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BOOK REVIEW

Bennett E., Berndt G. M., Esders St., Sarti L. (Eds.) (2021). Early Medieval Militarisation. Manchester University Press.

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Enormous political transformation in Europe was catalyzed by the disintegration of the Western Roman empire. Political instability and frequent military conflicts reshaped social relations in the Germanic kingdoms. Yet, a broader context which includes the developments in the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) empire, whose borders were threatened by Slavic and Arabic invasions in the 7th century, is important for understanding the changes in early medieval Europe.

Collected volume *Early Medieval Militarisation* edited by Ellora Bennett, Guido M. Berndt, Stefan Esders, and Laury Sarti and published in 2021 showcases recent scholarship on social militarisation from the 7th to 10th century. It covers vast territorial expanse and a variety of topics ranging from the legal status of military classes in early medieval kingdoms, to the image of an ideal king in various narrative traditions, to the theories of "just war." The papers work both with material evidence such as burials and settlement structure and with textual sources.

In the editors' view, the central notion of "militarised society" was best defined by one of the volume's authors Edward James: "By a militarised society I mean a society in which there is no clear distinction between soldier and civilian, nor between military officer and government official; where all adult free men have the right to carry weapons […] where the symbolism of warfare and weaponry is prominent in official and private life" (p. 10).

In the early medieval period, there was hardly a widespread militarisation of societies. Philip Rance and Kai Grundmann show that a rigid demarcation between the military and the civilians persisted in the Eastern Roman empire

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and the Ostrogothic kingdom (pp. 37–38, 52). In contrast with the barbarian polities, Byzantium preserved most of its political structures. In the Ostrogothic kingdom, there occurred a relatively painless power transfer from the "Romans" to the "Germans". However, the Byzantine-Ostrogothic wars (535–554) and the Lombardian migration (568) destabilized political situation in the Apennine Peninsula. Guido M. Berndt argued that Lombardian army was manned by diverse militias commanded by kings, dukes or gastalds (pp. 69–70). Ryan Lavelle also showed that free male population was involved in the military campaigns of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom (pp. 84–86). The last two cases mark the growing permeability of boundaries between the military and the civilians.

The authors analyzed laws that regulated the military or were relevant to military sphere. Legal acts provide the best evidence for the attitudes of the ruling elites to warfare. Upper classes were eager to strengthen their own power, therefore, they were interested in the effective functioning of the military system. Construction of fortifications and maintenance of strongholds fell within the purview of emperors, kings, and nobles, but also allowed them to expand their influence. Conor Whately pointed out how important the system of fortifications was to ensure the Byzantine presence in the province of *Palaestina Tertia* in the 6th century (pp. 100–103). Luc Bourgeois, in turn, demonstrated that during the Carolingian period, Roman fortresses were actively exploited, many of which were reconstructed. In addition, new strongholds were built, used not only to protect the settlements, but also as residences of the aristocracy (pp. 130–146).

Apart from wide range of approaches the volume offers, different voices are presented in its chapters as, for instance, we can see to what extent the views of clerics with respect to war and warfare varied in narrative sources. This diversity stems from the requirements of the genres, or the needs and expectations of the audiences, or from authors' life experience. However, many early medieval authors interpret warfare by through the lenses of their Christian identity. Gregory of Tours († 593/594) and Notker the Stammerer († 912) saw nothing but evil and destruction in wars, which by its very nature was contrary to Christian values (chapters by Edward James and Thomas Wittkamp). For Bede the Venerable († 735), faith divided people into friends and strangers, which was to some extent a manifestation of Northumbrian patriotism (chapter by Ellora Bennett).

The volume contributes to our knowledge of the commoners in the early Middle Ages, of those who often are described as "silent majority". Benjamin Hamm highlights that in the 5th century the number of burials with weapons increased on the territory of the Western Roman empire. Such burial practice allowed "to display the martial skills of the deceased, or to show that they belonged to a community of fighting men" (p. 245). This fact best demonstrates the nature of the socio-political changes in the early Middle Ages. Looking at military laws or historical chronicles alone might be misleading in our assessment of militarisation. We ought to explore how the masses reacted to the changing circumstances. In general, Hamm's argument and conclusions are consistent with Stefan Esders's chapter on the Ripuarian Franks, whose military organization was based on the militia of freemen.

Nevertheless, a reader might be puzzled, if not confused, by the structure and the choice of topics in the volume. Perhaps, the book might have benefited from a clearer focus or from the editors' spelling out its internal logic. While no author disputes the militarisation of early medieval societies, the collection gives no answer to the question of its extent or scope. Giving the due to the contribution this volume makes to the scholarship of early medieval militarization we might conclude that there was no uniform way of socio-political development.

The disappearance of the *pax Romana* led to a significant increase in the number of centers of power. This could not but provoke clashes between them. Such situation led to the involvement in warfare of a significantly larger number of individuals, whether active participants or victims. Therefore, it is difficult to agree with Guy Halsall, who wrote in the final essay that early medieval militarisation was not so much a process as a discourse (pp. 340–341). It would be more accurate to talk of the influence of the political situation on a discourse. Different social groups and individuals perceived the realities of the changing world in different ways. We can better understand these developments as creative adaptation to such changes based on the tradition, Antiquity primarily.

It is also important to take the specific historical background into account. The fall of the Western Roman empire and the rise of the Arab Caliphate led to the collapse of the *pax Romana*. There was hardly ever the peace (pax) within its limits. The Romans had to deal with civil wars, rebellions, enemy invasions of the frontier provinces. However, since the 5th century the intensity of hostilities in the Mediterranean region has increased significantly. Sicily is an excellent example as it lived in peace for almost 500 years: from the war between Sextus Pompeius and the Second Triumvirate in 42–36 BCE to the conquest of the island by the Vandals in 440 CE. Afterwards, Sicily was attacked by the Ostrogoths, the Byzantines, the Arabs and even the Vikings.

Thus, the book *Early Medieval Militarisation* is an important contribution to the medieval studies. The authors convincingly demonstrated the impact of warfare on the various spheres of social and political life. It would be important to develop these studies and explore how the early medieval militarisation affected particular realms and regions with the help of all available sources.