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Antonio Santosuosso, *Barbarians, Marauders, and Infidels: The Ways of Medieval Warfare*. 2004; rpt. New York: MJF Books, 2008. Pp. xiv, 344. ISBN 978-1-56731-891-3.

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Writing a one-volume work that covers over a thousand years' worth of medieval military history for the whole of Europe is a daunting task. Little wonder, then, that books that have succeeded remain popular decades after publication.¹ Antonio Santosuosso's *Barbarians, Marauders, and Infidels* is the latest to attempt the feat. Not content to restrict himself to Europe, Santosuosso, an emeritus history professor at the University of Western Ontario, adds to the historical scope by including a section on the neglected topic of Islamic warfare. This author of two previous books on Republican and Imperial Roman history² clearly has the background to view medieval warfare through the lens of its ancient antecedents, and to show how conflict in the Middle Ages grew out of, or departed from, Roman practices. His stated goal for the present volume is to extend his earlier work through the medieval period (xiii), arguing that "medieval war was carried out for God, personal profit, and honor" (2).

The book is divided into four parts. The first, "The Barbarian Kingdoms," exams the transition of the Roman Empire into Germanic polities. Here, the Huns assume central importance, not so much for direct damage to Rome, but for impelling other barbarian groups into Roman imperial lands. To Santosuosso, the western Roman Empire had ceased to exist by A.D. 500, at least as a political unit, with the successor kingdoms seething in endemic violence. Two chapters discuss the politico-military situation in Italy, where Byzantines battled Ostrogoths for control. Perhaps to simplify this complicated history, Santosuosso focuses on the Byzantine general Belisarius's capture and desperate defense of the city of Rome against a much larger Gothic army, and on the confrontation between the Byzantine Narses and his Gothic foe, Totila, at the battle of Taginae in 552. Despite their victories, Constantinople's goal to retake Italy was hopeless and seriously depleted the Byzantine treasury. The arrival of a new invader, the Longobards, ensured that Germanic peoples would continue to play a crucial role in the West. One group in particular, the Franks, had a bright future. These people of murky origins quickly conquered or assimilated with everyone in their path, receiving the backing of the Roman Catholic Church, due to their direct conversion (as opposed to passing through a heretical Arian phase). Militarily, the Franks reached their apogee under Charlemagne (r. 768-814), who, according to Santosuosso, ushered in an era of cavalry dominance and overwhelming force to extend his empire.

The second part of the book, "The Muslim Empire," gives separate treatment to an aspect of medieval warfare often subsumed within coverage of the Crusades or ignored altogether. After a thumbnail account of the rise and tenets of Islam, Santosuosso discusses Muslim armies' triumphs over weakened Byzantines and Persians. The battles of Yarmûk in 636 against the Byzantines and Al-Qâdisiyya in 637 against the Persians serve as case studies of Islamic victories over larger armies. How did they do it? The author suggests, among other factors, that the Muslims expertly used harsh desert environments to their advantage, and, in their religious zeal, associated God with military victory in a way that largely eluded Europeans until the Crusades. Finally, Santosuosso covers the much slower Muslim takeover of North Africa, the assimilation of the Berbers, and the destruction and occupation of Visigothic Spain, with the obligatory nod to unsuccessful confrontation with the Franks at Tours/Poitiers in 732.

¹ E.g., Philippe Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages* [1980], trans. M. Jones (NY: Blackwell, 1984).

² *Soldiers, Citizens, and the Symbols of War: From Classical Greece to Republican Rome, 500-167 B.C.* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997) and *Storming the Heavens: Soldiers, Emperors, and Civilians in the Roman Empire* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001). The latter has been excerpted in J.R. Mitchell & H.B. Mitchell, edd., *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in World History*, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (NY: McGraw Hill, 2009).

Europe suffers invasions, ends them, then expands outward in Part Three, “New Invaders and the Expansion of the West, 800-1300.” Here, Santosuosso mixes chronological and thematic treatments: in addition to examining Viking and Magyar invasions, the Norman Conquest of England, and the Crusades, he also delves into such subjects as medieval weapons and armor, siege warfare, knighthood, and foot soldiers. This approach is echoed in the final section, “The End of the Middle Ages, 1300-1453,” where a chapter on the Hundred Years’ War provides a framework for separate chapters on Joan of Arc as soldier, mercenaries, new weapons, and a putative shift away from the mounted knight as the critical component of fighting.

Given such breadth of subject matter, there are inevitably some problems. In view of Santosuosso’s background in Roman history, there is surprisingly little direct discussion of continuities (or lack thereof) between the Roman Imperial and medieval periods. Vegetius, the late Roman military writer, whose *De re militari* (“On Military Matters”) remained of central importance throughout the Middle Ages, gets no mention anywhere. Despite recognition that the Franks appear to have learned siege methods from the Romans (57), and that many medieval rulers practiced battle avoidance, Santosuosso’s medieval military landscape bears precious little resemblance to that of the Roman Empire.

The author’s choice of topics—admittedly difficult within the constraints of a one-volume study of the entire Middle Ages—is a bit puzzling. For example, at a mere six pages, the shortest chapter in the book is dedicated to siege warfare (165-70), for which Santosuosso wisely draws on Jim Bradbury’s acclaimed *The Medieval Siege*.³ Yet, he misses the central thesis of that work, namely, that sieges were the mainstay of armed conflict in the Middle Ages. Rather, he gives simple descriptions of various siege techniques and fails to note that key field engagements (e.g., Lechfeld, Antioch, Courtrai, all of which are treated in the book) often transpired because of a siege already in progress. Although the roles of women in general and Joan of Arc in particular in medieval warfare (Chapter 16) are certainly important topics, one might reasonably ask whether these subjects merit nearly twice as many pages as sieges.

This leads to a related problem, namely, Santosuosso’s contention that “[h]eavy cavalry remained dominant on the battlefield during the Middle Ages until the very end” (208), a stance reflected in his concentration on battles. This is a not a trivial point, for if sieges were more frequent and more significant than battles, then mounted knights did not dominate armed conflict of the age. On this important matter, Santosuosso seems to accept the knight-centered model forwarded by medievalists like Contamine and J.-F. Verbruggen,⁴ which has, however, been seriously challenged by more recent experts like Bradbury and others.⁵ Santosuosso discusses famous triumphs of infantry over mounted knights at Courtrai, Crécy, and Agincourt, to name but a few later medieval battles where heavy cavalry was decimated. These examples, however, are used to demonstrate how foot soldiers’ new weapons and tactics reclaimed the battlefield from the towering knight, rather than to indicate how properly trained infantry (a mere “accessory to the knight” [186]) had always been able to stand up to heavy cavalry. As Santosuosso demonstrates, cavalry experienced its greatest successes not by charging into enemy formations, but by delivering well-coordinated feints to entice a strongly positioned foe into the open. He rightly recognizes chivalric literature depicting knights in action as “propaganda” (178), but cannot bring himself to discard the flawed model of heavy cavalry’s centrality.

The strengths of this book include exceptionally clear writing, the absence of technical jargon, and the use of colorful stories to set the scene at the start of most chapters. The introduction to Chapter 9, “Protecting the Borders Against the New Enemy: Vikings and Magyars,” is typical in this regard:

³ Rochester, NY: Boydell Pr, 1992.

⁴ *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages: From the Eighth Century to 1340* [1954], trans. S. Willard & R.W. Southern, 2nd ed. (Rochester, NY: Boydell Pr, 1997).

⁵ See Bernard Bachrach, “Medieval Siege Warfare: A Reconnaissance,” *Journal of Military History* 58 (1994) 119-33, “Medieval Military Historiography,” in Michael Bentley, ed., *Companion to Historiography* (NY/London: Routledge, 1997) 203-20, and for the state-of-the-question regarding the role of medieval cavalry, “Debate: Verbruggen’s ‘Cavalry’ and the Lyon-Thesis,” *Journal of Medieval Military History* 4 (2006) 137-63; Kelly DeVries, *Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century: Discipline, Tactics, and Technology* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Pr, 1997); Carroll Gillmor, “Practical Chivalry: The Training of Horses for Tournaments and Warfare,” *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 13 (1992) 7-29; and Stephen Morillo, “The ‘Age of Cavalry’ Revisited,” in Donald Kagay & L.J. Andrew Villalon, ed., *The Circle of War in the Middle Ages* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1999) 45-58.

A blackish boat split the dark waves under a sky barely lit by a cold moon. Its prow was high, the shape of a dragon emerging now and then from the fog. Fear struck the few monks who had left their modest cells to look out to sea. They could barely distinguish the crew except for the sudden flash of weapons, the multicolored shields carefully lined along the gunnels, and the hair, which seemed the color of the sun. Soon they would land and march against the barely defended walls of the monastery. They had been there before, and they were coming back. They were the strangers, the heathens (139).

Although some might object to this literary flair, such lively writing will instantly appeal to the novices who appear to be Santosuosso's intended audience, so teachers of the subject may find certain chapters worth assigning to students. More seasoned historians, however, will find little that is new here. Despite ample endnotes and spotty invocations of scholars' names in the narrative, readers will come away without an appreciation for the controversies that roil the medieval military community. Further, the themes of God, gold, and glory are not sustained throughout, leaving the chapters isolated from one another. Of the book's dozens of maps, most are helpful, but some are of poor quality, even bordering on illegible. The complete absence of a conclusion is a serious omission.