

Seas Fleet at Kiel. The potential of the carrier-borne torpedo strike remained at the forefront of FAA planning during the interwar period and attempts by the Royal Air Force to attack German warships at the start of the Second World War provided more lessons that would prove valuable. Hobbs sees the attack on the French battleship *Richelieu* at Dakar on 8 July 1940 by torpedo-armed Swordfish biplanes as exerting the single greatest influence on Taranto strike planning, as it demonstrated the need for lower torpedo depth and speed settings than were used with torpedo attacks at sea.

When the Taranto attack was launched three months later, it was as part of Operation MB 8, a series of naval deployments taking place simultaneously throughout the Mediterranean. That the airstrike stands out is a testament to the operation's success, with three battleships disabled and three other warships damaged. While acknowledging that the number of planes – amounting to fifteen percent of the frontline Swordfish force in the entire Royal Navy – committed to the strike represented a significant allocation of force, Hobbs is nevertheless critical about the use of just one of the three aircraft carriers available in the region for the attack. For him, the failure to employ *Eagle* and *Ark Royal* was a missed opportunity that reflected the outdated thinking of Andrew Cunningham, the commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, who until that point viewed planes as adjuncts to the battle fleet rather than a powerful weapon in their own right.

The success of the Taranto attack changed this. By this point in the war, the Royal Navy was employing their aircraft carriers in the region on a variety of missions, from airstrikes on targets in Italy to ferrying aircraft to Malta. Their utility in these roles was constrained by several factors, from the

small size of their deck elevators to the limited capabilities of the navy's carrier-capable aircraft. Fortunately for the FAA, the poor coordination between the Italian Navy and its air force (which often failed to provide air cover for naval units engaged with British forces) usually ensured that the FAA's inferior planes enjoyed air superiority by default.

By the end of 1942, the FAA was given a new mission: supporting the amphibious landings in North Africa. Despite the formidable learning curve they faced, the FAA soon established itself in the role that would increasingly characterize its operations over its final two years of activity in the region, thanks to the use of new aircraft models (particularly American-built planes that were designed for carrier use) and the influx of smaller escort carriers. Above all else, though, it was a testament to the adaptability of the men of the FAA, for whom this was merely another of the challenges they overcame in order to win their war.

It is this empathy for the men of the FAA which is the real hallmark of Hobbs' work. His book is as much a tribute to them as it is a history of FAA activities in the Mediterranean. This compliments rather than detracts from his coverage of British naval air operations, as it provides the emotion underlying his solid and well-researched study. Not only has Hobbs advanced his efforts to chronicle the history of the Royal Navy's air arm one step closer to completion, he has provided an essential work for anyone interested in the naval air war in the Mediterranean and naval operations in the theatre more generally.

Mark Klobas
Phoenix, Arizona

Richard J. King. *Ahab's Rolling Sea: A Natural History of Moby Dick*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, www.

press.uchicago.edu, 2019. 464 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. US \$30.00, cloth; ISBN 13:978-0-226-51496-3. (E-book available.)

Of the many people who have written about Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, few own two decades sea experience aboard bona fide square riggers. Such a one is Richard J. King, visiting professor of maritime literature and history at the Sea Education Association in Woods Hole, MA. During the course of his fascinating career, King has cruised the Pacific Ocean on board three-masted barques, earned a doctorate at the University of St. Andrews, illustrated children's books, sailed the Atlantic alone in a 28-foot sloop, and written a regular column for *Sea History* magazine. When he declares, as he does in his latest book, that, "Tacking a big ship with three masts and more than a dozen potential sails is an operation requiring a lot of people hauling and easing lines in order, especially with sails suspended from heavy horizontal yards that must be shifted from one angle to another with some precision" (94), the reader is compelled to sit up straight and attend.

Given his credentials, King is uniquely qualified to evaluate Melville as natural philosopher, sailor, and writer. Overall, he gives the bearded novelist high marks, especially considering the state of oceanic science and environmental sensitivity in Melville's era. Most Americans then regarded the sea as something to be traversed or exploited. Few people troubled themselves with thoughts of overfishing or waste. But sitting in his clapboard Berkshires house, alternately scribbling away at his epic and contemplating the green hills outside his window, Melville came to a deeper appreciation. He remembered his long voyages and understood, King writes, "that the sea drives our climate, our biodiversity, our economy, our inter-

national politics, and our imaginations" (2). Like the character Pip, bobbing in the Pacific's immensity, Melville "saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it" (220).

King structures his book like Melville did *Moby Dick*, alternating between first-person episodes and natural history, with an emphasis on cetology. King's personal insights are easily his book's highlights. These include describing what it feels like to spy a whale spout from the gently swaying cross-tree of a square rigger and quizzing a scientist beside a giant stainless-steel tank containing a squid carcass reeking of alcohol. In the natural history realm, he includes chapters on phosphorescence, brit and baleen, barnacles, sharks, and, like Melville, every bit of the whale from its skeleton to its skin. Not infrequently, cetology and the personal intersect, as when King explains ambergris. This waxy substance is produced in the digestive tracts of sperm whales and has always been highly valued by perfumers as a fixative. In *Moby Dick*, Melville has the character Stubb scoop handfuls of it from a rancid whale carcass, "worth a gold guinea an ounce to any druggist" (215). Today a pound of it can fetch \$15,000. King contemplates a sample of this pricey stuff "in the tank room at the Natural History Museum in London" and testifies that it "smells, well, like it came out of a whale's ass" (217).

King also studies whale behaviour, especially whether or not the aggressive tendencies that Melville described so vividly in his novel – flipping boats, snapping off human limbs, and ramming ships – are credible in the real world. "Most of these behaviours are the actions of what seems to be only a literary, foaming leviathan that's whipped up for the drama of the fictional climax," he declares. "Yet, as ever, these animal behaviours are all far less fictionalized when you examine them carefully"

(314). This King does, of course. His examples include a nineteenth-century sailor's description of a sperm whale chomping into a boat and "making a hole as big as the head of a barrel," (316) as well as female whales fending off killer whales with their jaws. Melville was aware of such incidents, including the loss of the whaler *Essex*, rammed and sunk by a whale in 1820. According to King, modern scientists doubt "any intentionality or malice in these animals," (322) but nineteenth-century whale men thrashing about in the debris of their smashed boats likely felt differently.

Running throughout King's book is an environmental *cri de coeur*. He credits Melville with a "brotherly, proto-ecological, proto-environmentalist eye for interdependency that was far ahead of its time" (330). Unfortunately, the oceans and sea life are considerably more stressed now than 170 years ago. To begin with, climate change has raised the Pacific an estimated eight inches since then. On the positive side, commercial whaling is nearly a thing of the past, and Americans consider the animal an "icon of conservation" (341). But overfishing of other species is still an issue. King quotes a 2003 study that found a 90 percent reduction in predatory fish worldwide since Melville's time. That includes sharks, the fins of which are a prized Asian culinary delicacy. Given Melville's grasp of the interconnectedness of things, King convincingly argues that *Moby Dick* may be read as a moral tale in which "messing with the forces of the natural ocean world will end poorly for humans" (350).

Ahab's Rolling Sea is a refreshing and substantive contribution to the existing mountain of Melville research. It avoids convoluted literary analysis and outrageous symbolic claims, instead focusing the reader's attention on the sea, where Melville intended it to be. Not the least of its many pleasures is the irresist-

ible urge to once again plunge into that classic book that so memorably begins, "Call me Ishmael."

John S. Sledge
Fairhope, Alabama

James M. Langdon. *Great Lakes Chronicle: Essays on Coastal Wisconsin*. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, www.shop.wisconsinhistory.org, 428 pp., illustrations, author index. US \$24.95, paper; ISBN 978-0-87020-919-2.

Great Lakes life and management encompasses a variety of disciplines: environmental, economic, and others. *Great Lakes Chronicle: Essays on Coastal Wisconsin* is a collection of essays related to Wisconsin's Lakes Michigan and Huron and Green Bay shorelines published annually from 2002 to 2018 on topics such as economic development, community planning, transportation, recreation, and stewardship. Its 121 essays are written by public officials, business and community leaders, and scientists and deal with some aspect of coastal Wisconsin.

Each year's collection begins with a forward by the Governor at the time, followed by seven to nine essays, mostly three pages each. Their wide variety of topics are sure to contain something attractive to most readers of *The Northern Mariner*. They deal with coastal and water management and wetlands, fisheries management, harbour and bay development and redevelopment in the wake of industrial changes, population trends, tourism, shipbuilding, wilderness protection and restoration, beaches, and rights of, and interaction with, Indigenous nations, just to give a sampling. They provide a catalogue of challenges confronting the stakeholders in Wisconsin's Great Lakes coastlines and