

left no personal diaries or journals from which his thoughts could be gleaned. Finally, as he was never arrested and tried for his crimes, court records, one of the most common sources for piratical histories, are no help. Rather, Nielsen has had to work diligently to pull fact from fiction within newspaper articles and often sensationalized accounts of the time, the end product of which is a fine piece of historical work. While readers might desire deeper discussions on particular points, the tapestry of a narrative that Nielsen does weave is awe-inspiring.

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**Michael North. *A World History of the Seas: From Harbour to Horizon*. (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, (first English translation), [www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com), 2022. 331 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. US \$30.95, paper; ISBN 978-1-3501-4543-6. (E-book available.)**

As I write the review of Michael North's book, out of the corner of my eye I see hummingbirds flickering at our birdfeeder for a brief sip of nourishment and then flying off. They are perhaps a metaphor for his English translation of *A World History of the Seas*. North, a maritime history polymath, covers this vast and complex topic in 240 text pages with occasional illustrations, and maps, and "punctuated" by approximately 40 pages of endnotes. The topics cover maritime events that occurred upon the various bodies of water of the world through to the present time, connecting a world permitting the transport of goods and people from far-flung regions. It appears as a literary millimetre of varnish-coating overlaying an enormous, multifaceted seascape.

The book is challenging because the names of places and people who populated them have changed throughout their history, sometimes many times over. North rarely defines them and they are occasionally in a foreign or antiquated tongue. Therefore, one is relegated to verifying where the author is taking his reader. Still, new perceptions can be gained from overviews that elude scholars habitually focused on details rather than the big picture. Every reader will certainly take away different and personal insights after reading this book, but I wish to mention a few that struck this reviewer.

The book is unequally divided into two segments dealing with many maritime ethnic, social, and religious networks highlighting cross-regional linkages on the world's oceans and seas. The first eight chapters centre on specific oceans and/or seas and their maritime histories and connections. These are followed by two chapters roughly focused on the seas as a resource, and finally, human relationship with the ocean environment. The extensive influence of the Vikings is well covered. The pervasive maritime history of

the Spanish and Portuguese are well known, but the legacy of the Dutch, perhaps the cleverest of all the traders, becomes evident in chapters covering the Mediterranean, the northern metropolises on the Baltic seas, and the Indian and Atlantic oceans. For example, Dutch East Indiamen were faster, cleaner, less expensive to build and maintain, and safer. In addition, the Dutch also invented marine insurance.

Many Levantine nations of the ancient world had a small Jewish population from time to time who were involved in trading. Slavery has been with us since tribes conquered each other, but this book documents that slaves were a trading commodity much like grains, livestock, finished goods, and precious metals. The slave trade was one of the world's most persistent and ugly maritime institutions. Hand in hand with this was the very profitable business of ransoming prisoners. Once the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition forced their Sephardic Jewish population to disperse, they became a footnote in Iberian history, but ironically, one to be found on almost every page. Jewish traders became essential for mercantile growth and communication between many disparate cultures and nations. The Spanish Catholic clergy, and to a lesser degree those of the Portuguese, were also interested in proselytizing among the Indigenous Peoples they encountered and forcing them to accept their doctrinaire religious beliefs. The pragmatic Dutch, however, combined their less dogmatic religion with Indigenous beliefs. This made them more acceptable to the Indigenous cultures and thus, they became trading partners.

Finally, one gains an appreciation of the importance of the evolution of watercraft. First, they were used to transport people over distances that were nearly impossible to reach overland, then to explore, make war, and arguably most important, increased cargo capacity for engaging in long-distance trading.

The seas are a transport medium linking societies and permitting the conveyance of valuable or vital goods to supply demands. Imaginative modern technology has changed this quasi-seascape. The waters have carried free human beings, enslaved people, indentured servants, coolies, and commonplace emigrants about to change their lot for better or worse. But ultimately, the seas function as providers of resources, spaces of transportation, means of communication, and metaphorical pages upon which human history is written.

Finally, North's 40-page bibliography is an excellent starting resource for scholars who might wish to pursue or expand upon the many maritime historical threads that his book exposes. Although *A World History of the Seas* is not an easy read nor a book for every historian's library, it can be engrossing at times and contains many unique perspectives worth considering.

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