

Oceans and Seas in World Culture

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INTRODUCTION

Culture comprises many elements, including beliefs, social norms, traditional customs, the arts, civic institutions, and collective achievements of people or societies, and people both shape culture and are shaped by it. In considering why oceans and seas matter in world culture, it is essential to realize that before mechanical ground transportation and aviation in the 19th and 20th centuries, ships and boats were usually the most efficient means of transportation—when they were not the only ones. Thus the opening of sea routes invariably resulted in cultural transformation, sometimes immediate, other times only in the long term.

The role of oceans and seas in world culture can be thought of in three distinct ways. The world's myriad fisheries are often overlooked in discussions of the seas and oceans in culture and history because for most people, fishing has traditionally been a subsistence activity about which little was written or recorded. Because most fishing grounds are generally located no more than a day or two's sail from home, the cultural impact has seemed negligible. But it is likely that people first set out on the water not to trade, but to hunt for fish, birds, and other animals, as reflected in some of the world's oldest representational art.

Oceans and seas are also vectors of culture, for everything from language and religion, to food and dress, to political, economic, and legal institutions. Before a link more than a century ago, everything that today travels between continents by airplane, telephone, or internet had to be carried by maritime trade. (And “cloud” computing notwithstanding, most intercontinental internet communication is via undersea cables laid by ships.) Some of this we know about from written accounts and records, but we can also trace patterns of maritime exchange and travel through archaeological finds, as well as by tracing the diffusion of language, religion, and other cultural norms, which is why such diverse disciplines as linguistics, paleobotany, and ethnography are so vital to the work of maritime historians.

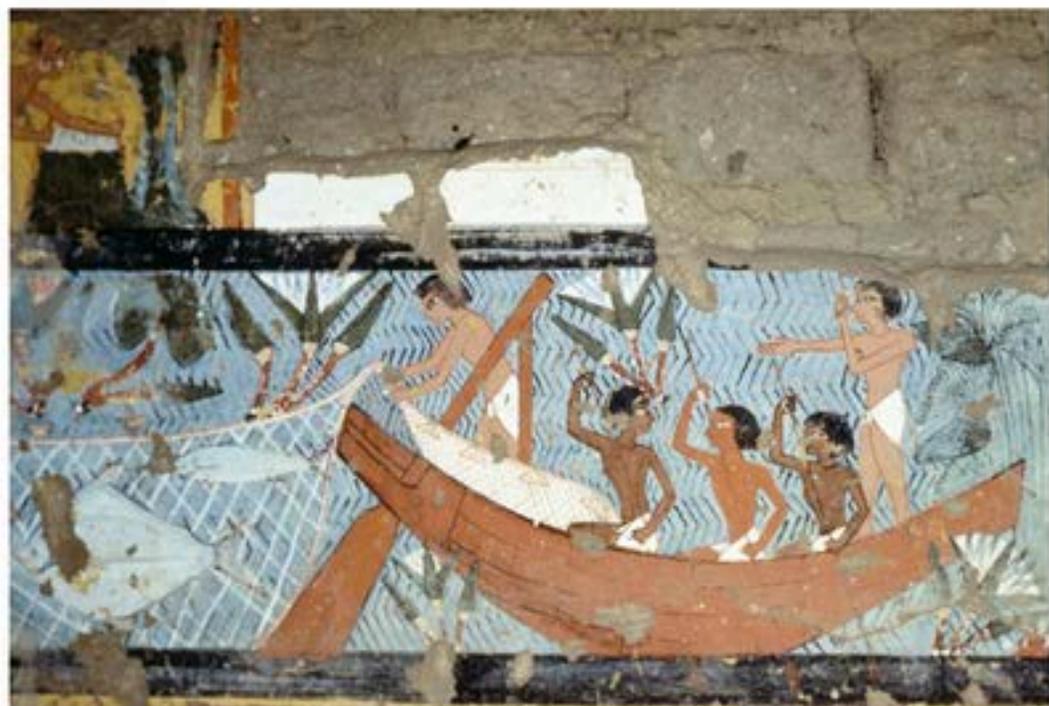
The third prong of the trident concerns the role of seas and oceans as sources of artistic and spiritual inspiration. These include mythic explanations of the origins of things like the flood stories from the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh

and its later expressions to pictorial renderings of the sea in its moods and as a geopolitical or environmental space.

FISHERIES

Among the oldest depictions of boats are 6,000-year-old petroglyphs in northern Norway, where people rendered a variety of waterborne activities on rocks. One shows people in a boat hunting reindeer, which are consummate swimmers, and easier to kill when most of their body mass is submerged than when on land. Contemporary with this are images of hunters pursuing hippopotami in boats found in the Tassili n'Ajjer in southeastern Algeria. More orthodox scenes of fishing and hunting survive from Egypt starting in the Old Kingdom (c. 2700–2055 BCE) and in Minoan frescoes from the island of Akrotiri, or Thera (c. 1500 BCE).

The fish is an important symbol in most religious traditions, one reason being that the multitude of eggs they lay are considered a sign of abundance. Salmon are revered by people in an arc that spans the northern rim of the Pacific from the Japanese island of Hokkaido and eastern Siberia to Alaska and the Pacific Northwest. In Buddhism, a pair of fish represents the fearlessness with which the Buddha swims in the dread cycle of *samsara*, or birth, death, and rebirth.



Detail from a painting found in an Egyptian tomb from the 19th Dynasty (1292–1189 BCE) in Deir el-Medina, depicting Egyptian fishermen casting nets. (Werner Forman/Universal Images Group/Getty Images)

The fish has also been strongly identified with Christianity since the religion's earliest days. Christ called his first four disciples from their boats to become "fishers of men," and the Gospels record two miracles in which Christ fed thousands of followers with only a handful of loaves and two (or a few) fishes. The Greek word for fish, *ichthys*, is also an acrostic of *Iesous Christos Theou Yios Soter*, meaning "Jesus Christ, Son of God."

Despite their ubiquity, written descriptions of local fisheries are few. Two modern works that capture the often-closed world of these sheltered communities are Yukio Mishima's *The Sound of Waves* (1954) and Brazilian José Saramago's magic realist novel *Master and the Sea* (1963). The former depicts the life of Japanese *ama*, or women divers, whose hunting for abalone and sea urchins at depths of up to 10 meters was first recorded in poems dating from the eighth century. The women divers of Jeju Island (the Jeju *haenyeo*) in Korea, whose involvement in the trade dates to the 17th century, are listed in UNESCO's register of the world's Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Although most people fish in their home waters, long-distance fisheries have played a major role in world history. In Polynesian mythology, fishing is thought to account for the very existence of many islands and for humans' discovery of places from Hawai'i to New Zealand. In one tradition, fishermen from Hawaiki (Tahiti) came across New Zealand while chasing an octopus that was stealing their bait. More recently, the search for cod drew Spanish, Portuguese, and English across the North Atlantic to Iceland, Newfoundland, and ultimately the Gulf of Maine, whose fisheries helped sustain the more corporate and better-known efforts at colonialization at Jamestown, Virginia, and Plymouth, Massachusetts, in the early 17th century. Negotiating the treaty that ended the American Revolution, John Adams was adamant about protecting American fishermen's "Right to take Fish" on the Grand Banks and preserving their "liberty" to dry their catch "in any of the unsettled bays, harbors, and creeks of Nova Scotia, Magdalen Islands, and Labrador" (Paris Peace Treaty 1783: art. 3). His home state of Massachusetts (the easternmost part of which is Cape Cod) was so dependent on fish that the general court hung "the representation of a Cod Fish in the room where the House sit, as a memorial of the importance of the Cod-Fishery to the welfare of this Commonwealth" (Roberts, Gallivan & Irwin 1895: 13).

At around the same time, whaling was becoming a deep-sea venture. Although European whalers had sailed long distances to find whales for centuries, they rendered whale blubber into oil at shore stations. New technologies enabled them to do this aboard ship in midocean, and by the late 1780s, whalers were beginning to venture into the Pacific on voyages that routinely lasted three years or longer. This is how long the *Pequod* is at sea before being stove in and sunk in Herman Melville's magisterial novel *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (1851). The whaling industry peaked later in the decade, and opposition to the continued practice of whaling has been a feature of the environmental movement since a

moratorium on commercial whaling was instituted in 1985–1986. A handful of nations continue to practice whaling in defiance of international opinion, and some aboriginal peoples in the Northern Pacific and Arctic, Greenland, and the Caribbean are entitled to limited catches.

Over the past century and a half, the advent of mechanical propulsion and winches, synthetic fibers, and remote sensing devices like sonar, spotter planes, and drones have enabled fishing vessels to operate at ever greater distances from home, which has led to overfishing and put a spotlight on the fragility of a resource once considered limitless. This has been exacerbated by the advent of refrigerated shipping, which enables lobsters to be flown from Maine to China or tuna from Australia to Japan, for instance, within hours of their being landed, thus creating a demand for certain fish where none existed before.

THE THINGS THEY CARRIED

Tangible Goods

The myriad things that people carried, inadvertently and otherwise, from place to place in the course of trade, migration, conflict, and other undertakings had a transformative effect on culture as well. When we talk about maritime exchange and its cultural implications, we must keep in mind the three broad categories of things involved: living things, including people and other animals, plants, and disease; inanimate objects, from minerals and harvested crops to manufactured goods and prepared foods; and the intangible products of human intellect and imagination—language, literature, and artistic style; religion and law; modes of governance and social organization; ways of doing business; and even biases and taboos.

Living things are among the most easily assimilated into host cultures, although as the phrase “invasive species” suggests, they can disrupt or transform ecosystems and the human societies that depend on them, even when their effects are apparently benign. Many of the foods that we associate today with particular geographic regions originated in completely different parts of the world. Sugar grew first on the island of New Guinea and was gradually traded westward, to Southeast Asia, India, and Southwest Asia, where Europeans encountered it for the first time during the crusades starting at the end of the 11th century. It was among the first commodities exported to the Americas in the 16th century, and Caribbean sugar plantations were so important to Britain’s economy that during the American Revolution George III insisted that “the islands must be defended, even at the risk of an invasion of this island” (Paine 2013: 485).

Foodways across much of tropical Africa changed with the introduction of three crops that originated on or near the island of New Guinea. Taro is one of the world’s oldest cultivated crops, identified in archaeological contexts from

the Solomon Islands from 28,000 years ago. The earliest long-distance voyagers in the Pacific carried it with them as they settled the innumerable islands of Oceania to the south and east starting in about 1500 BCE. At some point during the first millennium CE, taro, the banana, and the purple yam were introduced to sub-Saharan Africa where they became culinary staples. Cultivation of these three crops was carried westward across Africa, and with the coming of the slave trade in the 16th century, they were transplanted to the American tropics, where they became comparably important foods.

Diseases were the most destructive and culturally transforming living things of the "Columbian exchange," the process by which animals, plants, and bacteria moved between Eurasia/Africa and the Americas and Pacific Islands in the 15th and 16th centuries. The introduction of Eurasian and African diseases in susceptible populations of the Americas led to catastrophic and wholly unanticipated loss of life—more than 80 percent (some estimates put the figure at 95 percent) of the population—and the consequent eradication of entire states and cultures. This demographic devastation, coupled with the survivors' lack of familiarity with newly introduced crops (such as wheat and sugarcane) and livestock (cattle, pigs, and sheep), was a primary driver of the slave trade, which saw nearly 11 million people forcibly carried from Africa to the Americas between the 1520s and 1860s.

The spread of disease by ship was not unique to the period of European expansion. In the 1340s, a Genoese vessel carried the plague (which had taken decades to cross Central Asia overland from China or Korea) from a Black Sea port to Italy and from there around Europe, where an estimated 25 million people—between one-third and one-half the population—died within a few years. Akira Yoshimura's novel *Shipwrecks* (1982) is an affecting account of the effects of a shipborne disease on a remote fishing community in early coastal Japan.

The effects of transplanting crops and people and other animals were not always negative. Coffee (native to the highlands of Ethiopia) and bananas are among the primary exports of Central and South America, and cattle and wheat (first domesticated in southwest Asia) are pillars of the North American agricultural economy. Before the European American settlement of the Great Plains in the 1800s, the mounted warriors of the Comanche, Apache, and Kiowa were considered among the finest light cavalry in the world. Yet fighting on horseback was a newly acquired talent for Native Americans, whose horses were descended from animals brought by Spanish conquistadors that had escaped into the wild. Domesticated anew, they gave Plains Indians a previously unimaginable mobility. Elsewhere, Australia and New Zealand have the second and seventh largest populations of sheep in the world, respectively, although sheep were introduced in the late 1700s. Similarly, New Zealanders only began growing Chinese

gooseberry in the 1900s and gave it the name kiwifruit, or kiwi, to help boost exports in the 1960s.

Considering American transplants to the rest of the world, potatoes and tomatoes were unknown in Eurasia before the 16th century. Yet who today can imagine Italian cuisine without the tomato, which until then was unknown outside of western South America and Central America? The long-term cultural effects of the diffusion of different crops around the world are not just culinary. Originally domesticated in the Peruvian highlands, the potato was introduced to Europe in the mid-1500s to scant acclaim. But as "an easily raised, nutritionally adequate and abundant food" (Salaman 1949: 335) that could feed livestock as well as people, in the 1600s the potato was readily embraced by an Irish peasantry devastated by a century of wars. Overreliance on the potato made the general population susceptible to any failure of the crop, a not infrequent occurrence.

The most devastating instance was the Great Hunger of 1845 to 1852, when Ireland's population fell by roughly 30 percent, half lost to starvation and disease, the remainder to overseas emigration. The overwhelming majority of emigrants went to the United States—1.7 million in the 1840s and 1850s—but the Irish formed a significant proportion of the immigrants to Britain, Canada, and Australia as well. Thus 250 years after the haphazard introduction of the potato, the failure of the crop would "have the most far-reaching effect on the future of Ireland and, indeed, Western civilization" (Salaman 1949: 214), as the people of a small, impoverished country on the western fringe of Europe came to exercise an influence in world history that owed little to native industry or commercial enterprise.

If the role of the potato in the Great Hunger exemplifies an unintentional large-scale cultural transformation resulting from maritime commerce, the deliberate effort to transplant breadfruit from Tahiti to the Caribbean yielded a different outcome. In the 1770s, British plantation owners proposed bringing breadfruit trees from Tahiti to the West Indies to be grown as a food for slaves. It took two separate voyages over five years for William Bligh to complete the mission. Yet although the trees thrived in their new environment, breadfruit itself proved an acquired taste. By the time it caught on, 40 years later, the British had abolished slavery and with it the whole rationale for the undertaking. Yet the effort gave rise to one of the most enduring and popular stories in maritime literature, that of the mutiny on the *Bounty*, the first ship sent to Tahiti in 1787.

Shortly after sailing from Tahiti with more than 1,000 trees aboard, Bligh's second in command, Fletcher Christian, seized the ship and forced Bligh and 19 shipmates into a 23-foot-long launch with enough food and drink to last a week. The following day, one of the crew was killed when the castaways landed on a nearby island. Bligh then determined to sail straight for the Dutch

settlement on the island of Timor, 3,600 all but uncharted miles to the west. They arrived 43 days later with not a man lost. Following his return to England, Bligh was given a second chance to complete his mission, which he did, in 1792. Christian and company had meanwhile returned to Tahiti, where they recruited some islanders, including women, before sailing into the vast Pacific to the tiny (4.5 square kilometer) remote island of Pitcairn in early 1790. Despite concerted efforts to find and punish the mutineers, it was not until 1808 that an American sealer called at Pitcairn, and it was another 13 years before a British ship reached there.

The dissemination of living things via maritime trade was often an unintentional consequence of maritime enterprise, as in the case of disease. In other cases, people carried crops and animals from home because they were familiar. If they found a welcome environment (and they didn't always), so much the better. Yet other cultural transformations were a by-product of the more deliberate search for inanimate things—the sorts of goods we associate with a globalized economy today.

Chinese pottery has been a staple of long-distance sea trade for more than 1,000 years. Dating to the early 800s, the so-called Belitung ship was built in Southwest Asia and sank in the Java Sea while en route from China with a cargo that included some 60,000 mass-produced bowls, inkpots, spice jars, and ewers and other pieces made in Changsha, in landlocked Hunan Province. The existence of the ship is proof of international sea trade 1,100 years ago, but what is most striking is the choice of decorative motifs employed by the Chinese potters, which testifies to a keen understanding of their intended markets. Most of the bowls bear geometric or naturalistic designs or inscriptions from the Quran rendered in red and green and were obviously destined for markets across the sprawling Abbasid Caliphate. Smaller numbers of green-splashed bowls were destined for Iranian buyers, whereas those adorned with lotus symbols were intended for Buddhist customers. The sensitivity of the landlocked Chinese potters to their customers' cultural expectations for ceramics that originated thousands of miles away is remarkable. Such a phenomenon recurred starting in the 16th century, when Chinese began making porcelain for export to Europe, often in forms formerly unknown to them but based on European samples.

What had brought Europeans to Asia in the first place was spices, the most alluring of which were cloves, nutmeg, and mace from the diminutive Spice Islands of Maluku in eastern Indonesia. Sought as much for their medicinal as for their culinary uses, spices had long been a driver of seaborne trade within Asia. Nutmeg was valued for providing gastrointestinal relief, and perhaps as a mild hallucinogen, and cloves have anesthetic and, purportedly, aphrodisiac properties. But the propagation of spices also transformed culinary traditions, as we know from a seventh-century monk who disdained a Chinese cuisine that was heavy on "fish and vegetables mostly uncooked," in contrast to the more

lavish culinary arts of India where “all vegetables are to be well cooked and to be eaten after mixing with the asafetida, clarified butter, oil, or any spice” (Paine 2013: 306). The drive to secure monopolies on spices, especially, transformed European economies, gave rise to the establishment of non-native groups—not just Europeans, but also Chinese, Indian, and others—throughout Southeast Asia, and laid the foundation for the oppressive European imperialism of the 19th and 20th centuries, which encompassed most of coastal Asia and Africa.

Inanimate Goods

Language, religion, and law (the last of which often derives from religion) are excellent markers for where maritime exchange took place, especially in the absence of explanatory written records. Among the most revolutionary developments in the ancient Mediterranean was the diffusion of a written alphabet from Phoenicia, the coast from what is now Palestine in the south to Syria in the north. The oldest Phoenician writings have been found not in the Levant, but along trade routes from the Levant to as far west as Sardinia. Maritime traders of the ninth century also carried the alphabet to Greece, whose people made it their own. With these letters—the last word in low-volume, high-value cargoes—the Greeks created the most diverse and influential body of literature in the ancient world, one that embraced philosophy, science, medicine, history, oratory, poetry, and drama, and the preservation of which has been the basis for countless cultural revolutions in the thousands of years since.

In Asia, the first religion to be widely diffused by sea trade was Hinduism, which reached the mainland and islands of Southeast Asia more than 2,000 years ago. Buddhism was originally introduced to China via the overland silk road, but it was reinforced by seafaring monks who carried their religion to Southeast Asia, China, Korea, and ultimately Japan. China's embrace of Buddhism led to changes in the nature and scope of long-distance sea trade. There was a new emphasis on religious artifacts, from relics to incense, and an increase in the movement of scholars, monks, and translators. Unlike Confucianism, with its elitist tendencies (or Hinduism, with its rigid caste structure), Buddhism was accessible to all. This gave merchants a bigger market to satisfy, especially as goods like incense became secularized and desirable among even non-Buddhists.

Somewhat later, Islam spread as far as modern Pakistan, where it stalled in its eastward overland advance in the eighth century. However, Muslim seafarers established enclaves along the west coast of India, as well as in pockets of what is now Indonesia (which is now the country with the world's largest Muslim population), Vietnam, and the coast of China, while to the west they launched a Muslim diaspora along the coast of East Africa from Somalia to Mozambique. True faith is powerful, but there is no gainsaying that the promulgation of

religion owes much to traders and is often facilitated by commercial self-interest. For traders everywhere, profession of a common religion facilitated transactions and increased trust.

A story in Buzurg ibn Shahriyar al-Ramhormuzi's 10th-century *Book of the Wonders of India* relates how a trader from Oman named Ismail kidnapped an unnamed ruler from what is now northern Mozambique and sold him into slavery. The captive king converted to Islam and escaped his owner by joining pilgrims bound for Mecca, from where he went to Cairo. He eventually returned home and resumed the throne. Ismail had continued his trade and eventually found himself in front of his erstwhile prisoner, who forgave him "because you were the first cause of the purity of my religion." Sending him on his way, the king asked Ismail to "let Muslims know that they may come here to us as to brothers, Muslims like themselves." The king's refusal to avenge his kidnapping testifies to his reverence for Islam; but his people's adoption of the alien religion had a practical side, and they could promote their new faith in the same way a business might post a sign saying, "Arabic spoken here" (Buzurg 1981: 31–36).

In a similar vein, a century before Ismail, St. Ansgar, known as the Apostle of the North, preached Christianity to the Danes for the first time. He was successful in part because the king allowed him to build a church at the port of Hedeby "near to the district where merchants from all parts congregated." As in the case of Buzurg's unnamed king, a willingness to accept Christianity was profitable, and thanks to Ansgar's evangelizing, Frisian, Frankish, and other Christian merchants "made for the place readily and without any fear—something which was not possible previously" (Rimbert 1921: 84).

Religion manifests itself in a people's culture not only in its practice and ritual, but also in its laws, many of which derive from religious precepts. Some of these actively inhibit commercial (and thus cross-cultural) exchange, and religious strictures proved a significant obstacle to the trade of the medieval Mediterranean. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all proscribed lending money at interest to coreligionists, and it was not until the 11th century that merchants had devised contractual forms that promoted growth without violating religious law. These provided a major impetus for the so-called commercial revolution that underlay the growth of Mediterranean trade between the 11th and 13th centuries. It is no coincidence that this was the era of the Crusades, which were sustained by maritime lifelines between the Middle East and Western Europe, and during which Europeans were first exposed to the Eastern exotics that would later fuel their interest in overseas expansion.

Intangible Goods

European expansion ushered in a new era in world history, in part because between the 16th and 19th centuries, Europeans disseminated worldwide a

variety of cultural and legal novelties that many now take for granted. Among these was the notion that political control could be exercised over the oceans. Although states had used their navies to extend their authority overseas—to seize islands, or to control strategic passages and choke points—no one had ever presumed to divide the sea preemptively and to treat it as a political space analogous to territory on land. The Romans had called the Mediterranean *Mare Nostrum*, “Our Sea,” but that was a simple statement of fact. Classical jurisprudence actually regarded the sea as a global commons, the property of all people.

By the 13th century, Genoa and Venice were asserting their jurisdiction over adjacent seas in the Mediterranean as a justification for taxing trade. The greatest change came in the 15th century, when various popes began issuing bulls (decrees) and mediating treaty negotiations in which Portuguese and Spanish asserted jurisdiction over lands not already ruled by Christians. In essence, the Spanish had the right to explore to the west, and the Portuguese to the east, of a line drawn down the middle of the Atlantic. In the Western Hemisphere, this gave the Spanish the right to virtually all of the Americas, apart from the eastern bulge of South America, which became Portuguese Brazil; Portugal claimed smaller territories in Africa and Asia. (The Spanish secured rights to the Philippines by a treaty of 1529 that continued the line around the other side of the world.) The Spanish focused their efforts on Central and South America, leaving North America open to Northern Europeans, especially the English and French. These papally sanctioned divisions help explain why, 500 years later, English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese are official languages in nearly 120 countries worldwide, and Christianity is the majority religion in more than 120.

ART AND LITERATURE

The Ship as Metaphor

When it comes to gauging the strength of a culture's identification with maritime enterprise, there are few better indicators than the ease with which it employs the metaphor of the ship of state. This is an ancient conceit, the oldest written reference to which, the Egyptian “Tale of the Eloquent Peasant,” dates to 2100 BCE. In this story, a peasant named Khunanup has been robbed and appeals to the pharaoh for justice. Khunanup repeatedly resorts to the imagery of the ship: “Behold, I am on a voyage without a boat” (Simpson 2003: 33), he says at one point. Later he chastises the pharaoh's high steward for creating a situation that is “Like a ship on which there is no captain” (Simpson 2003: 36). The same imagery recurs in classical Greek and Latin literature—the verb “to govern” comes from the Greek word meaning “to steer,” by way of the Latin *gubernare*, which means both “to steer” and “to govern”—but this is not surprising in light of the close maritime connections that bound the people of the

Mediterranean. Nor is the metaphor unique to the West. The people of the Perak Sultanate, on Sumatra, identified their state as a ship, "with the ruler as her captain (*nakhoda*) and some of the ministers as members of the crew," including a mate, helmsmen, lead oarsmen, and "the person who bales the ship if she leaks, i.e. who removes any danger threatening the country" (Manguin 2005: 6–7). Similarly, Māori today trace their descent from members of the crews of the *waka* (canoes) in which their ancestors arrived in New Zealand 700 years ago, and the *waka* represents an important unit of Māori group affiliation.

States that relied deeply on the sea and maritime power have gone to great lengths to adorn their ships, which could function as instruments of propaganda. Starting in the 11th century, the Venetians developed an ever more elaborate ceremony during which the doge, his retainers, members of the clergy, and ambassadors to Venice set out in a resplendent state barge called the *Bucintoro* to enact a spiritual joining of the city-state and the Adriatic. Declaring "We wed thee, Adriatic, as a sign of our true and perpetual dominion," the doge dropped a gold ring into the sea, and in so doing, proclaimed Venice's exclusive mastery over the Adriatic (Senior 1929: 135).

The ship of state as an instrument of propaganda reached its apogee in 17th-century Europe, when the general feeling was, as Louis XIV's minister of finance wrote, "Nothing can be more impressive, nor more likely to exalt the majesty of the King, than that his ships should have more magnificent ornamentation than has ever before been seen at sea" (Paine 1997: 569). The greatest exemplar of the form is the Swedish warship *Vasa*, which sank on its maiden voyage in 1628, and was raised from the seabed more or less intact 350 years later. The ship's more than 1,000 wooden sculptures comprise a complex iconography intended to show the legitimacy and power of the House of Vasa, including a magnificent stern decoration showing the House of Vasa's coat of arms, a series of figures from the Old Testament Book of Judges, a representation of Gideon's victory over the Midianites, and an image of Hercules. Lining the bulkhead forward are two rows of Roman emperors, and the bowsprit features a forward-leaping gilded lion. Other ships of the era boasted comparable symbolic imagery and names that reflected the sovereign ruler's ambition. England's Charles I ordered the *Sovereign of the Seas*, the name of which bolstered the king's intent to reassert England's ancient, if fanciful, title to the waters around the British Isles.

At the time, there was a renewed debate over the right to territorial seas. In *Mare Liberum*, or the free sea (1609), Hugo Grotius argued "it is lawful for any nation to go to any other and to trade with it" (Grotius 2004: 11), and that claims to a monopoly of trade on the basis of a papal grant, territorial possession, or custom were groundless. Now recognized as a cornerstone of international law, it was countered vigorously by John Selden's *Of the Dominion; or, Ownership of the Sea* (1635), which argued that nations could

exclude rivals from certain waters. Dedicating his work to Charles I—"The sea will also submit to him"—Selden delineated an absurdly expansive conception of the "sea-territory of the British Empire" (Thornton 2006: 112), which extended all the way to North America. Similar ideas are also evident in the work of writers like John Dryden, who, following an English victory over a Dutch fleet in 1666, wrote "all was Britain the wide ocean saw" (Paine 2010: 213).

THE SHIP AS VEHICLE

As an essential means by which people relate to the seas and oceans, ships have been central to the culture and identity of maritime people. If warships represented early modern rulers' maritime ambitions, with the rise of the nation-state and national identity, ships began to embody aspirations of the general public. This was especially true among Western powers from the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries, when national rivalries found explicit expression in the construction of ever more powerful naval ships and ever faster and more lavish passenger ships. *Mein Feld ist die Welt* ("My field is the world") proclaimed the motto of Germany's Hamburg-American Line, whose passenger liners were among the proudest on the North Atlantic. At the same time, ships and even yachts came to reflect cultural norms and ideals for both good and ill. When in 1851 a syndicate sent the ocean-going racing schooner *America* across the Atlantic to challenge English yachts in English waters, newspaper publisher Horace Greeley wrote, "The eyes of the world are on you. You will be beaten, and the country will be abused. . . . If you go and are beaten, you had better not return" (Paine 1997: 21). The *America* did return, and with the prize known ever since as the America's Cup.

At the other end of the spectrum is the *Titanic*, which sank on her maiden voyage in 1912 with the loss of more than 1,500 lives, more than two-thirds of her passengers and crew. Thanks to the recently invented wireless telegraph, this was one of the first disasters of its kind to be broadcast in something close to real time, which gave it a previously unheard of immediacy. This also helped disseminate competing narratives about what the loss of the *Titanic* symbolized. Foremost was the tripartite code of honor against which all survivors and victims were measured at the time: "Women and children first"; gentlemanly conduct—a function of both gender and class; and the superior behavior of Anglo-Saxons generally. The exemplars were wireless operator Jack Phillips and band leader Wallace Hartley, who remained at their posts until the ship sank, gratuitously selfless behavior that earned them the lion's share of public acclaim. A minority view held that the loss of the ship was divine retribution for "those given to greed and pleasure in a world cursed by sin," which overlooked the fact that only a quarter of the 710 third-class passengers survived. In the United

with greater authority over their crew and passengers than virtually anyone of a similar station in life on land.

The ship as heterotopia, or "other place," and the influence of the maritime world on the land took a curious turn with the coming of steam-powered ocean liners at the end of the 19th century. Because ships were the only way to cross any body of water broader than a river, shipping companies had something of a captive market. Yet they could not rely exclusively on the immigrant trade and people who had to travel for business, for despite the fact that ships were becoming ever safer, being on a ship midway between two continents is something that many people instinctively fear. The solution for ship designers was "to convey the idea that one is not at sea, but on terra firma" (Brinnin 2000: 340). Gilded Age designers of ocean liner interiors took their inspiration from, among other land-based sources, 17th-, 16th-, and even 15th-century European manors, mansions, and castles. The result was incongruous, for although shipping companies vied to build the biggest, fastest, and most indestructible ships possible, they knew their passengers wanted interior spaces that were "as little like a ship as human imagination can do it" (Brinnin 2000[1971]: 392).

In 1925, the International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts took place in Paris. This gave us the term *arts décoratifs*, or art deco, though until the 1960s it was generally known as "ocean liner style" (Peter & Dawson 2009: 149). It first went to sea in 1927 in the *Ile de France*, whose designers opted for a sleek, streamlined look that promised efficiency, speed, and modernity. In a curious twist, ocean liner style was adopted by architects and designers ashore so that buildings and their furnishings began to look like ships, rather than the other way around. This approach endured until ocean liners lost their passengers to jet planes. When passenger shipping revived in the 1980s, the ships were built almost exclusively for cruising, and they began to look like massive floating resorts, which they are, with a preponderance of amenities that would not be out of place ashore.

Notwithstanding the resonance of some isolated events, usually disasters, and the fact that vastly more people go to sea on cruise ships today than ever traveled on ocean liners, since the 1960s the cultural influence and relevance of the maritime world per se has receded from public view. As passenger shipping declined at the end of the 1950s, containerization and massive bulk carriers, especially oil tankers, were changing both the face and nature of commercial shipping. Containerization and automation forced ship-handling operations into bleak industrial lands far from the docks around which port cities like Amsterdam, New York, and Hong Kong originally grew. They have also decreased the size of ships' crews and gangs of shoreside cargo handlers, who lent color and a sense of the exotic to seaports. In an unmistakable expression of "form follows function," the new shipping has yielded a grimly utilitarian aesthetic, afloat and ashore, as so-called box ships began to expand the volume of goods traded

worldwide and to promote consumer culture that migrated from city centers and downtowns to cavernous, windowless suburban box stores.

Thanks to these developments, the traditional expressions of maritime culture have all but disappeared, especially the ancient sailors' arts of carving, knot work, and other handicrafts, as well as chanty singing and storytelling. The one sailors' art that has blossomed in the same period is tattooing, which Western sailors learned from Pacific Islanders in the 18th century. But for most people tattooing is a passive art, something done to oneself rather than by oneself.

Artistic and Spiritual Inspiration

The profound cultural significance of the seas and oceans is clear from the fact that worldwide there are hundreds of deities, divinities, saints, and others associated with aquatic environments, related geographic and meteorological phenomena, and the people who depend on them. Not surprisingly, maritime technology and enterprise feature in some of the world's oldest examples of representational art: petroglyphs of boats in Gobustan, Azerbaijan, overlooking the Caspian Sea, which date to 12,000 BCE—8,000 years before the hunters of reindeer and hippopotami mentioned earlier. The importance attached to boats is evident from their place in religious ritual, especially burials, in Egypt, Northern Europe and the British Isles, East and Southeast Asia, and the Americas. And the sea itself features prominently in cultural belief systems. As rising sea levels threaten to drown the San Blas Islands off Panama's Caribbean coast, some Kuna Yala elders refuse to move, seeing the rising tide as indicative of their community's loss of "spiritual equilibrium" (White 2017: 272).

Foucault wrote that "the boat has not only been for our civilization, from the 16th century until the present, the great instrument of economic development . . . but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination" (Foucault 1986: 27). Because they function as microcosms of the "real" world, writers and other artists can depict events aboard ship in ways that reflect situations on land without doing so explicitly. This accounts for the durability of the concept of the ship of state and the variety of meanings attached to episodes like the sinking of the *Titanic* or the mutiny on the *Bounty*.

Bligh's peerless feat of open-boat navigation sailing to Timor notwithstanding, the focus of the *Bounty* story has always been on the mutiny and mutineers. From almost the moment of Bligh's return to England, evaluations of his behavior and Christian's motives have been viewed in terms of a struggle between authoritarianism and freedom. This schism is due in part to the fact that, as a recent historian has written, "It was Lieutenant Bligh's ill luck to have his own great adventure coincide exactly with the dawn of this new [Romantic] era, which saw devotion to a code of duty and established authority as less honorable than the celebration of individual passions and liberty" (Alexander 2003: 345).

For most of recorded history, artists have focused on things of and in the sea and people's relationship to them. A change occurred in the early modern period as ocean-crossing sailors realized an oceanic immensity previously assumed in names like Sea of Darkness, as the Atlantic was known, and place names like Land's End. While artistic renderings of ships grew more exact, their depiction of untamed seas became more vivid and energetic, with the heightened sense of realism confidently suggesting that ships were equal to whatever challenge nature posed.

This was the backdrop to the emergence of the Romantic movement in art, which reveled in atmospheric painting animated by the immediacy of personal experience. It found expression on both sides of the Atlantic, notably the work of J.M.W. Turner in England and the Hudson River School in the United States. At heart a response to industrialization and urbanization, Romanticism extolled the individual and the natural world, from which people were increasingly alienated, and it had a powerful analog in literature. As W. H. Auden wrote, the hallmarks of Romanticism were an urge "to leave the land and the city" and a belief that "the sea is the real situation and the voyage is the true condition of man . . . where the decisive events, the moment of eternal choice, of temptation, fall, and redemption occur" (Auden 1951: 3). Exemplars of Romanticism in maritime literature include Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient*

CARRYING AN ALBATROSS AROUND ONE'S NECK

An albatross can cut through the sky, gliding, with barely a flap of its wings. A soaring albatross would have an almost hypnotizing effect on sailors, who believed that this bird would guide crew and passengers to safety. The ocean bird came to be seen as a symbol for good luck among mariners and explorers, and to kill this majestic creature meant to tempt fate. It is precisely the killing of an albatross that inspired Samuel Taylor Coleridge to pen his famous poem, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," first published in the late 18th century. The poem's tragic sailor kills an albatross with his crossbow and, as tragedy befalls the ship and crew, is forced to wear the bird's carcass around his neck to identify him as the culprit of the curse. Although the sailor, unlike most of the crew, survives the voyage, he is forced to wander the Earth telling others about his misdeed. The cultural reference "to wear an albatross around one's neck" thus signifies the carrying of a heavy burden and has inspired movies, songs, and stories since Coleridge's time.

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Mariner (1798), Lord Byron's *The Island, or Christian and His Comrades* (1823), Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851), and Victor Hugo's *The Toilers of the Sea* (1866).

The Romantic vision of the sea popular in the 19th century flowed from the confluence of a unique set of historical and cultural circumstances. But the same trends affected how people on the receiving end of European expansion viewed the sea, especially in Japan. The Japanese have always seen their island nation as a place apart and protected by the sea, particularly during more than two centuries of self-imposed isolationism. As foreigners began to test their resolve, artists responded with visions of the sea that reflected a collective anxiety about geopolitical change, notably in Katsushika Hokusai's "Under the Wave of Kanagawa" (1830–1833), which suggests both Japan's vulnerability and its potential for overseas expansion.

The Romantic movement had a defining impact on the way people view the oceans of the world and see themselves in relation to the maritime environment, yet it has simultaneously distorted popular interpretations of the seas' influence on culture. Written, visual, and performance art of all genres has always helped people mediate human experience of the maritime world. It is certainly possible to detect elements of Romanticism in the quest narrative that forms the basis of sea narratives starting with Gilgamesh or Odysseus, but those heroes are deeply engaged with the world as it is and do not stand aloof from it. Moreover, the natural world through which they move does not represent freedom from an ordered, mechanistic society and a personal challenge that will lead to the Romantic's "temptation, fall, and redemption." Rather than being a threat to or opportunity for personal fulfillment, the sea is a perennial danger to communal well-being, something to be overcome by a combination of wit and divine intervention.

Economic and technological changes over the past century and a half have made the sea—both on the surface and below it—accessible in ways that it never was before. This has had an enormous impact on people's collective attitudes toward the natural environment and given us a new, more immediate appreciation of the world's oceans. It has also forced us to reevaluate our relationship to the sea and to acknowledge both our debt and our obligation to this great reservoir of our cultural life.

Lincoln Paine

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