

further information, particularly in regard to Muselier (a reputed opium addict) and Darlan, which adds to current knowledge and draws on original sources not otherwise familiar. In keeping with the publisher's series, the focus is mostly on the army(ies), though a surprising amount of discussion is devoted to the French navy and France's general conduct of the war in those early years to provide context. The book is recommended for readers and researchers interested in the Second World War and France's part in it.

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Stephen P. Roberts. *French Warships in the Age of Steam 1859-1914: Design, Construction, Careers and Fates*. Barnsley, South Yorks: Seaforth Publishing, www.seaforthpublishing.com (distributed by Naval Institute Press), 2021. 512 pp., illustrations, drawings, appendices, bibliography, index. US \$90.00, UK £50.00, cloth; ISBN 978-1-5267-4533-0. (E-book available.)

The French navy (La Royale, Marine française, Marine nationale) is comparatively understudied in English-language scholarship, more so in the modern era than the age of sail. British naval historians studying the Royal Navy seem to have an aversion or national bias toward acknowledging that France was a serious competitor, taking the lead at times with its republican and scientific accomplishments. The main impediments holding back the French navy were economic (lack of industrial capacity in a predominantly agrarian economy), financial, and the necessity of keeping a large army for defence purposes on land. Published writings by American historians Theodore Ropp, Ray Walser, and Ronald Chalmers Hood III still remain among the few available. Canadian naval officer Hugues Canuel has added his book *The Fall and Rise of French Sea Power* (Naval Institute Press, 2021) and an article in the *Naval War College Review* (vol. 71, no. 1, (2018)) covering the period up to 1914. John Jordan, editor of the popular *Warship* annual and author of several books on types of French warships published by Seaforth Publishing, has reached out to French historians similarly interested in technical details. These new sources make full use of available French published sources and archival holdings. Stephen Roberts, who completed a PhD dissertation on the introduction of steam technology in the French navy at the University of Chicago in 1976 and edited Ropp's book for publication in 1987, provides a comprehensive catalogue of virtually every warship added to the French navy in the 55 years before the First World War. The book is part of a trilogy, the first two books prepared in collaboration with Rif Winfield dealing with French

sailing warships from 1626 to 1861.

The book is divided into three chronologically distinct parts or phases comprising eighteen chapters in total: traditional fleet updated, 1859-1882; fleets of the Jeune École, 1882-1897; towards a modern battle fleet, 1897-1914. Each part follows a similar standard format, progressing from the largest warships to smaller boats, submarines, and auxiliaries. Opening sections provide a rationale for the book's arrangement, the methodology used for comparison of technical characteristics, a timeline, and a preamble on the transition from sail to steam prior to 1859, and the building of the first seagoing ironclad, *Gloire*, and its successors designed by master naval architect Henri Dupuy de Lôme.

The first phase straddled the naval ambitions of Napoleon III, the inactivity of the French fleet during the disastrous war against Prussia on land in 1870-71, and slow nibbling away in the decade afterwards to budgets and attention devoted to the navy employed on various colonial expeditions. The once technological leading-edge French ironclads and cruisers became progressively dated in the face of improvements in guns and armour. France acquired rights to the manufacture of the Whitehead torpedo in 1873 building upon earlier interest in the automobile (self-propelled) underwater weapon and sea mines and embarked on construction of small sleek-looking torpedo boats organized into mobile flotillas.

The second phase was characterized by the influence of Jeune École ideas on fleet composition and the relative priority given to certain classes of weapons and warships in the French inventory. Advocates argued that war against England was most probable, and France had to be prepared to defend its coasts and when opportune attack the enemy's commerce and squadron units using new, improving technology. Work on battleships and armoured coastal defence ships progressed in fits and starts, even stopping at times, depending on the whims of successive ministers of marine and legislators in Paris. Concerns about the navies of Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the Mediterranean finally provided some rationale for the larger warships. The French navy innovated classes of protected and armoured cruisers, which one admiral argued in 1896 should provide a basis for all fleet construction. Differing professional opinion and limits on industrial capacity meant that greater attention was given to gunboats and torpedo boats that could be constructed reasonably quickly (within a budget cycle) at naval arsenals and private shipyards. The first experimental submersibles and submarine boats were also introduced and operationalized.

The third phase details the filling-out of a battle fleet envisioned under several naval building programs from 1900 to 1912, based upon a balanced mix of large and small warships and submarines, including France's response to the

revolutionary big-gun *Dreadnought* that underpinned an arms race between Great Britain and Imperial Germany. The French navy moved from being second to fourth ranked in Europe and the world, though the Imperial Russian navy showed its deficiencies against Japan in 1905 and had to rebuild. Due to politics and finances, France was late in devoting resources to naval building, and bigger warships in later planned naval programs were left unfinished when the First World War started. Many of the armoured cruisers were older and obsolete in armaments and protection, and the Marine nationale only possessed a small number of out-dated, early design dreadnought battleships in 1914, mostly deployed in the Mediterranean because they were too vulnerable to use against German main fleet units in the North Sea and the Channel. New classes of French counter-torpedo boats that evolved into destroyers were smaller and too limited in range to be truly effective workhorses of the fleet and submarine hunters, the large number of earlier-built torpedo boats suffering many of the same shortcomings. Based on years of experience and trial, the French navy poured money into submarine development that delivered a significant capability with a selection of combination diesel-engine and electric-battery submarines around 800 tons with an effective cruising range over 1200 nautical miles on the surface and 100 nautical miles underwater. The French naturally considered the submarine merely an underwater torpedo boat, with lower silhouette and greater stealth, in keeping with the Jeune École legacy. A French pioneer aviator also flew the first aircraft with floats from a water take-off, portending future military and naval usage. The *Fourde*, previously a torpedo boat transporter, was converted and retooled as a seaplane tender in 1912.

The appendices furnish particulars on French naval artillery and torpedoes, a list of ministers of marine for the period, description of naval shipbuilding bodies, names of naval constructors, details of planned naval building programmes, budgets, and expenditures, alphabetical standardized ship-type descriptors, and disposition of naval squadrons and divisions for certain years.

French Warships in the Age of Steam is a big, beautiful book with small type. Seaforth Publishing delivers another outstanding visually pleasing product. It is logically arranged in a standard format that gives lots of useful technical information and background on individual ships and armaments, for easy reference. The variety of selected photographs and illustrations are appropriate to the subject. Entries are encyclopedic in nature and draw upon the best available French primary sources. Coverage includes many better-known warships in the fleet of “samples” slave-ship-interdiction as well as less-known vessels employed close to the metropole and across France’s colonial possessions. Roberts is to be commended for his diligence in chasing down information and his depth of knowledge. Jane Winfield, the sister of

his previous collaborator, helped immeasurably, in that regard. The book is recommended as an essential one-stop warship reference for historians interested in the French navy and its rivals before the First World War, ship scale modellers and hobbyists, as well as naval wargamers.

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A. E. Rooks. *The Black Joke: The True Story of One Ship's Battle against the Slave Trade*. New York, NY: Scribner, www.simonandschuster.com, 2022. 382 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. US \$29.00, cloth; ISBN 978-1-98212-826-5. (E-book available.)

Prepare to encounter more than you may have bargained for: Rooks wields her quill like a scalpel, keeping us up to speed on all facets of the setting, including backstories both personal and political. The tableau of this masterful feast of information is admirably laid out and kept within a 52-month period from September 1827, when the swift, Baltimore-built slave ship *Henriquetta* was intercepted enroute from West Africa to Brazil, to when forces as high as they get – to the Sailor King, William IV himself – turn against the West African Squadron's (WAS) anti-slavery efforts. At that point, the dreaded *Black Joke*, former slaver turned tender then brig, was burned to the water line to cover the bottoms of Admiralty overseers in their base in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

The geographic epicentre of the book is Freetown, British West Africa, where the WAS was conducting its slave-ship-interdiction from the island of Fernando Po, the Gulf of Benin, Biafra, Togo, Guinea, even south to Angola, yet not all the way to Cape Town, South Africa. At that time, Liberia was being checked by US Navy ships like *Java*. At a British outpost known as Bathurst, now Banjul (in the Gambia), are sad reminders of how Africa and much of the imperial world was regarded primarily for what could be stripped from it. Hence the Gold Coast, the Ivory Coast (still the name of a country), and the wrenching name, "Slave Coast."

Palm oil and other cargoes were pulled from many rivers in the region, and slave entrepôts proliferated, including Gallinas (Sierra Leone). The focus, however, was on how wretched this harsh environment could be, and the extreme depths of depravity and inhumanity that played out there from the late 1700s to the mid-1800s in the name of profits, empire, and markets. As the frontispiece warns: "Beware, beware, the Bight of Benin, there's one comes out where fifty went in."

Into this rich, disease-ridden sea of connivance sailed both commercial and naval ships carrying the flags of half-a-dozen countries in the event that