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Frank Lambert. *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World.* New York: Hill & Wang, 2005. ix + 260 po. $24.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8090-9533-9; $15.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8090-2811-5.

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Anti-Piracy and the Making of America

In this slim and eminently readable volume, author Frank Lambert makes a case for the Barbary Wars as the first true test of American independence. Lambert, whose previous works deal with early American religious history, goes to great lengths to show that these disputes between North African Muslims and North American Christians were rooted in economic issues, and not in religious or cultural ones. Further, Lambert argues that the thirty-three years (1783-1816) of tension between the United States and the Barbary States were formative ones for the American military, as well as for its economic and diplomatic corps, allowing the infant republic to "extend its newly won independence to overseas commerce" (p. 7). Lambert uses the vehicle of the Barbary Wars to investigate such critical issues as the switch from the Articles of Confederation to the Constitution, and the need for an independent foreign policy.

Lambert skillfully addresses the American-Barbary disputes in the context of a wider Atlantic and international realm, giving a richly detailed and highly nuanced appreciation for the dizzying array of events that marked Mediterranean and North African history from the Crusades through the eighteenth century. Operating on the margins of the great power struggles of their day, the Barbary states were political and economic opportunists preying on any ships that scooted too close to their well-defended shores. Lambert even asserts, "pirating in the Barbary States was a capitalist enterprise" (p. 37). Theoretically vassals of the Ottoman sultanate in Turkey, the Barbary deys had routinely collected ransom from European traders who wished to trade unmolested in the Mediterranean. Notoriously fickle, the states of Algiers, Morocco, Libya and Tunisia routinely ripped up these agreements, captured the ships of "trespassing" entrepreneurs, and enslaved their crews. Rather than risk a costly military expedition, most Europeans agreed to pay a ransom for the captives and allotted the Barbary States an annual tribute to protect their trade. Once the United States secured its independence from Great Britain, it lost the protection of the British fleet. Barely a year after the Treaty of Paris guaranteeing its freedom, a band of Moroccan brigands seized the American brig *Betsey*. This placed the United States in the most unpropitious of

circumstances–it lacked a navy (the last vessels having been sold off in 1785 to finance the mounting war debt) and, at the same time, it needed to protect its trade, as well as its independence.

A series of violent and humiliating attacks–viewed with glee from London and other old world capitals eager to deny the upstart Americans free trade in the Mediterranean–placed the Americans in the unenviable position of having to fight or pay. Worse, the impotent Articles of Confederation left the United States in no state to protect its ships. With the public credit in disarray and no taxing authority, the new nation could fund neither an expensive treaty with the Barbary States nor a navy to fight the pirates. It seemed as if the United States had won the war against the British, only to lose the peace by becoming tributaries of the pirates. It became clear to many observers that independence backed by inadequate power was an empty promise, which resulted in increasing calls for a stronger national government that could correct the fact that the newly independent United States was not truly independent. The Constitution answered these deficiencies, replacing the Articles of Confederation with a new government capable of dealing with the Barbary corsairs.

While the new government gave the United States the ability to deal with the depredations, it did not stop the attacks on American shipping in the Mediterranean. Negotiations with Algiers resulted in amity with that polity, but only heightened tensions with Tunis, Morocco, and Tripoli. Although the Washington administration found it easier to pay tribute to the brigands, neither the Adams nor Jefferson camps felt the same. As the author puts it "while the American spent 'millions for defense but not one cent for tributeâ in the Atlantic, they did the opposite in the Mediterranean" (p. 98). When tribute payments topped $1 million (the equivalent of $18 million today), becoming the single largest item in the national budget (fully one-fifth of all expenditures), some began to question the propriety of dealing with the Barbary States in this way. Increasing naval buildups and dilatory squadron detachments to the region proved that the Americans considered military response an attractive option to paying tribute.

Despite his claim that the Barbary Wars were not rooted in cultural or religious roots, Lambert spends a good part of his work on the "cultural construction of pirates," examining the very socio-religious factors that he tends to downplay. Barbary corsairs were routinely depicted as tyrannical and evil, in direct opposition to the lofty, virtuous and free Americans. For many, this was a clear case of good versus evil, of savagery versus civilization, of barbarism versus culture. At a time when most Americans (African American slaves, excluded, of course) were enjoying the "blessings of liberty" and in a land where "the pursuit of happiness" was regarded as a natural right, American sailors languished in North African prison cells, or toiled under the hot sun for their Moorish masters.

American military–as opposed to diplomatic–responses to the Barbary pirates took shape under Thomas Jefferson. Never comfortable with paying tribute, Jefferson was nonetheless hamstrung by his disavowal of a large standing military force, which many Americans continued to see as a threat to liberty. Caught between his pride and his purse, Jefferson was faced with a dilemma: would he authorize a costly naval buildup to deal with the threat and protect American merchantmen, or would he allow the attacks to continue, resorting to pusillanimous payments of annual tribute? Ironically, the very type of navy that Jefferson had long argued for–highly maneuverable coastal defense vessels–were the exact ships that would make a blockade of North Africa successful. Dispatching a squadron to the Mediterranean in 1801, Jefferson was able to deal effectively with the situation, though only after one of the Navy's prized ships, the USS *Philadelphia* had fallen into Barbary hands. A daring sabotage mission prevented the corsairs from using the vessel against others, but this was a pyrrhic victory, to be sure. A combined U.S.-North African force, built out of tribal antagonisms and contested claims to power, finally toppled the Tripolitan government, and added to the growing sense of nationalism seen in the wake of the Quasi War and the Louisiana Purchase. A second conflict against Algiers in 1815 cemented these earlier victories and added to the notion that the United States was more than just a marginal player in the Atlantic world.

The Barbary Wars is an important contribution to the fields of Atlantic and Early American history. Do not be fooled by the thinness of the volume; this is a weighty and much-needed corrective to the historiography of American relations with the Muslim world. Where others see knee-jerk reactions based on religious differences, Lambert sees the conflict as rooted in economic terms. Furthermore, his assertion that the conflict is best understood in the light of larger issues–the Napoleonic Wars, for example–allows the reader to better grasp the nuances of an often misunderstood chapter in American foreign relations. Lambert's sober reasoning and crisp

writing allows him to use the particular events of the Barbary Wars to illustrate larger generalities in American and Atlantic history. *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World* is a treatment that deserves a wide–and guarantees an engaged–readership.