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Martin Bellamy, **Christian IV and His Navy: A Political and Administrative History of the Danish Navy 1596-1648**. Brill, Leiden and Boston, 2006. ix and 297 pages, illustrated, plans and 23 plates.

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Early modern navies were curious, transitional organisations. Although still the personal property of the monarch their ever increasing demands for money and resources made it necessary for kings to share power with nobles and merchants. In the process modern navies emerged. The Danish navy of Christian IV existed in this period halfway between king and council. Christian was a remarkable ruler, boisterous, larger than life and anxious to make his name, and that of his country resound across Europe. Like a better known King, England's Henry VIII, he possessed the intellect and application to rule as well as reign, making decisive, if not always successful, interventions in the development of many aspects of the state. Christian took a serious interest in the navy, but he went beyond Henry and other monarchs by serving afloat, directing the royal dockyard and commanding in battle. Only Peter the Great of Russia a century later rivalled his all round commitment to naval power. Christian inherited a large, expanding navy from his father, but quickly set his personal stamp on the organisation. He was the directing intellect of the force, which was shaped to serve his subjects.

Yet while Christian worked on a vast scale, both in building his navy and enlarging his capital city, he lacked the wisdom to know his own limitations, and those of his kingdom. This would be his undoing; in the end his quest for power and prestige was a *folie de grandeur*, and Denmark never again essayed such heights. He also lacked reliable, effective administrators; many of the men he appointed were incompetent or corrupt. As Martin Bellamy demonstrates the navy he built reflected the man who created it, for good or ill. Christian was an elected monarch; his dynastic claims were recent, and therefore uncertain. His success would determine whether the throne would pass to his own family. So, from the outset, the navy was a tool of dynastic and personal ambition. He built mighty ships to show his power, and named them for himself, and his family. At the same time he rebuilt his capital city, bringing majesty and grandeur to the hitherto unremarkable northern trading town of Copenhagen, ordered fine art to celebrate his power, and built a new castle at the entrance to the Baltic, to demand the payment of the Sound Dues, a levy on all commercial shipping entering or leaving the Baltic that remained a key element of Danish state revenues until the 1860s. He was striving for control of the enclosed sea, to extend his empire across the waters, build an economic power base and enhance his prestige. It should be stressed that Christian's Denmark was somewhat larger than the modern country. It

included Norway, Iceland, a claim to Greenland, the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, what is now southern Sweden and territory in Estonia far to the east. Perhaps the only weakness of this rich and rewarding book is the lack of an accessible map of Christian's kingdom.

This dispersed collection of holdings was held together by the sea, and it needed a navy to safeguard territory, suppress piracy and promote trade. However, Denmark had not developed large oceanic trade, or a significant shipbuilding industry, in contrast to the other major navies of the era. Consequently the state could not call on the large armed merchant ships that other powers took up for wartime service: it had to build a war fleet from scratch. It also had to create a shipbuilding industry, and Christian hired skilled shipwrights from the kingdom of his brother-in-law James VI of Scotland, later James I of England. These men used the new English method of using plans to build a series of successful designs which could be repeated. Christian's prestige flagships so impressed James and his son Charles I that they build their own prestige flagships, *Royal Prince* and *Sovereign of Seas* in response. Such mighty warships were the gilded embodiment of royal prestige at sea.

Christian depended on his fleet more than most: Denmark was not a significant military power. For as long as the fleet remained unbeaten and the King's prestige unshaken Christian IV had a European reputation. That reputation collapsed after the defeat of the Danish fleet in 1644. Christian's reputation was eclipsed by the military achievements of King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, a fate in which his country was wrapped up. Denmark's pretensions to be a great power never recovered.

The administration of the navy remained quasi-medieval, under the personal purview of the monarch, and lacking the professional bureaucracy that would come to dominate the English and Dutch navies by the end of the century. When Christian delegated authority he was frequently disappointed by corrupt and incompetent noblemen. He worked hard to build a dockyard that could maintain and fit out his fleet, and reshaped much of the waterfront of modern Copenhagen in the process. There was a foundry, a ropewalk, storehouses, slipways and docks, barracks and a massive naval brewery that is still a waterfront landmark. Somewhere under that waterfront are the remains of some of his old ships, used to extend the shore line.

The cost of naval power was high, and so the cadre of seamen and gunners was small, training programmes limited to seamanship and basic skills. There was no facility for teaching noble officers the higher functions of war, and the Danish fleet found itself without effective combat leaders. Internal power politics limited the ability of the fleet to be an effective fighting force. These problems were intimately connected with royal ambition. Christian used his control of the fleet as a tool in his constant struggle with the State Council, where the nobles opposed his assumption of power, and his fiscal demands. Unwilling to share power with the State Council Christian was forced to work with the old feudal systems, in order to retain power in his own hands. By contrast the naval administrations of England, Holland, Spain and Sweden were taking on a more national character. Bellamy consciously positions his work in the important debate launched by Jan Glete in his major study *Navies and Nations: Warships, Navies and State Building in Europe and America 1500 - 1860* published in 1993. Glete argued that the rising cost of naval power drove nations into the administrative, bureaucratic and fiscal reforms that created the modern state. That Holland and England were the first such states was powerful evidence for

the connection. Christian did not follow this pattern, he held up progress, and only after his death did the Crown share control of the navy with the State Council.

The real problem for Christian IV's navy was that it outgrew the resources of the kingdom in pursuit of royal ambition, propelled by an immense ego. The inevitable failure was hastened by royal mistakes, the King failed to delegate or develop a leadership cadre, but above all he failed to recognise the limits of Danish power. The fleet outgrew the state and collapsed, a fate that has befallen many other navies in the last four hundred years. This beautifully produced book is a major addition to our understanding of early modern navies, and naval development. In combination with the work of Jan Glete, David Goodman and Alan James Bellamy, it has brought the study of the era to a new level, and integrated the results into wider academic debates about the development of the modern state. That it appears in a series dedicated to North European History is significant, naval history needs to reach out to the rest of the discipline, join in the big debates, and make sure that it is never again marginalised and ignored.



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