1 'Then was then and now is now': an overview of change and continuity in late-medieval and early-modern warfare

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This book examines how European warfare changed in the 400 years from the mid fourteenth to the mid eighteenth century. Military change and its effects in this period have emerged as of critical importance in European and global history. Some scholars have argued that dramatic changes in technology and the art of war, amounting to nothing less than a 'military revolution', were responsible for the development of strong central states within Europe and their subsequent domination of the rest of the globe. At the heart of several global historical and sociological grand narratives is the issue of what changed and what remained the same in the organisation, administration, and conduct of warfare, and its wider repercussions, especially for power relationships within polities.

However, European warfare in this period has generally been approached either from a late-medieval or from an early-modern perspective, leading to substantial confusion over whether change occurred, the nature of changes (if any) and when changes occurred (if they did). Geographically, as well as chronologically, historians have generally adopted a narrow focus, concentrating either upon western or upon eastern Europe; historical inquiry is generally restricted to specific national case-studies, and is focused disproportionately on western European nations, particularly France, Germany, Scandinavia, Spain, and England. These have been assumed, rather than proven, to be typical; many scholars have ignored the considerable military power of Poland and the Ottoman Empire. In addition, military historians have created their own specialisms; in consequence, late-medieval and early-modern sieges and battles are often treated in isolation from each other and the campaigns of which they were part, while the implications of war at sea for the wider history of conflict are rarely elucidated. Furthermore (and with some honourable exceptions), historians of technology, historians of the art of war, and historians of the state and of society have tended to talk amongst themselves rather than engaging in dialogue with other types of historians; and far too often historians do not talk at all with political scientists and sociologists.

This book crosses the chronological divide between medieval and early-modern history, the geographical divide between western and eastern Europe, and the artificial boundaries between different types of history, so that the extent and nature of continuity and change can be identified. The book takes as its starting point the fact that armies and fleets were for fighting – at its heart is a concern with combat and the conduct of military operations, and with how societies, states and polities organised themselves for conflict. This reflects the fact that academic history in recent years has primarily concerned itself with the social and institutional contexts of war, rather than the business for which armies and fleets were created.[1] The result has been a rich and nuanced historiography of the relationship between war and society; but it comes at the price of an impoverished understanding of how and why wars were actually waged, of the reasons for military success and failure, and of the consequences. Yet such an understanding is crucial, because the fate of nations could be decided by their ability to wage warfare effectively. In this period, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary, Novgorod, Portugal, Serbia, Siena, Wallachia, and arguably Scotland, were all conquered or absorbed by other polities as a result of catastrophic failures in military campaigns; whereas military and naval success established the Ottoman Empire as first a European and then a global power, and turned the Grand Duchy of Muscovy into the Russian Empire, the Swedish component of the Union of Kalmar into a separate kingdom and (briefly) a great power, the northern provinces of the Habsburg Netherlands into the independent Dutch republic, and the territories of the Hohenzollern Electors of Brandenburg into the kingdom of Prussia. The social history of armies and navies should not distract attention from their primary function: campaigning. This book, then, is a history of warfare, rather than of war.

This volume is not structured as a chronological narrative. Instead, fourteen leading historians have each examined a particular aspect of European warfare over several centuries. All share a common concern to identify what changed, how, and why – and what remained the same. Collectively the chapters deal with warfare across the whole of Europe, over the whole of the period, drawing on evidence from a wide geographical range, and integrating campaigns both at sea and on land. Maritime technology and naval tactics are the specific focus of one chapter, but naval strategy, particular naval and amphibious campaigns, and the economic implications of war at sea are integrated into

[1] See Lynn, 'Embattled Future', 782–4; Citino, 'Military Histories', 1070–1.

other chapters. This book thus provides a comprehensive picture of European warfare from 1350 to 1750.

This periodisation was chosen deliberately and reflects three issues. The first is that warfare changed in this period. This was recognised by contemporaries. A military treatise written by the Englishman Robert Barret in 1598 is constructed as a dialogue between a country gentleman and a veteran of the Eighty Years' War; in it the former asks whether there is any need for 'great change' in the armament of English soldiers, whose ancestors had won wars with bows and bills. The experienced soldier simply replies: 'Then was then, and now is now. The wars are much altered since the fierie weapons came up.'[2] As this implies, developments in technology (the introduction of gunpowder) were an important part of the reason for change; however, as chapters in this volume show, incremental improvements in metallurgy, as well as in weapon design and in production techniques, were at least as important as the application of gunpowder to missile technology in stimulating changes to the conduct and organisation of war. When one compares, for example, the War of the Eight Saints (1375–8) with the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–8), the weaponry, battlefield tactics, and even more, the strategy and national management of war, stand in stark contrast to each other. This is not of course to suggest that the armies of the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries were necessarily superior to their medieval counterparts, either in their fighting qualities or in generalship, but that the manner of waging warfare had changed.

Second is the fact that, traditionally, scholars have seen the military changes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as of critical importance in shaping European history – a point to which we shall return below. However, the exact period of the alleged 'military revolution' has been the subject of heated debate. As a result, dates for its genesis and terminus have been extended far beyond the original periodisation; indeed, many scholars now contest the very existence of a military revolution. The only way to assess the significance and extent of changes in warfare is to cover the whole epoch in which 'revolutionary' change has been perceived.

Third, sociologists and political scientists have described this 400-year period as critical to the emergence of the modern international state system, which reached its apogee in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Whether or not this period truly witnessed the birth of the *modern* state, there were significant changes in political realities. In the mid fourteenth century powerful monarchies emerged,

[2] Barret, *Moderne Warres*, 2.

in which systems or central institutions existed through which part of royal/princely power was exercised – systems or institutions that, if they survived long enough, could take on a life of their own. In addition, in these monarchies, subjects had a nascent sense of self-identity. These monarchies were becoming polities, in which there existed, or there was the prospect of, an exercise of power that could continue efficiently beyond the lifetime of a particular prince and so could be effective, to some extent, regardless of the personality of the ruler. Although these polities were still focused on the person of the prince or dynasty, they nevertheless had the potential to transcend them.

That potential was realised in various places and at various times throughout the period; but by the middle of the eighteenth century it had been widely realised across Europe. This is reflected in the increasing use of the term 'state' by contemporaries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Institutions or systems that had been established or had emerged in the fourteenth century had rarely survived across 400 years; but they provided some basis for subsequent institutions or systems that became permanent. At the same time, for reasons that remain much debated by scholars and in ways that are not clearly understood, the collective identity of the governed had become more closely aligned with the polity than with the prince (despite the enduring importance of dynastic loyalty into the nineteenth century). In consequence, by the early eighteenth century, some polities had acquired such a sense of identity, and such well-established, influential, and authoritative institutions, that the power of the polity was no longer only a function of the personality of the prince or the gene pool of the ruling family.

For example, in France, Spain, the Dutch republic, Brandenburg-Prussia, and Austria, the sovereign's ability either as commander in the field, or as war leader more generally, remained important, but not decisive. Each of these states was a power and a force to be reckoned with in European international politics throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, even when the head of state was mediocre or downright ineffective as a war leader. Spain and the Netherlands were in decline in this period, but still disposed of formidable military power, at least potentially, and this bore little relationship to the identity of the head of state. Louis XV's France was not as bellicose as Louis XIV's, but France throughout the eighteenth century was still arguably Europe's leading land power, even though neither Louis XV nor XVI had the same predilection for military uniform or participating on the battlefield as the Sun King. Austria emerged as a great power after 1648, despite a sequence of rulers who were indifferent war leaders.

Although Denmark accepted the status of a regional power from the second half of the seventeenth century on, it was able to maintain this status and preserve its core territories, while engaged in a series of wars, despite having no great royal military leaders.

By contrast, Sweden had a sequence of kings who were talented field commanders; their fondness for war led to an extreme case of over-extension and the collapse of the Swedish Empire; yet while this again demonstrates that the military ability of the sovereign was no longer decisive in the fates of nations, the existence of institutions, systems, and a sense of national identity ensured that Sweden maintained the status of a regional – albeit no longer a European – power. To be sure, the Ottoman Empire may seem to constitute an exception, since personal ability to lead armies on campaign was an essential ingredient for military success, which was in turn vital if the sultan was to establish and maintain his personal authority. Nevertheless, the Turks did have permanent institutions and systems – such as those that produced the *timari* cavalry, Janissary regular infantry and *kadi* administrators – which enabled the Sublime Porte to wage large-scale, long-term wars throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, despite the personal ineptitude of a whole series of sultans after Murad IV (1612–40), the last Turkish ruler who was also a capable battlefield leader. In all these nations, leadership in war was no longer inextricably intertwined with command in the field, whereas, up to the fourteenth century, princes who successfully waged war were invariably also capable battlefield leaders.

The late-medieval and early-modern period thus saw the development of polities whose power was not dependent on the monarch – the emergence of what can reasonably be termed great powers, rather than great princes. In the fourteenth century and earlier, the ability to wage long wars of attrition had been a hallmark of great princes; by the middle years of the eighteenth century, it was also a hallmark of great powers.

Central to this pivotal development had been changes in and associated with warfare. The permanent institutions or systems associated with the state had largely been founded in response to the demands of warfare. They were by no means always more effective than their medieval forerunners, but their permanence meant that they had the potential to develop institutional memory and corporate identity; this in turn gave rise to greater authority and allowed, as a spin-off, the development of military and naval professionalism, which ultimately did help give rise to enhanced efficiency. As this happened, they also enhanced the power of the centre over peripheries, and of rulers over

the ruled. Furthermore, the waging of long-term wars, associated with the polity, not just the prince, acted as a stimulus to nascent national identities, which also helped to bind polities together, so that, again, there was a willingness to sacrifice for the polity, even if not the prince. To be sure, scepticism about the rightness of war had emerged in the sixteenth century, expressed by humanists such as Erasmus and by radical Protestants such as the Anabaptists; and in the eighteenth century, some, like the Abbé St Pierre in France, argued that war was actually unnatural. Yet for the most part war continued to be perceived as part of the divinely ordained order, and was regarded as the ultimate test – albeit now not just of the prince and his cause, but also of the polity.

Of course, state development did not end in the eighteenth century. The early-modern state was to be transformed into the nation-state after the emergence of revolutionary political ideology in North America and France. Yet however much the nation-state – the fundamental political unit of the modern world – owes to the rhetoric of the 1790s and 1840s, modern nation-states developed out of the polities that first emerged in the period 1350–1750.

For all these reasons, then, warfare in this period is critical to an understanding of the emergence of Europe's nation-states in the nineteenth century – their governance and government were shaped more by the exigencies of waging warfare than by any other single factor. However, this has a relevance that transcends European history, because Europe's great powers proceeded to dominate the globe – a process that was begun in the sixteenth century. Between 1500 and 1800 Europeans gained control of more than 35 per cent of the globe; by 1914 the figure was 84 per cent. If the dramatic expansion of the final hundred years has attracted most scholarly attention, it was nonetheless founded on the extraordinary early acquisition of more than a third of the world's surface that began with the expansion of Spain into the Americas and of Portugal into the African and Indian Ocean littoral in the late fifteenth century.

Explanations of how this was accomplished have frequently juxtaposed modern, forward-looking, technologically superior Europeans against static, tradition-bound, primitive peoples. Primacy has been given to the use of force: well-armed, disciplined, and trained Europeans purportedly cut a swathe through poorly armed, badly led and ill-trained local levies. It must be recognised that, as a number of revisionist historians have begun to point out, this model oversimplifies what was a complex phenomenon. Non-military factors, such as disease and diplomacy, were often crucial to the success of Europeans; and Indian, Moroccan, Persian, and Japanese military technological

development – at least until the late sixteenth century – matched or sometimes surpassed that of western Europeans.[3]

Nonetheless, the ability of Europeans to globally utilise means for the conduct of warfare forged in Europe and adapted to local circumstances clearly is a significant factor in the expansion of Europe overseas. European warfare between 1350 and 1750 is thus vitally important for an understanding of world – as well as European – history. Because theories about the global dominance of the West are premised upon purported changes within Europe, the focus of this book is on these, rather than on developments in Asia or Africa, fascinating as the latter have proved to some historians of warfare. While they help to explain why Europeans did not enjoy unvarying military success in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,[4] they add nothing to our understanding of what changed and what remained the same in the European art of war. They do not, therefore, form any part of the consideration of this volume.

Overseas expansion, like state development, has been linked to theories of a 'military revolution'. First advanced in the 1950s by an historian of seventeenth-century Sweden, Michael Roberts, it was adapted in the 1970s by an historian of the Spanish Monarchy, Geoffrey Parker, to include a greater emphasis on the introduction of artillery fortresses (of the so-called *trace italienne* style) in the sixteenth century; later, in the 1980s, Parker ascribed the global dominance of the West to this model of the military revolution. The Parker–Roberts thesis has since been heavily modified and attacked outright. Jeremy Black and Clifford Rogers, for example, have argued for a sustained period of military evolution, rather than of revolution, potentially beginning in the late fourteenth century and not concluding until the eighteenth century; others have rejected the entire concept of a 'military revolution'. The military revolution debate has now lasted for decades and has spawned an extraordinary number of publications, for both academic and popular readerships, but at times it has been remarkably fierce and it still generates historiographical controversy.[5] Yet while the geographic area encompassed has expanded, the conceptual frame of reference is still much the same.

[3] E.g. Chase, *Firearms*; Black, *European Warfare 1494–1660*, *European Warfare 1660–1815*, and other works.

[4] Cf. e.g. Black, 'Introduction', 7, and *European Warfare 1494–1660*, 207–11.

[5] For the classic statements on the military revolution, see Roberts, 'Military Revolution'; Parker, *Military Revolution*; Black, *Military Revolution?*; and the essays in Rogers, *Military Revolution Debate*. Recent contributions by key protagonists: Parker, 'Military Revolutions', 'Gunpowder Revolution', and '"Military Revolution", 1955–2005'; Black, *European Warfare 1494–1660*, 'On Diversity', 'Military Revolutions', and 'Was There a Military Revolution?'.

Rehearsing the details of the military revolution debate runs the risk of sterility, especially because this volume is a wider study of European warfare, rather than only of the military revolution thesis. While the chapters that follow are not intended to be the last word in this controversy, they do authoritatively indicate where significant changes in the art of war and the state management of war did – and did not – occur. They suggest that no simple model of a military revolution, especially one that puts undue emphasis on technological developments as the driver of change, is going to be adequate. Moreover, they reinforce the judgement that any discussion of broad social, political, and economic changes must include military developments both as part of the explanatory model and as part of the outcome.

Certainly, while the military revolution thesis has not gained universal acceptance amongst historians of warfare, it has been widely adopted by sociologists, such as Charles Tilly and Michael Mann; by authors of general histories; and by economic historians, such as John Brewer and Jan Glete; all of whom see significant military *change*, if not revolution, as integral to the development of the state and to wider political developments. Brewer used Peter Dickson's theory of a financial revolution in state affairs to explain the formation in Britain of what he termed a 'fiscal-military state',[6] which Glete has expanded into a broad explanatory model for the emergence of great powers in Europe.[7]

Furthermore, the model of a 'military revolution' was the basis for the concept of the 'revolution in military affairs (RMA)' – the term used to describe the marriage of hi-tech 'systems that collect, process and communicate information with those that apply military force'. Because only the United States or, in some cases, its allies have access to 'stealth, "smart", space and computer weaponry', this 'RMA' has resulted (or so it is claimed) in the ability of the United States, untrammelled by constraints of 'time and space', to attack targets across the globe with great precision, the minimum use of manpower and the maximum deployment of technology.[8] However, the conceptualisation of a revolutionary change as reliant on technology was a direct borrowing from the apparent emphasis in Roberts and Parker's work on technological innovation as the driver of tactical, operational, and institutional change.[9] Military theorists based in the United States identify technology as the best source for radical new ways to project power, partly

[6] Brewer, *Sinews of Power*.
[7] He discusses them further in Chapter 14 in this volume.
[8] See Knox and Murray, *Dynamics of Military Revolution*; Freedman, 'Britain', 111; Smith and Uttley, 'Military Power', 3, 8; Black, 'Introduction', 5.
[9] Knox and Murray, 'Thinking', esp. 2, 13.

because of the unwillingness of late twentieth-century US politicians to accept casualties, partly because of an enduring presumption that political objectives can be secured primarily or only through military force, but also because this is what the historiography of the early-modern 'military revolution' seems to suggest.

Thus, in a number of respects, late-medieval and early-modern European warfare is central to current and ongoing debates about the nature of power, both in the past and in the present. Particularly critical are the issues of how warfare changed and how it remained the same, and the reasons for both continuity and change.

For example, warfare, as the following chapters show, was important not just in the formation of states, but also in their decline and even fragmentation. If, as has been argued by some scholars, notably Jeremy Black, the motor for military change (and hence for European state development and expansion in Africa, Asia, and the Americas) was not technological developments but rather changes in culture and organisational ability,[10] this has potentially profound implications for theorists of the technologically based 'Revolution in military affairs'. Similarly, Paul Kennedy's theory that links economic change and military conflict and holds that powers naturally tend to over-reach themselves, if substantiated by the historical record, has potentially worrisome implications for the nations of Europe and North America.[11] European warfare between 1350 and 1750 is therefore of more than purely historical interest.

The chapters that follow do not attempt to consider every aspect of late-medieval and early-modern warfare. Rather, they focus on the key issues: How and why did warfare change in the period roughly spanning 1350 to 1750, and what effect(s) did changes have?

Chapter 2 analyses the purpose, role, or function of warfare in medieval and early-modern international relations, dealing with *strategy* (or grand strategy) rather than the conduct of military operations, which is dealt with in Chapter 9. Polities are examined in Chapter 2 from an international perspective; Chapters 3 to 6 address the role and power of the state within polities, but in the context of actual campaigning and combat capabilities, rather than from a purely institutional perspective. Each of these four chapters has a slightly different chronological focus, reflecting the lack of uniformity in developments across Europe and across the period, but collectively they provide comprehensive geographical and chronological coverage. The subject matter of these chapters includes

[10] E.g. Black, *European Warfare 1660–1815*, 3 and *European Warfare 1494–1660*, 1–3, 51–3, 213–14; Wills, 'Maritime Asia', 89–90, 93–4, 105.
[11] Kennedy, *Great Powers*.

finance, logistics, and recruiting from the state perspective; however, these issues also need to be addressed from the perspective of military organisation. Thus, Chapters 3 to 6 deal with how recruits and supplies were *obtained* by regimes. How they were *processed* and *organised* by militaries is the specific concern of Chapters 7 and 8 (and is considered in several other chapters). Chapter 7 focuses on military organisation in the Ottoman Empire – the most significant eastern power; Chapter 8 considers military organisation in the West, using the Netherlands (often called 'the cockpit of Europe' for the frequency with which wars were fought there) as a microcosm.

Thus, Chapters 3 to 8 examine the development, evolution, and efficiency of military institutions and hierarchies, and explore the relationship between state development and military organisation. Their concern is with how states and military organisations waged war, and how effectively their armies and navies fought. They cover most of Europe and the whole of the period, and are based on scholarship in a wide range of languages, including several rarely utilised by historians writing in English.

The book moves from issues relating to the state and administration, to explicit consideration of issues concerning the 'art of war'. Chapter 9 examines what some writers have termed *strategy* but modern military studies refer to as the *operational*, rather than *strategic*, level of war: the conduct of warfare at the level of the campaign, rather than of the battlefield. While the history of military campaigns has all too often been considered only in terms of battles, in this period sieges were of exceptional importance, and Chapter 9 is written by a pre-eminent historian of siege warfare. He focuses on often overlooked yet vitally important aspects of the conduct of operations: 'developments in the nature of military command and its tools of communication; the heavy weapons available to commanders in the field and in siege warfare; and what was known in all of Europe's principal languages as "small war" '.

Explicit attention to tactics (Chapter 10) is essential, rather than considering them as part of a wider 'art of war on land', because the extent to which there was continuity or change on the battlefield is subject to quite different statements by different schools of history, and is fundamental to the 'military revolution' thesis; and yet tactics are rarely addressed by academic historians. In general, arguments for substantive change in tactics, linked to arguments for a military revolution, have been made by early-modernists, and have tended to be based on a superficial knowledge of combat in general, and medieval combat in particular. However, Chapter 10 is written by a leading expert on medieval warfare and combat.