



# Lords of the Sea: The Epic Story of the Athenian Navy and the Birth of Democracy

By John R. Hale

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**Lords of the Sea: The Epic Story of the Athenian Navy and the Birth of Democracy** By John R. Hale

**A stirring history of the world's first dominant navy and the towering empire it built**

The navy created by the people of Athens in ancient Greece was one of the finest fighting forces in the history of the world and the model for all other national navies to come. The Athenian navy built a civilization, empowered the world's first democracy, and led a band of ordinary citizens on a voyage of discovery that altered the course of history. Its defeat of the Persian fleet at Salamis in 480 BCE launched the Athenian Golden Age and preserved Greek freedom and culture for centuries. With *Lords of the Sea*, renowned archaeologist John Hale presents, for the first time, the definitive history of the epic battles, the indomitable ships, and the men—from extraordinary leaders to seductive rogues—who established Athens's supremacy. With a scholar's insight and a storyteller's flair, Hale takes us on an illustrated tour of the heroes and their turbulent careers and far-flung expeditions and brings back to light a forgotten maritime empire and its majestic legacy.

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### Editorial Review

#### From Publishers Weekly

Historian and archeologist Hale brings both skill sets to bear in this account of an Athens whose golden age and democratic institutions depended on its navy. Between 489 and 322 B.C., Athens built, ruled and lost an empire extending from the Aegean to the Black Sea. The sea permeated every sphere of Athenian life, and most well-known Athenians were identified with sea power: Thucydides and Sophocles commanded fleets. The fleets were based on triremes, reflecting a doctrine favoring the craft and cunning of the steersman and rowers over brute force. Those skills were a product of the commitment and cooperation of free men who played an increasing role in Athenian politics at the expense of those better off and higher born. In times of crisis, all free adult males were expected to board the triremes. Athens's rule of the sea came to an end when a cabal of aristocrats betrayed the fleet to the Macedonians. And that was possible only because the mysterious spiritual essence sustaining Athenian effort and sacrifice had been lost as well. (June)

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#### From [Booklist](#)

Hale has enjoyed a career as an archaeologist, including underwater searches for ancient warships. Here he examines the origins, growth, and campaigns of the great Athenian fleet, which helped make Athens the most powerful polis in Greece for most of the fifth century BC. After the defeat of the Persian army at Marathon in 490 BC., the Archon Themistocles urged his fellow citizens to build a large fleet to counter further Persian invasions. Financed by the windfall of silver from the nearby mines at Laurium, the Athenians soon constructed a fleet of over 300 triremes, the most advanced naval vessels in the eastern Mediterranean. Athenian naval supremacy held the Persians at bay and formed the basis for the Delian League, used by Athens to build a maritime empire. Hale follows the campaigns of the fleet through the Peloponnesian War and the supremacy of the Macedonians under Alexander the Great. His efforts to link Athenian naval growth to the growth of democratic institutions will be disputed by many historians. Still, this is a well-written, stirring chronicle. --Jay Freeman

#### Review

"Nobody knows more about the history of oared ships around the world than John Hale, and he combines with it a knowledge of and love for the ancient Athenians that helps explain their achievement. To provide a new angle from which to view and understand the experience of the Athenians of the Classical age is a remarkable feat, but *Lords of the Sea* accomplishes just that. The writing is utterly captivating and makes the reader feel he is back in ancient Athens among the great poets, historians, sculptors, architects, soldiers and sailors, all of whom were connected in important ways to the Athenian navy."

- Donald Kagan, author of *The Peloponnesian War*

"The dazzling moment of Golden Age Athens was built on democracy, silver, reason and power. It was arguably the most creative moment in history, when western architecture, philosophy, drama and politics were all given their fundamental form. Behind it all was the Athenian navy, its life and fortunes described here with exemplary clarity and a vivid engagement with the visceral realities of battle and the sea. John Hale combines fluent readability with up-to-date scholarship and a sense that in these pages you are witnessing not only a driving collective enterprise but the foundation-level struggles of our own world. This is tour de force of historical imagination."

- Adam Nicolson Author of the *New York Times* bestsellers *God's Secretaries: The Making of the King*

### *James Bible and Seize the Fire: Heroism, Duty, and Nelson's Battle of Trafalgar*

"Hale's simple but vigorous sentences prick up your ears from the first page... one hopes to hear more from him."

-*New York Times* (Dwight Garner)

"Compulsively readable...history so brilliantly told that, like the Athenian democracy, it is truly for all people."

-*Louisville Courier-Journal* (David Jones)

"Absorbing reading for those interested in either Greek or naval history...well- documented, with numerous maps, a chronology and glossary."

-*Charleston Post and Courier* (Lisa Isringhausen)

"You'd have to be half asleep to not become hooked by the first few paragraphs of Hale's *Lords of the Sea*."

-*Cleveland Plain Dealer* (Jean Dubail)

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