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Jon K. Hendrickson, *Crisis in the Mediterranean: Naval Competition and Great Power Politics, 1904-1914*. Annapolis: Naval Inst. Press, 2014. Pp. ix, 219. ISBN 978-1-61251-475-8.

Review by Carl Cavanagh Hodge, The University of British Columbia (carl.hodge@ubc.ca)

True to the promise of its introduction, *Crisis in the Mediterranean* does indeed “enhance our understanding of the context that surrounded the outbreak of World War I” (12). Historian Jon Hendrickson (US Naval Acad.) achieves this by stressing the interplay between naval strategy and diplomatic posturing among the major powers active in the Mediterranean in 1904-14.

Since the Mediterranean and North Africa were not major theaters when the war came, history that looks backwards from events has ignored them. However, for those trying to understand the increasingly complex situation in the years before the outbreak of the war, the Mediterranean was a difficult, but very important situation to understand. This study also attempts to provide a more nuanced understanding of the position of Italy, which, because of its actions in 1914-1915, is often viewed as comfortably in the Entente’s pocket, despite continually renewing the Triple Alliance. (13)

Italy’s strategic dilemma is the focus of the book’s analytical narrative. Given its central position in the Mediterranean, Italy was forced to choose between a more powerful France to the west and Austria-Hungary to the east, just at the time Britain, once dominant from the Gibraltar to Alexandria, was shifting its attention and its resources to the North Sea and the naval arms race with Germany. Based on his own careful research,¹ Hendrickson maintains that the Italo-Turkish War (1911-12) drove a wedge of distrust between Italy and France that encouraged the former to reach a naval understanding with Austria-Hungary in an effort to keep its options open as long as possible.² Although he concentrates on the naval arms race in a secondary theater of the coming Great War, the author carefully relates it to the competition of Britain, Germany, and France in the Atlantic and the North Sea. All this in a compact volume that will well serve both students and seasoned scholars of naval history, Great Power diplomacy, and strategic studies.

Crisis in the Mediterranean supplements existing studies of specific national naval policies in France, Italy, and Austria-Hungary.³ While these works “posit naval growth as the result of reform, political jockeying, and personality,” Hendrickson writes, “this book argues that these maneuvers may have allowed for growth, but that without pressure from other powers most navies would not have expanded as rapidly as the Mediterranean navies did before World War I” (8). Scholarly studies of the larger pre-1914 Anglo-German naval arms race⁴ have given scant attention to the Mediterranean. And yet the powers on its shores had to be most concerned with the gathering storm over the North Sea.

1. He has consulted primary sources at archives in London, Paris, Vienna, and Rome.

2. He argues here against the positions of Richard Bosworth, *Italy and the Approach of the First World War* (NY: St. Martin’s, 1983), and Mary Allen, *Relations between France and Italy, 1885-1915* (Spencer, MA: Heffernan Pr, 1927), who believe improved Franco-Italian relations engineered by French foreign minister Théophile Delcassé in 1900-1902 account for Italy’s initial neutrality in 1914 and its coalition with the Anglo-French Entente in 1915. Cf. M.B. Hayne, *The French Foreign Office and the Origins of the First World War, 1898-1914* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 1993).

3. E.g., Theodore Ropp, *The Development of a Modern Navy: French Naval Policy, 1871-1904* (Annapolis: US Naval Inst Pr, 1987); Marco Rimaneli, *Italy between Europe and the Mediterranean: Diplomacy and Naval Strategy from Unification to NATO, 1800s-2000* (NY: Lang, 1997); Laurence Sondhaus, *The Habsburg Empire and the Sea: Austrian Naval Policy, 1797-1866* (West Lafayette: Purdue U Pr, 1989), and *The Naval Policy of Austria-Hungary, 1867-1918: Navalism, Industrial Development, and the Politics of Dualism* (West Lafayette: Purdue U Pr, 1994).

4. E.g., Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1980) and *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (NY: Scribner, 1976); Arthur J. Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era, 1880-1905* (NY: Knopf, 1940); Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany, and the Coming of the Great War* (NY: Random House, 1991).

With three Great Powers—France, Austria-Hungary, and Italy—each building larger navies but not able to force the others to accept their dominance outright, diplomacy became even more important. In the North Sea, diplomacy was limited to half-hearted arms control meetings and efforts to prevent various international issues from spiraling out of control. In the Mediterranean, with three powers pursuing their own agendas through naval power, the situation could only be more complex, with more variables, problems, and other issues for each power to explore and consider. (9)

Crisis in the Mediterranean has seven chapters. The first three discuss the equilibrium of Mediterranean naval power up to the 1890s, a phase of apparent stagnation from the late 1890s to 1904; and a period of tension between Italy and Austro-Hungary brought on by the latter's naval modernization program that nonetheless ended in rapprochement. The next four chapters explain how Rome, again confident in the stability of its relations with Vienna, ventured upon an imperial gambit against the ailing Ottoman Empire in North Africa that immediately complicated its relations with France. Because Britain was by 1909 obsessed with the threat to its North Sea position by Wilhelmine Germany, the withdrawal of Royal Navy ships from the Mediterranean left France anxious about its own position. Hendrickson then explains how Italy's concern for its troops in North Africa adjacent to territory where French troops, too, were active led Rome to a renewal of the Triple Alliance and a commitment to provisions of a 1913 naval convention stipulating combined Austro-Italian naval efforts against France. For its part, France promised to help protect British interests in the Mediterranean, without being certain that its own 19th Corps could be safely retrieved from North Africa in the event of a general European war.

Hendrickson's discussion of the comparative strengths of the Italian and Austro-Hungarian navies—especially the threat posed by the displacement and firepower of *Radetzky* class semi-dreadnoughts to Italy's best warships—will be useful to all students of the pre-1914 naval arms race.

The Italians, after decades of taking their naval superiority over the Austrians for granted, suddenly, in one of their navy's darkest hours, found their long-standing, large lead in naval power eroding in the face of an aggressive Austro-Hungarian naval expansion program. While the Austro-Hungarians had defeated the Italians at the Battle of Lissa (1866), the Italians had continued to pursue their naval aspirations of becoming a leading Mediterranean power, with all of the appropriate naval construction that came with it. The sudden unexpected shift in Austrian construction, beginning with the transformation of their fleet from a coastal defense force to a blue-water fleet, alarmed the Italians. When coupled with the unique situation in the Adriatic—which ... heavily favored the Austrians in any Austro-Italian war—the Italians faced a suddenly unnerving situation in their own backyard as their diplomatic position with Austria deteriorated. Those who wished to rectify the situation had to pressure the government for more naval spending. (63)

The author's elucidation of the relationship between national strategic neuroses and the domestic political economy of naval expenditure is especially insightful. He points out, for example, that the politicizing of the *Jeune École* in France so complicated domestic debate about the priorities of naval construction as to produce strategic incoherence—"the passage of five naval bills between 1890 and 1900 as each side attempted to stake out its share of naval construction against the advances of the other parties" (22), producing dire budgetary problems.

For Vienna, too, naval policy was driven by domestic interests within a multinational empire. Naval construction employed many Croats, while the demand for steel armor and artillery was met by Czech labor in Bohemia. Support of the empire's ethnic minorities through naval construction enhanced Austrian over Hungarian prestige and thus "played into Franz Ferdinand's political plans quite well, both internally and externally" (54). The warming of relations between Rome and Vienna in 1910 permitted Italian imperialist factions to press for intervention in Ottoman Libya (89–90). Although the Italian fleet easily outclassed its Turkish adversary, the attempt to control territory beyond the Libyan coast required the deployment and maintenance of ground troops, whose involvement led to some particularly ugly fighting, international condemnation, and daily evidence that an expansionist Italy was punching above its weight class (90–94). Hendrickson thus demonstrates that pressure among the Great Powers was critical to naval expansion in the Mediterranean and that the influence of domestic lobbies determined its specific forms.

Chapter 5, on Britain's Mediterranean crisis, emphasizes Winston's Churchill's role as First Lord of the Admiralty in proposing a radical redeployment of Royal Navy ships at the expense of the Mediterranean fleet.⁵ Hendrickson is especially good on the internal debate between Churchill's Admiralty and Eyre Crowe's Foreign Office as it affected Italy. For Britain there was no getting around Italy; for Italy there was no getting around Britain:

The main leverage that the British and French held over the Italians was the power of their combination, particularly in the threat of British sea power. If the Italians went too far into the arms of the Triple Alliance, then Britain would become too powerful a threat to ignore. However, that same power offered the Italians safety from the Triple Alliance, if the Italians wanted it. This simultaneous threat and safe haven allowed the Italians to play the double game they had played for the previous decade, a game that was fundamentally advantageous to the British. Without the offer of British safety or the threat posed by a strong British presence, the Italians would seek safety from the Austrians and French in the arms of the Triple Alliance. (117)

That is, of course, what Italy gained when it received assurances of Austrian naval support in a renewal of the Triple Alliance. A continuation of a Mediterranean naval arms race on this trajectory would have put France in an increasingly perilous position. When Franz Ferdinand's assassination short-circuited the evolution of the Austro-Italian combination, the Italian government turned wistfully toward Britain and France. Hendrickson should have pointed out⁶ that distant events on land after the opening of hostilities—namely the check of the German army at the Marne—confirmed the gnawing suspicion of the Italian government that neutrality followed by alignment with the Entente was likely the better part of prudence. In any event, all the calculations and anxieties over comparative tonnage and firepower were suddenly moot. The Mediterranean witnessed nothing like the battle fleet engagement at Jutland. The adventures of the German cruisers *Breslau* and *Goeben*—often within spitting distance of the Italian coast—preoccupied Royal Navy warships in the Mediterranean during the opening phase of the war, and the presence of German cruisers in the Black Sea influenced Turkey's decision to side with the Central powers, but, like so many other plans on land and sea that did not unfold as anticipated, the Mediterranean naval arms race of 1904–14 did not count for much.

Jon Hendrickson has produced a helpful,⁷ mostly well-written⁸ corrective study of pre-Great War diplomacy, the complexities associated with the Mediterranean theater, the relationship of naval preparations there to the larger strategic picture, and the tension between the accommodation of domestic political interests and the exigencies of defense budget allocations. *Crisis in the Mediterranean* adroitly fills a hole in our understanding of the Mediterranean's place in the feverish prewar decade. It should be required reading for all students and scholars of the causes of the First World War.

5. Hendrickson seems oddly unaware of Nicholas A. Lambert's criticisms of Churchill's Mediterranean policy in *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution* (Columbia: U South Carolina Pr, 1989) 252–61.

6. As does Hew Strachan, *The First World War: To Arms* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 2001) 261.

7. The book's eight figures and five tables illustrating trends in comparative naval spending, tonnage, and broadside throw weights help to clarify the complex picture of national efforts in battle fleet war-readiness.

8. There are occasional traces of poor copyediting, especially unnecessary repetitions: e.g., "tension *between the two nations* grew to the point where war fever flared *between the two nations*" (52; my emphasis); "the Italians" occurs six times in one paragraph (96). See, also, the block quotations in this review.