

and the complex nature of international imperial politics. If there is a critique to be made about this particular layout, it is that these topics cannot be fully separated from one another, meaning that there are instances of the text to a degree repeating itself. Yet, the other readily available division would seem to have been across regions, which would have detracted from Barcia's larger point of the global nature of these patterns. In the end, these repetitions are generally minor and drive home the core arguments all the more strongly.

Beyond its classroom applicability, the book's accessible language makes it easy to pick up and read for both academic and casual readers. Through lively, contemporaneous narratives that highlight the highs and lows of various "piratical" persons and the political wranglings over who and what were seen as a pirate problem, the more technical aspects of the work remain engaging without becoming fictionalized adventure. Almost certain to become a frequently cited text in the years to come, this tome will make an easy addition to nearly any shelf and collection.

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Barritt, Michael. *Nelson's Pathfinders: A Forgotten Story in the Triumph of British Sea Power*

Yale University Press, 2024

xvi + 267 pp., illustrations, plates, figures, maps, endnotes, index, appendix, glossary

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The safe navigation of Mahan's "far distant, stormbeaten ships, upon which the Grand Army never looked, [that] stood between it and the dominion of the world" is frequently assumed. At best the hazards and challenges might be dismissed in a few lines. Yet in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars "more than twice as many British ships had been lost to shipwreck than in action with the enemy" (3). The challenge is easily stated. At Aboukir Bay, Mahan's sole navigational comment was that "the only chart in the fleet was a rough sketch taken from a captured merchant vessel and no British officer knew the ground." When Nelson chased the French into the eastern Mediterranean, he had no small scale chart of the area. Until Hurd's own work the ships blockading Brest had no reliable chart of the area. The dangers were summed up in Collingwood's much quoted August 1803 comment when on the blockade, "an anxious time I have had of it, what with tides and rocks, which have more danger in them

than a battle once a week” (3).

As providing antiscorbutics to sailors was essential for the health of ships’ companies, so providing for safe navigation was essential to maintaining the those “storm-beaten ships” on station and close in-shore. In *Nelson’s Pathfinders: A Forgotten Story in the Triumph of British Sea Power*, Michael Barritt’s purpose “is to show how Thomas Hurd made hydrographic capability a crucial enabler of strategic planning and front-line operations in the age that saw the classic application of British sea power” (5). It would be difficult to find a more suitable author. Barritt served in the Royal Navy’s hydrographic service, capping his career as the Hydrographer of the Navy. In retirement he has been the president of the Hakluyt Society. Thus, professional and historical expertise are happily combined.

Captain Hurd succeeded the civilian Alexander Dalrymple, the first Hydrographer of the Navy. The responsibilities of the position (paraphrasing the original order in council) included the “judicious arrangement and digestion of the mass of information and the “custody and care of such plans and charts as are now, or may hereafter be, deposited ... selecting and compiling of such information ... for the purpose of improving navigation” (cited in Day, *The Admiralty Hydrographic Service*, 334). Hurd’s tenure as Hydrographer saw an important expansion of these duties and indeed he has been described by another former Hydrographer as “truly the Father of the Surveying Service” (Ritchie, *The Admiralty Chart*, 106). Notwithstanding Hurd’s importance, Barritt’s book is the first comprehensive study of his overall work.

The period covered extends to Hurd’s death in 1823. Thus, it sees the launch of the hydrographic work into the extended Pax Britannica. But perhaps more important, it chronicles hydrographic support to naval operations to the end of the Napoleonic War. There is a widespread and false belief that the 1805 Battle of Trafalgar ended the French naval threat to Britain. (For example, the three Navy Records Society volumes that chronicle the blockade of Brest end in 1805.) Following the 1807 Treaty of Tilsit alliance between France and Russia, the naval forces available to Napoleon expanded beyond British strength. Indeed, the war concluded, Lord Melville, the First Lord of the Admiralty, was recorded by the diarist Charles Greville as saying that “our navy must have eventually been destroyed.” This emphasizes the importance of the Brest blockade in helping prevent the concentration of Napoleon’s dispersed naval assets, and therefore the importance of ongoing hydrographic work reviewed here.

Hurd’s initial success depended on commanders-in-chief wanting better information, thus providing the necessary justification for making specific appointments, and finding men suitable for the task. Hurd required that

these men had the education needed for accurate astronomical observations for determining position and making a triangulated survey from a measured baseline. His insistence of “scientific” men provided the foundation for the reliability of the resulting charts and the reputation of the future service. Many of the men he selected had been masters appointed by Navy Board warrants. Some achieved commissioned rank but few rose to the level of Principal Officers, the cut-off used by Dawson in his *Memoirs of Hydrography* that was continued by Day. Consequently, Barritt’s book is the first time the work of most of them (by my comparison with Dawson) has been brought to wider attention. The local admiral wanting the survey appointment had to make vessel and manpower resources available.

Barritt first provides a vignette of Hurd surveying off Brest. This is followed by a discussion of the state of hydrography, a review of Hurd’s early career, and a discussion of the relationship of hydrography and the expanding trade. Barritt then turns to the Napoleonic War.

Chapters are focused on individual stations and problems are carefully reviewed. This theatre-arrangement will facilitate the book’s use. Barritt’s research is both extensive and new; it “draws on largely untapped sources” (12). In addition to extensive use of the archive of the UK Hydrographic Office (Taunton, Somerset), he has used the collections of the National Maritime Museum and The National Archives at Kew. This is supplemented by memoirs written by many of his subjects and more recent secondary sources.

In sum, this excellent book breaks important new ground. The 1965 *Admiralty Manual of Hydrographic Surveying* says that amongst “the principal qualifications of an efficient surveyor are probably an unlimited capacity for taking pains and conscientious devotion to the accuracy of detail in his work” (1:2). That Barritt satisfied his superiors of his ability on that point is obvious in his selection to be Hydrographer. It is ably demonstrated in this book. One could only wish all historians more widely emulated his standard.

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Black, Dan. *Oceans of Fate: Peace and Peril Aboard the Steamship Empress of Asia*

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Dan Black reveals for us in personable detail, as though in a fireside chat,