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Review of *How the Army made Britain a Global Power, 1688-1815* by
Jeremy Black

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perspective of material culture, literature, social history, political history, and cultural history.

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Jeremy Black, *How the Army made Britain a Global Power, 1688-1815*. Oxford: Casemate Academic, 2021. 205pp. ISBN: 978-1952715082 (hardback). Price £55.

With this book prolific military historian Jeremy Black seeks to refocus attention on the military, rather than naval, dimensions of Britain's expansion as a global power, noting the lack of a single volume on this topic despite numerous excellent works examining various aspects of it. Black is successful in setting out the strengths and weaknesses of the British army and state over the long eighteenth century and in outlining the successes and failures the army met with campaigning globally. He argues that it learnt from, and built on, these experiences and that this, alongside the geographical range and near continuous service of the army's commanders and soldiery, led to Britain achieving global dominance by 1815. That it makes this argument in just over two hundred pages whilst also outlining Britain's campaigning efforts around the world and over a multitude of conflicts is the book's key achievement. In particular, Black's argument that the British successfully honed a well-disciplined musket fire and bayonet charge from the 1750s that became an essential tactical strategy in almost all the locations in which it fought is strongly reinforced throughout the volume. Yet Black is not only concerned with tactics and strategy, considering the political, social, and cultural factors that impacted the army's ability to function effectively during both war and peace time. The book recognises the role these factors played in the army's development, with specific attention given to the army's role at home and the military reforms undertaken at various times, with most emphasis given to those upon the outbreak of war with revolutionary France.

Black emphasises the importance of viewing both the role of the army in Britain's expansion and the army itself as a collective rather than as a series of individual conflicts and commanders. Yet he also seeks to demonstrate the individual experiences of some of those involved in the conflicts. Unsurprisingly, special attention is given to Marlborough and Wellington, two commanders whose service bookends the study and who Black argues shared similar leadership qualities despite operating within different contexts. But Black also seeks to provide an insight into the careers and experiences of other officers and even ordinary soldiers. He does this using

extracts from letters, journals, and memoirs and through the inclusion of short biographies of select individuals within the text. The inclusion of primary material is a welcome addition that illustrates the development and implementation of the army's tactics and individual experiences of warfare. The biographies are less successfully integrated into the text, instead tending to interrupt the flow of the narrative whilst the insights they provide are frequently left unexplored. A separate chapter exploring the composition and service of the officer class and the role of family ties, patronage, and merit in developing command structures and transmitting expertise would have better served Black's argument that geographical range and continuity of experience was important for the army's increasing effectiveness over time whilst freeing up discussion of the various conflicts and campaigns.

Greater focus on the conflicts and campaigns would have increased the appeal for a general readership interested in tracing the conflicts in order to understand Britain's military development into the global power of the age. As it is, the brief outline afforded to each campaign, alongside the book's hefty price tag, likely limits its appeal to a general readership. On the other hand, despite Black's claim to offer a new perspective that 'concentrates on both the global role of the army and its central part in imperial expansion and preservation' (p. vi), there is little here that will be new to a specialist audience. The army's role in British expansion is well established, whilst numerous studies, including many of those Black includes in his list of further reading, have demonstrated the army's ability to repeatedly defeat both western and non-western enemies and to recover from defeat itself. Additionally, the slim nature of the volume prevents Black from making the most of recent scholarly interpretations when outlining the various campaigns and leads to numerous oversimplifications and inaccuracies. The difficulty of balancing a need to outline the military campaigns and consider wider institutional factors perhaps points to why there has not yet been a single volume study of the army's role in Britain's global expansion. Black's contribution does not end that wait, but it does provide a starting point for researchers to develop this whilst providing a useful overview of the development of the army throughout the long eighteenth century.

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