

# 1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era

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## EDITOR'S CHOICE Underappreciated Books

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# Editor's Choice

## Underapplauded Books

Paul H. Silverstone, *The Sailing Navy, 1785–1854*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001. Pp. xviii + 105; illustrations; bibliography; index. \$38.95.

*Reviewed by Kevin L. Cope*

**I**nterdisciplinarity” may be a password to academic success, but some scholars may nonetheless regard it as strange to review a book about naval hardware in a journal devoted to “ideas, æsthetics, and inquiries.” Paul H. Silverstone’s *The Sailing Navy, 1775–1854* is a book destined to vanquish such prejudices. Compiled by a self-made expert with a varied career—by a streetwise attorney turned windblown old salt—*The Sailing Navy* will remind humanists that the long eighteenth century could find æsthetic and philosophical value in the harshest areas of experience, including the rough world of military affairs. Poet Laureate John Dryden, for example, elicited heroic quatrains, critical theories, and philosophical meanings from dockyard scenes and sea battles, even going so far as to set his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* aboard a

vessel near a naval engagement. John Philips's gentle, mildly mock-heroic panegyrics harmonized Philips's delicate phrasing with Marlborough's bloody campaigns. Laurence Sterne's lovable, fortification-building character "Uncle Toby" satirized veterans' tendencies to remember only the stimulating side of war. Silverstone's *The Sailing Navy* may not share in the wit or geniality of these Augustan exercises in martial art, but his comprehensive catalogue of colonial American fighting ships performs at least three important services for scholars of long-eighteenth-century cultural affairs. First, *The Sailing Navy* gives a more complete picture of life in the militarized eighteenth century than do mill-run social-historical literary studies, studies that place a disproportionate emphasis on ugly social phenomena such as colonialism, oppression, and slavery. Second, Silverstone's study fills in background detail for the many tales of seafaring adventure that filled early-modern bookstalls. Third, Silverstone's book (probably unintentionally, but certainly forcefully) lays a foundation for a long-needed history of that most underestimated of all visual genres, naval-architectural illustration.

In performing the first of these scholarly tasks, the provision of a thorough and balanced analysis of the naval culture that was so integral to colonialism, Silverstone reminds socially sensitive readers that the American colonies were engaged in a battle *against* colonialism, indeed that that struggle continued decades beyond the revolutionary war owing to unremitting harassment from French, British, and privateering forces (21–22). Silverstone's reminders about American resistance to continental colonialism is especially timely at a moment when wars in the middle east are drawing acrimonious anticolonialist comments from European intellectuals. Far from condemning hegemonic American regimes, Silverstone rises to a wry, perhaps unplanned humor when recounting numerous examples of almost comical ineptitude in early American admiralities. Once the revolting colonists recognized the need for a navy, shipbuilding contracts were distributed among the states for purely political reasons, with little regard for those states' shipbuilding capabilities—the predictable result being that few of the planned vessels ever left dry-dock (1). Despite their reputation for dogged persistence, the colonists quickly forgot about their naval needs once their revolution had been accomplished. They sold, dismantled, or scrapped all of their vessels by 1785 (2) only to discover a few years later that piracy and European adventuring required the rebuilding of a seagoing force. America might have had a reputation as a land with vast shores and pounding seas, yet a good deal of early American naval heroism transpired on calmer inland

waterways such as Lake Champlain (16, 67 and *passim*). Many American ships had a foreign pedigree, having been taken as prizes, re-rigged, and turned into American vessels (multiculturalists will be amused at the imperial-sounding "HMS *Edward*" metamorphosing in American hands into the more culturally diverse "*Sachem*" [12]). Silverstone thus gives us a rough picture of a ragged "naval" force that came and went with the political tide, that grabbed whatever bouyant detritus might wash ashore and patched it together into simulacra of fighting ships, and that stumbled through a variety of defensive postures more often than it challenged the roaring main.

Silverstone's second task, that of filling in the naval-architectural detail underlying the great sea stories of the period, is one in which his accomplishment must be regarded as definitive. Helped in part by the limitations of his subject—by the fact that colonial America didn't have all that big of a navy—Silverstone catalogues, describes, analyzes, historicizes, and often illustrates *every* military ship of the revolutionary and early Republic periods. Logical and methodical, Silverstone provides us with well-organized columns of architectural detail, armament data, haulage capacity, crew requirements, and both military and postmilitary history for each and every vessel. This last category of information is among the most useful for cultural historians. Silverstone's rich but manageable entries give scholars their first clear look at the way in which ships, battles, prizes, and takings were circulating around the picaresque eighteenth-century world. One can easily imagine the American counterparts to the characters in Smollett's or Defoe's novels moving from ship to ship and allegiance to allegiance as their vessels were seized, reflagged, seized again by other forces, reflagged again, and so on. One can feel the fear and hear the frenzy as crews get swept off the deck by one hurricane, get picked up by some foreign vessel, get swept back into the sea during a sinking, and then, at last, wash ashore on some Crusoesque island. By recording the postmilitary records of any ships that survived their wars, Silverstone shows how sea explorations and the peaceful, scientific, literary, and æsthetic projects that they facilitated relied on surplus naval hardware—how the cultural establishment gladly made itself dependent on military inventory and spin-off military research. Silverstone sprinkles his catalogue with an array of remarkable facts—for example, he drops an anecdote about the first submersible vessel and its successful mission in New York Harbor in 1776—that enrich our knowledge of the highly miscellaneous world of early American maritime projects.

The third of Silverstone's great deeds—the one of which he himself seems least aware, yet the one that is likely to stimulate the most research and draw the largest audience—is the assembling of a remarkable gallery of naval illustrations. In Silverstone's large-format book we find dozens of pictures in every genre (paintings, drawings, sketches, plans, even a few early photographs). In the amalgam, these illustrations create a splendid visual record of early America's most spirited ships. Readers of Silverstone's volume see a full range of naval imagery: ships presented through the glamorizing lens of a naive heroism, as if charging of their own accord out to an adventure-filled ocean (see the illustration of the Brig *Porpoise*, 48); dignified renderings of famous vessels such as the USS *Bonhomme Richard* (11); attempts at land- and seascapes, as in the painting of the wreck of the USS *Philadelphia* off Tripoli (31); disciplined architectural plans like that of the sloop *General Pike* (68); and vintage photographs like that of the hybrid paddlewheel steamer and sail-assisted frigate *Fulton* (74). It would have been lovely indeed to have a few of these images in color, although admittedly many are probably monochrome in the original, and although Silverstone could never be faulted with respect to his thoroughness in preparing a book that could easily pass as an art- as well as naval-historical study. *The Sailing Navy* is a visual delight for anyone whose sensibility responds to the striking creations of the military, technical, and seafaring imagination.

Silverstone's volume offers far more than these few paragraphs can relate. His understated but confident preface and his headnotes to his various sections (on the Continental Navy, on the United States Navy from 1797, and on the Revenue Cutter Service) are packed with information. Silverstone provides an additional invited mini-essay on naval ordnance (by W. J. Jurens) as well as short segments on "state navies" (armadas under the authority of the individual state governments rather than the early continental, federal government) and—of all things—on the Texas Navy (recording and discussing ships under the jurisdiction of Texas during its brief period of independence). *The Sailing Navy* is a book that will serve many audiences, whether by boarding the coffee tables of picture-book fans or by taking a prize position on the gangplanks of naval-history libraries. Thorough, scholarly, forthright, and intelligently entertaining, *The Sailing Navy, 1775-1854* is a battleship of a book and a "must buy" for every scholar of the long eighteenth century.



**Davor Krapac, Dalibor Čepulo, Kraljica Marija Terezija, Neda Engelsfeld, and Željiko Pavić, *Pravni Fakultet u Zagrebu / Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb 1776–2001*. Zagreb: University of Zagreb Law Faculty, 2001. Pp. 194; illustrations.**

*Reviewed by Kevin L. Cope*

1776 was a banner year in Croatia as well as in America, and with good reason. While the planters who peopled the western frontier of the British Empire had by that time begun to realize that rudimentary democracy served their interests better than did subjection to a foreign sovereign and while they had managed to stage a few uprisings hither and yon around the colonies, old-world intellectuals on the southeastern flank of the Austrian empire were already implementing the reforms needed to build a modern nation with justice (and maybe liberty) for all. Following the fashion for national academies that had begun with England's Royal Society, Croatian legal educators were busily reinventing themselves into a modern college charged with the professionalization of government and governing. The success of the American experiment together with the general direction of early-modern exploration has encouraged scholars to look westward when searching for the origins of modernization. Scholars habitually study the emancipating experience of American immigrants or consider English commonsensicalness or celebrate French expansiveness. The publication of *Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb, 1776–2001* reminds us that there were many routes to modernization that passed through many out-of-the-way places. This overdue book shows that the oldest, most conservative parts of the "old world" were in many ways more organized in their pursuit of modernity than were their more incendiary counterparts on the sunset side of the globe.

Commitment to a "society of laws" had characterized Croatian legal culture since Magna Carta times. The earliest recorded Croatian law students completed their schooling in the thirteenth century (17). From the beginning, unfortunately, Croatian law studies had been plagued by a shortage of money, students, and resources. The resulting brain-drain sluiced Croatian students and professors to distinguished foreign law schools like those in Bologna or Padua. Legal education within Croatia

was limited to short-lived private schools. Even the attempt in the later seventeenth century by King Leopold I to grant the Jesuit-controlled Academy of Zagreb the right to award academic and professional degrees foundered when the regnant Jesuits, reluctant to compete against other Jesuit academies in the Austrian orbit, refrained from establishing the royally recommended programs (18).

The repatriation of dispersed Croatian legal talent—and the secularization that it required—came about through an unlikely vehicle of modernization, the Empress Maria Theresa. In one of the more refreshing paradoxes in the history of dictatorships, Maria Theresa's imperial ambitions induced her to reestablish local intellectual culture and enhance academic freedom. Like Thomas Jefferson hoping to partition America into rationally quadrilateral sectors, Maria Theresa sought to condense her bureaucratic apparatus into highly gerrymandered districts, one of which was an awkward compilation of Dalmatia, Slavonia, and Croatia. To accomplish her plans, Maria Theresa needed a cadre of trained bureaucrats, not many of which were emerging from Jesuit-dominated Croatian educational establishments. The solution was the redirection of universities toward the training of qualified civil servants (20–22), the socially progressive establishment of scholarships for commoners and even for poor persons (24), and a liberalizing of the process for selecting professorial candidates such that social rank was of no concern (30). Maria Theresa was assisted in these potentially democratic projects by a variety of fortunate circumstances, including a catastrophic fire in Varaždin (circa 1772) that forced the relocation of government bureaus and educational programs to the emerging cultural capital of Zagreb. In the end, however, it was Maria Theresa's drive to modernize and dominate the Croatian universities that imposed a modern, rational, and liberal mentality on an otherwise reactionary academic establishment.

Macroscopically, *Faculty of Law* offers a highly informative account of one underappreciated aspect of modernization, secularization, and legalization. It shows how an expansive imperial vision unexpectedly but inevitably established the broad prerogatives of modern academic research, including academic freedom. Microscopically, this study abounds with quietly amusing details about the lighter side of imperialism and about the history of Eastern European education. We learn, for example, that Maria Theresa's henchmen, loving the language of "this our archducal town of Vienna" (22), attempted to convince the reluctant Croatian pedagogues to use good, solid German as their language of instruction, purportedly to provide them with a (more) universal language for academic pursuits and

thereby to open up both a broader audience and a more direct route of entry into the German-speaking court culture. The textbook for law schools was to be Sonnenfels's *Grundsätze der Polizey-, Handlung-, und Finanzwissenschaft*. Considerable efforts were made to advertise the new curriculum to underprivileged rustics as well as to urban insiders. Unfortunately, not a single student took advantage of the German-encoded opportunities that the benevolent queen wanted to bestow on her lowliest subjects. Within a year the German language curriculum had been withdrawn, Latin adopted as the language of instruction, new circulars disseminated, and students recruited for a linguistically revamped program. Maria Theresa eventually promulgated a formal, somewhat pedantic program for her reforms, the 1777 proclamation *Ratio Educationis*, in which she reaffirmed the status of Latin as the official language of instruction but also quietly left open the possibility of using vernacular languages—a possibility that the Croats quickly exploited. Scanning through the pages of *Faculty of Law*, we also learn some amusing tidbits about the annexation of *history* instruction into the faculty of law and of the necessity of using books from the somewhat pedantic Göttingen school of history, with its heavy dependence on obsolete seventeenth-century “historical erudition” (42–44). We scowl at Hungarian schemes to centralize university-level education in Budapest at the expense of regional “academies” like that at Zagreb (32) while we cheer the resurgence of Croatian national pride via sly mandates to teach the “municipal rights of Croatia” as part of the curriculum in “public law” (50). Although somewhat scattered in its presentation owing to a less than idiomatic translation (the text is set up in side-by-side robust Croatian and fluent but stilted English), the many topics woven into *Faculty of Law* yield a tapestry-style representation of Croatian intellectual life in which the details are often the best place to look for an impression of the big picture.

Like many commemorative books, *Faculty of Law* is splendidly produced and indeed marks a huge step forward in book design in the poorer European states. Done up in a square format reminiscent of a quarto of the handpress era, this handsome volume is decked with a lovely dust jacket portraying the Italianate façade of the Zagreb Law Faculty building (indeed, the dust jacket is suitable for framing and would make a nice addition to any *dix-huitième*'s office decor). The volume overflows with carefully selected and splendidly reproduced portraits of prominent persons connected with, documents pertaining to, artifacts located in, and venues near the Law Faculty. Many of the images reproduced in *Faculty of Law* will never be found in other resources and are here shown in



context and to maximum advantage. The volume therefore provides a unique visual history of a national law tradition. A cautionary comment is in order regarding the photographic reproductions of the early documents shown in this book. No technical notes are provided, but it appears that most of the illustrated documentary materials (manuscripts, charters, diplomas, examination papers, books and their frontispieces) have been photographed in a high contrast monochrome and then printed in sepia or black atop a computer-generated field of a color that might be called “mocha manuscript beige.” The results are images in which handwriting or printing seem to float atop what looks like Starbucks coffee spilled on a smooth oilcloth. It is difficult to have confidence in the accuracy of reproductions that have been so obviously altered, even if the intent of the adjustment was to make them legible or perhaps to make them look “old” in virtue of resembling café latté. It would certainly have been much wiser to photograph the documents in their original state rather than to levitate the ink from the page in so bizarre a fashion. Amusingly, from a bibliographical point of view, the oil painting of a document shown on page 73 is probably more accurate than the retouched photographic facsimiles distributed throughout the volume.

*Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb, 1776–2001* is an important as well as an attractive contribution to the understanding of the development of rational, law-based, nonauthoritarian societies outside the western side of the European sphere of influence. It offers an intelligently optimistic picture of the rise of credible institutions even despite questionable motives such as imperial ambition or conventual conniving. With cross-market appeal to art collectors and enthusiasts for eastern Europe—and with a stunning photograph of the medal-decorated Dean to introduce the preface—*Faculty of Law* deserves inclusion in every library of Austrian and Eastern European studies.