

localities that stimulated the fluctuation in mariners committing acts of piracy in those colonial spaces, often as a reaction to broader factors like displacement, opportunity, or reprisal.

Making Pirates

Local material conditions form a consistent throughline in this volume, but equally important are the more diffuse cultural issues surrounding the stories told about pirates. To their benefit or detriment, maritime predators could not escape their reputations; at times, some were lauded as heroes, but they could also find themselves rhetorically made into pirates, regardless of the legality of their actions. Just as piracy as a crime defies neat legal definitions and as piracy as a practice defies simple description, representations of “the pirate” as both an individual and a collective defies consistent categorisation. When an individual, group, or community is labelled as being piratical, this cannot be detached from the underlying motives of those who apply the label.²⁵ For example, beyond just legally prosecuting pirates, state actors sometimes crafted media campaigns against individuals, such as Henry Every or William Kidd. These stories competed in a saturated market with laudatory tales. The tone and content of narratives spread about them could be important to the raiders themselves; Henry Morgan successfully sued for libel against the publisher of a negative account of the sack of Panama.²⁶

Untold numbers of seafarers have committed diverse acts of maritime predation and yet only certain individuals and groups dominate the popular imagination as pirates. Public campaigns and popular media have both deliberately and inadvertently constructed dominant piratical myths. Such representations blend fact with fiction by mixing historical events with false suppositions or by simplifying real life figures to fit contemporary desires. Such distorted representations of pirates and piracy also appear when reading the first-hand accounts of maritime predation across diverse historical records not intended for public consumption. In these documents, singular piratical acts are represented in strikingly different ways depending

25 See Bahar, *Indians and Empires*; Elliot, “Pirates, Politics and Companies”; Elliot, “The Politics of Capture”; Kwan, “Piracy and Occasional Interstate Power”; Kwan, “Barbarian Ships”; Layton, “Moghul’s Admiral”; Lipman, *Saltwater Frontier*; Risso, “Cross-Cultural Perceptions”; Sicking, “Pirate and the Admiral.”

26 Lincoln, “Henry Every”; Ritchie, *Captain Kidd*; Gibbs, “A Certain False.”



on the author's perspective. Certain ideas then circulate in the contemporary media, depending on cultural desires for particular stories, often salacious, adventurous, heroic, or damning. Regardless of accuracy, these stories are then refashioned and repurposed across different popular forums over subsequent decades and centuries, coming to shape present-day popular images of pirates. Dominant representations of "piracy" and especially particular "pirates" are also determined by local and regional connections to distinctive individuals and groups and the local histories and myths that have emerged therein.²⁷ Across these representations, the ways that those dubbed pirates represent themselves is often lost as individual crewmembers rarely had the chance to shape the dominant narrative and, instead, were reduced to the nameless, heterogenous, and largely unheard followers of leading figures or communities.²⁸ In this volume, Wim de Winter (chapter 5) shows groups of Southern-Netherlandish sailors traversing the globe committing acts of piracy, yet always perceiving and portraying themselves as legitimate traders and privateers. James Rankine (chapter 7) also discusses raiders' self-perception, focusing on a single crew member forced to join a pirate vessel and never committed to the lifestyle.

Often relying on the same limited source material as popular representations of piracy, the historical scholarship has also been guilty of homogenising representations of pirates. This has further added to our simplification of who was a pirate and what a pirate was. This has led most predominantly to representations of pirates as groups existing outside of society, whether as a result of their isolation from landed society and the proactive pursuit of pirates by monolithic state forces or, alternatively, as a choice made by individual pirates to escape societal norms and create alternative social orders on board vessels or in island and coastal outposts.²⁹ While such perspectives have provided important insights into shipboard life and labour conditions in the maritime world more generally, the similarities between distinctive crews, crewmembers, and contexts are often exaggerated using limited and often problematic evidence while differences are either smoothed over cursorily or left largely unexplored. This has changed in the past two decades as historians have delved into the complexities of

27 See Burwick and Powell, *British Pirates*; Eastman, "Blood and Lust"; Jowitt, *Culture of Piracy*; Lincoln, "Henry Every"; Lincoln, *British Pirates*; Macfarlane, "Pirates and Publicity"; Rennie, *Treasure Neverland*.

28 Hanna, "Well Behaved Pirates."

29 Examples include Bromley "Outlaws"; Kinkor, "Black Men"; Rediker, "Hydrachy and Libertalia"; Rediker, "Seaman as Pirate"; Rediker, *Deep Blue Sea*; Rediker, "Under the Banner"; Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*.



piracy as a label as well as the sustained connections of pirates to landed societies.³⁰ In chapter 6, Rebecca James critically analyses one of the most popular primary sources, Charles Johnson's *General History of the Pyrates*; James surveys different versions of the text for the ways they discuss or elide the fellowship of pirate groups in the narrative.

Chapter Summaries

This collection is divided into three thematic sections, each containing chapters covering different chronological and geographical contexts. In the first section of this collection, *Jurisdiction*, the authors discuss the limits of states in exercising jurisdiction over “piracy.” Each case study suggests that colonial regimes often struggled to impose European understandings on and exercise control over the problems that maritime predation posed to state control in the seventeenth-century Caribbean and nineteenth-century insular Southeast Asia.

John Coakley (chapter 1) discusses the limits of metropolitan authority over the newly established English colony of Jamaica from the 1650s to 1670s. He argues that England's jurisdictional claims over its far-flung empire were tenuous and limited. London nominally administered Jamaica but lacked the capacity and resources to support the colonial project there. Instead, Coakley shows that the island's affairs were in fact largely in the hands of governors and local authorities who could often act independently of the metropole. Equipped with vaguely worded commissions, governors of Jamaica harnessed the island's seafaring power, employing it against Spanish targets. Mariners with such commissions became known as “privateers.” While acting on geopolitical motives, the privateers were principally driven by local concerns. Thus, they continued to attack Spanish shipping and territory despite the negative impacts this might have on England's treaty negotiations with Spain. That maritime predation continued in defiance of restrictions from London revealed the limits of English control over Jamaica. As the example of Henry Morgan's expeditions reveal, maritime and military activity sometimes served imperial interests but were run locally and executed by private individuals. Even after the Treaty of Madrid of 1670 rendered maritime reprisals illegal, English authorities in Jamaica still relied on private seafarers to engage in illicit trade with Spanish territories

30 Appleby, *Women and English Piracy*; Hanna, *Pirate Nests*; Wilson, “Caribbean to Craignish”; Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*.



in violation of the treaty. Transgressions against metropolitan decrees and international treaties during the first two decades of the English presence in Jamaica reveal the limits of England's control over the island and the extent to which local authorities held *de facto* jurisdiction over Jamaica's private seafarers and maritime affairs.

Moving beyond the Caribbean and the seventeenth century, Martin Müller (chapter 2) examines the piratical label that British and other colonial regimes applied to the activities of "sea nomads" in Southeast Asia in the first half of the nineteenth century and how this characterisation was used as a means of exerting control and jurisdiction over the literal floating population of the region. European observers considered the transient seaborne peoples of insular Southeast Asia to be less advanced and hence prone to activities that approximated piracy in European understandings. Through various, often problematic, explanations, piracy came to be seen as a characteristic of the sea nomads. While the sea nomads were considered piratical, their activities, which often took place close to shore, in rivers, on land, or otherwise outside of the realm of the high seas, did not necessarily fit the definition of piracy in international law. Suppressing piratical peoples, however, helped justify violence in areas outside of the jurisdiction of international maritime law. In the process, maritime groups were de-politicised and de-legitimised, their sphere of activity reterritorialised as imperially controlled space. Colonial regimes sought to assimilate them into sedentary society or to channel their activity away from predation and towards gathering marine products and thus integrating them into a capitalist economy, activities that would inform policies in the seventeenth-century Caribbean as well as nineteenth-century Southeast Asia.

In the different contexts discussed in this section, state authority dealt with piracy in a variety of ways: relying on local authorities and actors, and seeking to convert seafarers into economic agents in the capitalist system of global trade. In each case, exercising, or at least claiming, jurisdiction over seafarers, often by using the label "pirate" helped states extend control, but in all cases, such measures were only partly successful. One of the principal reasons why imposing legal control over pirates around the world was such a challenge was that the practices of piracy, discussed in the next section, were diverse and localised, not conforming to legal definitions and expectations.

In the second section of the volume, *Practices*, each chapter charts the complex and often deeply localised surges of piracy, providing multiple reasons why individuals turned to piracy, how they operated, and where they concentrated. They demonstrate that piracy regularly transcended the localities in which such practices initially emerged, both over the short- and

long-term, whether by following the same prey to new localities, by adapting practices to new circumstances and waters, or by positioning their practices as lawful and legitimate compared to equivalent practices being committed by competitors.

Simon Egan (chapter 3) investigates this process in the late medieval Irish Sea, demonstrating that episodes of piracy (loosely defined) cannot be disentangled from the geopolitical and commercial competition surrounding Ireland and the resources of the Irish Sea. For example, increased herring stocks off Ireland's western coast, prompted by lowered ocean temperatures during the Little Ice Age, led to greater fishing and commercial traffic in Irish waters. Increased fishing opportunities and the resulting commercialisation then enabled and encouraged Irish lords to grow their own fleets to protect their control of these resources while also undercutting the economic base of their Irish and non-Irish rivals. These localised projections of power also paired with intermittent archipelagic and European warfare, in which maritime predation was intrinsically connected to the conflicts between the Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Manx, and English as well as their European rivals, particularly the Norse, French, and Spanish. Multiple groups committed various acts of piracy for varying complex reasons throughout the late medieval period, and such motivations cannot be easily disentangled from the backdrop of warfare, colonisation, and commercialisation over the long term.

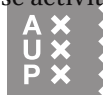
Focusing on a shorter fifteen-year period, Steven J. Pitt (chapter 4) examines the role of Boston and the logwood trade in the rise and decline of piracy in the early eighteenth century. Pitt demonstrates the centrality of competition and conflict over the logwood trade in the surge in piracy that occurred in the western Atlantic following the Peace of Utrecht in 1713. This surge is traditionally considered to have resulted from the significant unemployment of mariners following the end of the War of the Spanish Succession, but Pitt offers a more nuanced evaluation of the process through which mariners were driven to piracy instead of other alternatives. Increased British participation in the logwood trade, particularly from Boston, centred on Laguna de Terminos following the declaration of peace, provided alternative employment for seafarers as both sailors and logwood cutters. The sheer volume of participation quickly left the market oversaturated and led to a severe drop in prices alongside famine amongst logwood cutters. The logwood cutters then turned to piracy, prompting retaliation by the Spanish who were already frustrated at the presence of traders and cutters in a region that they claimed fell under their possession. A Spanish assault on Laguna de Terminos ended the British trade and displaced the logwood



cutters who turned to piracy once again and provided a significant boost to a population of pirates already gathering at the Bahamas. As Pitt shows, this was not the end of the intrinsic relationship between piracy, logwood, and Boston, as the decline of piracy was also shaped by the re-establishment of a logwood trade centred on the Bay of Honduras, which coincided with renewed employment opportunities for mariners and also to greater policing of these waters by British Royal Navy vessels in the mid-1720s at a time when pirates were operating there in a much reduced capacity.

Wim de Winter (chapter 5), meanwhile, focuses his examination of the practices of piracy on the shipboard perspectives of Southern-Netherlandish Sailors who traversed the North Sea, Indian Ocean, and Pacific Ocean in the eighteenth century. In his examination, De Winter demonstrates that Ostend sailors often engaged in maritime predation but did not consider themselves as pirates or these acts as piracy. Such terms were instead reserved for European and non-European competitors who were portrayed as “heathens,” “moors,” or “outlaws.” In this way those who committed piracy were positioned as “others” whose actions were unlawful and unjustified compared to the actions of Ostenders, who legitimised their own practices as lawful privateering on dubious grounds. Crucially, De Winter discusses that the tactics that Ostenders used were similar to those whom they deemed pirates, especially as Ostenders adapted their practices to regional contexts and geographies. This included operating from bases on islands, small creeks, sand banks, or river deltas and employing a system of passes to justify predation. Likewise, the same local and regional issues that encouraged surges in predation of those groups and communities they deemed pirates, such as famine and market fluctuations, also encouraged Ostenders to turn to piracy as the impact of such issues led to declining opportunities in regional trade. Such similarities in practices did not diminish shipboard perspectives of the legitimacy of their actions compared to other groups who were deemed as illegitimate. Similar to the legal posturing of pirates and the legal ambiguities surrounding piracy, mariners could perceive and portray the same actions concentrated on the same regions using the same tactics as both piratical and not piratical practices.

By focusing on specific case studies covering different seas and groups, the three chapters in this section align with sentiments that geopolitical and market fluctuations shaped piratical practices while emphasising the importance of specific regional and local realities. At the same time, each of these chapters demonstrates the problems of representing predatory practices on the sea as outright piracy. This depended on whose perspectives were emphasised and whose activities were questioned.



It is to these issues that we turn in the third and final section of the book, *Representations*. In spite of the more nuanced representations of piracy that have emerged across the historiography, the representations of pirates as outlaws operating beyond society continues to influence both popular and academic perceptions of piracy. The three chapters in this section each tackle these issues from different perspectives, collectively demonstrating the problems of accepting and advancing the one-dimensional representations of pirates that have been constructed through testimonies, reports, newspapers, literature, plays, film, and historical scholarship.

Focusing on *A General History of the Pyrates* by the pseudonymous Captain Charles Johnson, Rebecca James (chapter 6) provides a closer reading of this infamous text than the countless others who have mined its pages for insights into a pirate world that was often more fantastical than factual. James compares five of the twelve versions of the text produced between 1724 and 1734 to observe the representations of pirates across different editions of the same text. James investigates how descriptions of fellowship amongst pirates alters from edition to edition with varying emphasis on the communality of pirates and individual protagonists. James argues that there is not a stable representation of piracy across the different editions but instead varied portrayals of piracy that were nonetheless simplified and narrativised to meet the needs and expectations of intended audiences. The text takes the complex motivations and feelings of pirates and distils these into erratic depictions of fellowship, community, and treachery that removes most individuals while also elevating certain individuals as archetypes. By focusing on different editions of this famous text, James offers a nuanced and critical reading of a text that has significantly influenced popular representations of piracy over the past three centuries.

Where James focuses on variable representations within different versions of the same text, James Rankine (chapter 7) instead investigates the variable experiences of crewmembers on board the same pirate vessel. Through a close examination of the experiences of Henry Glasby, a member of Bartholomew Roberts' crew between 1720 and 1722, Rankine argues against the representations of individual crewmembers as "monolithic extensions of their commanders" that Johnson and others have constructed. Rankine demonstrates that, in order to survive, Glasby had to assume different roles on board the pirate vessel on which he had been forcibly recruited. After being forced to sign the crew's articles following violent intimidation, Glasby worked as a pirate while actively resisting his reduction to compliant crewmember through attempts to escape and, later as ship's master, by exerting his influence over collective decisions. By focusing on Glasby's



experience and the interpersonal networks that he navigated, Rankine convincingly demonstrates that the crew held highly variable attitudes and levels of involvement in piracy, in which the vast majority of the crew were those who were “neither fully committed to lives as criminals nor completely innocent.” At the same time, there were a core of hardened veterans committed to piracy who had to carefully manage the internal tensions of a larger crew through violence, intimidation, and surveillance but also by granting privileges, security, and influence. Rankine argues that the representations of piracy that are provided through the rare accounts of rank-and-file crewmembers provides a fuller understanding of the historical realities of piracy than the myths and legends of figures who have dominated the narrative ever since they emerged in print.

Rather than concentrating on a specific text or crew, Anna Diamantouli (chapter 8) instead examines the representation of entire states as “piratical” to reveal how such descriptions were employed in politically and culturally charged attacks that have endured over the long term. Focusing on the “Barbary crisis” (1784–1797), Diamantouli charts the process by which diplomatic correspondence and newspaper articles in the United States began depicting North African corsairing sponsored from Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, and Morocco as piracy being conducted on behalf of piratical states. This occurred within the context of the larger anxieties felt within the newly established United States, where diplomatic decision-makers struggled to communicate and negotiate effectively with the North African Ottoman states following the loss of protection via British treaties. The inability of the United States to effectively repel corsairing led to attempts to delegitimise the North African states in print, perpetuating a racially charged binary “between evil and good, Muslim and Christian, African and European.” Having demonstrated the context in which this binary emerged, Diamantouli argues that this is a narrative that continues today, in which a line is drawn between the actions of “Barbary pirates” and modern-day fundamentalist groups, in order to continue the narrative of a conflict between the United States and a monolithic “Islamic World” as imagined in print. The purposeful and persistent reduction of North African corsairing to “Barbary piracy” demonstrates the intent of the US to delegitimise those Muslim states, and reveals a long history of racial and religious othering.

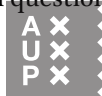
By interrogating representations of piracy across popular print, newspapers, and shipboard views, these chapters collectively emphasise that the designations of “pirate,” “piracy,” and “piratical” speaks more profoundly of the perspectives of those who deploy the terms than it does of the actions



of those accused or characterised as such. The dominant representations that each of the chapters argue against not only indicate the ways that “pirates” have been simplified and romanticised but also demonstrate that the designation of “piracy” has been employed in targeted campaigns to deride, delegitimise, and propagandise. It is only by closely examining the sources and contexts of these representations—such as on board pirate vessels, during diplomatic crises, or in dominant literary texts—that we can begin to understand why particular representations of piracy emerged and recognise the complex power relations that fed into their construction. Uncritical engagement with such representations will only continue to undermine our understanding of pirates and piracy in the past. Perhaps more importantly, this will also continue to impact our perceptions of and approaches towards those who are deemed “pirates” and “piratical” in the present and future.

Conclusion

Early modern states did not solve the multiple and intersecting problems of piracy that they largely created. Modern scholars may never fully untangle them either, but the authors collected here address the problems of piracy by carefully analysing the local contexts behind individual cases of maritime predation. They reveal that piracy was a label as much as anything else. States were most concerned with using this label against certain maritime practices that threatened state expansion or complicated their jurisdictional claims to territory and sea space. Legal manoeuvres to make pirates the “enemies of all”—and the crafting of international law in this period—had to do with states seeking control not just of seafarers but of the labels used to describe them. Military campaigns to suppress piracy furthered state’s expansionist efforts, and media campaigns against certain individuals were assertions of primacy in a losing battle. Despite claims to the contrary, states did not win these many wars against the pirates, but rather they exerted their power occasionally in attempts to co-opt some seafarers and root out others. The motivations and practices of maritime predation proved too diverse to control entirely. As such, states perhaps never achieved a complete monopoly on violence, but they made significant strides towards a monopoly on *representing* violence by strategically utilising the pirate label. In doing so, persistent popular images of pirates emerged alongside dominant and flawed legal constructions of piracy, giving rise to cultural fascination, ongoing legal questions, and an entire field of study.

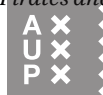


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