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Atuaz, Ayşe, *Eight Thousand Years of Maltese Maritime History: Trade, Piracy, and Naval Warfare in the Central Mediterranean*. University Press of Florida, 2008. 400pp. Forward by James C. Bradford and Gene A. Smith, 3 b&w figures, 16 tables, 13 maps, afterword, 4 appendixes, notes, bibliography, index.

Review by Jessica Salter
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Ayşe Atuz's, *Eight Thousand Years of Maltese Maritime History: Trade, Piracy, and Naval Warfare in the Central Mediterranean* is a maritime history of the Maltese islands from the first human occupation until the French invasion in 1798. This work offers an interdisciplinary approach to maritime history in the Mediterranean, and puts forward the argument that Malta was far less important than has previously been suggested.

The history of Malta is doubtless unique with a continuous flow of foreign rulers. The first known inhabitants of Malta were the Phoenicians. They were followed by the Romans, Arabs, Normans, Genovese, the Order of St. John, French, and British until Malta finally became an independent state in the 20th century. It is interesting to note that the indigenous population are virtually absent from the historical record and are not recognizable as a cohesive group with a national identity until the time of the British rule in the late 19th century.

Atuaz seeks to answer questions that were raised during archaeological underwater surveys conducted around the archipelago between 1999-2001. The main issue raised is a surprisingly scarce amount of archaeology. It is also of note that to date, no reference to the occurrence of a shipwreck in Maltese waters has been recovered in the historical record. Although Atuz offers various explanations for the lack of archaeology, including treasure hunters and undiscovered shipwrecks covered by layers of silt or in deep waters beyond safe diving limits, the purpose of *Eight Thousand Years of Maltese Maritime History* is to prove the modern history of Malta has been exaggerated by historians, many of which are modern-day Knights of the Order of St. John.

As the archaeological record is so limited the book focuses on a very brief history of Malta and Gozo, the only two Maltese islands large enough to ever be inhabited by humans. At first glance, one may think it impossible to cram eight thousand years of history into 400 pages. According to the author, there is little in the way of source material until 1530 when historical accounts and references to Malta increase as the Order of St. John advertised its activities to promote its accomplishments.

The prehistory of Malta is only very briefly addressed as is the Punic period. The author discusses the Roman and Byzantine periods in more detail but the conclusions are always the same; Malta had no strategic importance and trade routes bypass the islands completely. There are only a handful of accounts by those accidental visitors who came to the archipelago when their ships were blown off course or lost in a storm. To prove this point, the author produces studies of sea currents and wind patterns as well as offering geographical and oceanographic factors to support her contentions.

The Roman period saw Malta develop into a pirate and privateer base. Until the introduction of cotton in the medieval period, Malta lacked the resources to sustain an export economy in addition to its considerable distance from any major commercial routes. However, it was close enough to major trade routes to be a suitable base to launch attacks. Even though the Romans had contact with Malta's population, only a few Roman characteristics were adopted and the Punic culture continued to dominate.

The Knights of St. John were given Malta in 1530, bringing their own traditions and customs to the archipelago. We do not know the extent to which the Order interacted with or dominated the cultural life of the islands since the Maltese inhabitants disappeared from history when the islands became the Order's property. According to Atauz, between 1530 and 1798 “major intellectual, artistic and ideological developments of this period did not reach Malta at all” (177).

In *Eight Thousand Years of Maltese Maritime History*, Atauz concludes that the maritime history of Malta is essentially a small part of the history of major foreign powers. Monumental events that swept across Europe and the Mediterranean, such as the collapse of the Roman Empire, the Italian Renaissance, and the reformation of Christianity were barely felt in Malta (177). This work is an interesting read as it seeks to undermine not only Malta's maritime importance, but also its political, economic, and social history as well. The author provides a high volume of interesting tables pertaining to the Order of St. John, showing great enthusiasm for the subject and offering the reader greater knowledge about an unpopular topic. Atauz's conclusions are of great importance to the history of Malta and definitely worth a read.



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