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Russell K. Skowronek, Charles R. Ewen, eds. *X Marks the Spot: The Archaeology of Piracy.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006. xxvi + 339 pp. $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-2875-0.

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Dead Men Tell Few Tales

With compelling enthusiasm, the sixteen contributors to this innovative volume explore the archaeology of piracy and illicit trade, introducing both significant material and neglected historical contexts. Piracy is defined here as "the unlawful taking of ships, cargoes, sailors, and passengers for profit" (p. xv), and, while there are a few comparative references outside of the period, with one exception this volume is confined to the so-called Golden Age of Piracy, the two to three decades on either side of 1700. The editors intend this collection to be "a status report on the contributions of archaeology to the history of piracy" (p. xvi), rather than the broad survey that the title might have suggested. Readers looking for the answer to the infamous "Money Pit" on Oak Island, Nova Scotia, for example, will be disappointed. Instead, there are interesting brief discussions of the tensions involved in the necessary cooperation between commercial maritime salvage operators and marine archaeologists, and of the role played by public interest in the identification and excavation of maritime sites. In several of the cases under examination here the archaeological traces of illicit activity are so slight or analytically opaque that the essays are largely historical exercises, and many of the contributors are limited by the fact that many of the lasting physical traces of piracy are found only indirectly, in regional reactions to its effects: in armaments and fortifications, in an enlarged imperial presence, and in the dispersal pattern of contraband goods.

The essays are divided into three parts. The first part, on "Pirate Lairs," includes essays on Port Royal, Jamaica, on Jean Lafitte's trading station near the mouth of the Mississippi, and two on Anglo-American logwood and freebooter settlements in the Bay of Honduras. The seven essays grouped under the title "Pirate Ships and Their Prey" involve largely non-technical discussions of specific excavations of maritime remains, ranging from Madagascar and Mauritius to North Carolina and the nineteenth-century Ohio River. Two essays form an inconclusive final section entitled "Pirates in Fact and Fiction," which attempts to theorize about both past and present public characterizations of pirates, as well as formulate a typology of the components and surviving remnants of pirate activity. This last section suffers the most from the central problem faced by all the investigators here, which is how to attribute specific archaeological contexts with piracy or illicit communities of some sort. As this collection makes clear, distinguishing the archaeological remains of a pirate vessel from an armed merchantman is often not easy, even with considerable supporting documentary evidence. Indeed, chapters by Mark U. Wilde-Ramsing and Wayne R. Lusardi explicitly provide contrasting perspectives on the attribution of a North Carolina wreck as Blackbeard's ship *Queen Anne's Revenge*, lost in 1718 in the Beaufort Inlet. These two essays could be paired usefully for upper-year courses on historical methodology.

The strength of the collection lies, in particular, with intriguing essays on historical contexts that have been neglected as subjects, such as J. David McBride's and Daniel Finamore's respective chapters on the contraband loggers of Roatan and the Barcadares, or Patrick Lizé's discussion of the remarkably successful pirates of Mauritius. In most contributions the documentary evidence has been well developed, but the secondary historical research is sometimes noticeably thin or dated, while some of the efforts to relate the historical discussions to modern piracy, or to public interest in and characterizations of pirates, remain considerably underdeveloped. The volume's efforts to situate piracy, and its suppression, into a broader historical and analytical context would have benefited from more specialized secondary material, such as the work of Janice Thomson or Anne Pérotin-Dumon, and some of the essays overstate the determinative role of piracy and illicit trade in shaping Atlantic patterns of settlement and commerce.[1] In places the historical and archaeological evidence might have been better correlated,

and some inclusions, such as the text of a 1688 probate inventory of Henry Morgan's Jamaican estate, are simply left for the reader to interpret. Still, even if this volume's efforts to use material culture to pursue the faint remaining traces of the social systems of illicit communities remain tentative, there are some interesting interpretations here of artifact assemblages, ranging from tableware to medical equipment. Given the limits imposed by the survival of archaeological remains, this collection makes a useful contribution to our understanding of the material culture of illicit commerce and non-state conflict in the early modern period.

Note

[1]. Janice Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates and Sovereigns: State Building and Extraterritorial Violence in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Anne Pérotin-Dumon, "The Pirate and the Emperor: Power and the Law on the Seas, 1450-1850," in *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires*, ed. James Tracy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 196-227.

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