

to introduce some sense and order into the matter. While Alfred Mahan explained to the British how their sea-power had secured an Empire, and Arthur Marder opened up the Navy of the Fisher era for scrutiny, Eugene Rasor offers a critical resumé of the subject to guide future enquiries.

His 1990 publication, *British Naval History Since 1815*, combined a 500-plus page assessment of the state of the subject between 1960 and 1990 divided into chronological and thematic sections, with a 3000-entry un-annotated bibliography of post-1960 material. The new volume adopts a slightly different method; material from all periods is included in the 4000-entry listing, and almost all are annotated, both for content and in many key areas as a contribution to the subject. While useful, accurate lists can be compiled by many hands and heads: the ability to impose some order on a subject, by analysing its practices, practitioners and products, requires an altogether different level of engagement. In the 360-page 'Historiographical Narrative' Rasor provides another overview, like that of 1990, which will be a godsend to any novice, be he a new student of naval history or, like many readers of this *Journal*, from a related subject.

Readers of this *Journal* will not be surprised to learn that it features in the descriptive list of academic journals to be consulted, alongside those dealing with mainstream naval history, or mainstream British history. There are also two new web-based journals. Some articles from the *IJNA* are included in the bibliography, notably Colin Martin's work on Spanish Armada wrecks. The treatment of nautical archaeology in the stand-alone section (pp.331–7) is adequate, offering the naval historian requiring an introduction to the subject the tools to make more specific searches. However, it is not a bibliography of nautical archaeology: that task remains to be essayed. What could be attempted here is a stronger focus on the way in which nautical archaeology has informed the technical history of pre-18th-century warships, the one area where new evidence has made a radical difference to our understanding of the ships and seafaring techniques in the past century. Where the coverage strays outside the United Kingdom it favours North America rather than the European littoral; such Scandinavian highlights as the Oslo Fjord ships and Skuldelev are absent, as is the Bremen Cog.

The uneven coverage is an inevitable consequence of the single-author approach. Rasor is clearly happier dealing with sea fiction than 'sub aqua'. This reviewer would have preferred to have naval fiction analysed in the context of the development of naval history, an area where such authors as Marryat, Fenimore Cooper and Frederick Chamier stand out. The last receives an unusually severe assessment from the normally benign Rasor. By contrast, Rasor's treatment of Gavin Menzies' sensationalist *1491: the Year China Discovered the World* reveals a man at ease with his method: 'Spectacular

claims for the voyage [Menzies] contends included the Americas, Australia and the Arctic, and that 'signs' included wrecks, Asian chickens in Peru, and plants; some reviewers are dubious' (p.793). Nicely done—it would be wrong to ignore such work: it must be examined and held to account. Across the board, the list contains rather more works lacking any enduring value than one might expect, and ignores some of the older biographies and memoirs. Admiral Sir William Cornwallis, a close friend of Nelson and an outstanding fleet commander, is denied his biography, and is confused with his elder brother Lord Cornwallis—a man rather better known to the Americans for the surrender at Yorktown in 1781. Such works are included in older listings and can be accessed on the Royal Historical Society's internet bibliography—a resource available free of charge.

At the time of going to press, Rasor was beginning work on a combined and updated edition of the entire run of English/British naval history. Future developments in this field will surely move towards a web-based living reference, with relatively small areas of knowledge being patrolled by experts. While this method should ensure that all of everything can be considered, and the cross-referencing to other areas of scholarship will be made far easier, the individual touch of the editor/compiler will be lost; and with it much of the value of the judgements expressed. It is this that makes Rasor's work a living, breathing source, rather than a dry catalogue.

This book offers any enquiring student easy access to the core of the subject, an intelligent and rewarding guide, and the basis for further research. No-one will agree with all of Rasor's judgements, but none will dispute that he has provided a unique, unrivalled and irreplaceable tool for all scholars in the field. Together with the 1990 volume he has used the critical bibliography to impose order and coherence on British naval history, an essential step in demonstrating that it has matured as a serious branch of the historical discipline. We are all in his debt.

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The Tragic History of the Sea

C. R. BOXER (ed. and trans.) with additional material by JOSIAH BLACKMORE

467 pp., 15 b&w illustrations

University of Minnesota Press (by arrangement with Hakluyt Society), 111 3rd Avenue South, Suite 290, Minneapolis MN 55401-2520, USA, 2001, \$50 (sbk), ISBN 0-8166-3890-8

The *História Trágico-Marítima* was first published in 1735–36 by Bernardo Gomes de Brito, and consisted

of two volumes with 12 narratives of shipwrecks and other maritime disasters. Mostly reprints of 16th- and 17th-century pamphlets, these narratives were an immediate success and triggered the edition of a third volume with another six accounts, clandestinely published by an anonymous printer who has never been identified. Mainly popular accounts recorded by survivors or writers who heard the stories first-hand, these narratives are, as Boxer put it, 'movingly and graphically written, if not always as grammatically as could be wished'. But their interest and relevance are beyond discussion, not only for the journalistic descriptions of the tragic situations endured by the ships' crews and passengers, but also for the insightful details about the voyages, life aboard, ships, shipwreck causes and processes, and even the descriptions of the South African peoples living on the lands crossed by the survivors while walking on the way to Mozambique.

In 1959 the Hakluyt Society published three translations of these accounts, by C. R. Boxer, in a volume titled *The Tragic History of the Sea*, and less than a decade later, in 1968, another three translations under the title *Further Selections from the Tragic History of the Sea*. Neither of these books contained the most famous and perhaps most dramatic of the 12 stories of the original edition: the 'Account of the very remarkable loss of the Great Galleon São João' in 1552, which occurred on the coast of Natal, South Africa. Already translated by George Theal in 1898–1903 and Charles Ley in 1947, this narrative was left out of Boxer's works. It is a poignant story of courage and resistance by 500 survivors from a shipwreck who marched an estimated 300 leagues (c.1850 km), from the shipwreck site (near the present-day Port Edward in Natal, South Africa), to Mozambique. The march took five-and-a-half months and most of the group died, including the captain, Manuel de Sepúlveda, his children, and his wife, who buried herself in the sand after being stripped of her clothes by a party of natives and died of shame, grief and exhaustion.

This new edition is a reprint of Boxer's two books in a single volume, which includes a new translation of Sepúlveda's shipwreck narrative, as well as a foreword, both by Josiah Blackmore. This new translation of Sepúlveda's account is good, vivid, and easy to read, even if somewhat unclear as far as the short portion of the text that deals with the ship is concerned. For instance, on p.6, instead of 'caused the rigging and the beams on the port side to explode into pieces, leaving nothing more than the three forestays' the following would perhaps be closer to the original: 'caused all port side shrouds and backstays to explode into pieces except the three foremost shrouds'. The truth is that the original is not completely clear itself, and neither Ley's translation ('burst the rigging and the mast beams on the larboard side so that only the three foremost ones were left') nor Theal's ('broke the shrouds as backstays on the larboard side, and nothing was left

but the three forestays') are very clear either. Be it as it may, the eventual mistranslation of one or two obscure 16th-century nautical terms does not take anything away from this amazing story, and much less from this wonderful book.

After Blackmore's insightful foreword, the book presents his translation of Sepúlveda's shipwreck, followed by a complete reprint of Boxer's 1959 *The Tragic History of the Sea*. This comprises the original preface and his remarkable introduction to the Portuguese India Route, followed by the narratives of the shipwrecks of the Indiamen *São Thomé* (1589), *Santo Alberto* (1593), and *São João Baptista* (1622). All three narratives had already been translated by Theal. The work is completed with five appendices, a bibliography and an excellent index. This is followed by a complete reprint of Boxer's 1968 *Further Selections from the Tragic History of the Sea*, comprising a brief preface, another useful introduction to the theme and the authors of the narratives presented, and newly-translated accounts of the shipwrecks of the Indiamen *Águia and Garça* (1559), *São Paulo* (1561) and of the Brazil-ship *Santo António* (1565), followed by a bibliography and index.

The images, mostly maps, are inserted in the central pages, printed on glossy paper, at a smaller scale than the originals in the Hakluyt editions. Of the 18 accounts published in the mid-18th century, both in Gomes de Brito's volumes and in the anonymous third volume, only 11 have been translated into English: eight by Theal and three by Boxer. The seven accounts presented in this volume cover a period between 1552 and 1622, during which Portugal fell victim to the religious zealotry of the Counter Reformation and saw its empire fading away, its king dying in an insane military campaign, and its independence disappearing under the Habsburg rule. Written during a period of eroding power, economic depression, war, and intellectual persecution, these accounts are at times permeated by the pessimism that characterizes some of the best literary works produced in this period. Following the brutal repression of the Renaissance by the Holy Inquisition, Jesuit scholars took over the universities in Portugal, deliberately closed courses, remodelled curricula, and even censored the works of Latin scholars from whose scripts 'readers' were made, removing most exhortations to the use of reason and observation.

Perhaps because of the pessimism and bitterness shown in some of these accounts, Portuguese Indiamen are sometimes considered by scholars as awful ships, badly built, manned by incompetent and corrupt officers, crewed by superstitious sailors, and bound to shipwreck on the first opportunity. Reality was quite different: these were wonderful ships, generally manned by competent sailors and knowledgeable pilots. In fact, when we consider the total number of ships lost at sea from the voyage of Vasco da Gama in 1497–98 to the restoration of independence in 1640,

the Portuguese Indiamen were safe ships that did not wreck often, with the exception of the two confused decades that followed the loss of Portuguese independence in 1580.

In any case, permeated by pessimism or not, this new edition of *The Tragic History of the Sea* is a 'must' for all readers interested in post-medieval seafaring and deserves a place in any basic maritime library.

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From a Watery Grave: The Discovery and Excavation of La Salle's Shipwreck, *La Belle*

JAMES E. BRUSETH and TONI S. TURNER

176 pp., 139 illustrations, 126 in colour

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Very rarely—perhaps no more than once in a decade—a nautical archaeological project sets new standards for the methodologies and approaches which can be applied to shipwreck investigations. The most recent has been the excavation, recovery, and conservation of the surviving hull and contents of *La Belle*, a small French *barque longue* lost during La Salle's abortive expedition to what is now Texas in 1686. Discovered in 1995 during a targeted geophysical search of Matagorda Bay directed by the then State Marine Archaeologist Barto Arnold III on behalf of the Texas Historical Commission, the wreck turned out to be exceptionally well preserved, with some 40% of the hull remaining intact and much of the cargo surviving *in situ*, still in its containers of casks and boxes. Because of the site's significance to the early history of Texas, and its vulnerability to treasure hunters, the Commission opted for total and immediate excavation. A cofferdam was built around the wreck, which lay in only 12 feet (c.4 m) of water, and in a year of intensive work the site was excavated in (relatively speaking) dry conditions and the hull raised. Conservation and post-excavation research have continued since, and the investigation is now close to completion. This volume is not the final publication—but is something we await with eager anticipation—that a general account of the project, written with a popular readership in mind.

But it is no less significant for that. First, its authors are the project's archaeological director (Bruseth) and one of its principal co-ordinators (Taylor), who most assuredly know what they are talking about. Second, it is published by a distinguished academic house which insists on anonymous peer review (generously

acknowledged by the authors) and rigorous editing standards. This reviewer could not find a single typographical error or textual infelicity—an almost infallible indication that the content is sound too. Third, it is a well-designed and superbly illustrated book, almost wholly in colour, which not only provides a comprehensive and eminently readable account of the excavation and its historical background but also chronicles, with refreshing candour, the trials, near-disasters, ingenuity, and determination which lie behind the project's successful outcome.

This book can be recommended unreservedly to both the general reader and the nautical specialist. The historical background is well explained, homing in from French colonial aspirations in the New World to La Salle's ambitious plans to develop trade by establishing an entrepot at the mouth of the Mississippi and ousting Spanish hegemony in the region. It came to naught in 1686 with the loss of the expedition's last surviving ship, *La Belle*, and the murder of La Salle by a disaffected subordinate. In passing, the extraordinary story is told of the establishment of Fort St Louis at the head of Matagorda Bay in 1685, and the off-loading of eight iron cannons from another of the expedition's ships, *L'Aimable* (herself subsequently wrecked) to arm it. The French colonists left at the fort were annihilated by Indians in 1689, but the Spaniard Alonso de León visited the site a few months later and buried the cannons for later recovery. He never returned, and in 1996 all eight were found just as they had been stashed at the site of the fort, carefully buried in a shallow pit and still in pristine condition.

A chapter is devoted to the wreck's discovery, the development of the project, and the construction of the cofferdam in which the excavation took place. This is followed by a chapter summarising the constructional evidence for the ship and its fittings. While clearly not the last word to be derived from the project's extensive and meticulously-recorded archive of structural evidence, it nonetheless presents a comprehensive overview of what was found and how it relates to documentary and other sources which relate to this particular ship and others of her type. Among many tantalising glimpses of good things yet to come is a mention of Toni Carrell's application of dendrochronological analysis to show that some of the timbers were more than 200 years old when built into the ship, suggesting several generations of re-use.

Chapter 6 describes the ship's contents which, as noted above, still lay in the hold without significant post-wrecking dislocation. Most are trade goods, unremarkable in themselves but given unique relevance by their packaging details and sheer quantity. There were an estimated 790,000 glass beads (more than half a million in a single wooden box), 300,000 lead musket balls in casks, and smaller but still significant collections of brass pins, hawk bells, mass-produced Jesuit finger-rings, and iron axe-heads. The only coin,