Jon Tetsuro Sumida. *In Defence of Naval Supremacy: Finance, Technology and British Naval Policy, 1889-1914*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, www.nip.org, 2014. (First published 1989.) xx+377 pp., illustrations, tables, appendix, bibliography, index. US $39.95, paper; ISBN 978-1-59114-803-6.

This book is a re-issue (entirely unamended, apart from a new three-page preface) of a volume that first appeared in 1989. When it was first published, the book was greeted as a pioneering attempt to offer a fresh explanation of British naval policy, one that took as its central theme the influence of financial and, more especially, of technological developments on the unfolding of new policy directions. The particular peg on which the author hung his analysis was the British Admiralty's interest in, and ultimate rejection of, a new fire control system invented and developed privately by Arthur Hungerford Pollen. According to the author, the promised capabilities of the Pollen system played a major role in the introduction of new capital ship types, especially the battle cruiser, and on all the policies – tactical, strategic and financial – that flowed from such design and procurement decisions. Similarly, the rejection of this system in favour of an allegedly inferior but cheaper rival, the Dreyer Table, condemned the Royal Navy, or so it is argued, to failure in the key surface fleet action of the First World War, the battle of Jutland.

There is no denying the originality of the thesis, which has in the past exercised enormous influence, despite the narrowness of the core topic that informs the argument –one, ultimately rejected, fire control system. Unfortunately, while some books are destined to remain classics – for example, Arthur Marder's *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, which is still the bedrock of the discipline more than half a century after publication – this book has not aged all that well. When it was first released, the author benefitted from an almost total absence of other scholars working on, or even equipped to comment on, what was undoubtedly a very technical area. Thus, if doubts existed about Sumida's analysis or the broader conclusions he drew from it, few had the inclination or ability to express them. This all changed, however, with the entry into the field of John Brooks, who combined professional expertise in engineering

alongside his skills as a historian. Brooks, who examined many of the same issues as Sumida, but from a wider angle and on a better-balanced evidential base, drew very different conclusions. His forensic analysis, while unfailingly polite and always willing to acknowledge the pioneering role that Sumida had played, could not but fail to hint that a thesis about the Pollen system, written largely to vindicate Sumida's hero Pollen, analyzing events from the point of view of Pollen, drawing heavily upon the Pollen papers and enjoying the support of the Pollen family, might lack objectivity and be drawn, as a result of its partiality, to conclusions that would look suspect when seen from a broader perspective. By contrast, Brooks' more judicious analysis, drawing extensively on records that Sumida had marginalized, and using a wider lens, strongly suggested that, if consideration were given to the Admiralty's agenda, the rejection of the Pollen system was not the travesty that Pollen believed and Sumida endorsed, but an entirely logical one, given that the Dreyer Table better suited the Royal Navy's proclaimed tactical requirements. This conclusion, being totally at variance with Sumida's core position, inevitably shone a critical light on some of Sumida's other judgements, which now appeared out of place and inconsistent with the evidence. In particular, the argument that Fisher's revolutionary advances in warship design had been driven by a belief that the Royal Navy would, courtesy of Pollen, soon have a monopoly of instruments that would enable them alone to practice long range gunnery looked especially suspect, all the more so as no evidence was presented that Fisher knew about the Pollen system at the time he conceived his new warship programme.

Since Brooks opened Sumida's ideas up to scrutiny, several other aspects of this book have been shown to be wanting. In most cases, this is because the arguments advanced run ahead of the documentary evidence presented. The hypothesis that the battle cruiser was designed to counter French and Russian armoured cruisers is a case in point. Mountains of evidence that the Naval Intelligence Department was unimpressed by the capabilities of these foreign vessels and did not believe that the French and Russian programmes would be completed as planned get no mention. What is presented instead is an argument based upon extrapolation. Fisher, as C-in-C of the Mediterranean Fleet before 1902, was worried about these vessels; therefore, he must have been similarly worried by them in 1904-5. The fact that there are no documents presented to sustain this link and that Russia's armoured cruisers had been all but annihilated before a single British battle cruiser had been laid down is not allowed to stand in the way of the hypothesis. As Sumida and others have subsequently asserted on the authority of this book, the agenda behind Fisher's reforms was preparing the Royal Navy for a global cruiser war. The fact that this book actually offers scant proof for the assertion needs to be stressed.

All in all, the reissue of this book is to be welcomed as the financial data in the appendices remains useful. The re-issue will also enable those who wish to do so to review the state of the historiography as it existed in the late 1980s. Given that no effort has been made to incorporate subsequent scholarship in this re-issue, however, anyone who wishes to read an up-to-date analysis of the fire control question is advised to refer to John Brooks' *Dreadnought Gunnery and the Battle of Jutland: The Question of Fire Control* (London: Routledge 2005).

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