CONFERENCE REPORTS

*Privateering and Piracy**

Regine Goutalier
University of Provence

The International Commission on Naval History held four sessions at the Mark Twain Hotel in San Francisco (23rd and 24th August 1975), during which papers on "privateering and piracy" were delivered and discussed. There was a final meeting on the 25th, at which an attempt was made to draw together from the various papers some general conclusions and impressions.

Privateering and piracy have a history which can be traced from antiquity to the early XIXth century, and have occurred on every ocean in the world. In the Eastern Mediterranean in the period of the Byzantine Empire (from the IVth to the XVth centuries), it is clear that seaborne brigandage was inversely related to the fortunes of the maritime powers which were involved in suppressing it.[1] The increase in piracy during the disruption of the Byzantine Empire in 1204 bears witness to this. In this part of the Mediterranean, pirates and corsairs used a variety of techniques, ranging from ship-wrecking to piracy on the high seas, attacks on ports, and even operations at sea combined with brigand operations on land. In the XIIIth and XIVth centuries, however, a new figure emerges, in whom piracy trade and exploration are combined, and this resulted from commercial developments, from the establishment of new fixed trading routes, and from new navigation techniques.

---

* Proceedings of the International Commission for Naval History at the International Historical Congress, San Francisco 1975.

[1] « Privateering and piracy in the Eastern Mediterranean in the XIVth and XVth centuries (Byzantine Empire) », H. AHRWEILER, Sorbonne.

Along the Dalmatian coast in the same period piracy was virtually endemic, and was organized collectively by the Croatians and Narentines in particular.[2] As the Croatian kingdom became strengthened in the Xth century, Croatian piracy declined, but from the VIIth to the XIIIth centuries the Narentines (from their base at Omis) were the scourge of the Adriatic for both the Venetians and the sailors of Dubrovnik. An explanation for this can be found in the poverty of the Narentines' land and in the political instability of the Adriatic.

In another paper the situation in the Red Sea was described, in particular the activities of Renaud de Chatillon, ruler of the land of Moab, in the southern part of the Red Sea, who organised a series of piratical operations towards the North at the end of 1182.[3] He had two objectives: first, to conquer the Holy Cities of Islam (Mecca and Medina), and second, to destroy Muslim trade in the northern Mediterranean. Chatillon had a fleet of 16 vessels (five of which were galleys), and he laid seige to the Island of Graye in the Gulf of Akaba, which was held by the Saracens while another part of his fleet attacked and sacked the port of Aidhab (a port on the Egyptian coast used by pilgrims), and then landed troops on the Arabian coast near Sherm Rabigh and El Harrach. The total defeat of the second Crusade in late February 1183 had an immediate impact, and this short episode helps explain the Draconian measures which sealed the Red Sea off as an exclusively Arab area for four centuries.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the Mediterranean remained the preferred base for pirates and corsairs.[4] It provided important employment for the coastal population, and was able to shelter behind the effective ideological cover of the war between the Cross and the Crescent. The phenomenon appeared in a variety of forms: pure piracy (especially on the Dalmatian cost), corsair warfare as was found in the west, and the privateering operations of the "corsair states", which appeared in both Christian and Muslim colours. At least three chronological phases emerge: first, a transition phase during which piracy assumes a wide variety of forms, and which lasted until about 1460 and the establishment of Ottoman power in the east; secondly, a century of maritime conflict, during which privateering played a major role in the struggle between the Spanish and Ottoman empires; finally, in the period after Lepanto, privateering replaced the naval squadrons in naval warfare (especially from 1580 to 1640), but then began to degenerate more

---

[2] « Piracy on the Dalmatian coast (VIIth - XIIIth centuries) », B. KREKIC, University of California, L.A.

[3] « Privateer warfare in the Red Sea during the Crusades: Renaud de Chatillon (1182-1183) », H. LABROUSSE, French delegate at the 3rd UN Conference on the Law of the Sea.

[4] « Privateering and Piracy in the Mediterranean from the late Middle Ages to the early XIXth century », M. FONTENAY (Sorbonne) and A. TENENTI (Ecole des H. Etudes, Paris).

and more into semi-piracy. The authors claimed, however, that because of the stimulus to trade arising from the sale of prizes, privateering probably benefitted the major naval powers and their merchants more than it harmed them.

Turkish terminology is also interesting in this respect, and the Destan of Umur Pasha, an early XIVth century chronicle written by an Anatolian Turk, provides one of the oldest narrative description of the development of Turkish privateering against that of Genoa.[5] This provides much tecnical information (in particular on the number and type of vessels used in privateering operations) and interesting points of terminology — especially the names for those engaged in piracy: *harami, corsar, corsan.*

It is almost impossible to draw a distinction between privateering and piracy in the Mediterranean, but this did occur in the Atlantic in the XIVth and XVth centuries.[6] From then on, piracy became the equivalent of brigandage while the privateer or corsair became a private entrepreneur either backed or exploited by one of the powers. Privateering was subject to customary law on reprisals, to the terms of letters of marque, and to the jurisdiction of the commissions of the Preservers of the Peace, who were empowered to adjudicate in the case of disputed prizes. In the final decades of the XVth century a series of international negotiations established a set of rules agreed between France, Britain, Spain, Portugal and the Hanseatic towns governing the commissioning of corsairs and procedures for taking prizes. During the XVIth century maritime codes based on this first attempt (the "rule of the sea") increased, despite difficulties, such as the Franco-Portuguese attempt to establish a prize tribunal at Bayonne (1537-41).

Frisia also proved interesting in this context, and in the XIVth and XVth centuries the Frisian coast acted as something of an intermediary between the two great commercial powers, the Baltic and the Low Countries.[7] The Frisians had generally been strippers of wrecks rather than pirates before the appearance in the XIVth century of the *italienbruden,* who were driven into the North Sea from the Baltic by the Teutonic Order. But in general, in Frisia piracy provided a living for foreigners, and the Frisians continued to depend primarily on ordinary trade for their livelihood.

Portugal provides a further case, however, and in the XIVth century piracy between Portugal and France doubled, one of the main reasons being the Iberian monopoly over the trade in certain exotic goods.[8] The economic

---

[5] « Notes on Turkish terminology for privateering », C. VILLAIN-GANDOSSI (CNRS, Paris).

[6] « Uncontrolled piracy and regulated privateering (XIVth - XVth centuries) », M. MOLLAT (Sorbonne).

[7] « Privateers and pirates on the Frisian coast in the XIVth and XVth centuries », U. SCHEURLEN (Museum für Hamburgische).

[8] « Privateering and piracy between Portugal and France in the early XIVth century: some economic aspects of the problem », A. M. FERREIRA (Paris).

consequences of the struggle were considerable, especially the disruption to normal trade and to the state's finances. This was especially damaging for Portugal, as foreign trade counted for 65% of her wealth.

* * *

It is in the modern period that piracy and privateering, which previously had confined themselves to European waters, were to take on an oceanic scale.[9] From 1540 onwards the numbers of vessels involved, the amounts of capital invested, and of the prizes seized, all began to increase. Anglo-Iberian rivalries, in particular in the year 1585 to 1604, led to an outbreak of privateering warfare, spurred on by the merchants of London and the sea ports of the West Country. With the return of peace, privateering became piracy, and occurred throughout the Atlantic, although the pirates generally used bases outside Britain. The process has been studied carefully since 1945, although many aspects have still to be explored.

It is clear that the problem is multi-dimensional in the modern period. For example, Dunkirk was considered to be one of the capitals of privateering in the years 1688-1713 (cf. Richard Steele's pamphlet of 1713 "On the Importance of Privateering"), and to have overshadowed St. Malo.[10] But one must also put some limits on the phenomenon, and it is clear that there were never over 4,000 men or 30 gunboats, which were never as powerful as those of St. Malo. This explains why agreements on joint enterprises were often reached with Flemish privateers, as in the case of the captains Saus and Baetman. As well as being a base for privateers, Dunkirk also possessed a naval arsenal, but local shipowners who generally acted in association in commercial ventures hardly ever commissioned naval frigates, even though some of them (the Bart company and the speculator Jacques Plets, for example) had contacts with Parisian capital.

The archives of St. Malo and the records of the prize tribunals reveal, however, that privateering had important financial and economic consequences.[11] Between 1688 and 1783 the French succeeded despite difficult circumstances in inflicting heavy losses on their enemies, and in the years between 1756 and 1763 these probably cost the English in the region of 80 millions *livres tournois*. Dunkirk, Calais, and Boulogne headed the field for the number of vessels and prizes, and were closely followed by the Breton ports and by St. Malo. During the XVIIIth century operations shiften towards the Antilles and the Mediterranean, and the peak came for the French

---

9 « The expansion of English privateering and piracy in the Atlantic (1540-1625) », K. ANDREW (Hull University).

10 « The Importance of Dunkirk (1688-1713) », J. BROMLEY (Southampton Univ. U. K.).

11 « Privateering warfare under the Ancien Regime », J. DELUMEAU (Collège de France).

privateer in the years 1688-1897, but thereafter slowly declined because it proved impossible to combine the two strategies of privateer warfare and squadron tactics.

Between 1713 and 1776 open piracy, which had already been stamped out in European waters, also began to disappear slowly from the Antilles and the eastern Seabord of North America.[12] Due to the weakness of their navies, however, the majority of the European powers continued to employ privateering vessels, "manned for war" or "manned for war and trade". Privateering occurred during every war in the period (the Quadruple Alliance, the Austrian Succession, the War of Seven years, etc.) on Europe's Atlantic coastline, in the Antilles, and along the North American coast. New York was as much a base for English privateers as were London, Bristol, Liverpool and the Channel Islands. The main French bases were still Dunkirk, St. Malo, and Bayonne. With the British code of 1756, the legal and administrative regulation of privateering was completed. For both ship-owners and merchants, privateering was a highly speculative business, but more detailed studies are needed to give an indication of the nature of the returns. The increasing use of convoys helps explain the decline in privateering warfare between 1713 and 1776, although this tendency was reversed in the years from 1776-1815.

English piracy in the Atlantic had, however, expanded rapidly during the reign of James 1st (1603-1625) after the Treaty of London, and was based on the Irish ports and Morocco.[13] The pirates operated through a sort of collective confederation, but their activities decreased after 1614, the year in which they lost the use of Morocco. Another paper also indicated that there are still many aspects of pirate and privateering activities in North American waters in the years 1525 to 1625 which remain to be studied.[14] At this time no distinction can be made between piracy and privateering, although it is possible to detect certain chronological developments.

1) From 1525 onwards French corsairs began to set up bases in North America - at Port Royal in 1562 (in present-day South Carolina) at Carlesfort in 1565 (present day Florida). This gave rise to a Spanish reaction, and the founding of St. Augustin in 1565, and secondly to the clashes in the 1550s between French corsairs and the Spanish and Basque cod and whale fishers.

2) Between 1568 and 1598 the operations of the French corsairs continued in the face of considerable opposition (the destruction of a French fort by

---

[12] « Piracy and privateering in the Atlantic 1713-76 », W. MINCHINTON (Exeter University, U.K.).

[13] « The confederation of high seas pirates - English pirates in the Atlantic (1603-1625) », C. M. SENIOR (London).

[14] « The North American dimension (before 1625) », D. B. QUINN (Liverpool University, U.K.) & S. Barkham.

Spanish and Indian attackers) and was limited to the north of St. Helena (near Port Royal). Officially the operations came to an end with the Peace of Vervins, although not in practice.

3) English privateers appeared on the North American south-eastern coast from 1570 onwards, and St. Augustin was attacked by Winter in 1571 and by Drake in 1586. The projects to set up privateering bases progressed alongside those for colonies, and the founding of a colony on Roanoke Island in 1585 provided a base for operations against the Spanish Indies. These were treated essentially as deviationary exercises to draw Spanish money and men away from Europe. After 1587 Roanoke ceased to be accessible for privateers.

4) In Newfoundland raiding and plundering passed for privateering. After 1580 English attacks on fishing vessels were directed against Portuguese ships, and then against Spanish Basques (the expeditions of Richard Clarke in 1582 and Bernard Drake in 1585).

5) From 1585 to 1604 English privateering spread from Newfoundland to Cap Breton and the gulf of St. Lawrence, and was directed mainly against Basque and Breton ships (in 1597 an engagement took place between the Bretons and Basques and an English vessel, known as the battle of Rameau). With the peace of 1604 hostilities ceased in the region.

6) Between 1597 and 1616 it was French and Anglo-French privateers in the Antilles and in the American south-east who introduced the Indians to European commodities and who set up what were in future to become the principal trading bases.

7) After 1604 Newfoundland became the main base for displaced privateers like Eaton in 1612.

Privateering did then make a major contribution to both the exploration and the establishment of colonies in North America. As far as fishing is concerned, it was the privateers who introduced European rivalries into the new international fishing economy, and who restricted the quantities of fish and oil which the Spanish might obtain, so creating effectively an Anglo-French fishing monopoly in the early XVIIth century.

If we then move to the other side of the Atlantic, it is also clear that Dutch privateers played a very important, although often neglected, role in the Anglo-Dutch wars of the XVIIth century.[15] The archives of the Admiralties of Zeeland and Amsterdam show that in the years 1665-1667 at least 130 privateering commissions were granted to vessels from Zeeland and Amsterdam, and further 259 between 1672-1674. The vessels most commonly used were frigates, which cruised the North Sea or hugged the French and

[15] « Dutch privateering during the second and third Anglo-Dutch Wars », J. P. BRUIJN (University of Leyde, Netherlands).

Spanish Atlantic ports which they used as bases. During the second Anglo-Dutch War these privateers carried off at least 360 English prizes. The records of the Amsterdam prize court show that 86 of these were alone valued at 140,000 *livres*. The same documents also enable us to reconstruct the ways in which Dutch privateering was organized, and show that the merchant Benjamin Raule of Middelburg was one of the most important speculators in Zeeland.

In the case of Sweden, a privateering war was undertaken between 1710 and 1718 by Charles XII, in order to prevent the Russians exploiting the ports in the eastern Baltic which had previously belonged to Sweden and to blockade them.[16] Gothenburg, Karlskrona, Stockholm and Stalsund provided the main bases for the privateers. Between 1710 and 1712 the activities of the privateers, which had been very effective thereto, were reduced following the Swedish expedition to Western Pomerania, but in the following three years reached a peak with the result that the British navy was drawn into the Baltic. In 1716 and 1718 privateers were used jointly with Swedish men-o'-war in Charles XII's Norwegian campaign.

After the conclusion of the War of the Spanish Succession, which had been a golden age for Dutch corsairs, the Dutch Republic itself became one of the principal victims of the privateers until the end of the XVIIIth century.[17] In her paper Alice Carter examined the relationship between Dutch privateering and the Dutch navy, the ways in which privateering was financed (the capital was generally put up by one or more individuals, or by a consortium of joint-stock association), the conditions of life on board, and especially the horrendous cruelty of various punishments (cable-hauling and ducking from the yard-arm). Despite the use of letters of marque to authorise privateering campaigns, the distinction between privateering and piracy proved difficult to sustain in practice.

The effects of French privateering on British trade in this period have been studied by both French and British historians, and indicate that the incidence was greatest between 1695 and 1713, then subsided in the mid-XVIIIth century, to revive again in the last decades.[18] Bayonne was, however, an exception to the rule, and enjoyed its fullest prosperity at the start of the century. This was due to the economic advantages which the port had inherited from the old English duchy of Gascony, and which had survived despite Colbert's work of economic centralization. Particularly important were commercial contacts with Spain, Portugal, Northern and Southern Europe, and the Antilles, together with the existence of a large number of

---

16 « Swedish privateers between 1710 and 1718, and the reactions of Great Britain and the United Provinces », D. ALDRIDGE (Newcastle University, U.K.).

17 « Dutch privateering from the mid to late XVIIIth century », A. CARTER (London University).

18 « Privateering and Bayonne 1744-1763 », P. CROWHURST (Leicester Univ. U.K.).

sea-fishermen in the port, who were engaged in whaling in the St. Lawrence Gulf and the Davis Straights, cod-fishing off Newfoundland, and in touch with the buccaneers of the Caribbean. Between 1689 and 1713, however, Bayonne took little part in the privateering war, as profits from normal trade meant that privateering was proportionally less attractive. But in the mid-XVIIIth century Bayonne fell on hard times, due to silting and competition from Bordeaux, and this accounts for the increased interest in privateering ventures during the wars between Britain and France from 1744-1763. But while this provided some returns for a handful of merchants and ship-owners, it did not prevent the port's economic decline.

Ireland was also involved in privateering, and used vessels which recruited crews in the French ports.[19] But Irish trade also suffered greatly from privateering during the wars of the League of Augsburg and the Spanish Succession which saw raids on merchant shipping along the Irish coast, and even attacks on certain shore establishments and during other wars in the century (one consequence was to increase traffic on the land routes to England via Chester rather than by coasting). One of the most interesting aspects of Irish involvement in privateering was the presence of Irish ex-patriots in French privateers after the Jacobite diaspora of the 1690s. This again occurred during the American War of Independence, when many of the "smugglers" from Rush, near Dublin, were equipped and armed in France. There were however a few Irish based privateers, and they reached their largest numbers during the Seven Years War.

During the troubled period of the mid-XVIIIth century New York was the most active privateering centre in British North America.[20] Between 1739 and 1763, for example, New York based privateers captured and destroyed over 400 French and Spanish vessels, and the value of prizes exceeded a million and a half New York silver pounds. The town had 16,000 inhabitants, and at least 16 privateering vessels at sea with a compliment of 1,600 men on board, mainly sailors. The ratio of crew to prize value was higher than in Europe, but the risks seem to have been greater — 1845 killed, wounded, lost or captured. The owners were generally merchants who invested in a number of privateering ships in order to spread losses, together with other speculators and admiralty officials. By the late XVIIIth century the authorities had succeeded in eliminating piracy, and had also been able to control privateering which constituted an important source of income in wartime.

The peak of privateering came at the time of the full perfection of the sailing ship and the proliferation of states lacking the resources to establish

---

[19] « Ireland and the Irish in XVIIIth century privateering », L. CULLEN (Trinity College, Dublin).

[20] « Privateering becomes business - New York in the mid-XVIIIth century », J. LYDON (Duquesne University, Pittsburg U.S.A.).

full navies.[21] Its decline set in with the technical revolution introduced by steam navigation, on one hand, and the emergence of the modern state pursuing national policies on the other. Various conclusions can be drawn regarding the legal, administrative and financial aspects of privateering, as well as its significance in economic warfare, its psychological features and its effect on public opinion. Amongst private enterprises, privateering was in this period one of the most risky, yet the State generally profited considerably from it, both by way of taxes and from the trade which it stimulated. The privateers also influenced the tactics adopted by men-o'-war, and its psychological value was well reflected in public opinion, and came to constitute one of the major features in assessing the success of a war.

In another paper the problem of the divisions in this period within French public opinion were discussed, for two contradictory commercial systems found wide support.[22] On one hand, the preservation of exclusive rights over shipping between metropolitan France and her colonies, and, on the other, the concession of trading rights to neutral vessels in order to break the British blockade. Britain of course wished to include the neutral powers, the U.S.A. as well, within its strategy of economic warfare in order to isolate France. The result was that privateering developed on a scale hitherto undreamt of. Over 1,435 American ships were seized by French privateers between 1797 and 1815, and 693 of them were declared valid prizes.

The American colonists had themselves inherited a privateering tradition from the English, but it was not until a year after the battles of Lexington and Concord that Congress approved a law regulating privateering (following the passing of the Prohibitory Act in Britain).[23] The Americans followed British practice in adjudicating and assessing prizes. During the Revolution itself, the American privateers numbered thousands, but although they caused great damage, they were not a decisive factor in the British defeat.

The colonists of the French Antilles did trade with the American insurgents from the start of the war, and were quickly followed by metropolitan ship-owners.[24] The British replied by asserting the right of inspection on the high seas and by equipping privateers from 1777 onwards. In response, the French adopted a further series of measures. Firstly, the procedure which was to be adopted again in 1914, and which was then described as "patrolled routes". After 1779, escorts were provided for convoys of ten

---

[21] « The rise and fall of privateering in the Atlantic from the late XVIIIth to XIXth centuries », U. BONNEL (French delegate at the Library of Congress, Washington).

[22] « France and the rights of Neutrals - American prizes captured by the French 1797-1815 », U. BONNEL.

[23] « American privateering during the War of Independence (1775-1783) » W. MORGAN (Naval Historical Centre, Washington).

[24] « The battle against English privateers in the Atlantic during the American War of Independence », P. VILLIERS (Lycée de Rambouillet, France).

to a hundred vessels for the full journey, and convoy travel became obligatory. Finally, regular cruising patterns were established which allowed naval frigates and corvettes to track British privateers. Between 1778 and 1783 the French navy captured 124 English corsairs, and the prize sales reached 2 million pounds. At the same time the number of French vessels captured declined rapidly. After 178 then the convoys were given adequate protection, and the battle against the privateers won.

There were also developments in the North Atlantic.[25] Between 1793 and 1801, for example, Danish and Norwegian vessels were caught up in the conflicts among the European powers, which greatly benefitted the corsairs of the Barbary states. Until 1806, Danish and Norvegian ships also benefitted from the situation, especially due to the increase in demand for neutral transports, but thereafter it deteriorated so rapidly that Norway and Denmark were forced to abandon neutrality and ally with Napoleon. Reports of ships' captains returning to Bergen after voyages south of Cape Finisterre indicate that the consequences of privateering were becoming unsupportable for the victims. The government began to use armed convoys and embargoes, and then eventually attempted to renew with Sweden and Russia the league of neutral powers, but this led to war with Britain and the attack on Copenhagen by Nelson on 2nd April 1801. After 1806 the consequences of the attacks of English privateers began to be disastrous — in 1807, for example, of 26 vessels which sailed south from Bergen beyond Finisterre, only one returned safely in the same year.

The extension of the naval war into the Baltic at the end of 1807 also threatened ruin for the region's commerce.[26] All vessels under the British flag, or sailing from British ports, were exluded from the Baltic ports. Trade between the Baltic and French ports was prohibited by British maritime law. French and Norwegian-Danish privateers thrived in the Baltic as a result, but the British navy managed to contain them, demanding from merchant shipping submission to British maritime law and the convoy system in return for protection. As a result, Britain became the sole market accessible to the producers and exporters of colonial goods in the Baltic.

An interesting example of privateering in the Napoleonic period is provided by "Liverpool Packet", a small galley which had been captured off the African coast and sold to four Liverpool merchants, who wanted to use it between Liverpool and Manchester (N.S.), by the prize court of the Vice-Admiral of the port of Halifax.[27] At the start of the war the ship

---

[25] « Privateering and Danish and Norwegian shipping south of Cape Finisterre (1793-1807) », K. UTAAKER, (Bergen, Norway).

[26] « The price of protection - foreign shipping in British convoys and Baltic trade 1807-1812 », A. RYAN (Liverpool University, U.K.).

[27] « Aspects of Nova Scotian privateering during the war of 1812-14, - the activities of the "Liverpool Packet" », D. WALKER (Halifax, Canada)

obtained a letter of marque (20th August 1812), and began cruising off the New England coast. On the 23rd June 1813 she was captured, and sold at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The Americans in turn also used her as a privateer, under the new name of "The Young Teaser's Ghost", but with no great success until she was again captured by an English brig, and sold on the 9th November 1813 in Halifax. Once again the "Liverpool Packet" became a privateer for Nova Scotia, and brought in numerous prizes until the war ended. Although the role of the privateers has often been exaggerated, the career of the "Liverpool Packet" serves to show that they did play a major part in the war, and were often the source of large profits for their owners.

One of the very last examples of independent privateering is provided by the part played by privateers in the revolutionary wars which led to the political independence of the whole Spanish south American empire.[28] Independent privateers began to appear between 1808 and 1818. French corsairs who had been driven off the Antilles came to the aid of the Spanish colonists who were attempting to break the blockade established by the Spanish government. Cartagena in Columbia became one of the principal privateer bases. As the Spanish regained control of the continent between 1815 and 1821, the corsairs withdrew from Columbia and settled on San Domingo. After 1816 Franco-American filibusters from New Orleans began to adopt the Mexican flag, and tried to establish bases in Spanish Territory in Florida and Mexico, so assisting American expansionist policies although they themselves suffered heavy losses. From 1817 onwards, privateers from Buenos Aires were also to be found in the Antilles, and even operated on the European seabord. But it was due to the participation of North American ports like Baltimore that privateering was to expand so rapidly between 1816 and 1818. The Spanish in turn fell back on Havana, and left the struggle against the Independents largely to the Cubans. Between 1821 and 1830 however pro-Independence corsairs succeeded in mounting a counter-blockade around Cuba, and the Spanish proved unable to control piracy in the area, which was often carried out by their own privateers. The extent of piracy in Cuban waters finally provided the great powers with an excuse for intervention.

This description indicates the important contribution made by privateers to the struggle for independence in Latin-America. The privateers used two weapons, the counter-blockade and the support of neutral trading powers. The filibusters were a very mixed crew, both blacks and whites, merchants and seamen from the north, and privateers of all races drawn from the Antilles. It was the latter who dominated ideologically, and subordinated,

---

[28] « The contribution of the "corsarios insurgentes" to American independence: corsairs and pirates off the gulf of Mexico and off the Antilles 1810-30 », A. PENTIN DUMON (Cahors, France).

for example, any attachment to the revolutionary republican movement in Haiti (1816-21) to support for the existence of an independent state, the motive being primarily the hope for gain. In this sense, privateering helped to carry the war of independence into purely commercial spheres.

Privateering was finally outlawed in 1856, but in France the theories of privateer warfare still continued to attract attention, and remained central to the theories on naval strategy of the so-called "new school".[29] Until 1883-6 Mahan continued to support privateering, but subsequently formulated the theory that the major naval powers must rely on the operations of massive battle fleets. Thereafter he became overtly hostile to both privateering and any disruption of commerce.

There were also a number of papers dealing with the development of similar phenomena in different areas of the world. In the case of the Indian Ocean, piracy was prevalent in the Arabian Gulf some six centuries before the birth of Christ.[30] From the VIIth to the XIth centuries the sea trade of Islam was constantly harrassed by pirates, operating especially from the north-west coast of India. The Portuguese conquests in 1500 opened with a variety of piratical operations, and Portuguese filibusters infested the Hadramouth coast, the Moluccas, and the north of the Bay of Bengal where the Feringhis formed a pirate confederation. In the XVIIIth century seaborn guerrilla warfare gave expression to the reaction of the inhabitants of the Arabian Gulf, and of South-East Asia against the Portuguese. Other European pirates also appeared in these waters, especially Dutch and English, and a pirate confederation was set up on Madagascar which was not destroyed until 1730.

During the XVIIIth century there was also a revival in Asiatic piracy, with the corsairs of Maratta, Sangan, Koli, Kathiawar, Jawamis who appeared on the Pirate Coast around 1750, the pirates of Madagascar (1785-1823) who engaged in the slave trade, as well as other pirate communities, such as the state of Atjeh in Sumatra. French privateers were also important, especially during the American War of Independence, the Revolutionary Wars and those of the Empire. Port Louis was their base and Robert Surcouf their most notorious leader. Their presence did not in any way disturb British naval supremacy, however. During the war of 1812 there were also certain British, Dutch and even American corsairs in the Indian Ocean. The English succeeded in suppressing pirates in Asia by 1870, with the exception of Atjeh, which did not submit to the Dutch until 1904, and of various forms of piracy connected with the clandestine slave-trade off the West African coast.

---

[29] « Admiral Mahan, the "new school" and privateering », G. Symcox (UCLA).

[30] « Privateers and pirates in the Indian Ocean », A. Toussaint (CNRS Maurice Island).

During the Middle Ages piracy had been prevalent along the western coast of India, and extended into the Malabar coast, with the exception of Calcutta.[31] The Portuguese in the XVIth century used the services of Timoja, a low caste Hindu who was the ruler of Honavar's corsair, during the conquest of Goa. Portuguese expansion also brought about the revolt of the Islamic communities of Kerala, and in 1525 the corsairs of Cananor drove the Portuguese out of Calcutta. As late as 1599 a corsair leader proclaimed himself King of the Muslims of Malabar and openly challenged the Samorin of Calcutta. Similarly, in the XVIth century groups of Islamic pirates took over from the Hindu corsairs of Carnatic and edged the Portuguese out of the spice markets and freed themselves from the authority of the Hindu rulers.

The period of the Revolution was, however, the golden age of the French privateer in the Indian Ocean.[32] Although Reunion was not comparable in importance to Maurice Island, it also played an important part for numerous reasons — patriotic enhusiasm, the hope for gain and the hope of ridding the island of certain undesirables through privateering. But the privateers were also hampered by the absence of an adequate port and by the hostility of public opinion. In 1799 the islanders went so far as to greet Surcouf with musket shots. Reunion therefore played a modest part in the privateering campaigns, although between June 1793 - April 1794, and 1796-8, and 1801-2 there is evidence of an increase in the amount of capital and men invested in such operations, and also the appearance of a leader of some stature in Ripaud Montaudevert.

In the Far East, the Batavian Republic prepared to defend itself by sea on the outbreak of war with Britain in December 1780 [33]. In August 1781 masters of Dutch East Indies Company vessels were authorized to take prizes, so long as they did not leave their prescribed routes. The government in Colombo chartered an aging vessel, the "Valk", to a group of citizens, and she took 14 prizes in the course of two cruises. But the Batavians did not equip any privateering ventures, and the East India Company's operations were not very profitable.

Another paper dealt with raiding in the far north, in the Behring Straits [34]. In the expanse between Alaska and Siberia, summer sea raiding

---

31 « Piracy on the Malabar coast during the XVIth century », G. Bouchon (CNRS Beaumont, France).

32 « Reunion and the privateering campaigns during the Revolutionary period », C. Wanquet (Centre Universitaire, La Réunion).

33 « Some observations on the Dutch corsairs in the Indian Ocean before the fall of Java in 1811 », P. de Wilde (Service Historique Maritime, The Hague).

34 « Raiding and slavery amongst native societies in the Behring Straits », J. Malaurie (Centre for Arctic Studies, Paris).

was essentially an economic phenomenon. The objective was not extermination, but terrorism and subjugation. The sources for this area prove in general to be more interesting for what they imply than what they state explicitly.

Returning to the East, another area discussed was the Malaysian archipelago.[35] After the Treaty of Vienna, Europeans once again took an interest in South East Asia and had to reckon with the slave trade and piracy in the archipeligo. The main base for the Lanoun and Lingan pirates was the island of Mindanaoe and the south-eastern coast of Sumatra. The expeditions generally followed a set route (and were generally directed against the rich island of Java) and could rely on assistance in the majority of the ports of Borneo, the Moluccas, and the Little Sonde islands. They were also financed by wealthy intermediaries. The Batavian government only succeeded in restoring order after the introduction of steam boats after 1843.

In Muslim Malaysia piracy had existed from time immemorial, due to the wealth of maritime trade in the area combined with political chaos after the XVIth century and the disruption of the native economies following the arrival of the Europeans[36]. Amongst the most feared of the sea brigands were the Muslim Malays, the sailors from the Celebese, the Dyaks from northern Borneo, the fishermen of southern China, the Lanouns and the Sulus of the Southern Philipines. As well as Chinese and Arab sources, the records of the first Portuguese and Spanish sailors and of other Europeans provide very interesting descriptions. It is also clear that the pirates' activities did not decline until the arrival of steam-powered gun-boats.

In concluding, Mr. Paul Adam[37] noted that the research papers had sketched out certain chronological and geographical patterns. He argued that it was also important to place the phenomena of privateering and piracy in a broad historical context, and to explore the ways in which pirates and corsairs succeeded in adapting themselves to the economic life and institutions of their ages.

To sum up, however, even if one takes into account various complimentary papers given during the conference sessions, there are still major gaps in our history of piracy and privateering, which tends to concentrate disproportionately on the Atlantic. Discussions during the sessions did serve to indicate the existence of certain characteristics which were common to all the regions and all the periods discussed. First, despite all the rules,

---

35 « Piracy in the Malaysian archipeligo in the early XIXth century », D. LOMBARD (Hautes Etudes en Science Sociales, Paris).

36 « Piracy in South-East Asia », L. WRIGHT (University of Hong Kong).

37 « Sketch of a typology of piracy and privateering », P. ADAM (General Secretary of the International Commission on Naval History).

including even the excellent system of registration developed in France, piracy and privateering prove to be virtually impossible to separate. Secondly, these two forms of economic warfare cannot persist once armed naval fleets are able to protect their prey. It was for this reason that the privateer disappeared during the American War of Independence once the convoy system had been successfully adopted.