Press, 1971).

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geographical and historical proximity to Europe, there was less ground to be made up in the military history of the Near East, but some notable new contributions were added to the literature, such as Hugh Kennedy's *The Armies of the Caliphs: Military and Society in the Early Islamic State* in 2001.¹² For obvious reasons having to do with availability of sources, relatively little has been written about warfare in sub-Saharan Africa in precolonial times (with the emphasis on the early modern period and zones of European contact), though recent general surveys by Richard Reid (2012) and Timothy Stapleton (2013) deal in passing with the timespan corresponding to Europe's Middle Ages.¹³ Leaping across the Atlantic to the Americas, Ross Hassig's now classic study of Aztec warfare was published in 1988, and there have since been other contributions by R. Brian Ferguson (with Neil L. Whitehead), Jonathan Haas, and Rubén Mendoza (with Richard Chacon) that range more widely through the Western Hemisphere.¹⁴

Despite the very considerable efforts of these scholars, the English-language literature on medieval warfare beyond Europe has yet to attain the same depth and sophistication as that written by European medievalists. This is due in part to formidable language barriers, in part to the rather small number of historians specializing in non-Western military history, and in part to the relative immaturity of medieval non-Western warfare as a serious field of scholarly investigation. Those working in this field have sometimes had the feeling of being engaged in the same sort of project that occupied Sir Charles Oman more than a century ago, weaving together battle narratives with discussions of weapons, tactics, and military institutions at a rather superficial level. This work was, however, essential in order to establish a baseline for deeper and more focused studies. Another shortcoming of the scholarly literature on medieval warfare, both Western and non-Western, is that, with the exception of a handful of military history textbooks, there has been very little effort to adopt either comparative or global perspectives; for

¹² Published by Routledge.

¹³ Richard J. Reid, *Warfare in African History* (Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2012); Timothy J. Stapleton, *A Military History of Africa* (Santa Barbara, CA, Praeger, 2013). For the early modern period, see John K. Thornton, *Warfare in Atlantic Africa, 1500–1800* (London and New York, Routledge, 1999).

¹⁴ Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare: Imperial Expansion and Political Control* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1988); R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehead (eds.), *War in the Tribal Zone: Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare* (Santa Fe, School of American Research Press, 1992); Jonathan Haas, *Stress and Warfare among the Kayenta Anasazi of the Thirteenth Century A.D.* (Chicago, Field Museum of Natural History, 1993); Richard J. Chacon and Rubén G. Mendoza (eds.), *Latin American Indigenous Warfare and Ritual Violence* (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2007); and *North American Indigenous Warfare and Ritual Violence* (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2007).

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the most part, medieval military history remains a set of isolated compartments. This legacy is visible in most of the individual chapters that make up this volume. Although a few chapters, such as the one by Stephen Morillo dealing with “Justifications, Theories, and Customs of War,” adopt a universal and comprehensive approach, the great majority of them are regionally specific. They are, however, firmly grounded in specific bodies of scholarly literature, primary source materials, and the linguistic skills and cultural understanding needed to make sense of them. Bringing all of these stories together in one volume covering most of the medieval world is a significant undertaking inasmuch as it facilitates the identification of universal processes, local differences and variations, hitherto unsuspected connections between developments in far-flung geographic regions, and perhaps even helps to inspire the creation of new master narratives for understanding war in the global “Middle Ages.”

Especially when projected onto a global stage, the Middle Ages is a concept that requires definition. The chronological boundaries adopted by this second volume of the *Cambridge History of War* do not depart very much from the traditional scheme, memorized by generations of schoolchildren, that took the removal of the last Western Roman emperor in 476 to mark the beginning of the medieval period and the fall of the Eastern Roman capital of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 to mark its end. From today’s perspective, the shortcomings of this time-honored convention are both many and obvious. In addition to being arbitrary, as such schemes of periodization almost always are, it is also quite blatantly Eurocentric in its choice of significant, world-historical events. By pushing the starting point of this volume forward a century or more to around the beginning of the seventh century of the Common Era, we hope to achieve a somewhat better fit with patterns of change more widely distributed across the Afro-Eurasian landmass. These include the break-up of the Gupta empire in India, the emergence of a new and lasting imperial formation in China represented by the Sui and Tang dynasties, and the rise and rapid spread of Islam which brought to an end both the Sasanian empire in Persia and the extended era of Late Antiquity in the Mediterranean world. At a more fundamental level, however, the very notion of a tripartite division of the past into ancient, medieval, and modern eras carries a great deal of baggage from the European past, where thinkers from the sixteenth century onward sought to differentiate the perceived advances and improvements of their own

times from the preceding “Dark Ages” that separated them from the splendors of the more ancient past.¹⁵

The long-prevalent perception of the Early Middle Ages (especially the sixth through tenth centuries) as a “dark” age of barbarism and superstition no longer finds much favor among medievalists, including the authors of the chapters that make up this volume. Although some parts of the world, Western Europe among them, did see a temporary decline of commerce and contraction of urban populations during this period, this was by no means a universal phenomenon. Some regions to the east, such as today’s Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, thrived under the rule of the Umayyad and ‘Abbāsid caliphates, while in China the Tang dynasty (618–907) is still considered to have been a golden age. Various “barbarian” invaders, from the Norsemen to the Mongols, rampage their way through several of the chapters in this volume, but for the most part the emphasis is on the creative and constructive aspect of the age rather than its destructive side, as new military techniques, technologies, and institutions afforded at least temporary or partial solutions to a range of security problems and (in some cases) began to lay the groundwork for the gradual emergence of more “modern” militaries in the centuries that followed.

Moreover, despite the European origin of the concept of the “Middle Ages” and of the specific dates usually assigned to that period, a case can be made that the notion of a medieval period within approximately the same chronological framework makes sense in more than just a European context – if not a fully global framework. Its characteristic features do not all appear everywhere and, where they do appear, they are not always present together at the same time, but they nevertheless help to distinguish this age from those that preceded and followed it. Some of these features are specifically military, and others are of a more general nature.

To begin with the more general, the early medieval period was a post-imperial age. This is not to suggest that there were no empires during the Middle Ages. On the contrary, Western Europe saw the aggressive empire building of the Carolingian Franks under Charlemagne’s leadership, followed by the efforts of the Ottonian Saxons. In the eastern Mediterranean the Byzantine empire remained a major power for more than five hundred years and lingered on until 1453. The Middle East gave rise to the Umayyad

15 Cf. Gibbon’s “triumph of barbarism and religion.” *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Philadelphia, The John C. Winston Co., 1845), ch. LXXI, p. 548. The tripartite scheme is of course intimately bound up with the concepts of “Renaissance” and “Enlightenment.”

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and 'Abbāsid caliphates and their various successor states; China was reunited under the Sui, Tang, and Song dynasties; the Indian subcontinent was nearly united by the Delhi sultanate for a brief time around 1300; Southeast Asia witnessed the imperialism of the Khmers on the mainland and Sri Vijaya on the island of Sumatra; and in West Africa the Niger river and the Sahel region provided the backdrop for the successive rise and fall of the empires of Ghana and Mali. The Mongol conquerors who exploded out of the steppe heartland of the Eurasian landmass during the thirteenth century built an empire so vast that in the annals of world history it is rivaled only by the British and Russian empires of c.1900. Nevertheless, the medieval scene was a far cry from the ancient world of just a few centuries earlier when it is estimated that half the humans then alive were subjects of one or the other of two massive imperial formations, the Roman Empire and Han China. The empires that existed in the medieval period tended to be smaller (compare the Roman Empire at its height with the diminished Byzantine realm described in the chapters by John Haldon and Mark Bartusis), more ephemeral (as suggested by Phillip Wagoner's discussion of the Delhi sultanate), and also very much in the shadow of their earlier imperial forebears. This last point comes across, for example in both Guy Halsall's chapter, which describes the efforts of Germanic rulers in post-Roman Europe to claim the mantle of the Caesars, and David Graff's chapter, where we see the concern of the Sui and early Tang emperors to recover all of the territories that had been ruled by the Han dynasty. Empires of the Middle Ages were less stable and more precarious, and they were often prey to a sort of inferiority complex with regard to the glorious past.

This period has also been characterized as an "age of faith." More precisely, it was a time when several major salvation religions with new promises of otherworldly rewards spread very widely across the Afro-Eurasian landmass. Through missionary activity, diplomacy, and armed conquest, Christianity expanded from its original base in the territories that had been the Roman Empire into Northern and Central Europe (in its Latin form) as well as Eastern Europe and Russia (mainly in its Greek form). During the seventh and eighth centuries Islam spread explosively through the great Arab conquests to dominate, and then gradually convert, peoples from Syria and Egypt across North Africa to Spain, and from Iran into Central Asia. Later waves of armed expansion by Muslim Turks carried Islam into South Asia and Southeastern Europe, but the religion's spread into Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa owed more to peaceful trading contacts than force of arms. Buddhism, a religion of South Asian origin, meanwhile spread

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eastward along both the overland and maritime trade routes to take firm root in China, Korea, Japan, and much of Southeast Asia. (Although less obvious than the expansion of these three religions, the rise of devotional Hinduism in India and its spread to some parts of Southeast Asia also fit into the pattern of the times.) For untold tens of millions who lived between 600 and 1500 religion was the central element of identity, and it created bonds and communities that transcended the more traditional boundaries of language, tribe, ethnicity, and polity. By the same token, the frontiers dividing religious communities were frequently the loci of armed conflict, as we see in the chapters by Matthew Gordon (on the armed expansion of Islam), John France (on the Crusades), Donald J. Kagay (on the Iberian Reconquista), and Gábor Ágoston (on the rise of the Ottoman Turks). Yet shared belief was no guarantee of peace. As Stephen Morillo points out in his chapter, groups perceived as deviant or heretical could be subjected to forcible suppression, as in the Albigensian Crusade of the early thirteenth century or any number of Sunni-Shi'a conflicts within the house of Islam.

Although the new salvationist religions – especially Islam and Buddhism – would eventually have an enormous influence over the nomadic peoples of the Eurasian heartland, this was an age in which influences flowed very strongly in the opposite direction as well. Steppe elites had learned important lessons from the older centers of sedentary civilization, and now tended to be better organized, more likely to be capable of written communication in their own languages, and much more effective in exerting pressure upon the sedentary world than in ancient times. In the old centers their influence was greater and more disruptive than ever before, as witnessed by the domination, at various times, of China, India, the Middle East, and vast expanses of Russia and Eastern Europe by rulers of steppe origin. This pattern is most obvious in the chapters by Étienne de la Vaissière on the early Turks and Roman Hautala on the Mongols, but it can also be glimpsed in Peter Lorge's chapter on Song China and its rivals and successors, Phillip Wagoner's chapter on India, John Haldon's chapter on Byzantium, and Martyn Rady's chapter on Eastern Europe. Its culmination was the creation in the thirteenth century of a Mongol world empire stretching from Korea to Russia and Iraq, and embracing the old civilized centers of China and Iran.

Due in part to Mongol imperialism and in part to the spread of the salvation religions, which created new, geographically extensive networks of co-religionists, the older Eurasian centers were gradually drawn closer together. Along both the overland trade routes (of which the famous Silk Road through the heart of Asia is the best known) and the maritime routes

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that connected East and Southeast Asia with the Indian Ocean littoral and, ultimately, the Mediterranean world, Northwestern Europe, and West Africa, commercial links became denser and more robust.¹⁶ Along these routes moved not just trade commodities such as silk and spices, but also ideas, technology, pathogens, and people. The Mongol empire has been implicated in the pandemic spread of the Black Death as well as the diffusion of military technologies (with gunpowder moving from East to West, and the counterweighted trebuchet traveling in the opposite direction); its rulers employed Persians, Arabs, and Italians in its service in China, at the same time that it was bringing Chinese to Persia and Iraq. Yet far-ranging travel was also possible in areas of the late medieval world that were never reached by the Mongols. Witness the travels of Ibn Battuta, a native of Tangier in Morocco, who ventured as far afield as sub-Saharan East and West Africa, India, and Southeast Asia (as well as North Africa, Central Asia, and China) during the fourteenth century. And when the early fifteenth-century Ming voyages led by the eunuch admiral Zheng He descended from China into the Indian Ocean, they were following existing trade routes that were already well known to private traders and seafarers.¹⁷

The Afro-Eurasian network was not only becoming tighter in this period, but it was also growing larger. The Middle Ages was a time of secondary state formation, as hitherto relatively unorganized peripheral areas learned the arts of civilization from older centers and were brought within their cultural and religious (if not political) orbit. In the mid seventh century, the Yamato rulers of Japan embarked upon an ambitious program of self-strengthening by imitating the political and military institutions of Tang China, a development examined in Karl Friday's chapter. After the predatory expeditions and adventures of the Viking era, newly consolidated Scandinavian monarchies embraced the Latin version of Christianity and were incorporated into Western European Christendom, a transformation that figures prominently in Anthony Perron's chapter on the Scandinavian world. Eastern Europe, meanwhile, saw the emergence of a string of new Christian kingdoms, a phenomenon detailed in the chapters by Martyn Rady and Mark Bartusis; some, such as Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary, looked to Rome, while others (Serbia, Bulgaria, and Kievan Rus') took their religious and cultural cues from

16 See Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1989).

17 This point emerges especially clearly from Edward L. Dreyer, *China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 1405–1433* (New York, Pearson Longman, 2007).

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Constantinople. The emergence of new states in sub-Saharan Africa such as Ghana and Mali under the influence of trade and Islam may be seen as an additional example of the same general pattern. And in his chapter on Southeast Asia, Michael Charney reminds us that that region was subject to waves of outside influence from China (felt mainly in Vietnam), India, and the Islamic world.

In addition to these general characteristics, there are also several more specifically military features that have often been taken to distinguish the period between 600 and 1500. Although each was prominent across a number of societies, none of them was universal – and even a single society could manifest considerable variation over such an extensive time span. Nevertheless, they are significant themes that recur in many of the chapters that make up this volume.

One of these themes is the extent to which social status and class identity were linked to violence and the bearing of arms. This phenomenon was perhaps most obviously on display in Western Europe; in their chapters both Guy Halsall and David Crouch note that on one memorable occasion in the mid ninth century Frankish warriors massacred their lower-status compatriots who had the temerity to take up arms against the Viking invaders. A similar attitude was found in distant Japan, where for several centuries warfare was largely monopolized by the *bushi* or warrior class (described in the chapters by Karl Friday and Thomas Conlan). Warfare as a caste or class-based activity took other forms elsewhere. Some states such as Tang China and the Byzantine empire placed considerable reliance on foreign contingents. In the Tang case these consisted mainly of mounted archers recruited from the nomadic peoples of the steppe, while the Byzantines at various times made use of Hunnish horse-archers, Varangian Guards of Norse and Anglo-Saxon origin, and the Catalan “Grand Company.” From the ninth century onward, the ‘Abbāsid caliphate and many other Muslim regimes relied very heavily on Turkish horsemen recruited from the grasslands of Central Asia and converted to Islam. Although Matthew Gordon’s chapter questions the widely held notion that these warriors were actually slaves, there can be no doubt that they started out in a subordinate role and then managed to leverage their martial prowess and dominance of the military into positions of privilege and power. Thus, military specialization does not appear simply as a marker of inherited class status, but in some societies could instead provide a path of upward mobility (as with the Ottoman janissaries discussed by Gábor Ágoston). This pattern comes out especially clearly in Wagoner’s chapter, which notes that some of the ruling groups in southern