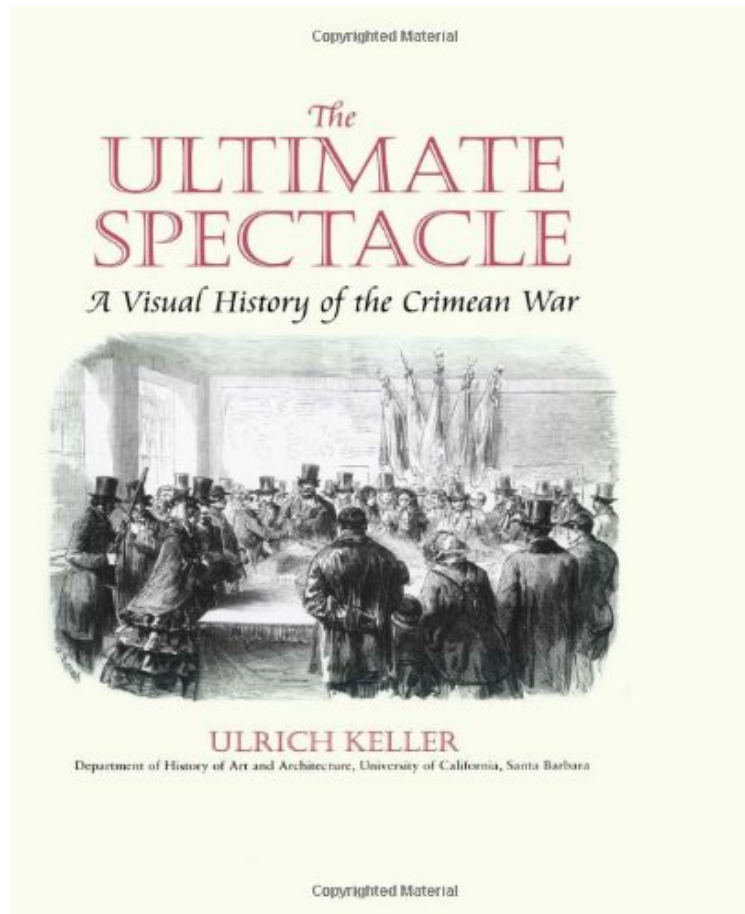


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The Ultimate Spectacle: A Visual History of the Crimean War (Documenting the Image)

Ulrich Keller

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Ulrich Keller : The Ultimate Spectacle: A Visual History of the Crimean War (Documenting the Image) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *The Ultimate Spectacle: A Visual History of the Crimean War (Documenting the Image)*:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. The first war of the modern media age By A. Fonteyne Ulrich Keller's book, "The Ultimate Spectacle: A Visual History of the Crimean War", explores and analyzes the historical significance of the various pictorial means that were used at the time to represent this forgotten conflict in the eyes of various segments of the (British) population. The Crimean war, he argues, because of technological change, was the first war of the modern media age. First, the mass market: with innovations such as lithography and the illustrated weekly press, it saw the advent of new means of reproducing and distributing pictures cheaply and quickly, for the immediate consumption by the emerging middle classes. Secondly, the recording of reality: it was also the first war to be captured in photography, although the technique was still costly and primitive. Because of this, it was still restricted to

uses by the army (recording topography), aristocrats (portraits of officers) or Queen Victoria (to remember the suffering and endurance of her soldiers, which she saw as her duty to protect and praise). Finally, the Crimean war required traditional history painting to adapt. Since it could no longer pose as a source of reliable information, a role now provided through more modern means, artists learnt to maximise the emotional powers of the painted image. Mass market media, photography, dramatization by art (later by cinema): war would from then on be more and more formatted into a spectacle, inaugurating an era that is still with us today (think of CNN and the Gulf Wars). This has a social function: to make war's raw cruelty acceptable despite the fundamental contradictions of its barbarous nature with modern civilization. With this somewhat philosophical angle, Keller offers a radically different approach to this conflict from traditional histories based on written sources and focused on characters, politics, diplomacy and battles. A refreshing book indeed.

Chloroform, telegraphy, steamships and rifles were distinctly modern features of the Crimean War. Covered by a large corps of reporters, illustrators and cameramen, it also became the first media war in history. For the benefit of the ubiquitous artists and correspondents, both the domestic events were carefully staged, giving the Crimean War an aesthetically alluring, even spectacular character. With their exclusive focus on written sources, historians have consistently overlooked this visual dimension of the Crimean War. Photo-historian Ulrich Keller challenges the traditional literary bias by drawing on a wealth of pictorial materials from scientific diagrams to photographs, press illustration and academic painting. The result is a new and different historical account which emphasizes the careful aesthetic scripting of the war for popular mass consumption at home.

"Thoughtfully conceived, satisfyingly researched...a mapping of the many ways in which the Crimea was produced as a spectacle for Victorian consumption." -Jennifer Green Lewis of Middlebury College, Vermont