Mark Stoyle, University of Southampton. *The British Civil Wars at Sea, 1638-1653*, by Richard J. Blakemore and Elaine Murphy (The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2018, pp. 225, 6 plates, 3 maps, hb, ISBN 978-1-78327 229-7).

It is a remarkable fact, as the authors note in the introduction to this admirable monograph, that no full-scale general survey of the British Civil Wars at sea has been published since the early 1960s, despite the appearance of many distinguished books, articles and PhD theses which have touched either wholly or partially on specific aspects of that subject over the intervening period. Now, Richard J. Blakemore and Elaine Murphy have filled this historiographical gap with a well-written, well-constructed and formidably well-researched book which will at once become the first port of call for anyone wishing to obtain a clear overview of the complex series of encounters and interactions which together made up the maritime dimension of the mid-seventeenth-century British Wars. The volume is divided into seven main chapters, the first of which provides an especially helpful introduction to warfare at sea during the early modern period, and which enables the reader to appreciate the broader geo-political and technological contexts in which early Stuart British mariners were operating. The second chapter turns to consider the outbreak of open warfare in the seas around these islands as the British crisis deepened. Having briskly surveyed maritime interactions between the English and Scots during the Bishops’ Wars of 1638-40 and between the English and Irish in the wake of the Irish rebellion of 1641, Blakemore and Murphy then go on to explore Parliament’s success in wresting control of the bulk of the navy from Charles I as England itself collapsed into Civil War during the early months of 1642. One of the most valuable aspects of this chapter is the care which it takes to stress that, while many ordinary seafarers may well have felt no particular preference for either side in England’s escalating political crisis, others evidently did sympathise with the king’s domestic critics - and that their attitude was probably crucial in permitting the Earl of Warwick to secure most of the royal fleet for parliament even before the civil war in England had begun. A clutch of contemporary depositions which allege, first, that Thomas Cooke, a boatswain from Chatham, had declared in 1641 ‘that King Charles was a Tyrant in demanding ship-monies, & that in England kings had beene deposed and murdered for lesse matters’, and, second, that Cooke and a corporal aboard the *Garland* had made it their continual practice to ‘censur[e] what is done by his Majestie & the State’, even ‘publickly, before common seamen’ - provide an especially powerful flavour of just how radically ‘oppositionist’ political opinion among pre-war English mariners may sometimes have been (pp. 51-52).

In the third chapter, Blakemore and Murphy provide a general overview of the war at sea between 1642 and 1646, while in the fourth and fifth they supply more detailed accounts of the history of Parliament’s navy during those years, and of the history of the Royalist, Irish Confederate and Scottish naval efforts up to 1653. A sixth chapter considers the many ways in which the men who served aboard Parliament’s ships were affected by the revolution in English affairs which took place between 1647 and 1649, while a seventh demonstrates how the possession of an expanding navy made it possible for the newly-established Republican regime to eventually defeat and subjugate all of its enemies in these islands, while at the same time administering the *coup de grace* to the few scattered naval forces and overseas possessions which remained in Royalist hands after Charles I’s execution. In the final chapter the authors summarise their findings and offer an overall assessment of the importance of naval operations during the British wars, stressing, *inter alia*, the key role played by parliamentary seamen in various sieges and amphibious assaults and arguing that ‘maritime affairs had a major bearing on the outcome of the war[s] … [which] should not be overlooked’ (p. 176). Few historians of the conflict seem likely to contest this point and, with the publication on *The British Civil Wars at Sea*, it is a truth which should become a good deal more readily apparent to a broader audience, too.

Blakemore and Murphy write in an easy, accessible style and their book - securely underpinned as it is by extensive archival research, much of it carried out in collections of manuscripts which will be unfamiliar to scholars of the Civil Wars - contains many fresh and arresting anecdotes. At one point, for example, we meet a Parliamentarian boarding-party breaking open a barrel of fish in the cabin of an intercepted ship during a hunt for incriminating documents, and being rewarded for their pains with the discovery of a concealed Royalist pass ‘stickinge in a herrings mouth’ (p. 81). At another, we encounter the forbidding figure of Captain Richard Swanley - previously most familiar to posterity as the puritanical scourge of Royalist shipping in St George’s Channel - in an entirely new light: this time struggling to refute a series of accusations that he had not only traded with the enemy, but that he had also kept ‘too familiar company with the women on his ship’, with the result, or so his enemies sorrowfully alleged, that ‘songs were frequently sunge upp & downe the Country of …Captain Swanley & … Bellendia Steele’ (p. 96). At the same time, and as one might expect from a book on this particular theme, *The British Wars at Sea* possesses an exhilarating geographical range: conveying its readers safely over the wide oceans from Aberdeen in the North to Cape Verde in the South, and from the Baltic, by way of Elsinore, in the East, to the Caribbean in the West - as the unfolding maritime ramifications of Britain’s mid-seventeenth-century conflict are expertly delineated and traced.