Fifteen outstanding studies on ancient maritime history, the fruit of intensive historical, archaeological and philological research, the rich harvest of an international symposium held at the Freie Universität Berlin in December 2013. More diverse than one might expect, also in their interpretations, they are set within a solid frame thanks to a well-considered and circumstantial introduction, adding to the collection the strength of coherence and purposefulness. For the next decades the collection will remain authoritative, as a whole as well as by a number of its individual parts, such as (1), (2), (5), (7), (8), or (13) (cf. infra). The consecutive titles give a good idea of the variety of subjects and approaches. The numbering is the reviewer’s:


The articles will be referred to by their given number, the authors by their initials. All dates are B.C. unless otherwise specified.

The articles are grouped in four sections under somewhat obscure headings – I. ‘Der Zugriff auf das Meer’ (1–4); II. ‘Operative Konzeptionen’ (5–8); III. ‘Grenzen des Kanons’ (9–10); IV. ‘Selbstwahrnehmung und Repräsentation’ (11–15) – the exact purport of which can be gleaned from a careful reading of the third part of the introduction (p. 18–23). The useful index (p. 333–344) not only includes detailed lists of naval battles and expeditions, but also conspicuous lemmata referring to more theoretical concepts in the maritime realm, such as ‘Thalassokratie’, ‘archê’, ‘Meer’, ‘Seemacht’ or ‘Seeherrschaft’. These concepts, for which exact equivalents in (other) modern languages are not always evident, occupy a central place in the volume, as they were equally fundamental, from a military, political, economic and even ideological point of view, to a number of ancient states. It goes without saying that relevant passages in authors like Thucydides and Polybius are fully exploited. The readability of some studies, on the other hand, would surely have been enhanced if abstracts had been added.

Grosso modo, two kinds of contributions can be distinguished: on the one hand, more theoretical studies, among them the Introduction (o), primarily reflecting on maritime strategies or conceptual categories like those mentioned (1–
8); on the other, more ‘factual’ ones, often restricted to a given period or area (9–14). Still, the demarcation line between both is not always neat, for the former are often based on specific cases, whereas the latter sometimes also deal with conceptual aspects. Some learned terminological discussions, written in a rather involved style, are likely to deter the traditional historian, reluctant to engage with what he might consider speculative elucubrations. In any event, the present volume makes it clear how careless one has been in the past by indiscriminately using fluid terminology or by uncritically projecting modern conditions onto difficult to gauge ancient realities. Its principal aim in this respect was to elaborate a common platform, smoothly ‘reformatted’ in the Introduction. The result is impressive, even if the individual contributors did not always understand crucial terms in exactly the same way. Reaching complete unanimity, for that matter, is likely fated to remain an illusion.

The chronological, geographical and historical emphasis lies on the classical world in both the Eastern and Western Mediterranean, which essentially means the traditional Greek polis, embodied by Athens in her heyday (5, 6, 12), and Rome in Republican times, especially during the struggle against (maritime) rival Carthage (7, 8, 14). We will return to this later on. As for Sparta (9), a self-contained, predominantly land power encompassing a large number of Peloponnesian allies, MD analyses its (often unduly neglected) naval history from the late 8th till the mid-4th century, with a short thalassokratia from 405 to 394 (Aegean) and 375 (Ionian sea) respectively, showing a special interest in the famous Spartan nauarchia (from 430 on), a slightly overrated institution (cf. p. 196 n. 22), as well as in the remarkable maritime role of the perioikoi with their ports Gytheum and Asine. On the subject of the Achaemenid Empire, a traditional land power, only the period from Cyrus II to Darius I (559–486) is covered (11). The main focus is on royal self-representation and Persian imperial ideology: Having appropriated elements of Babylonian and Assyrian state doctrine, the great kings claimed universal rule. It is shown how the symbolic significance of the sea, of sea power and overseas expansion finds its expression in the royal inscriptions, starting with the Cyrus cylinder. The permanent composite character of the Persian navy as well as the central role of the Phoenician contingents (including the Sidonian king: AncSoc 1, 1970, p. 1–8) are rightly stressed (p. 223). The Hellenistic world is represented by the small Jewish territorial state (10), whose fleet, apart from the days of Herod the Great, was virtually nonexistent, which explains the question mark in the title. Delos (12) (see infra) and Rhodes (13) also flourished in Hellenistic times. In an exhaustive synthesis Rhodes’ (sometimes exaggerated) sea power is reduced to its real, still exceptional, significance. Due attention is paid to vessel types and numbers, epigraphically documented naval careers (absence of ephebia suggesting compulsory naval service: p. 268) and anti-piracy actions. DK rightly points out our ignorance concerning other major maritime poleis like Heraclea Pontica, Massilia and Cyzicus (p. 256). On the other hand, the large territorial kingdoms like those of Alexander and the Ptolemies, the naval pioneers of their time (recently treated by W.M. Murray: see Gnomon 86, 2014, p. 38–44), are lacking. With the exception of the already mentioned chapter on the Jews (10), MR’s historiographical study (2) (cf. infra), and EB’s intriguing essay on the staged naumachiae at Rome (from Caesar to Trajan)
and their evolving ideological implications (suggesting absolute, quasi-divine, power over both land and sea, fauna and flora included), showing at the same time how all kinds of boundaries were continually pushed \( (15) \), the chronological limits of the early Roman empire are not exceeded.

In the opening study \( (1) \), the fundamental question of the multilayered, flexible and hardly definable concept of ‘thalassocracy’ is tackled: what did this sparingly occurring notion imply in Antiquity (only three examples as substantive; not before the late 1st century B.C.), to what extent do the different modern interpretations (since the 16th century; not necessarily those of the Ancients) comply with ancient understandings, and in how far does its frequent use by modern scholars influence our analyses? HK’s highly semantic analysis is probably the most thorough and nuanced (unfortunately not always easily accessible) study so far devoted to the subject. Related questions are: what did the Ancients (and what do we) exactly mean by the generally agreed upon contention that classical Athens exerted ‘control over the sea’, and is such control possible? Should we conceive the so-called Athenian archê \( (cf. \text{also} \ [1], \ p. \ 36-37, \ opposing \ archê \ to \ kratos) \) as an ‘empire’ (‘Reich’), a ‘league’ (‘Bund’), or a composite ‘Groß-Staat’ (difficult to render in English when contrasted with ‘Reich’)? A practically insoluble problem, the more so as modern terminology is often nation- or language-related \( (cf. \ [5], \ p. \ 120) \). Though not necessarily univocal, the articles tackling these questions \( (4, 5, 6) \) are also fundamental to a better understanding of Athens’ 5th- and 4th-century maritime ambitions and power politics, when the metropole was successively heading the Delian League \( (5) \) and the Athenian Confederacy \( (5, 6) \). Though operating within a dramatically changed military and political constellation after the Peloponnesion War, the Confederacy was still influenced by its predecessor’s imperialistic dreams, whereas the allies were unable to surmount their distrust of the leading city. BS \( (4) \) compares the inevitably restricted impact of sea power in Antiquity with its patent efficiency in the modern world, opposing at the same time outspoken ‘navalists’ like the naval officer and historian A.T. Mahan \( (1840-1914) \) to more ‘moderate’ ancient historiographers as Thucydides. Partly driven by his aversion to radical democracy, the latter, «not a thoroughgoing advocate of sea power» \( (p. \ 96) \), who rightly assessed the limited possibilities of ancient fleets, appears to have distanced himself from contemporaneous statesmen like Themistocles and Pericles \( (cf. \ also \ [3], \ p. \ 84) \). Mainly basing herself on the statements of 4th-century authors, JW \( (6) \), on the other hand, tends to utterly emphasize the military, economic and ideological significance of sea dominance for Athens. Essential in establishing the city’s identity (even after Chaeronea), sea dominance was felt as a kind of mission, even when it became an unbearable financial burden. KAR \( (5) \) deals with the nature, aims, functioning and evolution of the federal structures of the Athenian alliance in its successive phases, duly contrasting that organisation with its Spartan and Boeotian counterparts. Referring, among other causal factors, to the restrictive (in fact very revealing) Greek, esp. Athenian, citizenship policy, the author tries to explain why it never came to a fully integrated Athenian 'superpolis' (in the way Cleisthenes, at the end of the 6th century, had transformed Attica into a performant and centralised state) and why the Athenians, contrary to their initial situation and the more liberal and forthcoming policy of Rome, rather than to
fully incorporate the different member poleis into the new political system, preferred to dominate and exploit them, thus gradually changing the alliance into an archê. But «das Prinzip der Herrschaft durch Ausbeutung vermochte Söldner, aber nicht Loyalität zu kaufen» (p. 115). There is an instructive section on presumed debates, from the late 5th century on, concerning integrative state models as opposed to Athens’ arrogant attitude towards her allies (p. 116–119; Thales’ and Bias’ successive proposals concerning an Ionian ‘superpolis’, as recounted by Herodotus, being probably anachronistic) and another involving an (ultimately insoluble) terminological discussion with Ian Morris about the real meaning of the said archê (p. 120–125), rightly arguing for a certain flexibility yet preferring the use of ancient terminology after all. We noticed interesting reflections on the logistic and financial requirements for the upkeep of a maritime empire (p. 109–110), the collective egoism proper to democracy (p. 113), and the Persian Empire as possible source of inspiration for Athens’ authoritarian exercise of power (p. 123).

Also connected with the Athenian maritime empire is MT’s detailed study on ‘visible’ Athenian impact on Delos’ ‘urban landscape’ (12), clearly distinguishing two periods of Athenian dominance: the first, showing a highly symbolic, religious, political (and military) character, from 478 to 314 (with a prelude going back to the time of Peisistratus); the second, rather ‘ambiguous’ and gradually of a more commercial nature, from 167/166 to 88 or 69 (or even «well into the Imperial period»), during which Athens depended on Rome and the latter regularly intervened in Delian affairs (p. 241). Partly capitalising on fundamental works by Pierre Roussel and Véronique Chankowski as well as on an amount of «necessarily fragmentary modern research» (p. 234), the article is mainly based on topographical and archaeological evidence, focusing on Athenian building policy related to the sanctuary of Apollo with its different temples, as well as to the civil edifices in the neighbourhood. Specific attention is paid to the trade port quarter (hard to envision due to changes in sea level and coast line, as well as to a current lack of naval archaeological research) and to the distribution of the tavernae over the city and the location of the warehouses (esp. in the second period), opening interesting (somewhat speculative) perspectives on different types of commerce practiced in that area, a commerce perhaps coordinated by Athens. Leaving many questions open, the conclusion (p. 250–251) is an example of brevity and prudent accuracy.

Until the establishment of an imperial monarchy in Rome, piracy was a widespread pestilence, seriously hampering overseas communications. Certain states (and even individual generals like Pompey; cf. [7], p. 158–159) derived their legitimacy, if not their identity, often also their hegemonic claims, from their successful elimination of piracy. Preventing chaos, they were seen as the representatives of law and order: thus classical Athens, which, acting as a responsible peacekeeping power at sea, not only protecting ships of her own, pursued hegemonic ambitions ([6], esp. p. 142–146); Hellenistic Rhodes, the rich and stable island state about whose efforts in keeping open the sea routes DK ([13], esp. p. 263–269) offers a well-balanced discussion; and Republican Rome. Groundbreaking, rather theoretical reflections by CW (3) expose the correlation between the gradual elimination of piracy and the emergence of organised states and empires in
Greece and Rome (a well-known example is the war against the ‘pirate queen’ Teuta at the beginning of Rome’s eastward expansion: p. 85). But established states were often involved in what one might call regular piracy on a larger scale, constituting as it were a kind of mirror image of their ‘wild’ counterparts. So the border between illegitimate and state-controlled (or tolerated) piracy (and between pirate and regular soldier) was thin and often a matter of perspective, reminding us of more recent times, when piracy was practiced under the aegis of the British or Ottoman empires. Anyway, that was the case in the first centuries of the Roman Republic (no longer seen as a fundamentally land-based power by CW), especially in its confrontation with Carthage.

Two, even three, more specific contributions concern the Roman Republic’s relation to the sea. The former (7) is about the evolution of global maritime strategy, taking account of all possible aspects: ports, naval bases, colonies, coast lines, food supply, fleets, ship types, etc. It examines the early years (starting with private maritime wars and looting raids), the Punic wars, the confrontation with the pirates and the intervention of Pompey (cf. already [3]), as well as the final decades of the Republic (with p. 160–161 the ‘maritime empire’ of Sextus Pompeius and Octavian’s reaction, a one-time transfer of the war scene to the sea). RS highlights Rome’s sustained maritime efforts and remarkable adaptability («Lernbereitschaft»: p. 162) from the second half of the 4th century on, explaining why this «Spätstarter» (p. 151) nonetheless was the first power to dominate the Mediterranean on land as well as (!) at sea (p. 182). The attentive reader will note that other authors, like those of (2) and (4), have more tempered ideas about the Ancients’ capability of really ruling the waves. According to RS, the reason why the Romans joined the maritime competition relatively late, was not their being a typical people of farmers with a legendary aversion to sea matters, but has to be sought «in strukturellen und macht politisch-militärischen Konstellationen» (p. 152), let us simply say: in more contingent historical circumstances.

Of course, such general statements can be neither proved nor disproved. Anyway, in this reviewer’s opinion the fundamentally gentilician (and patrician) character of early Roman society (and army structure), of course closely linked to its agrarian nature, may (also) have caused its initial landbound disposition.

The second article (8) is a real eye opener, focusing on the Punic Wars. At times perhaps slightly overinterpreting the sources, it primarily aims at elucidating the continuous interaction between foreign and internal affairs, showing the impact of the war with Carthage not only on Roman maritime policy and fleet building, but also on the often strained relations between Rome and its Italic hinterland as well as between the different social classes and political groups within the city. The result is a less ‘heroic’ and straightforward picture of Roman history. Many questions are dealt with and unexpected links revealed. BL stresses the permanent (often extremely) lucrative aspects of (naval) warfare: private expeditions systematically involving piracy and looting, misappropriation of booty by ruling (senatorial and other) classes, each time dramatically enhancing social inequalities. Different ways of recruiting or pressing ships’ crews are described with their implications for the Italic allies. It is explained why and how Rome’s early squadrons (since 242 comprising real warships) were alternately private, state-owned or ‘mixed’ and why in 247, still during the First Punic War (264-241), the
Roman fleet was temporarily abolished (contradicting, in a certain way, the Romans' more positive sea-minded attitude as suggested by RS in [7]); why, unlike in Athens, the recruiting of a multitude of – generally lower-class – crews had no repercussions on their political weight, as if their quantité remained négligeable; how the conflicts over booty between foreign crews and Roman citizens led to the creation in 242 of the office of praetor peregrinus; how, after the First Punic War, Roman squadrons were used for further looting and establishing maritime provinces; how a limited group of senatorial families copied the political behaviour of the Barcid family of Carthage: republican at home, monarchic (and exploiting the territory) abroad ('Barcidisation' of the nobility: p. 177); how the well-known Ebro Treaty of 226/225 created a win-win situation for both the Carthaginian and Roman elites; why the lex Claudia of 218 had nothing whatsoever to do with moral objections to senatorial trading activities, but aimed at preventing senators from monopolizing the profits of looting for themselves.

A special mention is due to VF's (14) well-structured article on P. Cornelius Scipio's 204 crossing from Lilybaeum to Africa, marking «a dramatic reversal in the dynamics [the buzz-word is also used p. 286 and twice p. 289] of the events» (p. 279) as reported in detail by Livy in Book XXIX (24.10–27.15). Lying at the intersection of history, historiography and narratology, it is an example of close-reading, giving a clear insight into the particular narrative technique of an author who was able to create in the reader a variety of impressions. By contrasting the story with his short description of Hannibal's crossing from Bruttium to Africa in 203 (XXX 20.5–8 and 25.11–12), VF also shows how Livy opposes the two main characters of the Second Punic War. The sea, an essential element in the narrative setting, is primarily seen as «a communication route connecting different lands» (p. 289).

One of the pièces de résistance in the volume is RM's article on the sea as perceived by ancient geographers (2). Against all appearances (for ancient authors seemed genuinely fascinated by the sea) and contrary to received opinion, as obviously represented by most contributors, among them CW (3) (cf. p. 87–88 with n. 38), KAR (5), JW (6), RS (7), VF (14), and the authors of the Introduction, for whom the sea was a «Geschichtsraum» sui iuris (p. 14), RM provokingly challenges the idea of the Mediterranean as a unifying factor. In Antiquity (and to a certain extent until WW I), he contends, the high sea (also applying to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean) was considered a mare ignotum full of perils, avoided as much as possible by sailors (interesting map p. 63: 'Vermutlich gemiedene Seeräume'). Periplus were essentially literary products with geographical, not commercial or military, aims, focused on coast lines, not on the sea, which was not regarded as a separate entity.

Gaps in the extensive bibliography (p. 305–332) are surely 'Die Staatsverträge des Altertums’ II (H. Bengtson–R. Werner) and III (H.H. Schmitt), München 1975–1969, especially concerning Rome’s relations with Carthage: relevant for (3) (e.g. p. 84 n. 23) and (8) (p. 177–178: excellent, less conventional, analysis of the Ebro Treaty [= StV III no. 503] of 226/225). Only two confusing misprints merit a warning: p. 113 n. 49: read ‘451/450’ instead of ‘551/550’; in the subtitle p. 208, read ‘168–67 v.Chr.’ instead of ‘168–167 v.Chr.’ In some cases one would have expected more clarification, e.g.
p. 166: what exactly has the installation of the short-lived corvus (‘boarding bridge’, on which see also L. Casson, ‘Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World’, Baltimore, MD – London 1995, p. 121 and Fig. 111) to do with the presence on board of forcibly recruited crews? Polybius I 22–23 does not give an answer to that question.

Linden – Lubbeek

Hans Hauben


Hendrik Mouritsen: Politics in the Roman Republic. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2017. XII, 202 S. (Key Themes in Ancient History.).

K.-J. Hölkeskamp and H. Mouritsen have both for some years been among the most thought-provoking current writers about Roman Republican politics, and the simultaneous publication of their new books provides an opportunity to compare the viability of their views. Viability will mean here the explanatory power of a given theory, or set of theories, with regard to the Republic’s durability, material success, and eventual demise.

H.’s new volume, the successor of his ‘Senatus Populusque Romanus. Die politische Kultur der Republik: Dimensionen und Deutungen’ (Stuttgart, 2004) and ‘Reconstructing the Roman Republic’ (Princeton, 2010), among other books, comprises nine articles selected from a considerably larger number published between 2005 and 2016 (all these edited and brought up to date), plus one more that was still in the press. After long essays about Mommsen and F. Münzer, H. concentrates on searching for the best ways of conceptualizing Republican politics, with the concept ‘political culture’ always to the fore, as in his previous works; the ideas of consensus and competition are also given plenty of space, as are some concepts I prefer to leave in German, ‘Stadtstaatlichkeit’ and ‘Intermedialität’, in the frank hope of discouraging the use of their English equivalents. (‘Performativität’ has probably come to stay, and I grudgingly admit that ‘city-stateness’ might be a useful term).

Chapter 3 is H.’s primary exposition of his doctrine about political culture. Chapter 4, ‘Prominenzrollen’ und ‘Karrierfelder’ – oder: neue Begriffe braucht das Fach’, tells us what, in H.’s view, a Roman historian of nowadays can still learn from Luhmann, Bourdieu and (to go back sharply in time) Georg Simmel. ‘Konsens und Konkurrenz’ is the subject of Chapter 5; in effect this is an earlier version of Chapter 3. Public meetings, contiones, and the rhetoric that was used in contiones, are the subject of Chapter 6. Next, in Chapter 7, come processions of all kinds and their political impact. How politicians used monuments and coin-types is the subject of Chapters 8 and 9, and a final chapter tells us how H. sees the Republic’s terminal crisis.

We begin with Mommsen and Münzer, who appear to be the ghosts that H. most wishes to exorcize – which in itself is a little strange if you consider how much and how often these scholars have already been critiqued. Their ideas about the nature of Roman politics (as set out, in Mommsen’s case, in the ‘Staatsrecht’, not in his ‘Römische Geschichte’) are reviewed here at some length.