Introduction

This book is about the theatre of power and identity that unfolded in and between Britain and Germany in the imperial age. It explores what contemporaries described as the 'cult of the navy': the many ways in which the navy and the sea were celebrated in the decades before the First World War. At the heart of this obsession were a host of rituals that put the navy and the nation on the public stage. Of these, fleet reviews and launches of warships were the most prominent. At once royal rituals and national entertainments, these were spectacles of power and pride, with hundreds of thousands regularly turning out to watch. They became a potent public theatre where tradition, power and claims to the sea were demonstrated to both domestic and foreign audiences. What role did this maritime stage play in the rise of the Anglo-German antagonism? What was its significance for nation-building and ideas of empire? And how might it change our under-standing of the relationship between politics and culture, between public ritual and power?

In addressing such questions, this book understands the navy not only as a political and military instrument, but also as a powerful cultural symbol. Unravelling the spectacle created around this symbol opens a window to aspects of the history of Britain, Germany and the age of empire that have to date remained unexplored. This was a public theatre in which the domestic and the foreign intersected, where the modern mass market of media and consumerism collided with politics and international relations, and where identity and conflict were acted out between the nations. By focusing on this dynamic arena, *The Great Naval Game* explores the Anglo-German antagonism from a new perspective. Traditionally, historians have understood the growing rivalry between the two countries in diplomatic, strategic and economic terms. In the grand narratives that explained the 'rise and fall of the great powers' culture seemed a lesser category, a sub-field of the high politics of diplomacy

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and strategy.[1] True, a number of scholars have since explored important cultural aspects of the two countries' relations, such as exchange and transfer, as well as mutual stereotypes and images of 'the other'.[2] Yet, too often this enquiry has been left disconnected from the world of power and politics, as if to confirm the view of culture as a separate phenomenon and a source of subordinate influence, a view that has been prominent amongst political historians. This book has a different premise as its starting point. It aims to discover the cultural in politics and the political in culture. The two were inseparable in the celebration of the navy and the sea: ritual and theatre merged with power and politics. Focusing on this spectacle allows us to see the intensely political implications of public entertainment and forces us to understand international relations no longer as divorced from the cultural context in which they took place.

An examination of this public stage has to overcome, however imperfectly, the artificial boundaries between academic disciplines and specialisms. Indeed, it is the increasing separation into scholarly sub-disciplines that best explains why historians have had surprisingly little to say about the naval theatre. There has been a strong interest in public celebrations and royal rituals, especially so since the concept of 'invented traditions' rose to prominence. Eric Hobsbawm and David Cannadine have been particularly influential in explaining the growing pomp and circumstance of the late nineteenth century as a reaction to the rise of democracy and modern mass society: the less monarchs and governments could rely on traditional forms of legitimacy, the more they invented public rituals to

[1] Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism 1860–1914* (London, 1980); Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict 1500 to 2000* (New York, 1987); Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany and the Coming of the Great War* (London, 1991); Gregor Schöllgen, *Imperialismus und Gleichgewicht. Deutschland, England und die orientalische Frage 1871–1914*, third edition (Munich, 2000); David Stevenson, *Armaments and the Coming of War: Europe, 1904–1914* (Oxford, 1996); Klaus Hildebrand, 'Zwischen Allianz und Antagonismus. Das Problem bilateraler Normalität in den britisch-deutschen Beziehungen des 19. Jahrhunderts (1870–1914)', in *Weltpolitik. Europagedanke. Regionalismus. Festschrift Gollwitzer* (Münster, 1982), pp. 305–31.
[2] Rudolf Muhs, Johannes Paulmann and Wilibald Steinmetz (eds.), *Aneignung und Abwehr. Interkultureller Transfer zwischen Deutschland und Großbritannien im 19. Jahrhundert* (Bodenheim, 1998); Lothar Reinermann, *Der Kaiser in England. Wilhelm II. und sein Bild in der britischen Öffentlichkeit* (Paderborn, 2001); Michael Epkenhans, 'Aspekte des deutschen Englandbildes 1800–1914: Vorbild und Rivale', *Westfälische Forschungen* 44 (1994), pp. 329–42; Günther Blaicher, *Das Deutschlandbild in der englischen Literatur* (Darmstadt, 1992); Bernd-Jürgen Wendt (ed.), *Das britische Deutschlandbild im Wandel des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Bochum, 1984); Peter E. Firchow, *The Death of the German Cousin: Variations on a Literary Stereotype, 1890–1920* (Lewisburg, PA, and London, 1986).

display their continuing relevance and power.[3] In the twenty years since the emergence of this thesis, historians have explored national festivals and commemorations extensively.[4] Curiously, however, neither in Britain nor in Germany has this interest extended to the navy, one of the most powerful icons in this period, combining royal, national and imperial symbolism.

Nor has the intensive debate about national identity directed any attention to the navy as a cultural symbol. In Britain this debate has focused on the role of religion, conflict and state formation for the making and unmaking of 'the nation', with Linda Colley as one of the most influential recent protagonists.[5] The cult of the navy in fact offers a powerful stage for the issues examined in this debate, a stage on which notions of Britishness collided with English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish identities. The Royal Navy became one of the most important metaphors of Britishness in the nineteenth century, just as the German fleet was employed as a floating symbol of unity and national identification on the other side of the North Sea. Both played essential roles for the shaping of 'the nation', for ideas of empire, 'overseas' and difference. In exploring

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[3] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870–1914', and David Cannadine, 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the "Invention of Tradition", c. 1820–1977', both in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 101–64, 263–307; David Cannadine, 'Introduction: Divine Rites of Kings', in David Cannadine and Simon Price (eds.), *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 1–19.

[4] See Michael Maurer, 'Feste und Feiern als historischer Forschungsgegenstand', *Historische Zeitschrift* 253 (1991), pp. 101–30. The most important studies that have appeared since Maurer's survey are: Johannes Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik. Monarchenbegegnungen in Europa zwischen Ancien Régime und Erstem Weltkrieg* (Paderborn, 2000); Jakob Vogel, *Nationen im Gleichschritt. Der Kult der 'Nation in Waffen' in Deutschland und Frankreich, 1871–1914* (Göttingen, 1997); William M. Kuhn, *Democratic Royalism: The Transformation of the British Monarchy, 1861–1914* (London, 1996); Richard Williams, *The Contentious Crown: Public Discussion of the British Monarchy in the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Aldershot, 1997). See also Dieter Düding, Peter Friedemann and Paul Münch (eds.), *Öffentliche Festkultur. Politische Feste in Deutschland von der Aufklärung bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg* (Reinbek, 1988); Manfred Hettling and Paul Nolte (eds.), *Bürgerliche Feste. Symbolische Formen politischen Handelns im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1993); Karin Friedrich (ed.): *Festive Culture in Germany and Europe from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Lewiston, 2000).

[5] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven and London, 1992); Linda Colley, 'Britishness and Otherness: An Argument', *Journal of British Studies* 31 (1992), pp. 309–29. See also Raphael Samuel (ed.), *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, 3 vols. (London, 1989); Raphael Samuel, *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain* (London, 1989); Robert Colls, *The Identity of England* (Oxford, 2002); Robert Colls and P. Dodd (eds.), *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880–1920* (London, 1986); Keith Robbins, *Nineteenth-Century Britain: Integration and Diversity* (Oxford, 1988); Keith Robbins, 'National Identity and History', *History* 75 (1990), pp. 369–87.

4   The Great Naval Game

the naval theatre, this book aims to contribute to our understanding of nationhood and its relationship with that 'remarkable transoceanic construct of substance and sentiment' called the empire.[6]

Naval historians working on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have shown sadly little interest in such issues. They have been interested in technology, administration and strategy, and they continue to be preoccupied with naval operations and sea battles.[7] What is sorely needed is a cultural history of the modern Royal Navy, an approach that inquires into the ways the navy and its past have been narrated and appropriated, an approach that investigates the cultural and political implications of the hero and tradition-worshipping that is so prevalent in accounts of the navy and the sea.[8] In *Losing Nelson* Barry Unsworth deconstructs such naval mythologizing by telling the (fictional) story of Charles Cleasby, a man unable to see himself separately from his hero Horatio Nelson. After years of re-enacting and reliving Nelson's battles and victories, Cleasby undergoes a painful metamorphosis. He begins to question his glorification of naval and national heroism and, in finally shedding his fixation, he comes to a better self-understanding.[9] Perhaps it is time that historians of the Royal Navy take a similar step. An inquiry into the symbolic role of the navy has important clues to offer for our understanding of sea power in the age of empire.[10] Strategy and battle tactics, diplomacy and politics alone do not explain why the Royal Navy mattered in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The 'great game for

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[6] David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (London, 2001), p. 122. The vast literature on 'imperial cultures' has left the celebration of the navy almost entirely unexplored. See in particular John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880–1960* (Manchester, 1984); John M. MacKenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, 1986); John M. MacKenzie (ed.), *Popular Imperialism and the Military 1850–1950* (Manchester, 1992); David Killingray and David Omissi (eds.), *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers c. 1700–1964* (Manchester, 2000).

[7] For a survey that comes to a similar conclusion see Barry M. Gough, 'The Royal Navy and the British Empire', in Robin W. Winks (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 5, *Historiography* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 327–41, here p. 339. The latest important studies of the Royal Navy in this period have been on administrative and technological reform: Jon Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Supremacy: Finance, Technology and British Naval Policy, 1889–1914* (Boston, MA, 1989); Jon Sumida, 'British Naval Administration and Policy in the Age of Fisher', *Journal of Modern History* 54 (1990), pp. 1–26; Nicholas A. Lambert, *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution* (Columbia, 1999).

[8] For a first step in that direction see John M. MacKenzie, 'Nelson Goes Global: The Nelson Myth in Britain and Beyond', in David Cannadine (ed.), *Admiral Lord Nelson: Context and Legacy* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp. 144–65.

[9] Barry Unsworth, *Losing Nelson* (London, 1999).

[10] For the twentieth century this point has been made by Ralph Harrington, '"The Mighty Hood": Navy, Empire, War at Sea and the British National Imagination, 1920–60', *Journal of Contemporary History* 38 (2003), pp. 171–85.

mastery in the North Sea'[11] was as much as a cultural phenomenon as it was a political one.

A cultural history of the German navy is similarly lacking. Here, historians have focused on the intentions behind the building of the fleet and its role in domestic politics. Was this an exercise in manipulating the masses, a palliative for the Wilhelmine electorate? Or was the building of the German navy a natural reaction to the rise of other powers in the age of imperialism and navalism? These questions, which were ultimately about how historians interpreted the relationship between foreign and domestic politics, have been impressively researched and hotly debated.[12] Yet, by focusing on such issues, historians have failed to investigate more closely the symbolic significance of the navy and the sea, described by Admiral von Tirpitz himself as a 'cultural space'.[13]

The Great Naval Game brings together these divergent historiographies. It is as much influenced by cultural, social and political history as it is by naval and maritime history. This is a book about the navy and the sea, about imperialism and Anglo-German rivalry, but also about ritual, identity and the imagination of 'the other'. Its title is intended to reflect this multi-faceted approach. The naval theatre was part of the imperial game, the struggle between great powers over spheres of influence and the domination of the sea. At the same time it was about entertainment, leisure and consumption. This was, as Henry Newbolt put it in his poem 'England', quite literally a 'game for man and boy'.[14] It could be played and enjoyed in numerous ways, ranging from the great fleet reviews themselves to a host of re-enactments in popular culture. The public collision of the intensely political and cultural dimensions of this game was precisely what made the naval theatre so relevant for Anglo-German relations.

The obsession with the fleet that flourished in Britain and Germany generated a vast amount of documents, ranging from central government

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[11] Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900–1990* (Harmondsworth, 1996), p. 56.

[12] Jonathan Steinberg, *Yesterday's Deterrent: Tirpitz and the Birth of the German Battle Fleet* (London, 1965); Volker R. Berghahn, *Der Tirpitz-Plan. Genesis und Verfall einer innenpolitischen Krisenstrategie unter Wilhelm II.* (Düsseldorf, 1971); Paul Kennedy, 'Maritime Strategieprobleme der deutsch-englischen Flottenrivalität', in Herbert Schottelius and Wilhelm Deist (eds.), *Marine und Marinepolitik im kaiserlichen Deutschland 1871–1914* (Düsseldorf, 1972), pp. 178–210; Holger Herwig, *'Luxury' Fleet: The Imperial German Navy 1888–1918* (London, 1980); Michael Epkenhans, *Die wilhelminische Flottenrüstung 1908–1914. Weltmachtstreben, industrieller Fortschritt, soziale Integration* (Munich, 1991); Rolf Hobson, *Imperialism at Sea: Naval Strategic Thought, the Ideology of Sea Power and the Tirpitz Plan, 1875–1914* (Boston, 2002).

[13] Alfred von Tirpitz, *Erinnerungen* (Leipzig, 1919), p. 16.

[14] Henry Newbolt, 'England', in Henry Newbolt, *The Island Race* (London, 1898), p. 78.

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records to the local files of the towns and dockyards where the navy was being celebrated; similarly from the highbrow press interpreting the naval theatre to the many layers of popular culture appropriating it. In order to reveal the often conflicting ways in which contemporaries participated in and made sense of this public spectacle, this book augments official and press sources with private diaries and journals. In addition, secret reports by undercover police and intelligence officers allow us to interpret the views of those who otherwise leave few traces in the archives. Through the help of such sources it becomes possible to contrast the role played by monarchs and ministers with that of the workers who built the ships, the lower ranks who kept them in order and the spectators who went to see them. Furthermore, it seems impossible to understand a spectacle so intrinsically visual without consulting a wide range of pictures, photographs and films. Taken by press correspondents and naval officers, commissioned by governments and film companies, these are essential sources that reflect the visual fascination of this public theatre.[15]

Two approaches are central for the way in which this book makes sense of such sources: the cultural and the comparative. Both require some explanation. Practitioners of cultural history have been remarkably successful in adopting the concerns and methods of other disciplines.[16] In focusing on the symbolic dimension of the navy, this book is clearly influenced by their endeavours. Yet, while taking important clues from scholars concerned with ritual and theatricality, it does not follow their tendency to neglect important political contexts and to view ritual as an end in itself. The kind of cultural history attempted here aspires to be neither naïve nor cynical: while interpreting the cult of the navy as a public theatre, with its own rules and rhetoric, the book is keenly aware

[15] One particular set of visual sources needs to be mentioned here: the Pescott Frost Collection of Portsmouth Dockyard Photographs (PFDP), held at Portsmouth Central Library. Mark Edwin Pescott Frost (1859–1953) was Secretary to the Admiral Superintendent at Portsmouth from 1899, a capacity in which he was responsible for naval ceremonies and celebrations. Between 1901 and the end of the First World War, he took hundreds of photographs of naval events and acquired additional material from local photographers, all collated as the PFDP, which presented an invaluable source for this book.

[16] Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1989); Peter Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1997); Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* (Cambridge, 2004). Particularly influential for this study have been Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre-State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton, 1980); James MacAloon (ed.), *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a New Theory of Cultural Performance* (Philadelphia, 1984); Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York and London, 1988); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Harmondsworth, 1974) and Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York, 1989).

of the politics involved, both domestically and internationally.[17] George
Mosse and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, amongst others, have explained German
national festivals and military spectacles as manoeuvres in the manipula-
tion of the masses, foreshadowing the rise of the Nazis.[18] Historians of
modern Britain have similarly interpreted public rituals as instruments
of propaganda, producing imperialist sentiment and domestic consen-
sus.[19] This book revisits such interpretations. It reassesses the direction
and character of power in the 'age of the masses' and it asserts that, while
certainly not an end in itself, naval and national pomp was more than
simply a function of power.

The second key component in this interpretation is the comparative
perspective. *The Great Naval Game* presents a parallel history of two
countries. It compares their approaches to the navy and the sea and
suggests conclusions about cultural and political differences. This com-
parison proceeds symmetrically; that is, it directs as much interest and
attention to the one as to the other nation.[20] While not presupposing that
the historical development of either Britain or Germany presents a model
by which the other country's history should be judged, the book does
contribute to the debate about 'German peculiarities'. Militarism, civil
society and constitutional development are issues that must be studied
comparatively if historians want to make assertions about whether or not

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[17] The categorisation of approaches to public ritual as either naïve or cynical is taken from
Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven and London, 1992), pp. 11 ff. See
also Cannadine, 'Introduction: Divine Rites of Kings', pp. 1–19.

[18] George L. Mosse, 'Caesarism, Circuses and Monuments', *Journal of Contemporary
History* 6 (1971), pp. 167–82; George L. Mosse, *The Nationalisation of the Masses:
Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through
the Third Reich* (New York, 1975), chs. 4, 5; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das Deutsche
Kaiserreich 1871–1918*, seventh edition (Göttingen, 1994), pp. 96–121, 171–8; Hans-
Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, vol. 3, *Von der 'Deutschen Doppelrevolution'
bis zum Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges 1849–1914* (Munich, 1995), pp. 985–90, 1129–45.

[19] MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*; James A. Mangan (ed.),*Making Imperial Mentalities:
Socialisation and British Imperialism* (Manchester, 1990); Jonathan Schneer, *London 1900:
The Imperial Metropolis* (New Haven and London, 1999), pp. 28–34; Scott Hughes
Myerly, *British Military Spectacle: From the Napoleonic Wars Through the Crimea*
(Cambridge, MA, 1996); Scott Hughes Myerly, '"The Eye Must Entrap the Mind":
Army Spectacle and Paradigm in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Journal of Social History*
26 (1992), pp. 105–31.

[20] Jürgen Kocka, 'Asymmetrical Historical Comparison: The Case of the German
Sonderweg', *History and Theory* 38 (1999), pp. 40–50. See also Heinz-Gerhard Haupt
and Jürgen Kocka, 'Comparative History: Methods, Aims, Problems', in Deborah
Cohen and Maura O'Connor (eds.), *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National
Perspective* (New York and London, 2004), pp. 23–39; Chris Lorenz 'Comparative
Historiography: Problems and Perspectives', *History and Theory* 38 (1999), pp. 25–39;
John Breuilly, 'Introduction: Making Comparisons in History', in John Breuilly, *Labour
and Liberalism in 19th Century Europe: Essays in Comparative History* (Manchester, 1992),
pp. 1–25.

8   The Great Naval Game

Germany took a 'special path' in the modern age.[21] This book combines
such a parallel history of Britain and Germany with a strong focus on the
space between the nations. The rituals created around the navy and the
sea in the two countries cannot be fully understood unless they are seen as
closely interrelated phenomena that reacted to and influenced each other
on many levels. Indeed, the naval theatre turned the sea, and the North
Sea in particular, into a stage between the nations on which the key issues
that defined the two countries were played out. In order to understand
this Anglo-German phenomenon, we need to practise both comparative
and transnational history. There need not be a contradiction between the
two.[22]

By uncovering this Anglo-German stage, *The Great Naval Game* seeks
to contribute to a new history of the sea as a cultural space.[23] Such
an approach is particularly needed for Northern Europe. While the
Mediterranean has been explored extensively since Fernand Braudel's
pioneering work, first published in 1949, similar studies are lacking for
the space between the British Isles and continental Europe.[24] Here, this
book takes a first step. It attempts to convince its readers that a fruitful

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[21] On the debate about Germany's 'path to modernity', see Richard J. Evans, 'Whatever
Became of the *Sonderweg*', in Richard J. Evans, *Rereading German History: From
Unification to Reunification 1800–1996* (London, 1997), pp. 12–22; David Blackbourn
and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in
Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford, 1984).

[22] German and French historians have been particularly prolific in debating the question of
how to go beyond traditional comparative history, at times with the tendency of setting up
a false dichotomy between comparison and transnational or 'transfer' history: Michel
Espagne, 'Sur les limites du comparatisme en histoire culturelle', *Genèses* 17 (1994),
pp. 112–21; Johannes Paulmann, 'Internationaler Vergleich und interkultureller
Transfer. Zwei Forschungsansätze zur europäischen Geschichte des 18. bis 20.
Jahrhunderts', *Historische Zeitschrift* 267 (1998), pp. 649–85; Michel Espagne, 'Au delà
du comparatisme', in Michel Espagne, *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands* (Paris,
1999), pp. 35–49; Matthias Middell (ed.), *Kulturtransfer und Vergleich* (Leipzig, 2000);
Michaël Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, 'Penser l'historie croisée. Entre empirie et
réflexivité', *Annales* 58 (2003), pp. 7–36; Hartmut Kaelble and Jürgen Schriewer (ed.),
Vergleich und Transfer. Komparatistik in den Sozial-, Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften
(Frankfurt and New York, 2003); Jürgen Osterhammel, *Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des
Nationalstaats. Studien zu Beziehungsgeschichte und Zivilisationsvergleich* (Göttingen,
2001); Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel (eds.), *Das Kaiserreich transnational*
(Göttingen, 2004).

[23] On recent initiatives in this field see Kären Wigen, 'Oceans of History', *American
Historical Review* 111 (2006), pp. 717–21; Bernhard Klein and Gesa Mackenthun
(eds.), *Sea Changes: Historicizing the Ocean* (New York, 2004); Daniel Finamore (ed.),
Maritime History as World History (Gainsville, 2004).

[24] Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*,
translated by Sîan Reynolds, 2 vols. (Berkeley, 1995); Peregrine Horden and Nicholas
Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford, 2000); Peregrine
Horden and Nicholas Purcell, 'The Mediterranean and "the New Thalassology"',
American Historical Review 111 (2006), pp. 722–40.

starting point for a history of Britain and Germany, and indeed for
modern Europe in general, may lie with a focus on the sea. Such an
approach would combine the traditional emphasis on the centres of
power, in this case London and Berlin, with a strong interest in the
space where their influence met: how were Britain and Germany 'made'
in the North Sea, how did the two countries project their power and
identity in this maritime theatre?

The book is divided into five chapters, each of which follows a thematic
approach, although they can be read chronologically. The first charts the
rise of the public theatre celebrating the navy and the nation in the nine-
teenth century. It examines the transformation of key rituals and their
emergence as professionally stage-managed and remarkably popular
events before they met a sudden and unceremonious end in 1914. The
chapter provides a close reading of the structure and choreography of
launches of warships and fleet reviews, and investigates their historical
background. It shows how, both in Britain and the *Kaiserreich*, these
events became more frequent, more elaborate, more costly and more
strongly regulated than at any time since the late eighteenth century.

One of the key factors influencing this rise was the unfolding of the
political and cultural mass market towards the end of the nineteenth
century. The second chapter therefore investigates how the naval theatre
changed with the advent of the 'age of the masses' and explains the
remarkable modernity of what was not least a spectacle of media, com-
merce and entertainment. The authorities in Britain and in Germany
acknowledged that naval ceremonies had turned into a popular nation-
wide theatre and they saw the great potential of this stage for promoting
the navy and 'educating the public'. However, while the governments and
monarchs in both countries attempted to exploit this potential, the public
itself became an important actor. Mass culture, popular papers and the
cinema conveyed naval celebrations to millions of spectators, and in turn
shaped the character of these events, often in a way that was beyond the
control of the authorities. The entertainment provided by the naval
theatre was thus never divorced from the fundamental political questions
that characterized the 'age of the masses'.

For critics at the time and for many historians since, the naval theatre
was a modern version of Rome's 'bread and circuses', designed to create
loyalty and social cohesion amongst audiences. The third chapter reas-
sesses this argument. Based on a wide range of first-hand accounts, it
addresses three key questions. First, what was the role of the 'radical
right' which historians have seen as so instrumental in the creation of
naval enthusiasm? How, in particular, does it compare to the influence of
other actors, who do not fall into the much-quoted, yet frustratingly

imprecise, categories of 'above' and 'below'? Second, are claims about
'manipulation' or 'self-mobilization' borne out by the way in which people
made sense of and participated in this public theatre? Third, how far does
the concept of militarism, frequently employed by scholars of the 'mani-
pulation' school, help us to understand the character of the naval theatre?
In bringing these questions together, the chapter suggests a revision in
our understanding of the 'mobilization of the masses' in the decades
before 1914.

The symbolic quality of ships and the sea has intrigued observers as
diverse as Admiral von Tirpitz and Michel Foucault. Chapter 4 follows
their lead and asks why it was that the fleet was invested with so much
meaning in the age of empire. Both in Britain and Germany the navy
served as a prime symbol of national identity at a time when ideas of 'the
nation' were contested both from within and without. While the army and
its representation were rooted in regional traditions, the navy was a
genuinely national institution that brought together key sources of iden-
tification such as monarchy, empire, geography and gender. Its public
celebration aimed to reconcile local, regional and national contexts. The
capability to symbolically merge different national signifiers into one
potent display made this a unique arena for cultural nation-building.

Chapter 5 asks what the naval theatre meant for the Anglo-German
antagonism. In the decades before the First World War, the North Sea
became a stage on which international relations and naval rivalry inter-
sected with popular culture and mass politics. In this inter-national
theatre, the dreadnought fleets of Britain and Germany were floating
platforms for the demonstration of sea power. Yet this was as much
about concepts of nation, race and gender as it was about the command
of the ocean. In the naval theatre, the Anglo-German antagonism was a
dramatic game, in which important cultural issues were bound up with
strategic and diplomatic developments. The significance of this game
became particularly clear after 1909 when the staging and celebrating of
the navy continued despite the fact that the Royal Navy had effectively
won the naval race.

The epilogue, finally, goes beyond the timeframe that is usually
associated with 'the age of empire'.[25] The imperial age did not end
abruptly with the First World War, nor did the rivalry between Britain

[25] For two prominent examples see Heinrich Friedjung, *Das Zeitalter des Imperialismus
1884–1914*, 3 vols (Berlin, 1919–22) and Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire
1875–1914* (London, 1987).