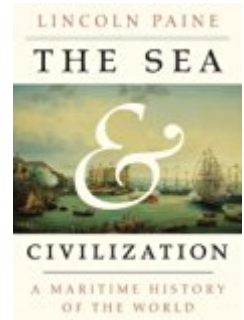


Lincoln Paine. *The Sea and Civilization: A Maritime History of the World.* New York: Knopf, 2013. Illustrations. xxxv + 744 pp. \$40.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4000-4409-2.



Reviewed by Rainer Buschmann

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Commissioned by Aaron D. Whelchel (Washington State University-Vancouver)

Sea and Civilization is a fabulous read. Lincoln Paine initiates his book with a bold statement wanting to change his readers' perspectives by shifting views away from terrestrial continents, regions, and nation-states, to the blue shades signaling lakes, oceans, rivers, and seas on any given map. This challenge means that Paine had to channel more than six thousand years of global maritime history into a massive tome of 600 pages (add to this another impressive 130 pages of notes, bibliography, and a very detailed index). The book is organized in twenty chapters that begin when humans first took to the water, depicted by Norwegian rock drawings dating to 4,200 BCE, to the technological changes--containerships, oil tankers, and nuclear-powered naval vessels--occurring during the second half of the twentieth century. In his global survey of maritime history, Paine includes novel areas of study, such as the Caribbean and Oceania, although the great majority of his work centers on developments among Eurasians located along and within the Mediter-

anean, the North and Baltic seas, and the Indian Ocean.

The work's uniqueness emerges from the fact that Christopher Columbus's crossing of the Atlantic and Dom Vasco da Gama's thrust into the Indian Ocean are not chronicled until chapter 14, leaving the majority of his text (about two-thirds of it) in the generally less emphasized pre-1400 time frame. Some historians might bemoan the speedy treatment of the technological changes in maritime technology of the twentieth century, but Paine's choice allows for an easy inclusion of *Sea and Civilization* in world history courses leading up to the year 1500.

Not only do Paine's chronological choices contribute to the work's exceptional features, but also his range of sources is exhaustive and impressive. The author is well versed in the secondary sources available to canvass the individual seas and oceans discussed in his work. What is even more appealing is his return to the available primary sources, be it Homer's well-known epic po-

ems, *the Epic of Gilgamesh*, or Babylonian as well as Mauryan law codes. Through the inclusion of personal stories and bountiful detail gathered from maritime archeology, Paine is able to breathe life into maritime topics that tend to get bogged down by technological details. Where written texts fail or are absent, shipwrecks tell us a great deal about the cargo they once transported as well as the shifts in maritime technology that accompanied their construction. Such aspects are expertly woven into Paine's complex tapestry. The wreck off the coast of Serçe Limani, Turkey, for instance, discussed in chapter 8, signaled the transition in shipbuilding from shell-first to frame-first technology.

The organization of Paine's chapters is another of his book's distinctive features. Framed by introductory and concluding sections, the chapters quickly move to tell the stories of the major actors, and religious and imperial forces in the expansion of maritime technology. The last chapter section generally links maritime skills with societal changes underscoring Paine's important mission of linking maritime ventures with prominent human change and development. Lastly, Paine discusses the individual vessels roaming the seas and oceans during any particular time period.

In the interest of space, one example shall suffice. In chapter 13, Paine discusses the golden age of the Indian Ocean. The chapter begins with the role of Chinese merchants in the expanding maritime trade. It then shifts to the maritime successes and failures of the Mongol-imposed Yuan dynasty. Paine then discusses important travelers to the region, including Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta, and he spends considerable time on the importance of the Cairo Geniza documents in illustrating the cultural, economic, and religious linkages of the Indian Ocean. Then, he introduces the important contribution of the Ming dynasty maritime expansion under Admiral Zheng He. He concludes his chapter by talking about the sewn boats

that frequented the Indian Ocean as well as the boats comprising Zheng He's fleet.

In short, one cannot find enough praise for Paine's work; and the acclamations found on the dust jacket by leading experts in the field are well deserved. In the interest of stimulating discussions in the author's forum, however, I will endeavor to raise four questions about *Sea and Civilization* and the writing/teaching of maritime world history in general.

First, Paine wants us to change the way we look at the world. How novel is his approach? Combining world history with maritime history, the author encourages us to look at oceans, rivers, and seas as novel frames of analysis, hence moving away from the terrestrial "shackles" that have chained global historical frameworks to nation-states and regional areas. On the surface, this shift is not as innovative as Paine would like us to believe. Since the 1990s, world historians in tandem with geographers (among them the late Jerry H. Bentley, Kären Wigen, and more recently Patrick Manning) have urged scholars to consider ocean and sea basins as novel analytical lenses.[1] In all of these cases, we find world historians who discovered maritime history. In Paine's book we encounter a maritime historian who discovers world history. Should there have been a more thorough discussion of existing maritime currents among global historians?

Second, is a chronological approach really the best method to write/teach maritime world history? Periodization is, of course, a major issue in world history and students generally feel more comfortable with narrow timelines than with thematic or geographic approaches to global pasts. Yet Paine's book begs the question whether the chronological approach really is the best method to follow. Take the first chapter, for instance. In the interest of establishing a tight timeline, the author gives a detailed description of Caribbean and Oceanian maritime traditions that seemingly do not "fit" well with the rest of the volume. Similar-

ly, Paine's narrative meanders from region to region throughout much of his book. Chapters 2 through 5 tackle the Mediterranean, before he shifts to the Indian Ocean in chapters 6 and 7. Chapter 8 returns to the Mediterranean, while 9 shifts to the North and Baltic seas. Chapters 10 and 11 return to the developments to in the Indian Ocean. Chapter 12 finds the reader again in the Mediterranean, while 13 discusses the golden age of the Indian Ocean. It is only with chapter 14, dealing with the European maritime expansion, that the aquatic areas are discussed in unison.

Third, does Paine's book return world history to a perspective--"The Rise of the West"--from which practitioners of this subfield have attempted to depart? Paine admits that his story relies mostly on European and Asian maritime traditions. His account seemingly favors the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean over other regions. He does acknowledge the important contribution of Oceanian and Caribbean societies, although they are conveniently tucked away in his first chapter. This emphasis is also apparent from the choice of the title: *Sea and Civilization*. Many practitioners in the field of world history perceive the term "civilization" as problematic and want to eschew it due to its evolutionary tone. Yet in a field such as maritime history, driven as it is by technological innovations, the term's permutations continue to haunt narratives.

Fourth, when teaching or writing maritime global history, how much attention should be paid to oceanography or physical geography? In a much-quoted statement, Felipe Fernández-Armesto once wrote: "In most of our explanations of what has happened in history there is too much hot air and not enough wind."^[2] Granted, students' eyes glaze over when one starts talking about the Coriolis effect, monsoon regimes, and currents and wind directions in the Atlantic and the Indian oceans. Nevertheless, should there be more attention to such features in maritime global histories?

Notes

[1]. To mention but a few works: Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal, Kären Wigen eds., *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007); and Patrick Manning, "Global History and Maritime History," *International Journal of Maritime History* 25 (2013): 1-22.

[2]. Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Civilizations: Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 405.

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