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Review of *Tempest: The Royal Navy and the Age of Revolutions* by James Davey

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topic is alluded to in the introduction, however, disappointingly does not feature significantly throughout the rest of the book. Furthermore, specific discussion of the reivers – Sadler’s ‘main theme’ – does not feature as much as would be expected for the majority of the middle chapters. Additionally, though admittedly a more minor issue, Sadler incorrectly states that Robert Bruce’s ‘wife and sister [were] held, like captive birds, in iron cages hung suspended over the battlements of Berwick and Roxburgh’. In fact, it was Bruce’s sister and Isabella MacDuff, Countess of Buchan who were imprisoned in these cages – not his wife. Perhaps Sadler had recently watched *Outlaw King* when writing this, as this wrongly depicts Bruce’s wife as the victim of the cage punishment. Finally, even more minor but worth mentioning, Sadler repeatedly states throughout *Crucible of Conflict* that Berwick swapped hands between the Scottish and English fourteen time – to the point of being overly-repetitive and unnecessary. In conclusion, *Crucible of Conflict* offers an overall compelling history of Anglo-Scottish border conflict. John Sadler’s personal experiences and knowledge adds a significant level of uniqueness and interest to this topic. However, it must be said that the book does not live up to the expectations set by the bold claims made on its blurb. Moreover, its varying tone suggests that it may not perfectly fit either those with a casual interest in history or academics; but rather those that lie somewhere in-between – perhaps not a particularly large audience. Lastly, minor incorrections such as mistaking Robert Bruce’s wife to have been imprisoned in a cage detract from the book’s accuracy. Despite this review focusing on critiquing *Crucible of Conflict*, as there is perhaps often more to say about negatives than positives, it must be noted that Sadler excels in achieving its main aim of providing a detailed and personal account of Anglo-Scottish conflict – though it is unfortunate that its other promises were not fulfilled.

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James Davey, *Tempest: The Royal Navy and the Age of Revolutions*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2023. 426 pp. ISBN 978-0300238273 (hardback). Price £25.00.

Tempest opens in 1797, *in medias res*, with a declaration issued by the leaders of the Channel Fleet mutiny at the Nore: ‘The Age of Reason is at Length arrived. We had long been Endeavouring to find ourselves Men, We now find ourselves so. We will be Treated as such’ (p. 1). This quotation sets the tone for the book, which provides a

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welcome corrective to the usual ‘triumphalist lens’ (p. 22) viewing the Royal Navy’s experience of the period between 1793 and 1815 as a series of grand victories and strategic triumphs. Instead, Davey portrays ‘a Navy in crisis’ (p. 23) – an institution for which final victory was far from guaranteed, and which reflected the turmoil involved in fighting an ideological war on a global scale.

Davey focuses on the experience of the British tar during a period of political and social upheaval. He denies that the Royal Navy was simply a prop to the status quo and depicts its sailors as a mirror of society on shore: ‘no ship was an island’ (p. 96). Whigs, radicals, Tories, monarchists, and republicans rubbed shoulders on deck as they did on land, with sometimes explosive results. But this was also a period of strong state repression and paranoia, and sailors were strongly aware of the irony of defending their fellow countrymen’s freedoms while themselves being subject to impressment and martial law. This dichotomy lies at the heart of the book, which tackles complex questions such as the role of the press gang, the abuse of discipline, and the Navy’s counter-revolutionary duties – including in protecting slavery, an uncomfortable reminder of the Navy’s complicated role prior to the abolition of the slave trade in 1807.

The centrepiece of the book is of course the infamous mutinies of 1797 at Spithead and the Nore. Davey reminds us these had a global dimension, as well as ramifications for the way the Navy was portrayed that lasted all the way to the mid-nineteenth century. Davey sees the mutinies of 1797 as the most visible crisis of an institution that had come unmoored in the face of European and domestic political developments: far from being an unquestioned plank of British national identity, ‘the revolutionary period eroded public faith in the Royal Navy’ (p. 25). That the Navy’s reputation as Britain’s senior service survived at all, Davey argues, is partly due to the government’s alarmed attempt to seize back control of the patriotic narrative by reframing the Navy as a tool of propaganda and control, largely by encouraging the cult of Nelson following the battle of the Nile in 1798.

Tempest succeeds in filling a sizeable gap in the literature on the Royal Navy between 1700 and 1850: the period of the French Revolutionary Wars (1793–1802). Other books on this period do exist – Roger Knight’s *Convoys* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2023), Evan Wilson’s *A Social History of British Naval Officers, 1775–1815* (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2017), and Sara Caputo’s *Foreign Jack Tars: The British Navy and Transnational Seafarers during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023) being some of the most recent examples – but these often focus on a specific subtheme. Davey’s general approach allows him to paint a much darker, more nuanced, picture that engages closely with current transnational and transcultural historiography, creating a much more complicated – and convincing – context for the Navy’s victories at the Nile,

Copenhagen, and even Trafalgar, in which ‘the sailor remained a contested figure associated with rebellion as much as valour’ (p. 313).

Davey closes by arguing that, although the British remained ambivalent towards their Navy by the time of the peace of Amiens in 1802, the association of the Navy with rebellion and mutiny ebbed in the 1800s, which Davey portrays as more politically uniform, both on land and on ship. This seems to ignore the rise of political radicalism and growing unrest in Ireland and Britain, where the dangers of Luddism led to 12,000 British troops being stationed in the Midlands in 1812. Davey nevertheless has to draw such a conclusion to allow *Tempest* to accord with its sequel, *In Nelson’s Wake: The Navy and the Napoleonic Wars* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), which depicted the post-1803 Royal Navy as ‘Britain’s most important martial institution’ (p. 316). But this is only a minor criticism of a splendid book that tackles some important, sometimes difficult questions about Britain’s role in the wars against Revolutionary France. Davey’s depiction of a divided society becoming increasingly aware of its political power invites deeper investigations of British identity and engagement with issues of republicanism, imperialism, and patriotism. *Tempest* will be essential reading for anyone interested in eighteenth century military and naval history, particularly readers interested in the impact of militarism on national identity and political development.

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Evan Wilson, *The Horrible Peace: British Veterans and the End of the Napoleonic Wars*. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2023. xvii + 334 pp. ISBN 978-1625347336 (paperback). Price: £29.95.

In this very thorough study, Evan Wilson examines the experiences of soldiers and sailors during the final and subsequent years of the Napoleonic Wars, as the fates of these servicemen were determined not only by the wars themselves but also by government policies, social processes, and international relations.

Wilson believes that the challenges faced by the British government and how they were met were fateful for these servicemen. The foremost challenge was the massive state debt. The increase in military spending during the wars – spending that