

that the lavishly engraved first editions were given as diplomatic gifts.

By far the most unique expedition is William Lynch's voyage to the Dead Sea, which sought to verify the Bible as a historically accurate document. Moreover, his primary motivation for launching the expedition was to refute the beliefs of certain Christian sects such as the Unitarians, Catholics and Orthodox in favor of the Protestant Evangelical biblical interpretation. (The fact that the expedition would be dependent on Muslims for its safety and passage is more than a bit ironic.) While the results of the expedition are debatable, it does seem to have made some diplomatic in-roads.

As for the Empire of Slavery, the United States' attempt to conquer South America in order to extend slavery would be impressive in its ambitions if it was not so tragic in its motivations. Nowhere is this dichotomy better reflected than in the person of the brilliant cartographer Matthew Maury. While naval explorers returned to Washington with the belief that the Amazon River Valley was perfect for colonization, the Brazilians were wise to the game after watching the U.S. annex Texas. Likewise, internal politics at home and arrogance aboard prevented the U.S. from mapping the Rio de la Plata.

The final chapter returns to the theme of the young nation seeking and gaining respect from its European cousins as it participates in the search for the explorer Sir John Franklin. In particular, it offers a lovely insight into the special relationship that seems so one-sided today.

If there is any quibble with this work, it's that the cameos are in danger of overshadowing the main players. From Edgar Allen Poe and Herman Melville to the creation of the Smithsonian Institution to encroaching tremors of war, the reader can't help but want to pursue these tangents further than the brief context the author provides. Regardless, *A Great and Rising Nation* is a fine piece of scholarship on the U.S.'s attempt to balance a desire to pursue imperial ambitions abroad while managing increasingly unmanageable tensions at home.

A Great and Rising Nation: Naval Exploration and Global Empire in the Early U.S. Republic, by Michael A. Verney. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022. Pp. xii, 300. Illus., maps, notes, index. \$35.00 paper, ISBN 978-0-2268-1992-1; hard cover & e-editions. --Greg McNiff.

***The Boundless Sea:
A Human History of the Oceans,***
by David Abulafia

Following the success of David Abulafia's *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (2011) comes this epic. It shows the strength and weakness of its predecessor and, like it, is a flawed masterpiece, but one that is probably going to dominate the field for many years, and deservedly so.

The flaws are readily apparent. Abulafia is clear that he is a maritime historian more than a naval one, and this is not a book for those who seek insight on naval warfare. Nor does he appear comfortable with the last century. Indeed, it is rushed through and in an unsatisfactory fashion which leaves issues such as global warming, pollution and the pressures on fishing mentioned in a perfunctory fashion, and others not handled at all. So either he should write a better second edition or sequel, or Penguin should publish one with the high scholarly and production values of this study.

It is, however, pleasurable to turn to the many qualities of this book. As with the Mediterranean volume, there is a strong grasp of early developments. Indeed, Abulafia ably pulls together work from around the world. Thus, the earliest Andean civilisations depended on marine resources. Fishing was a major source of protein and, even later for the highland-based Inca, the sea and its resources played a critical role in imperial geopolitics. Across the Pacific, the ancient inhabitants of Japan were regular voyagers to offshore islands, at least seasonally, many of which were settled. However, with the notable exception of Okinawa, there was no long-distance marine expansion. As Abulafia shows, the situation in the south-west Pacific was dramatically different.

Moreover, with his global range of interest, commitment, knowledge and scholarship, Abulafia is able to offer broad assessments that would seem presumptuous from others. He is up to date in his scholarship, notably on maritime archaeology, and able to range across cultures in an inimitable fashion. As with the earlier book, there is a valuable engagement with the degree to which the sea, and notably maritime trade, provided crucial links within and between cultures, and thus, in the latter case, a degree of porosity for them.

Again, as he showed in his careful refutation of Braudel in the previous book, Abulafia is both well aware of the multiple pressures from environmental factors and yet no determinist. Instead, he handles issues such as climate and current in a subtle fashion, one in which the very use of what is termed possibilism makes for a

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much better engagement with how different cultures have responded to such factors. Here again Abulafia's wide-ranging scholarship is particularly valuable for, in putting aside determinism, he has to offer assessments that draw on an appreciation of complexity in causation. Abulafia's understanding of the oceans, and his knowledge of wrecks, leads to an appropriate appreciation of the difficulties of maritime life across most of history. Coastal charts were frequently imperfect or non-existent, and lighthouses absent or inadequate. Accurate timekeeping and thus navigation were very difficult without the instruments that were to be developed later. As a result, knowledge was unfixed, in the sense that it could not readily be related to the maps that did exist. Experience, in the shape of the views of long-lived members of the crew, was a crucial element in knowing how to respond to circumstances. Alongside a quest for practical solutions, there was a belief that witches could direct winds. As another aspect of maritime uncertainty, there was the role of piracy.

For the early-modern period, Shakespeare mentions piracy frequently as well as providing clear evidence of the widespread impact of the sea, including on the collective imagination. References to catching the tide and to the winds are frequent, with the tide providing a clear metaphor. Shipwreck and the problems of storm-tossed or, in contrast, becalmed journeys, of too much or too little wind, engaged the imagination of the age. Winds blowing ships onto rocky coasts were a particular threat. A terrible storm is important to the plot of *Othello* in that the destruction of the Turkish fleet preparing to invade Cyprus leaves the Venetians sent to help the island free to pursue the obsessive jealousies that Iago builds up. Dutch paintings of the period, for example by Jan Ruysdael, include harrowing scenes of ships being sunk in storms. Winter voyages were harshest and most dangerous. This situation invites caution before a progressivist and positive account is adopted, and Abulafia is properly careful not to do so.

Another key instance of Abulafia's skill in conceptualisation, methodology and historiography is provided by his ability to answer the need to argue from the particular to the general that stems from the global scale of his subject. Again, most yield to this by turning to a misleading search for patterns alongside overused, even bland, concepts such as globalisation or revolution, which provide a rush of blood to the head. Abulafia is justifiably skeptical about the spray-painting of the term globalisation, and provides, instead, a more careful account of "the links between the oceans".

Abulafia, however, does not seem comparably interested in what lays under them, but that is one of the great epics of human maritime exploration and, increasingly under it. Telegraph cables are briefly here, but not subsequent activity, which is a great pity as it is only in recent decades that the floor of the oceans has been reliably explored and mapped, while oil and gas extraction has become more important, and maritime territorial claims are pushed with zeal. The latter are another topic that links to geopolitics, and here there have been important shifts, not least over the last 150 years.

Alfred Thayer Mahan sought naval power for the United States in order to implement his view of the national destiny of international power expressed through naval strength. In contrast, Halford Mackinder, the founder of British geopolitics, came, in the early 1900s, to support the new imperialism of the Liberal Unionists, such as Joseph Chamberlain, as he saw territorial control over land as a key to economic strength. Irrespective of their oceanic profiles and strength, the industrialisation and political coherence of large land powers appeared to Mackinder to challenge the value of sea power or to give it a new direction and energy by basing their strengths on land resources. In *Britain and the British Seas* (1902) he argued forcefully that the development of rail technology and systems altered the paradigm of economic potential away from maritime power. Mackinder told his audience at the Royal Geographical Society in 1904 that an international system based on sea power, which he termed the Columbian epoch, was coming to an end as a result of the reassertion of land power made possible by the railway. He was challenged by Leo Amery who argued that air power would take precedence: "A great deal of this geographical distribution must lose its importance . . . It will not matter whether they are in the centre of a continent or on an island." In turn, Peter Hugill took forward Amery's critique of Mackinder in 2005. Now Chinese policy suggests an attempt to have both a land and a maritime geopolitics.

If there is much missing in this major study, that simply whets the appetite for Abulafia to deploy his formidable skills in relevant subsequent work.

The Boundless Sea: A Human History of the Oceans, by David Abulafia. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. xxxii, 1050. Illus., maps, notes, biblio., index. \$39.95, ISBN 978-0-1999-3498-0; audio-, e-editions.

--Jeremy Black

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