

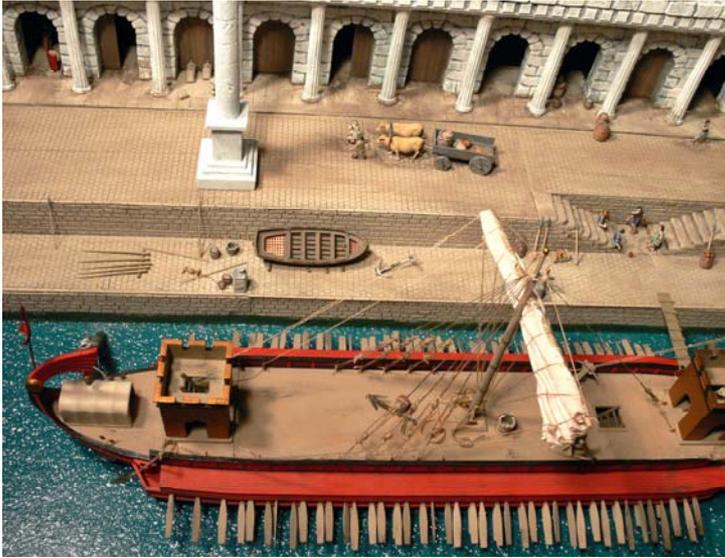
THE MINERVA AT HARBOR

STEPHAN BERRY

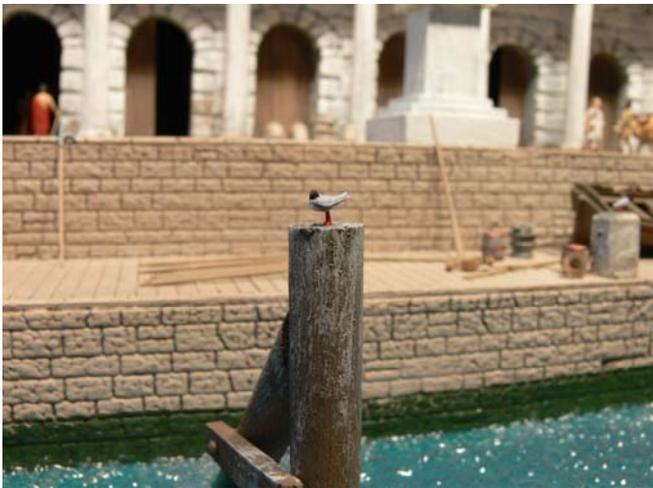


The Roman goddess Minerva was the patron of artists and workmen, but also the protectress of the whole city, and her name is frequently attested for Roman battle ships, especially those of the fleet at Misenum on the west coast of Italy, one of the two large imperial fleets in the Mediterranean (the other one being stationed in Ravenna on the east coast). So Minerva seems an appropriate choice of a name for the Roman man-of-war presented here.

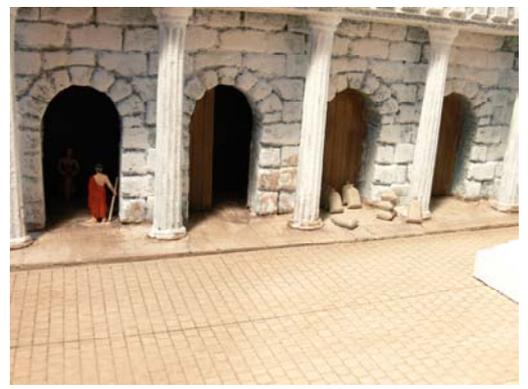




The ship model is based on the “Trireme of the Roman Emperor” from Zvezda (9019), with some minor modifications. Sails and rigging had to be built mainly from scratch, because a harbor diorama required a ship with reefed sails (by the way: the rigging as proposed by Zvezda is oriented towards modern sailing boats and, thus, it is historically not fully accurate anyhow). The life boat (Latin *scafa*), that was usually dragged behind, is Zvezda’s “Medieval Life Boat” (9033), also with minor modifications.



Translated from 1/72 scale into reality, the dimensions of the Minerva would be 35 m length and 5 m beam (7 m with outriggers). There are only 17 full sections with three oars on each side, which is somewhat low: one could expect 20 or 25 full sections for a ship of this size. But the overall dimensions of the ship are perfectly plausible for the era. Battle ships of the Roman Empire were generally smaller than their predecessors from Hellenistic and Republican times. This reflects the absence of big naval battles; the main tasks of the Imperial Roman Navy were police and coast guard operations rather than full-scale wars.



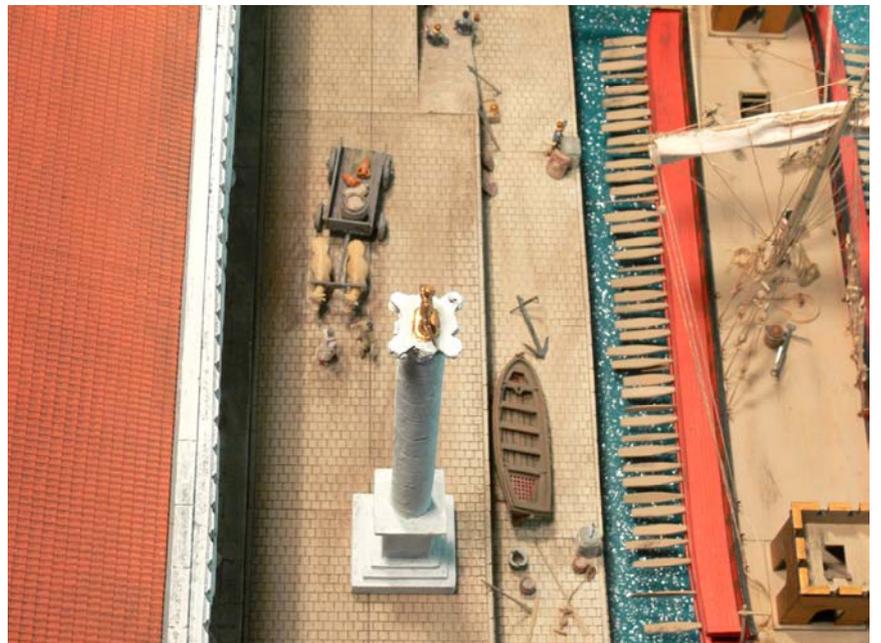
At the same time, the battle ships had become broader: The Zvezda model has a beam : length ratio of about 7, which is a realistic number for such a Roman ship. By comparison, the Athenian *trieris* of the Persian wars had been much more slender, with a beam : length ratio of 10 or more. This more stocky build of Roman ships provided a steady platform for precise aiming; it is a consequence of the increased importance of artillery, while the ramming tactics had become less crucial. I have fitted the Minerva accordingly with scorpios from Hät (8035 Roman Catapults).





The harbor shown in the diorama is a generic Roman harbor, rather than the reconstruction of any particular site. Typical elements are the long storage buildings stretching in the back, and the quayside with two levels, connected by a stairs. The storage building was built using plaster casts from a self-made silicone mold, together with columns from Kai Fuhrmann Figuren (ceramic casts, GRB1). The quayside is made from polystyrene profiles as they are used for model railways.





Monumental honorary columns have been erected in several places, including harbors: The two best-known examples are certainly the columns of Traianus and Marcus Aurelius in the City of Rome, but one such column and the base of a second one are still extant in Brindisi/Italy, where they marked the endpoint of the *Via Appia – Traiana* at the ancient harbor of Brundisium. And, according to a fresco from early imperial times found at Stabiae, there were several of such columns at the ancient harbor of Puteoli (modern Pozzuoli). I built the column here using a ceramic cast obtained from Kai Fuhrmann (Corinthian column GRB4)



The soldiers of the fleet, who guard the ship, are white metal figures from Fine Scale Factory (AR4 Roman Camp Life). There is not much information available on the appearance of navy soldiers, but one might say that typical legionary equipment was unlikely for these men. However, in recent years the views have become less dogmatic and it is clear that at least some auxiliaries had “legionary” items such as the *lorica segmentata* and the curved rectangular

scutum – so why not the navy soldiers, too? The civilians are a mixture from various sources (Fine Scale Factory AR10 & AR32; Nexus Atlantic Reissue ATL014 Greek Life; crew from Kai Fuhrmann ANT01 Roman merchantman), the ox cart is Fine Scale Factory AR33. And, last not least, the seagulls are pre-painted figures from the Preiser HO set 10169 (Tauben, Möven, Krähen, Raubvögel).



And then, when everything is finished, the work is still not done yet: the final step of a diorama project is taking the pictures. By combining model photos with pictures from the real world, one can obtain “fakes” with quite surprising effects.



Links & further reading:

Bockius R. (2007) *Schiffahrt und Schiffbau in der Antike*. Theiss, Stuttgart.

Morrison J.S., Coates J.F. und Rankov N.B. (2000) *The Athenian Trireme*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

OSTIA Harbour City of Ancient Rome: <http://www.ostia-antica.org/>

PORTUS <http://www.arch.soton.ac.uk/Portus/>

Viereck H.D.L. (1996) *Die römische Flotte - Classis Romana*. Nikol Verlagsvertretungen GmbH, Hamburg.

Wrecks & Shipfinds Worldwide: <http://www.abc.se/~pa/uwa/wreckint.htm>

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www.stephan-berry.de/model.html
 Contact: er.selbst@stephan-berry.de