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FACULTY OF HISTORY

DOCTORAL THESIS

-Abstract-

*Peace treaties and naval alliances during the
Punic Wars (264-146 B.C.). Literary and
epigraphic sources*

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Table of contents

I. Introduction	5
II. The beginnings and the organization of the Roman fleet	12
II.1. Trade and piracy in the Mediterranean Sea in the 6 th -8 th centuries B.C.	12
II.2. The first Romano-Punic treaties	22
II.3. <i>Duumviri navales et quaestores classici</i>	34
II.4. <i>Coloniae maritimae</i>	39
II.5. Navy manpower	48
II.6. The crews	144
II.7. The Command structures	153
II.8. Typologies of ships	167
III. Peace treaties and alliances with naval provisions	177
III.1. The Main naval battles	177
III.1.a. Battle of Ecnomus	177
III.1.b. Battle of the Aegates Islands	188
III.1.c. The Illyrian piracy issue	192
III.2. <i>Socii navales</i>	199
III.3. The Treaty of Caius Lutatius Catulus	203
III.4. The Peace of Zama 201 B.C.	210
III.5. The Treaty with king Philip V of Macedon, 197 B.C.	214
III.6. The Peace Treaty of Apamea 188 B.C.	218
IV. Final considerations	224
BIBLIOGRAPHY	228
Annexes	239
Annex 1 – Etruria	240
Annex 2 – Greek colonies in Sicily and in Southern Italy	241
Annex 3 – Roman colonies in The Italian Peninsula	242
Annex 4 –Southern Italy, Sicily and Northern Africa	243
Annex 5 – Sicily	244
Annex 6 – Italy and the Adriatic Basin	245
Annex 7 – Hispania	246
Annex 8 –Aegean Basin and Western Asia	247
Annex 9 – The Coast of Asia Minor	248
Annex 10 – The Battle of Ecnomus	249
Annex 11 – The Boarding- Bridge	250
Annex 12 – Trireme profile	251
Annex 13 – Pentera oar system	252
Annex 14 – The Ram of the ship	253

The invention of the ship was seen as a source of evil which disturbed the sea god. The traces of the oars and the ship keel displeased and facing the waves represented a huge offense to divinity.

Roman epic writers fervently evoked the storms, the terrors and the sea monsters, and the poets went so far as to claim that the navigation disturbed the order established by the gods. The Romans were an agricultural and pastoral people and dying in the sea was unworthy according to the beliefs of the citizens. If there was a period when the navy had an honored place in the Republican military forces and in the heart of the citizens living in the town situated on the river Tiber, this happened during 264-146 B.C. when the navy decisively contributed to the establishment of the Roman Empire.

When developing this thesis we took into account some research-related goals specific to each chapter. Thus, the second chapter approaches the beginnings of the Roman fleet and its organization. The first part of the chapter will describe the relation of forces existing in the Western basin of the Mediterranean Sea during 6th -3rd centuries B.C. and the first administrative measures taken by Rome in reference to the organization of its own fleet. Based on the decisions establishing the first naval functions, the second part will describe the organization and the structure of the Roman navy during 264-146 B.C. Here, there will be addressed a number of issues, namely the vessel typologies that built-up the Republican fleet and who occupied the command structures within the Republican fleet.

The third chapter will analyze the naval battles which led to the conclusion of some peace agreements and provisions of treaties sealed by the Romans during the period elapsed between the First Punic War until the destruction of Carthage. Regarding the battle, we will refer to the navy manpower engaged, the ordnances, the strategy embraced during the evolution of the events and the battle casualties of each confrontation. As for the treaties, we will analyze the circumstances which led to the conclusion of these agreements and their tenor. The first agreement to be analyzed will be the one jelled with *socii navales* (naval allies). The pact of the naval allies includes, in fact, several individual agreements executed between Rome and maritime cities situated in Italy.

The next two subchapters will be reserved to the treaties which ended the first two battles between Rome and Carthage, and the last two researches approach the agreements concluded with two Hellenistic states, one in 197 B.C with Macedon and the other in 188 B.C. with The Seleucid Kingdom.

The Western basin of the Mediterranean has become an attractive target for maritime and commercial nations of the Orient beginning with the 9th – 8th centuries B.C., due to abounding raw materials and fertile soil. Shortly, the Southern Italian Peninsula and in the Eastern Sicily developed various Greek settlements, while the Phoenicians installed in the Western Sicily and Sardinia.

The trade conducted by these two peoples with the Etruscan tribes located in the Western Central Italian Peninsula led to their development. Under the influence of the trading partners, the Etruscans learned the art of navigation and they became the third maritime nation in the Western Mediterranean Basin. These three nations were either at peace or in conflict till the beginning of the 5th century B.C. when the Etruscan power began to decay. The vacuum of power created by the breakdown of the Etruscans was taken over by the Romans, the later initiating a gradual conquest of the Italian Peninsula.

Once the Republic became a form of governance, the importance of the Romans grew, resulting in the conclusion of some agreements sealed with Carthage, the most powerful state in

the West. The first agreement between the two citadels was concluded at the end of the 6th century B.C. The increasing Roman power in the Peninsula worried Carthage, fact attested by the second treaty concluded between the two republics mid 4th century B.C., in which the Carthaginians set restrictions to the Romans.

Although the literary sources mention only one episode that involved the Roman navy, it was certain that the Romans developed their fleet along with the expansion, forcing the Carthaginians to ban the navigation in the agreement concluded in 348 B.C.

The Roman maritime interests were manifest in the period between the establishment of the Republic and the beginning of the first Punic battle. The Roman navy was involved in all kinds of actions that could be carried out by vessels, trade, piracy and war. In addition to the presence of vessels in sailing activities, the Romans were also concerned with their maintenance through administrative measures resulting in the creation of some functions exclusively for the fleet. Unfortunately, because of the truncated literary tradition that came to our hands, it is difficult to advance a complex picture of naval actions in which Rome was involved during this period, but out of the information that we hold we can say that Rome disposed of its own vessels before the onset of the first Punic War.

At the outbreak of the first Punic war, the Romans were experienced in the art of naval warfare, given the fact that an important strategy in the battle was conquering the main ports and beaches.

The Romans challenged the Carthaginians to battle not only in the waters of Sicily, but they carried out actions along the coast of Sardinia, Corsica and Africa. The fact that all the naval clashes deployed over Sicily ended with the victory of the Romans, with one exception, was a symbol of the superiority of the Roman fleet.

The battle for maritime supremacy in the Western basin of the Mediterranean Sea continued between Rome and Carthage during the second conflict started between the two rivals. The Carthaginians were not capable of defending their interests in the western Mediterranean and the strategy adopted by Hannibal fully reflected that the Roman navy controlled the Western waters.

The Carthaginians tried in vain to conquer ports in Sicily and Sardinia and to open a road to Italy through Africa in order to render food and military assistance to Hannibal. Despite a strong fleet, the problems created by Hannibal in Italy and by Hasdrubal in Hispania prevented the Romans for 10 years to get to Africans and to defeat them. The victory of Zama ensured the Roman hegemony over the Western Mediterranean.

The freedom of trade and naval security led the Romans to engage in Oriental business. After two brief encounters with Illyrians, the Romans fought with King Philip V of Macedon who aspired to transform Macedon in a thalassocratic power.

However, the Macedon fleet being reduced, it could not stand to the Roman navy, as the phalanx failed to defeat the legion. Philip could not prevent the installation of the Roman influence in the Aegean basin. Roman involvement in Eastern affairs had serious consequences for this space, changing the balance of powers in the Eastern Mediterranean. Rhodes and Pergamum have benefited from the Roman presence in the East, earning positions that they have not been able to obtain on their own.

After Philip's defeat, another candidate with thalassocratic ambitions stood in the Orient. Immediately after Rome cut off the maritime power aspirations of Macedon, it had to confront

with the ambitious king Antiochus of Syria, for the Eastern Mediterranean domination.

The Seleucids had a well-established plan that would expel the Roman influence from the Eastern Mediterranean basin. Initially, they tried to stop the junction of Roman and allied fleet in Pergamum and Rhodes, and then they resorted to another stratagem, trying to deal with each of the three squadrons that formed the allied navy.

Finally, as did Philip, Antiochus was forced to recognize the Roman supremacy and give up to his plans of hegemony over the Eastern waters. Both the conflict with Philip V and Antiochus III of Syria ended with peace treaties which included naval provisions. The maritime provisions from the agreements highlighted the thalassocratic power status of the Republic situated on the Tiber.

The last two conflicts, the one with Perseus, the last king of Macedon and the 3rd Carthaginian war, after which the Mediterranean passed under the control of Rome, confirmed that the Romans were masters of the sea. During the two wars the Romans had everything under control, especially the sea.

The Roman fleet had different tasks working together with land forces and organizing the supply routes. The Roman fleet carried out independent actions in an appropriate manner of a great maritime power. Rome took part in the naval arming race and had one fierce rival: Carthage, while the Macedonian Kingdom and Syria have proven limited resources.

The Roman authorities, wishing to make Rome the greatest maritime power in the Mediterranean, always ensured the army with a greater number of vessels and of most combative type than could dress the opponent.

The importance that the Roman authorities have granted the fleet and the role it played in the period 264-146 B.C. was highlighted by the fact that it was often commanded by the highest dignitary of the republic or subordinated by an interposer.

The diplomacy had an important role in imposing Rome as sole hegemony over the Mediterranean. The Romans followed the traditional line opened soon after the conquest of the Antium that of annihilating any aspiration to the title of naval power of the defeated opponents by imposing restrictive sailing provisions and limiting to an insignificant figure the number of ships the defeated camp could hold.

Rome's policy to cut off any country with thalassocratic aspirations had negative repercussions. The Roman Republic, being the only country with large fleet, had to ensure freedom of the seas on a large area. Unfortunately, the Roman state was involved in frequent land conflicts thus being impossible to ensure the free maritime circulation in the Mediterranean basin, which led to the development of pirate scourge.