

**BOOK REVIEW**  
**ITALIAN BATTLESHIPS**  
**The Conte Cavour and Duilio Classes 1911-1956**  
**Erminio Bagnasco & Augusto de Toro**  
 Seaforth Publishing 2021  
 ISBN 978-1-5267-9987-6 (hb)



This impressive work by two of Italy's leading Naval Historians is a follow on from the authors earlier work on the Littorio Class, Italy's last and largest Battleships which were comparable to Germany's *Bismarck* class. The three ships of the Littorio class were of typical Italian design being fast, elegant but boasted some innovative features particularly in its protective armour system. It is worth noting that the *Roma* has the unfortunate distinction of being the first capital ship sunk by guided missile!

The origins of the Cavour and Duilio classes of battleship lie in the design proposals of the naval engineer Vittorio Cuniberti for an 'ideal battleship' for the Royal Navy published in an article in the 1903 edition of Jane's Fighting Ships. It seems the Italian Navy had considered Cuniberti's proposals beyond its capabilities and allowed him to divulge them through Jane's Fighting Ships! Cuniberti's ideas apparently Influenced the First Sea Lord, Admiral John 'Jackie' Fisher and Britain was soon to lay down and complete the *Dreadnought* launched in 1906. Although other navies were reaching the same conclusions as Cuniberti and Fisher, Britain's lead in bringing the first single calibre battleship into service was due mainly to the speed of construction. As the battleship enjoys a unique status among warship enthusiasts this study of the Cavour and Duilio Classes is certain to become a classic in the field. Especially resonant among the connoisseurs will be the fascinating history of these ships built in WW1 serving WW2.

Originally comprising five ships in two classes, they entered service at the beginning of the Great War. As designed, they were powerful examples of the second generation of dreadnoughts, with a combination of twin and triple turrets producing a unique main armament of thirteen 12-inch guns. The *Leonardo da Vinci* of the Cavour Class was sunk by an internal explosion at Taranto in 1916, and although the hull was raised post war, the plan to rebuild the ship was abandoned deemed not cost effective. However, the remaining four ships (*Conte di Cavour* and *Giulio Cesare* of the Cavour Class and the *Duilio* and *Andrea Doria* of the Duilio Class) were to undergo one of the most radical reconstructions of any battleship class during the 1930s, emerging with an entirely new profile, more powerful machinery and all the characteristics of a modern fast battleship. It was in this form they became an important element in the Italian fleet that opposed the British after 1940.

This book covers all the technical details of the ships, both as built and rebuilt, also providing an extended history of their active service, including battle plans and track charts. Thoroughly illustrated with photographs, ship and armament plans, detailed line drawings and colour illustration of camouflage schemes, the book is a superb example of the genre and a fitting companion to *The Littorio Class*, a resounding conclusion to what was without doubt many years of painstaking detailed research and the embodiment of as complete a thesis on a single class ever published. In conclusion the standard set by the authors in terms of presentation, depth of coverage in technical descriptions and analysis, operational analysis and general narrative overall aspects of Italian warship design has been superlatively maintained if not exceeded in this work on the Conti di Cavour and Duilio Class Battleships. For anyone with an interest in Warship design especially capital ships and Italian naval history this volume comes highly recommended, essential for all those with an interest in naval history.

**Martin Willoughby**