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Maritime Supremacy & the Opening of the Western Mind: Naval Campaigns That Shaped the Modern World

By Peter Padfield



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Maritime Supremacy & the Opening of the Western Mind: Naval Campaigns That Shaped the Modern World By Peter Padfield

From "the best naval historian of his generation" (John Keegan), a brilliant exploration of the significance of maritime power in shaping the western ideal of political freedom.

In the great wars of modern history maritime powers have always prevailed over land-based empires, whether Habsburg, Napoleonic, Nazi or Soviet. This extraordinary book charts the growth of these powers in various western countries, while also revealing the way in which supremacy at sea freed thought and society itself. As noted historian Peter Padfield demonstrates, those nations attaining mastery at sea have been distinguished by liberty, flexibility and enterprise, a historical lesson of burning relevance today.

Maritime Supremacy details the struggles of the first supreme maritime powers of the modern age, the Dutch and the British, and ends with the emergence of the ultimate successor, the United States of America. Changes in society, politics, trade--including the slave trade--and in naval capability are interwoven with descriptions of the great sea battles by which world power was won. Bringing the characters vividly to life and immersing the reader in the drama of events, Padfield challenges our view of the evolution of today's world.

"A work of stunning originality...this book confirms Padfield as a historian of the highest order."--*The Sunday Times* (London)



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

This book, a kind of sequel to or refinement of Alfred T. Mahan's 19th-century classic *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, begins with a standard observation: In war, naval power tends to trump land power. But Peter Padfield makes an even bolder claim: "Maritime supremacy is the key which unlocks most, if not all, large questions of modern history, certainly the puzzle of how and why we--the Western democracies--are as we are." To put it more frankly: "Our civilization (if we can lay so large a claim), our beliefs, our dominance are products not of superior minds or bravery, cunning, greed, or ruthlessness--common attributes of mankind--still less of the Christian religion, the 'Protestant work ethic,' or blind chance, but of the particular configuration of the seas and land masses that has given the advantage to powers able to use and command the seas." That may sound incredibly deterministic, but also intriguing. The resulting discussion of military and economic might on the seas begins with the Spanish Armada and concludes with the founding of the United States. It's an engaging mix that will appeal to readers who like to tackle the big questions of history, as in David S. Landes's *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* or Thomas Sowell's *Conquests and Cultures*. Best of all, readers need not agree with the striking thesis of *Maritime Supremacy* to profit from its ideas. In the end, more than a few may wind up agreeing with Padfield that "We are the heirs of maritime supremacy." --John J. Miller

Review

Outstanding....offers up naval campaigns and sea battles as vivid as any you will find in Patrick O'Brian. -- John Lehman, former Secretary of the Navy, *The Wall Street Journal*

[Padfield's] comprehension of the context and his natural, understandable absorption in the details are expressed in fine writing. -- Stephen Howarth, *Naval History Magazine*

About the Author

Leading naval and military historian Peter Padfield is the author of many works of naval and military history including, most recently, a history of submarine operations in the Second World War, *War Beneath the Sea*., and *Himmler: Reichsfhrer SS, Hess: Fight for the Fhrer, Armada: A Celebration of the Four Hundredth Anniversary of the Spanish Armada*, and *Guns at Sea: A History of Naval Gunnery*.

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