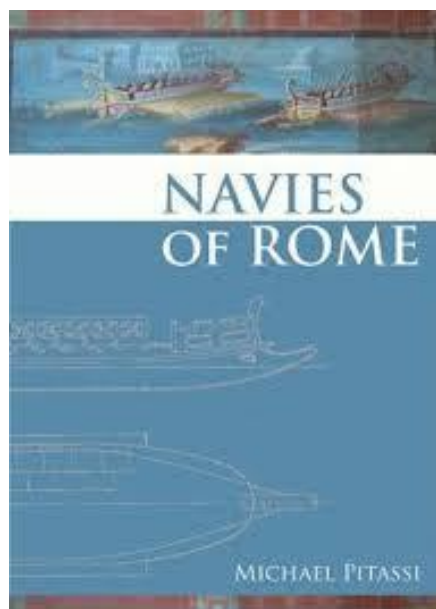


***Navies of Rome* by Michael Pitassi**

Reviewed by Rob Morgan

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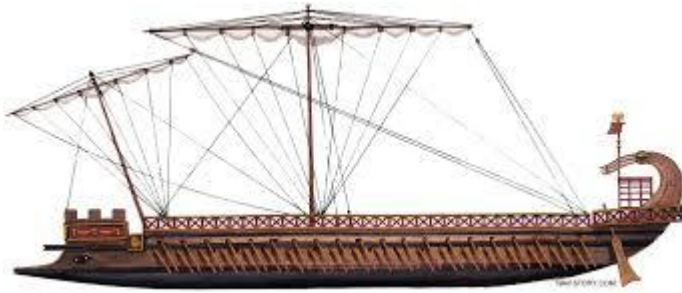
A superb book, which is amply illustrated with maps, line drawings and plates, some of them being quite unusual. Pitassi opens with a general chronology from the founding of Rome to the acknowledged end of the Western Empire in 476AD. In nine chapters, he deals with the early Republic's fleets, with the establishment of Roman naval power during the First Punic War (264-218BC), and with that war's victories and disasters for Rome. The mapping of the stages of the Battles of Ecnomus (256BC) and of Mylae (260BC) are good fodder for the naval wargamer. The author doesn't ignore 'Combined Operations' in the war either. Plenty here for the 'solo' wargamer to mull over.



The book goes on from the first Roman victory over Carthage then to the resumption of hostilities in 219 BC, to the adventure of Syracuse and covers the 'Carthage Campaign' of 204-202BC, after which Rome wasn't merely the supreme naval power in the Western Mediterranean, but the only naval power! Ideal for the solo 'meglomaniac'.

The growth of the Empire, its wars in Macedonia, Seleucia, the Battle of Myonnesus (190 BC) all are given competent if brief examination. The Third Punic War, and the almost inevitable 'run-down' of naval forces following the victory are linked to the rise of piracy, which was the major naval activity encountered before Rome took the rocky road to Civil War. I thought the coverage of piracy and Pompey's 'pirate wars' valuable, from a 'solo' point of view; and Pitassi gives an account of the attacks on Gaul and Britannia, from a naval perspective which might prove useful to the ancient 'land' wargamer. Caesar against Pompey and that vigorously executed and often overlooked attack by Pompey on Caesar's warships at Oricus (48BC) are mapped and described in some detail. The Alexandrine war, which had but one serious naval encounter, and the end of the Republic at Caesar's hands follow on inevitably.

The remarkable to-and-fro in naval terms not least, of the years after 43BC; the War against Sextus, the eventual finality of the Actium Campaign are all well described and neatly mapped. Though Actium doesn't stand out as an encounter tactically or in terms of sheer size, in comparison with some of the other actions in this volume; perhaps it was just Shakespeare who made it famous.



The next section of the book, the 'Imperial Fleets', provide a good deal of information for those newly introduced to the navies of the ancient world, and a good deal too for those with more experience of early oared warfare. Training, recruitment, the space aboard

warships, weapons - the Roman Imperial Marines were all apparently trained with the sling (which intrigued me) the naval ranks, shield types (useful indeed) and command structures are all examined. In fact there's enough to create a single ship deck plan and wargame a boarding skirmish on that.

Yet nothing, not even the amazing naval campaigns in the Revolt of Civilis (69AD), in the later centuries, compares with the Punic Wars.

Yet here, in these squabbles and civil troubles, the book has great strength for the solo wargamer, putting forward minor campaigns, the everyday work and fighting of small flotillas. Minor campaigns ensued along the Rhine, northwards along the coast of Britannia, in the Black Sea; but of course the Roman navy was past its best. Great galleys were less effective in 'flank' control raids, and police work than the small craft of later decades.

The brief renewal of naval strength was eclipsed by the long decline that followed, and by the time of Constantine around 330AD, military policy had changed. The great Mediterranean fleets had virtually ceased to be, and the role of the border patrol forces was in the long term unlikely to be anything but a failure. Barbarian sea-borne raids grew in strength and frequency, and though in 357AD the Emperor Julian had a fleet of some forty new warships built, the end was in sight. He commanded a navy estimated at around six hundred vessels of all types, but these were the naval instruments of survival, not the sea-going extensions of power and might.

The final pages of this excellent, fascinating and comprehensive work cover the crumbling end of Rome's fleets in defence and rebellion are described, like that of the Count of Africa in 413AD - said to be enormous at 3,700 ships, much larger than those of the Punic Wars! Yet the last warship described was the best of them all, the Dromon.

I can't recommend this book too highly. It has a superb index, is chronologically sound, well noted, and referenced. The appendices deal with ranks of naval personnel, crew levels by ship types, with a glossary of place names and one of nautical terms. The Bibliography is a selected one of a hundred or so titles. I particularly liked the format where the text is occasionally broken up by information panels, dealing with ship types, the 'Lembus' for instance, or with the development of the corvus and of ship signals. There are many of these throughout.

If I had one concern as a wargamer, it would be that the book is best read with another alongside. An illustrated volume dealing specifically with ship types, Conway's 'Age of the Galley' being one example, as Pitassi doesn't provide line drawings or plans of all of the types of warships in the Roman Fleet, especially during the Punic Wars.

Incidentally, and most important of all....almost everything floating in this book can be found in the new 'Tumbling Dice' 1/2400th Classical and Ancient Range. Well worth twenty pounds!