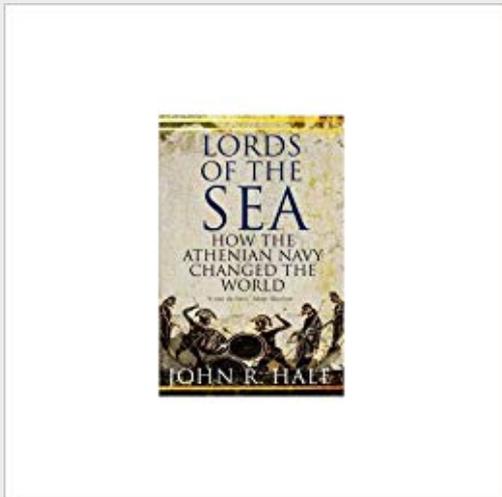


Lords of the Sea: The Epic Story of the Athenian Navy and the Birth of Democracy (Playaway Adult Nonfiction) by John R Hale,David Drummond



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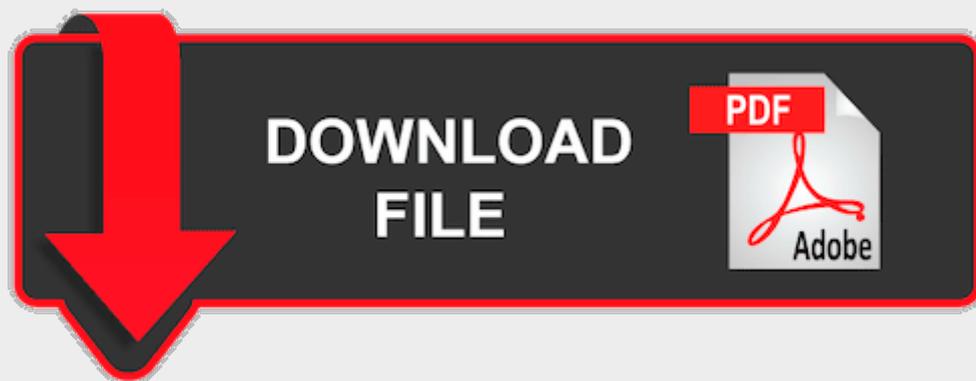
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Noted archaeologist John R. Hale presents a stirring history of the world's first dominant navy and the towering empire it built.



Reviews of the **Lords of the Sea: The Epic Story of the Athenian Navy and the Birth of Democracy (Playaway Adult Nonfiction)** by John R Hale,David Drummond



1. Drelalen

First posted on Amazon.co.uk on 29 November 2011

This book was first published in October 2010 and, as another reviewer mentioned, it made an excellent Christmas present. It still does this year. The author is an archeologist specialised in underwater searches for ancient warships. His story of the "rise and fall" of the Athenian Navy is outstanding, compelling, fascinating and backed by flawless research (or, more modestly, I should say that I didn't find any!).

Although this is NOT a historical novel, you sometimes have the impression it is, given the way it is written. Another huge plus in favour of this book is that it is written in such a way that you are reading a story rather than digesting the history of one of the first major naval powers. In addition, John Hale manages the rare feat of explaining technicalities, such as the conception of Athenian triremes, how they were built to emphasize speed and swiftness, how the favorite Athenian battle tactics made the maximum use of the ships' design, what this implied in terms of training, maintenance and organization and how some of the ships could be adapted and converted into troop or horse transports to carry expeditionary forces overseas.

But, above everything else, and while following a chronological order, the author presents those that, in his mind, were the real "heroes" that, in addition to finance, organization and ship building skills, allowed Athens to "rule the waves" for most of the 5th century and reestablish most of their city's dominance through most of the next century: these were the crews (rowers and sailors) that came from the lower classes which could not afford to fight as hoplites and even less as horsemen. While some might find that John Hale tends to "wax lyrical" on these, they - and the fleet that they manned and which could not exist without them, were clearly the mainstay of Athens democracy. The economic impact of paying for their very valuable services -unlike what some still believe, they were full citizens - integrated them and allowed to effectively participate in Athens' political life. The importance of the ship crews was clearly shown when, during the last years of the Long War against Sparta, the latter managed to challenge Athens at sea thanks to Persian gold which allowed Sparta to outbid Athens by offering higher pay. At this point, however, losses on both sides had been such that a large portion of rowers were hired men (or mercenaries, if you prefer) rather than the poorest citizens of Athens.

The last strong point I want to emphasize is the story of Athens' decline. As the last section of the book makes clear, this started by a "Rebirth" as Athens recovered most (but not all) of its naval supremacy and strived to

maintain it after having lost the Peloponnesian War against Sparta and its allies. However, Athens had become much more vulnerable in the long-run. Despite its efforts, it could no longer draw the same level of resources from what had been its "allies" of the First Delian League. In fact, it could no longer stop League members from quitting the Alliance if they saw fit to do so. In addition to financial strains, and as Athens' population had increased considerably since 480, it had had to increasingly import most of its grain from overseas. This was probably one of the main reasons for the expeditions to help Egypt's revolt against the Persian Empire in the early 460s and for the expedition to Sicily between 415 and 413, both of which were disasters. This left Athens having to import most of its grain from the Bosphoros which became its main lifeline.

"The Last Battle", as the last chapter is entitled, tells the story of the Athenian fleet, and its weaknesses, in the revolt against the Macedonians just after the death of Alexander. This was indeed the last battle (in fact, they were at least two, both defeats) and the author clearly explains why. Although Athens would still be dragged into a number of conflicts between Alexander's Successors and would even wage wars of its own against Macedonia, these would essentially take place on land for there was no more a large fleet.

This is a fantastic book that I can only urge you to read, once again. If not quite the best book I have read over the last twelve months (and I read a lot), then it is a very close second.

2. Hawk Flying

If all history books were as well written and informative as "Lords of the Seas" I think that more people would be interested in history. This book traces the history of the Athenian Navy and how it helped shape the history of Athens. Far from being dry and boring as this sort of story might be, Professor Hale tells it in the style of a great novel. We can almost hear Themistocles, Pericles or Demosthenes speak from the bema, stirring the citizens of Athens to resist the Persians, the Spartans or the Macedonians with the might of the Athenian Navy. You can almost smell the sweat of the rowers and see the battles that they fought. Not only is the book well written, it provides a great deal of history. It tells the story of the naval aspects of the conflicts between Athens and Persia, Sparta and Macedonia, and how the needs of the Navy molded the history of

Athens. Professor Hale is an expert on the ancient Greek navy and their ships. He describes the construction of an Athenian Trireme, how much it cost to build one, how they were commanded, and how it was rowed and used in battle. I found that the focus on the naval aspects of Athenian warfare added a great deal to my understanding of the history of Athens.

The book delves into more than just naval history. It also contains quite a bit about specific Greek plays, Greek philosophy, and their influence on Greek history. There is a focus on the political systems of Athens and Sparta - both their strengths and weaknesses. Contrary to what one might have thought about Athenian Democracy, I doubt that most people living in modern day democracies would have liked to live under their system. This part of the book gave me a much better understanding of why the US founding fathers (who studied classical Greece and Rome in College) did not want that style of democracy; instead favoring a republic, where there were limitations on the power of the majority, which was greatly abused in Athens.

The book is augmented with many fine maps that show not only geography but also the disposition and maneuvering of naval fleets. There is also a superb chronology of the history of Athens from 524 BC to 322 BC, a useful glossary, notes on sources (which goes beyond just citing the source of something in the text to discussing the relevant sources themselves and how they were used in the book) and an index.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who is interested in a well-written history, especially if they are interested in the history of Greece. The book is suitable for high school students and above. It is a great supplement to a book such as Donald Kagan's "The Peloponnesian War", as well as an excellent stand-alone history of the period, and you do not need to know a lot about the history of Greece to thoroughly enjoy this book.

3. Global Progression

John Hale's *Lords of the Sea* is a splendid read. Hale has a narrative gift to bring alive the circumstances and motives behind the projection of Athenian power. Interestingly as well, Hale documents Athenian innovation in the construction, manning, and tactical deployment of their triremes (boats). (these oar-powered boats could make 10 knots!) Themistocles convinced his countrymen to leverage scientific knowledge to compensate the disadvantage of Greek numbers against the Persians.

Further, while this may be overstatement, this title reads like Athenian navy Cliff Notes for the Peloponnesian War.

For me, Hale's most illuminating sections are those where he illustrates the changeless nature of human nature and the destructive nature of hubris. Man hasn't changed in the 2,000 or so years since.

This book also has very good maps and illustrations. If you're unfamiliar with this period of history, this is probably a good entry-level text (at least from the point of view of Athens). Highly recommended.

Well done, Dr. Hale!

4. Drelalak

Thorough discussion of Athenian Navy. It's importance in the rise of democracy. The importance to the independence of Athens and the tenacity of the Athenian people to build FOUR navies as they allowed Athens to thrive. Details of navy life, ship and shipyard construction and supported by stunning new artwork by one of the best artists alive today. Fast moving, impactful and all based on accurate archaeology by one of the nations pre eminent historians. A must read.

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