

VICKERS, Daniel, and Vince WALSH — *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005. Pp. 336.

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over the course of three centuries. Placing Salem, Massachusetts, at the heart of the study, Vickers has provided some strong evidence to debunk other portrayals of early modern maritime history. The focus of this book is on the reasons why young men would work at sea. In Vickers's view, the notion that there is something exceptional about maritime labour in maritime communities is incorrect. Men toiled at sea, initially at least, because seafaring was part and parcel of all work in such communities.

The author has two primary targets for his revision of early American maritime history. First, Vickers takes aim at earlier histories of the American colonies, which missed the crucial role played by the sea in their development. Many social historians of New England rushed "precociously into the interior", with "the ocean ... an obstacle over which the settlers had to pass in order to play their historical roles as conquerors, planters or Christians. Once ashore ... the planters turned their backs on the water and marched off to found agricultural villages where the sea played no further role in their lives" (p. 8). Vickers maintains that the inland activities of colonists, including relations with Natives, taming the wilderness, and slavery, required them to interact continually with the ocean.

Secondly, the author also takes aim at the work of maritime historians such as Marcus Rediker's *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (1987). Vickers notes that their attempts "to classify sailors as adventure-seeking youths, old salts, ship-masters on the make, saltwater mechanics, proletarians, or lumpenproletarians runs into this obstacle: that in the course of their lives most seafaring men fell into several of these roles" (p. 4).

Tracing the progress and growth of the maritime community of Salem, the thesis is liberally and convincingly supported by case studies of individual sailors, captains, merchants, and their families, as well as details of shipping registers showing the development of a sea-going fleet. These show that by the late seventeenth century just over half of the working-age population of Massachusetts were mariners, making seamen more prevalent in the total population than in dominant maritime powers such as Restoration England or the Dutch Republic.

By the late eighteenth century, Salem's maritime community had grown in size, but remained primarily dominated by commerce and mariners of local origin. It could not compare with larger European seaports, whose wealthy merchants contracted large ships and polyglot crews to trade in expensive goods throughout the world. It was in larger rather than smaller ports where commerce was generally conducted by seamen or fishermen themselves, however, carrying small cargoes on short passages in coastal waters. Both types of trade were present in Salem, and Vickers contends the town was more typical of the seaports mariners in the eighteenth century would be likely to encounter on their voyages.

Much of the study revolves around debates on the nature of class, status, hierarchy, and power in the early modern maritime world. The origins of Salem's seamen, ship-

masters, and merchants in the fishing trade and their close familial ties ashore and afloat both vitiated the development of any sort of rigid hierarchy aboard ship, particularly one based upon class.

Vickers believes stratification in such communities was based upon age, not social status. While acknowledging the importance of class in the larger context of the maritime labour system within the British Empire, where merchant capitalists and shipmasters were supported by the force of colonial and imperial law, allowing them “to exploit and control this maritime labour force in the pursuit of their commercial designs”, Vickers outlines an alternative approach. Over the entire careers and lives of individuals, the importance of class appears to diminish, unlike what is revealed by the study of only the portion of time an individual might spend working at sea (p. 130).

In eighteenth-century Salem, seamen knew that over time they could advance their place in society. By the age of 30, most seamen would have followed one of two career paths — promotion to an officer, possibly becoming a shipmaster who could manage capital, access credit, and follow opportunities to conduct his own business; or quitting the sea to follow a trade ashore, with products, property, tools, or skills needed by merchant capitalists. The author accepts that larger seaports such as London, Bristol, and even Boston, with landed gentry, wealthier merchant capitalists, higher demand for labour, and more anonymity and poverty, did have class distinctions that kept seamen apart from their superiors over the course of their entire lives. But in the early modern English Atlantic world, Vickers posits, it was more common for the average sailor to be from a port like Salem than one of the few great seaports that have been the subject of earlier studies.

By the nineteenth century, this picture had changed dramatically. Seafaring no longer was something one did because one grew up alongside the ocean, but had transformed into an exceptional activity over the course of the century. The American Revolution first devastated maritime commerce, forcing merchants and shipmasters into privateering to survive, and then created new opportunities for global trade with the removal of the restrictive imperial trading framework based on the Navigation Acts. The new larger fleets required for these activities, which continued to grow after the setbacks of the War of 1812, meant that Salem itself could no longer provide the men required. More common transoceanic voyages were dangerous, and crew turnover was high. As working conditions worsened, up to one-third of crews were lost to desertion on an average voyage between 1826 and 1850, compared with much lower rates for earlier periods. As the worldwide shipping market became more capital-intensive, Salem was transformed into a global port of call, the social chasm between seamen and captain grew, and the working life of seamen became more proletarian, with fewer opportunities to escape upwards or outwards.

Broader changes in American society were also affecting Salem and marginalizing seafaring. The first factory opened in the 1820s, producing sperm oil and candles, quickly followed by other manufactories and mills. By 1850 the local shipping industry was dying, as the products of the American industrial revolution were leaving Salem by railroad as the country expanded westwards. The last visit of a ship from overseas was recorded in 1877.

In another challenge to the views of Rediker and others on the exceptional and harsh nature of early modern maritime labour law, Vickers concludes his study with an analysis of its origins and the notion of master-servant relationships at sea. Before the 1830s these were generally no more authoritarian than similar labour codes and relationships ashore and “rooted less in ownership than in the traditional notion of mastery” (p. 215). This implies that shipmasters possessed authority not based on ownership of capital, but on their own craft skills and seniority, in line with a traditional authoritarian patriarchal system used for centuries. The main difference, compared with master-servant relationships ashore, was that shipmasters had quasi-judicial magisterial powers as well, due to the need to maintain cooperation and order aboard ship in a potentially deadly environment, far from regular courts of justice.

While agreeing with Rediker and others that shipboard discipline could be brutal, Vickers notes the methodological problems involved with proving the degree of brutality. Early modern court records indicating harsh discipline represent either the tip of the iceberg or exceptions to the rule of many normal, unrecorded, and uneventful voyages. By examining multiple sources “from the side” to establish what was seen as customary discipline and what was seen as extraordinary, Vickers contends that, in general, harsh discipline was rarer than has commonly been portrayed. Its main cause was the growing scale of maritime enterprise, with long voyages to distant countries on large ships being far more prone to brutality than short trips on smaller vessels in closer waters.

In all, this is a masterfully written and eminently readable social history that explains the transformation of American identity from one that was primarily seafaring and outward in outlook to one that became continental and focused inward. As this occurred, the maritime world of early America gradually became peripheral and was literally “mapped out” of American consciousness and culture (p. 248). Although some may disagree to some extent with some of the conclusions, and the naval historian might desire more emphasis on the relationship and interactions between the Royal and young American navies and American maritime society, the research effort, methodology, evidence, and presentation are convincing and impressive. They are also backed up with detailed appendices containing some 20 pages of source commentary, graphs, charts, and statistical analyses. An engaging and comprehensive overview of the early modern maritime experience useful to specialists, yet accessible to the general reader, this work is essential for anyone studying or interested in the Atlantic world of that era.

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WALTER, François — *Les figures paysagères de la nation. Territoire et paysage en Europe (16<sup>e</sup>–20<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Paris, Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2004, 524 p.

Notre époque discourt beaucoup sur le paysage. Cette profusion, avancement certains, témoignerait de la force d'une demande sociale de plus en plus vive exigeant que la