



you get little Celtic discussion. Mostly, it is only how the Mediterranean cultures responded to a Celtic incursion. The same is true of any discussion of equipment development. The author gives basic descriptions of equipment and that is all. No discussion follows as to why or how developments occurred.

The lack of citations and the remarkably limited use of secondary sources further limit the usefulness of this book for most readers interested in researching the topics. The numerous shortcomings of the book are not a credit to the publisher either. Given these issues this particular work does not have anything to recommend it.

**Grainger, John D. *Sextus Julius Frontinus and the Roman Empire*. Yorkshire, UK: Pen & Sword Military, 2023. ISBN: 9781399051224. XIV + 250 pp.**

Reviewed by Magnus Frisch, [post@magnus-frisch.de](mailto:post@magnus-frisch.de)

Regarding his political and military career, we know much about Sextus Iulius Frontinus, the author of *Strategemata* and several other works, including the unpreserved *de re militari*, the *de aquaeductu* and the first Roman writings on the art of surveying. Despite the lack of information about his private life, we know he was *praetor urbanus* in AD 70 but did not hold this office until the end of the year (Tac. *Hist.* 4, 39), being recalled prematurely and entrusted with a new task: the subjugation of the Gallic tribe of the *Lingones* (Frontin. *Str.* 4.3.14). In 73, he held his first consulship and afterwards served as governor of Britain for four years. In 76, he subdued the Silurians in what is now Wales in a lengthy campaign (Tac. *Agr.* 17.2).

As epigraphic evidence suggests, Frontinus was probably *legatus Augusti pro praetore* and governor in the later province of Germania Inferior under Emperor Domitian in the years 81-84 (W. Eck / A. Pangerl, "Sex. Iulius Frontinus als Legat des niedergermanischen Heeres. Zu neuen Militärdiplomen in den germanischen Provinzen", *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 143 (2003), pp. 205-219."). In this function he probably also took part in Domitian's campaign against the Chatti in 83, as indicated by some of the stratagems he cites. Epigraphic and numismatic evidence also indicates that Frontinus was governor of the province of *Asia* in 86 (A.R. Birley,

*The Fasti of Roman Britain*, Oxford 1981, p. 71).

In 97, Frontinus became *curator aquarum* (the head of the state water supply system) – an appointment he would hold for life. In 98 and 100, he held the consulship for the second and third time. According to Pliny the Younger, Frontinus also held the high office of *augur* and as such was one of the emperor's advisors (Plin. *Ep.* 4.8.3). The year of death is assumed to be AD 103.

There are also speculations about his origins from the province of *Gallia Narbonensis* and about his relationship to other bearers of the name Julius Frontinus and to a possible daughter (cf. W. McDermott, "Stemmata quid faciunt? The descendants of Frontinus", *Ancient Society* 7 (1976), p. 254 f. and R. Syme, "P. Calvisius Ruso. One Person or Two?", *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 56 (1984), pp. 190f).

This is not a small amount of information, but not nearly enough to fill an entire book on Frontinus and the Roman Empire. And yet this is what Grainger promises in the title of his book. In the introduction he admits: "A good deal of this account therefore has to be, shall we say, less than well sourced; it is, that is, in parts conjectural and in others, speculative. Nevertheless, I believe it is possible to tease out from the inadequate sources enough to attempt his biography. Or so it seems to me. (p. xiii)". Therefore, he combines what we know about Frontinus from the sources with facts about the respective circumstances at his places of activity at the time of his work there, as well as with the political and military conditions.

Grainger provides some maps to illustrate his overview of Frontinus' life (p. vii-xi): one map of the Roman empire with the places of his life and work (both confirmed and assumed) and maps of Roman Wales, the north of Britain, and the German frontier.

In the first chapter "Early Life: An Exercise in Speculation" (pp. 1-19) Grainger speculates on the political reasons for Frontinus' short praetorship in AD 70. He also makes assumptions about his life up to that point, based on the references to his work on the art of surveying in the *Corpus Agrimensorum* which may possibly refer to personal experience in this field in Spain and Africa. He goes even further and attempts to



reconstruct Frontin's earlier military career before a possible activity as a surveyor based on some stratagems regarding Domitius Corbulo's Parthian War in the 50s and 60s. On the basis of these speculations, Grainger gives a "likely outline" (p. 9) of Frontinus' career before AD 70 and his relationships with the respective political rulers. Thereby he also discusses potential alternatives. Lots of speculations on the basis of assumptions and "indirect evidence" (p. 9) are quite possible and coherent, but no more than that. To be fair, he indicates this already in the introduction to his book as well as in the headline of the chapter.

The same method is also used throughout the other chapters: Chapter 2 "Frontinus on surveying" (pp. 20-30) links Frontinus' very short surviving text on the art of surveying with possible personal experiences "he could have acquired [...] as army officer" (p. 22).

Chapter 3 "Rise to consul" (pp. 31-52) outlines a possible career path on Frontinus' way to his first consulate, beginning with speculations about his role during the civil war of 69 AD, through the subjugation of the Lingones 70 AD and suspected connections to the imperial family up to the extensive conjectures why Vespasian may have appointed Frontinus as a consul.

In chapter 4 "Governor of Britannia, I: The West" (pp. 53-78) and chapter 5 "Governor of Britannia, II: The North" (pp. 79-99) Grainger places Frontinus' commitment as governor and his successful campaign against the Silures in the wider context of the conquest of the province thirty years earlier, the achievements of his predecessors, the military presence and infrastructure, and the ongoing battles against Britannic tribes. He also explains Agricola's later successes in northern Britain as a continuation of Frontinus' previous activities.

Chapter 6 "Frontinus on War" (pp. 100-112) presents Frontinus' military treatises *de re militari* and *strategemata* as a result of his "accumulated considerable experience of warfare" (p. 10) – confirmed by sources as well as assumptions: *probable military tribune in the East under the inspiring command of Domitius Corbulo, a fellow Narbonensian; command of military surveyors in Africa and Spain; possible officer in Galba's legion in the Civil War; praetorian commander of a legion in Gaul;*

and proconsular governor of Britannia with four legions and over sixty auxiliary regiments under his command, and a considerable conquering achievement to his credit (p. 100; assumed experiences emphasized in italics by the reviewer).

Chapter 7 "*Comes* in Germania" (pp. 113-129) provides an overview of the political situation in Rome after Vespasian's death in 79 AD and puts our scarce knowledge of Frontinus' activity as *comes* in Germania in the context of Roman-Germanic relations and Domitian's campaign against the Chatti 83 AD.

Chapter 8 "Asia" (pp. 130-142) explains the significance of Frontinus' governorship in Asia as a special honor and describes the tasks associated with it as well as the conditions there in detail.

In the chapters 9 "Nerva" (pp. 143-159), 10 "The New Regime at Work" (pp. 160-172), and 11 "Traianus Imperator" (pp. 173-182) the author speculates about Frontinus' probable family relationships and his work and life as well as his role in the political conditions of the Roman Empire during the years for which we do not have certain information.

Chapter 12 "Water, and Another Book" (pp. 183-190) deals with Frontinus' appointment as *curator aquarum* in 97 AD and his writing *de aquaeductu Romae*.

Chapter 13 "The Narbonensian and Other Connections" (pp. 191-203) about Frontinus' assumed origin from a Gallic family in Gallia Narbonensis and the supposed political network of other personalities of the Roman political elite from this region is purely speculative.

In chapter 14 "The Man" (pp. 204-215) Grainger tries to reconstruct Frontinus' "birthdate, parentage, and birthplace" (p. 204), his family background and descendants and summarizes his work as a writer.

The last chapter 15 "Frontinus and the Roman Empire" (pp. 216-225) examines Frontinus' relationship with the emperors and makes assumptions about his impact and significance through his military, political and literary activities.

# RES MILITARES

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Notes (pp. 226-238), pictures, schematic illustrations, a bibliography (pp. 239-242), and an index (pp. 243-250) complete Grainger's book.

Due to its concept and methodology, this book is more fact-based fiction than biography. The reader gains an insight into how Frontinus' life and career might have unfolded, taking into account our knowledge of the Roman Empire in his time and the information about him that is confirmed by our sources. The author's assumptions are always plausibly substantiated. However, when reading the book, one learns far more about the Roman Empire, its provinces, its rulers and the political and military conditions in the 1st century AD than about Frontinus. In this respect, this book is very exciting and informative, and it is also pleasant to read.

**Pitassi, Michael Paul. *Hellenistic Naval Warfare and Warships 336-30 BC: War at Sea from Alexander to Actium*. Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Military, 2023. Pp. 320. £22.50, Hardback. ISBN 9781399097604.**

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Patassi, a retired lawyer, has a lifelong interest in naval warfare and ancient history, especially Greek and Roman, and has written three related volumes: *Roman Warships* (2019) Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2019); *The Roman Navy: Ships, Men & Warfare, 350 BC-AD 475* (Barnsley: Seaforth Publishing, 2012); and *The Navies of Rome* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010). He also builds ship models. His new book is designed to parallel the 2012 volume book on Roman war and warships, and has two primary goals in covering the 336-30 BC period, to provide 1) a historical chronological summary of Hellenistic naval events and engagements, and 2) a detailed explanation of the construction and their rowing schemes. This scholarly 320-page hardcover, contains 21 maps. 104 illustrations (mostly in color), 555 endnotes, a gazetteer with 229 entries, five appendices, and a bibliography of 79 sources. The narrative is divided into six arbitrary parts with 16 total chapters. The appendices, noted below, are mostly about battles and inserted within the six parts, documenting naval battles, ship types, suggested numbers of rowers, an index of "characters" (persons mentioned in the text), and listings of five Hellenistic dynasties with tenures of 57 rulers.

Dates of events are included along page margins. All dates cited in my review of Pitassi's text are BCE (Before the Common Era).

The author commences with his assessments of the events, considering ancient terms and equivalents, sources, spellings/translations, "reconstructions" of ship types, and logical deductions made in the narrative.

Part One (three chapters) focuses on the period before Alexander came into power, covering his life of his father, Phillip II, ship types, the Carthaginian and Persian fleets at this time, naval tactics of that era (notably rams and towers), and invasion of Persia in 337.

Part Two (two chapters, one appendix) recounts Alexander's life, invasions of Persia and Central Asia, the Indus campaigns, his navy (particularly ships armor and artillery), and features the 332 siege of Tyre.

Part Three (three chapters, one appendix), "Struggles to Succeed," appraises the post-Alexandrian division of the empire, 321-301, the Battle of Cyprian Salamis in 306, rowing systems (4 to 10 banks of rowers), and construction of even larger ships.

Part Four (three chapters, one appendix), "Age of the Supergalley," 310-200 BC, chronologically documents the naval arms race, the Battle of Chios in 201, the echelon rowing system, and "ultimate" galleys with up to 30 banks of rowers.

Part Five (two chapters, one appendix), "Power from the West," relates the shifting balance of power, the construction of new ships, and the 190 Battle of Myonnesus.

Part Six (three chapters, one appendix), "Twilight of Hellenistic Navies," focuses on the final days of the Hellenic fleets and ships, the Battle of Actium in 31, and the Mediterranean as a "Roman lake," 100-38 BC.

The Hellenistic period from Alexander the Great to the Battle of Actium was one of significant naval battles and profound technological change, and innovation in naval ship design, particularly in armaments, warship rowing, and "stages of growth." As an example, Patassi provides a