

Brenda Ralph Lewis. *The History of Pirates*. London: Amber Books, 2017. Illustrations. 192 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-78274-490-0.

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Commissioned by Gregg French (Saint Mary's University)

As yet another installment to the widely successful *Pirates of the Caribbean* film franchise hit the big screen this past summer, it was joined by a slew of new books by both scholars and popular writers attempting to satisfy the general public's appetite for all things "pirate." Several made significant contributions to our understanding of these "robbers of the sea" and the motives and circumstances driving them over the centuries. Others repackaged oft-told tales of the most widely recognizable pirates during the so-called Golden Age of Caribbean piracy, while some chose to unabashedly echo and perpetuate well-worn myths surrounding the pirate life. This offering from illustrated nonfiction powerhouse publisher Amber Books, a rebranding of an earlier book, *The Pirate Code: From Honorable Thieves to Modern-Day Villains* (2008), by the same author, occupies a space all its own.

Though lacking many of the conventions of an academic work and virtually silent on some of the more pressing issues and themes surrounding piracy in its historical sense, this book provides general audiences with an accurate and effective overview of pirates from antiquity to the modern day. Author of more than eighty-five books, mostly in children's and young adult genres, including the immensely popular DK Readers and A Dark History series, Brenda Ralph Lewis brings her lit-

erary flair and passion for storytelling to examining the history of piracy through eight exceptionally readable chapters, generally organized around the main eras of sea roving.

Opening with the ancient world of the Mediterranean, the book demonstrates that piracy has been a reality since humans have been engaged in maritime commerce. The Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans faced constant attack from successive waves of pirate assemblies, such as the Sea Peoples, Tyrrhenians, Illyrians, and Cilicians. Lewis proves adept at incorporating descriptions of tactics, strategies, and archaeological evidence in support of these findings, both for the age of antiquity and the medieval period. In terms of the latter, Lewis focuses on the Viking and Barbary pirates as the two most notorious pirate groups of the era. Though Viking methods and practices are granted their due, there is very little discussion of the Norse transition from sea raiders to colonizers and no mention whatsoever of Rollo and Normandy. Their movements ranged as far west as Newfoundland in present-day Canada, rather than Labrador as she states, as supported by the UNESCO World Heritage Site at L'Anse aux Meadows. Her treatment of Arab and Berber pirates is solid, as she covers their expansion across the Mediterranean and eventually into the North Atlantic by the seventeenth century. Barbarossa and

Murat Reis receive ample attention as does the use of Barbary piracy by the major European states as a weapon of foreign policy, which eventually leads to the American campaigns against the Barbary states in the early nineteenth century.

Lewis departs from her chronological approach in chapters 3 and 4. In "Pirates of the Far East," she probes piracy in Japan thoroughly, yet exclusively, without paying attention to the massive fleets under the command of Chinese pirate leader Koxinga in the seventeenth century or Madame Cheng in the nineteenth century. A chapter on pirate democracy follows, and though it is curiously placed it helps set the scene for the ensuing three chapters, which deal with the height of piracy in the West. Lewis is most at home when exploring the pirate code, the focus of her previous book, as she compares the articles of agreement carried by ships commanded by William Kidd, Bartholomew Roberts, John Phillips, and Edward Lowe (Ned Low). Followers of H-Caribbean will find chapters 5-7 of particular interest and value. In "Brethren of the Coast," Lewis focuses on the origins of piracy in the Spanish New World Empire. Here, she examines the rise of the buccaneer and touches on the origin of popular conceptions of pirates as depicted in nineteenth-century novels and twentieth-century film. Chapter 6, "Tales from the Caribbean," delves into the lives of several well-known and less familiar figures, including Christopher Myngs, Henry Morgan, Francois L'Olonnais, and the infamous Edward Teach (Blackbeard). In the seventh chapter, "The Golden Age of Piracy," she presents the causes for both the upsurge of Caribbean piracy in the early eighteenth century and its rapid decline by the 1720s, detailing the lives of pirates Howell Davis, Edward England, and Charles Vane, and the pirate-hunter Woodes Rogers. The author's driving narrative is nowhere more evident than in these chapters. The final chapter, "Piracy Today," reminds us that piracy never disappeared. Its incidence has multiplied increasingly since the 1950s, especially in such hot spots as the Strait of Malac-

ca and the South China Sea, where high-value lightly defended shipping is an extremely tempting target for those living in regions stricken with depressed economies and failed states.

While the book is geared toward a nonspecialist audience, there are areas in which it could have offered all readers much more in broadening their understanding "of the beliefs, actions and organization of pirates" (book jacket). Issues around gender, masculinity, and sexuality, a mainstay in the scholarship around piracy for the past two decades, are not explored here. Female pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Read do not appear despite having four chapters devoted to their world. Lewis touches on the common view among pirates that women were commonly regarded as unlucky aboard ship but refrains from analyzing the various ways in which women were enablers of piracy. Pirates in popular culture also receive short shrift, which is particularly problematic given the power and influence of theater, novels, film, and computer games in sanitizing and even celebrating piracy during the modern era.

Less challenging ways in which to enhance the value of the book would be to add some color to the ample illustrations that populate it and include descriptive details to the picture credits. Apart from a small map of the Spanish Main, there are no geographical aids to help guide readers as they navigate the world's oceans over a 3,500-year period. A final criticism lies with the limited source material, for most of the go-to sources on pirates and piracy do not appear in the rather thin bibliography. A startlingly obvious omission is Captain Charles Johnson's *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates* (1724), which was and remains the most influential treatment of piracy during the Golden Age. Recent scholarly work on the topic is also sparsely represented, most prominent being Marcus Rediker's *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750*

(1987) and his *Villains of all Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (2004); Kris Lane's *Pillaging the Empire: Global Piracy on the High Seas, 1500-1750* (1998); C. R. Pennell's *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader* (2001); Frederick Leiner's *The End of Barbary Terror: America's 1815 War against the Pirates of North Africa* (2006); and David Cordingly's *Under the Black Flag: The Romance and the Reality of Life among the Pirates* (2006). A sampling of these as well as several excellent treatments that have appeared in the past decade, from Colin Woodard's *The Republic of Pirates: Being the True and Surprising Story of the Caribbean Pirates and the Man Who Brought Them Down* (2007) and Benerson Little's *Pirate Hunting: The Fight against Pirates, Privateers, and Sea Raiders from Antiquity to the Present* (2010), to John C. Appleby's *Women and English Piracy, 1540-1720: Partners and Victims of Crime* (2013) and Margarette Lincoln's *British Pirates and Society, 1680-1730* (2014), could easily have been included in the updated edition.

It was not the author's intention, of course, to provide a scholarly examination of pirates through the ages. As it stands, Lewis equips popular audiences, secondary students, and teachers with an engagingly written survey of piracy, from its earliest manifestations to recent times.

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