
***Global Military Transformations:
Change and Continuity,
1450-1800,***

edited by Jeremy Black

Global Military Transformations examines the notion that there was an identifiable revolution in modern military affairs that can be clearly described and timed. The two earliest proponents of this concept were Michael Roberts, in his groundbreaking 1955 lecture on the subject, which was then expanded on by Geoffrey Parker in his famous 1988 book *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800*. Much has been written since then on the topic and many different theories have been advanced as to the criteria, the causes, and the results that must be met to qualify for the title of a modern military revolution. These are as varied as changes in military technology or in tactics or in strategy, or changes to the structure of states, cultural changes, economic changes and more.

To accommodate much of the recent historiography on the subject Jeremy Black has edited this large book of 533 pages comprising 15 chapters written by different historians. Black's preface explains the origin and purpose of the project, which is important to understanding its intentionally diverse and far-reaching format. Unlike many edited volumes, no uniform template was imposed on the contributors to encourage the greatest possible variety of approach and content. Black also wrote an Introduction which further clarifies that this volume is intended to cast a very wide net regarding some traditional views of the "geographical and chronological range" (p. 13) of the early modern Military Revolution as interrogated by the latest scholarship on the subject. Each chapter, in its own way, deals with the seminal works of Roberts and Parker and demonstrates how new research has developed and new views have appeared regarding the meaning and the whole notion of what a military revolution might entail and when it might have emerged. For example, was it the revolution in weapons,

tactics, and strategy that caused the emergence of early modern society based on nation states ruled by strong kings, or did the emergence of nation states and strong kings make possible the new forms of warfare? In the following chapters these sorts of arguments are scrutinized in detail.

As Black recognizes, this is probably not a book to try to read straight through. Each chapter has its own internal purpose, and the subjects vary widely from a discussion of the possible medieval origins of a military revolution, to a military revolution at sea, to military revolutions in different countries in Europe and different eras all the way up to the late eighteenth century. The last four chapters explore the idea that military revolutions in different parts of Asia and in Africa have been mostly overlooked because of the predominantly western focus of the very notion of a military revolution. Most of the chapters are very dense and detailed and perhaps mostly of interest to those already well-versed in the history of the era or topic under consideration. Indeed, this is not a book for the faint of heart. Some of the chapters are jargon laden, some are acronym heavy with obscure meanings, and throughout the tone is decidedly academic. Some of the chapters, too, are marred by what are clearly infelicitous, or incorrect, translations.

In his Conclusion, Black emphasizes what he calls the "inherent flaws" (p. 529) in the original thesis of Roberts and Parker, particularly in its Western bias and in its focus on Western concepts of the dawn of the modern era. He acknowledges that there is no single way to account for the profound changes that took place in military affairs over time and around the world, still less to account for related changes in different cultures, and he points out the weakness of the early focus on technological advances, particularly the introduction of gunpowder. Indeed, this book is a very salutary corrective to any narrow interpretation of the scope and meaning of a modern military revolution and it rewards the careful reader by showing how very diverse and complicated are the many views on the topic expressed by the historians represented here.

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–Kathleen Broome Williams

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