

**Ancient Greek Warship 500-322 BC**  
Osprey New Vanguard series No.132 (2007)  
Text by Nic Fields; illustrated by Peter Bull

Reviewed by Rob Morgan

The remit of the New Vanguard series is 'the design, development, operation and history of the machinery of warfare through the ages.' And what a war machine the Trireme was! Formidable and sophisticated, and at its operational best in the hands of the Athenians; Nic Fields provides in just 48 pages one of the best introductions to these galleys around. Of course, the text includes that almost ubiquitous, these days, comment on the splendid *Olympias*, which for the ancient naval wargamer must rank as the lead project of modern times, and there are some good photographs of her.

The author begins with the origin of the Trireme concept, down to the Phoenicians; neatly put, and followed by notes on the design, the long-argued-over oar system, hull construction and, delightfully, a comment on decoration, beyond the Homeric 'black.'

The following section deals with the crew of the warship, the oarsmen, deck crew and officers and marines and archers -- relatively few of the latter -- and again well written and nicely referenced to Xenophon, and the greatest of all war correspondents, Thucydides.

I did enjoy the section called 'In Action,' which highlights (as always) the major failing of my ancient fleets, Triremes especially: no lowered masts on my models. The section goes on to deal with armament, in main the ram of course, and the tactics of the time, particularly at Salamis.

There follows a good contribution on control of the sea, again well referenced, on land bases, on raiding and the strategy of Perikles (or Pericles, as most of us prefer), under whom the Mediterranean became an Athenian sea. Nic Fields goes on to deal with the rivalry, the encounters (again referenced), and the decline of the fleets, though sadly the Fourth century revival and the 'rating' of Triremes as warships is all too briefly considered. A toe dipped into several ponds after this, expenditure and naval service included. The debacle at Syracuse in 413 BC is touched upon, and the book's chronological ending is at the time of the Macedonian victory at Amorgos in 322BC, after which Athenian naval power was, effectively, no more.

The illustrations in the text are sound, as you'd expect, but Peter Bull has been, I suspect, limited in his coverage of the warship, and linked to the *Olympias* replica, but plates B, F and G are very useful for the wargamer.

Of course, the bibliography is one which must be dipped into for a real understanding of this awesomely efficient fighting vessel. Naturally, Morison and Coates, the *Olympians* are foremost, but this is a bibliography of articles, not books. The best overall view of the use of the Trireme in warfare and on the wargames table too, is to be found in Richard Nelson's 1975 book 'The Battle of Salamis,' an excellent work. Nelson's Wargames Research Group book, first published in 1973, my copy's long lost, entitled 'Warfleets of Antiquity,' is another classic; and I think a short dip into R.C. Anderson's legendary 'Oared Fighting Ships' would be of value.

Where models are concerned, well, in terms of scales almost every realistic naval scale is available, 1/1200<sup>th</sup>, 1/3000<sup>th</sup>, 1/2400<sup>th</sup>, 1/600<sup>th</sup> and 1/300<sup>th</sup>. Of course, unless you are inclined to the collector's quality, then a decent sized battle is best played out with models from Navwar or Skytrex ranges. I like the Tumbling Dice 1/2400ths these days, as well detailed and sea-based and sturdy, but not too expensive. The finest models I've seen are the Xyston 1/600<sup>th</sup>, rather pricey, but I bought a small number when one of the local model shops closed -- not enough to fight Salamis or Syracuse, but a fair running skirmish. Rules? Well, there are a lot of them around, but a decent short set, offering a fast-ish game, is that in Don Featherstone's 'Naval Wargames.'

New Vanguard

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Nic Fields • Illustrated by Peter Bull