

The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815

By N. A. M. Rodger

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
Starred Review. The adjective "magisterial" is justified for this colossal second volume of a complete history of British sea power, which began with *The Safeguard of the Sea* (1998); the author of the classic 18th-century British naval history, *The Wooden World*, has surpassed himself here. The book opens with the establishment of the Commonwealth in 1649; for its duration there were two British navies, the Commonwealth Navy (which laid the foundations for a professional officer corps and fought the First Dutch War of 1652–1654) and a semipiratical Royalist Navy-in-Exile. After the Restoration, we quickly find the diarist Samuel Pepys exercising less literary but more permanent influence as secretary (or chief administrative officer) of the admiralty. The book offers colossal amounts of information (organized sometimes thematically, sometimes chronologically) right through to its endpoint of 1815, accompanied by a formidable set of notes and bibliography, as well as 24 pages of illustrations. The author not only avoids a hagiography of famous admirals but displays psychological insight in his portraits of, for example, the trio of Lord St. Vincent, his protégé Nelson and Nelson's indispensable second, Collingwood. Rodger also demonstrates a firm grasp of the relationship of technical subjects (the amount of tar caulking a ship needed) to British strategy (keeping the Baltic sources of tar accessible). Readers without an intense interest in the subject may be daunted; readers without some background knowledge in British social history may be somewhat at sea in the author's discussion of the officer corps and the recruitment of sailors (usually through the press-gang). Serious students of naval history, however, will find this absolutely indispensable; this is *the* place to find out whence the navy of Jack Aubrey and Horatio Hornblower came.
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Review
Rodger illuminates the world of Nelson and Hardy and its portrayal by C. F. Forrester in the Hornblower novels and Patrick O Brian in the Aubrey and Maturin cycle . . . to understand the Royal Navy at its peak, Rodger s account is indispensable

About the Author
N.A.M. Rodger is Professor of Naval History at Exeter University and Anderson Senior Research Fellow, National Maritime Museum. He is the author of The Wooden World and The Admiralty as well as the highly acclaimed first volume of his naval history of Britain, The Safeguard of the Sea (available in Penguin).

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