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a cura di
GIAMPIERO BRUNELLI



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Direzione, Via Bosco degli Arvali 24, 00148 Roma

Contatti: direzione@nam-sigm.org ; virgilio.ilari@gmail.com

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(www.societaitalianastoriamilitare@org)

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Vienna, Monumento equestre al Principe Eugenio di Savoia, particolare.
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EDITED BY
JAAKKO BJÖRKLUND, SEBASTIAN SCHIAVONE,
STEVE MURDOCH & ANU LAHTINEN,

The Business of War in the Early Modern Baltic Sea Region, 1530-1765

Helsinki University Press, 2026, open access



Published in open access in April 2026, *The Business of War in the Early Modern Baltic Sea Region, 1530–1765* represents a significant step forward for the military historiography of the early modern period and deserves therefore some reflection in this issue¹. In its simplicity, the title precisely illustrates the general theme of the book and the geographical area studied, clearly orienting the public and the scholars searching for references. The editors de-

¹ Available at: <https://hup.fi/books/e/10.33134/HUP-37>

fine the business of war as «the commercial supply, financing, and organisation of soldiers and materiel for armies and navies»², a formulation subsequently expanded through the volume's attention to financial services and intangible resources. The book is, and will be, an essential volume for whoever might be interested in studying the historical and complex problem of the business of war in the early modern age.

The editors, by choosing this title, explicitly position themselves in dialogue with the seminal work of David Parrott, one of the foremost scholars of this topic, whose *The Business of War* (2012) still represents the essential point of reference for discussing the intricate reality of war economics between public and private actors, forcefully criticizing the teleological narratives of state monopoly over military supply³. The volume here considered builds upon it through the more recent reflections on the different models of the Fiscal-Military State and, in particular, the Contractor State, by giving specific relevance to an area previously studied only in a fragmented manner, including by the same Helsinki University Press, which had already offered a rich overview of the relation between civil and military societies in supplying war (though limited to the case of Finland)⁴. Combining early career scholars such as Jaakko Björklund and Sebastian Schiavone with more experienced ones like Steve Murdoch and Anu Lahtinen, the editorial team brings together researchers whose backgrounds range from social and economic history to military history, resulting in a broad and methodologically varied historical approach. The volume contributes thereby to a broader field of research, the mobilisation and management of military resources, on which this journal has also obviously reflected in different ways in previous issues⁵.

2 Jaakko BJÖRKLUND, Sebastian SCHIAVONE, Steve MURDOCH, Anu LAHTINEN (eds.), *The Business of War in the Early Modern Baltic Sea Region, 1530–1765*, Helsinki, HUP, 2026, p. 1

3 David PARROTT, *The Business of War: Military Enterprise and Military Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, CUP, 2012.

4 Petri TALVITIE, Juha-Matti GRANQVIST (eds.), *Civilians and Military Supply in Early Modern Finland*, Helsinki, HUP, 2021. On the contractor state model, the historiographic framework is presented in Richard HARDING, Sergio Solbes FERRI (eds.), *The Contractor State and Its Implications, 1659–1815*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 2011.

5 See, for example, the discussion proposal about logistics of last year's issue: Luca DOMIZIO, «Logistics in Early Modern History», *Nuova Antologia Militare* (NAM), a. VI, f. 23 (luglio 2025), pp. 495-522.

The book brings together sixteen contributors and is composed of twelve chapters, framed by a wide introduction and a rich epilogue. The structure is divided into three sections, each dedicated to a different type of resource. The first, 'Materiel', explores the flow of material resources (military equipment, arms, armour and victuals) and the public–private relationships involved in their supply. An example is Mika Mickelsson's chapter on the arms manufacturer and entrepreneur Louis De Geer, which follows his transnational network across the Baltic and North Sea and illustrates how personal social capital and financial connections enabled the gradual emergence of permanent armies and navies as part of the early modern state formation process. The second section, 'Soldiers', concerns military entrepreneurship, migration, and also intelligence as mechanisms for the recruitment of personnel. Here, Björklund's own chapter on Jacob De la Gardie during the Ingrian War (1609–1617) stands as a particularly fine example of actor-centred analysis: De la Gardie appears simultaneously as commander and entrepreneur (acting also in politics), embodying precisely the overlapping public-private roles the volume sets out to explore. The third section, 'Finances', addresses war credit, fiscal contributions, and the infrastructures of monetary transfer. Peter Ericsson's chapter on bills of exchange and the Swedish exchange bank in the eighteenth century shows how the operational logic of private war finance gradually converged with the broader European market, making Amsterdam, Hamburg and London indispensable nodes for Baltic war finance. Running through all three sections is a fourth category of resource throughout the volume, working as a kind of connective tissue: intangible assets such as knowledge, expertise, reputation, and social networks traced in individual trajectories. Individual as they are, the chapters share a common analytical framework and benefit from an equally varied archival base (account books, fiscal registers, correspondence) that grounds the theoretical categories in documentary evidence. Taken together, these case studies challenge any linear narrative of state centralization displacing private initiative, demonstrating that military effectiveness in the Baltic depended on the capacity to mobilize men, money, and materiel through negotiated public–private arrangements⁶.

6 On this recent widening of the field, see Philippe ROGGER, André HOLENSTEIN, «Introduction. Mobilising Resources for War: Early Modern Military Entrepreneurs and Their Transnational Fields of Action», in Philippe ROGGER, André HOLENSTEIN (Eds.), *Officers, Entrepreneurs, Career migrants, and Diplomats. Military entrepreneurs in the early modern*

The precision and depth of the individual chapters (which could also stand as autonomous articles) come at a certain cost, like the geographical imbalance. Rather than one actor among several, it is possible to say that Sweden functions as a lens through which the Baltic system is observed. The Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth, Denmark and Norway, Russia, but also the commercial cities of the Hanseatic tradition, are not completely absent, but rarely acquire the analytical autonomy of the Swedish system and its military operations. This is also partially acknowledged in the introduction, which explicitly foregrounds Sweden and its allies, but is also the result of precise archival studies that required careful choice evidently. Nevertheless, the consequence is a Baltic that sometimes appears primarily as the operational space of Swedish expansion and its entrepreneurship, rather than a polycentric fiscal-military regional system. This constraint obviously does not detract from the quality of the studies but maybe offers a clear direction for future research to extend more equally detailed investigations.

A different problematic aspect of the volume is the maritime and naval dimensions of the business of war. The Baltic Sea was one of the principal media of long-distance military supply and trade in the region. Control of its waters, and especially access through the Danish Sound, conditioned many of the trans-regional resource flows examined in the volume⁷. However, no chapter takes the fleet and naval administration (as naval entrepreneurship in its own right) directly as its main object of analysis. The chapter by Grosjean and Murdoch does make valuable use of ship records from the Sound Toll Registers and from Scottish ports, and De Geer's network in Mickelsson's study touches on the provisioning of naval forces, but these remain dimensions of arguments primarily concerned with land armies. Sarti's epilogue itself acknowledges that «the very maritime character of Baltic warfare seems still to be a challenge to conceptualise» and

world, Leiden, Brill, 2024, pp. 1–42. Particularly relevant are Part I, *Chances and Challenges: Actors and Forms of the Enterprise*, especially the section *Public-Private Partnership, Feudal Patterns, and the Relativity of 'State' and 'Private'*, and Part II, *Transnational Fields of Action*, especially the section *Networks, Hubs, Markets*. The volume is also cited in the bibliography of the work under review.

7 For example, see Jan Glete's foundational work on Swedish naval administration and warfare. Jan GLETE, *Warfare at Sea, 1500–1650: Maritime Conflicts and the Transformation of Europe*, London, Routledge, 2000, pp. 112–130; Id., *Swedish Naval Administration, 1521–1721. Resource Flows and Organisational Capabilities*, Leiden, Brill, 2010.

calls for greater integration with maritime history⁸.

A related absence concerns the environmental and climatic conditions of the region, that appear at the operational level in individual chapters but are not systematically integrated into the volume's general definition of the Baltic fiscal-military environment. In the introduction, the editors describe the Baltic's distinctive fiscal-military environment as characterised by «long distances, difficult terrain, lack of infrastructure, and a low degree of urbanisation», while noting the «paucity of capital and an undeveloped economy» that left mercantile groups smaller than their counterparts in other parts of Europe⁹. These are presented as structural, almost static, conditions of the landscape. What is missing, however, is a clear engagement with climate as a structural variable. The early modern Baltic, particularly within the so-called period of the Little Ice Age, was subject to seasonal rhythms that determined the feasibility of military logistics. Geoffrey Parker's *Global Crisis* demonstrated how pervasively the climatic deterioration of the seventeenth century shaped war-making across Eurasia, and the Baltic was among the regions in which it could most visibly affect military operations¹⁰. Incorporating this dimension would have sharpened the analysis of the structural constraints the editors themselves identified, adding explanatory depth to individual case studies.

These observations do not diminish the achievement of the volume but reflect the scale and ambition of an undertaking that offers the first sustained collective synthesis of a field previously divided among national historiographies and individual case studies. By placing the Baltic Sea region within the wider European fiscal-military system, the contributors demonstrate that military effectiveness depended upon the capacity to mobilize men, money, and different supplies through knowledge, credit, reputation and transnational networks. In the Baltic as elsewhere, state power grew through and alongside private enterprise, not at

8 Cathleen SARTI, *Epilogue*, in Jaakko Björklund, Sebastian Schiavone, Steve Murdoch, Anu Lahtinen (eds.), *The Business of War...*, p. 354. She also adds that «results from maritime history are especially promising to consider». *Ivi*, p. 356. Significantly, Murdoch himself has published extensively on maritime warfare: see Steve MURDOCH, *The Terror of the Seas? Scottish Maritime Warfare, 1513–1713*, Leiden, Brill, 2010.

9 *Introduction*, p. 5.

10 The topic emerges many times in the chapter dedicated to Russia and the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth: Geoffrey PARKER, *Global Crisis. War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2013, pp. 152-184.

its expense. The book is consequently as important for what it opens as for what it resolves: both a foundational reference for the Baltic business of war and a stimulating programme for its future investigation.

LUCA DOMIZIO
Università di Genova

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Johann Georg Ziesenis (1716-1776). Portrait of Friedrich the Great (1763).
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