

Reader's Guide

On April 8, 2009, in waters about 350 miles (563 kilometers) off the coast of Somalia, four pirates boarded the *Maersk Alabama* in a botched attempt to seize the cargo ship. After a stand-off with the ship's crew, the Somali pirates took the captain, Richard Phillips (1963–), hostage and sped off in a life boat. They were soon surrounded by military warships and helicopters from several nations, and for five days the pirates held the captain at gunpoint on the small boat. Footage of the hostage situation was broadcast to millions of television viewers throughout the world. In the end, U.S. Navy snipers killed the pirates and rescued Phillips. But piracy experts noted that the rescue of Phillips was the exception; at the time of his rescue, pirates held hundreds of other hostages in Somalia. The *Maersk Alabama* incident, only one among hundreds of pirate attacks in the waters off Somalia over the period of a few years, brought international attention to the rise in piracy in the twenty-first century, after many twentieth-century history books had pronounced piracy a thing of the past.

For most of us, it is difficult to connect the Somali pirates—young men and boys in t-shirts and jeans using modern technology and carrying automatic weapons—with the familiar image of pirates we have known since childhood: the swarthy seafarers with peg-legs or eye patches wearing tri-cornered hats and bearing parrots on their shoulders, who are known for phrases like “avast, me hearties,” “shiver me timbers,” and “aarr.” The familiar image, a product of both fact and fantasy, is based on the historical era known as the golden age of piracy, a brief period during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century when famous pirates like Blackbeard (Edward Teach; c. 1680–1718), William Kidd (c. 1645–1701), and Bartholomew Roberts (1682–1722) ruled large areas of the Caribbean

Sea. But Somali piracy and golden age piracy both take their place in a long, global history of similar pirate eras, periods when seas in certain regions became infested with pirates who managed to resist law enforcement agents for extended periods of time.

Who were these pirates? Pirates through the ages have been as diverse as the rest of the human population. Pirate leaders have ranged from poor English sailors to highly successful Chinese businessmen and ferocious Scandinavian warriors. Like most criminal paths, piracy has drawn courageous adventurers, sadistic psychopaths, and many who fall somewhere in between. Most were drawn to piracy as a rare means to lift themselves out of poverty, but not all pirates chose their trade. Many sailors were forced into it by pirates who raided their ships. Others, on the other hand, traveled long distances and some even converted to new religions for the opportunity to get rich by raiding ships at sea. Pirates have come from all nationalities and races. The Chinese pirates included women among their ranks, and there were also several notorious European women pirates, but overall, the overwhelming majority of pirates have been men.

On land and at sea, pirates have always sought places where they could carry out their plundering (robbing of goods by force) while living outside the law. They spent much of their lives on the high seas, the open waters of the ocean that are outside the limits of any country's territorial authority. At sea, most pirates have established their own codes of conduct and social structures. Pirates also need land to carry out large-scale operations. In pirate havens, usually remote sea ports or islands without any strong governmental presence, pirates have been able to establish rough societies of their own where they live and carry out their business under their own rules. In pirate havens, as at sea, pirates defied law enforcement authorities—but only for a time. After every major pirate era, law and order has been restored, pirate havens have been destroyed, and many notorious pirates have faced prison or the hangman's noose.

Pirates have fascinated people from ancient times to the present day. Studying them provides insight into history and human nature in all its complexity. Historians study pirates in a surprisingly wide variety of contexts, such as the wars they fought in, their contribution to the settlement of new lands, the social institutions they have established at sea, and the social classes from which they arose. Lawmakers and international diplomats ponder the unique challenges of trying to stop piracy by establishing law and order on the high seas. Fiction writers, poets,

playwrights, and filmmakers have all been drawn to the romantic aspects of piracy, such as the courage and ingenuity of the raiders, their thrilling adventures, the freedom of the seas, and the brotherhood of pirates.

The abundance of legends and writings about pirates has led to a strangely comfortable image of piracy in modern times. Children dress as pirates for Halloween, watch pirate cartoons on TV, and play pirate video games. In studying real piracy, though, it quickly becomes apparent that pirates are dangerous, and often violent, criminals. Pirates have murdered, raped, tortured, and enslaved their victims. They have disrupted trade and made sea travel a terrifying experience. Though they may fascinate us with their adventures at sea, they are predators who do a great deal of harm in the world.

Pirates v. privateers

Many of history's major pirate eras began with governmental policies that encouraged the licensing of privateers, private ships or ship owners commissioned by their government to raid enemy ships during war-time. The actual work that pirates and privateers do is the same. They attack ships, usually merchant vessels, or coastal communities, and they use violence or the threat of violence to rob their victims of valuables, sometimes taking the ship itself as a prize. The main difference between pirates and privateers is that pirates work solely for their own profit, while privateers, at least in theory, work for their country. While piracy is illegal, privateering is considered legal, at least by the nation that licenses the privateers.

The history of pirates cannot be separated from the history of privateers. Since ancient times, warring nations have frequently enlisted privateers to destroy their enemies' trade and harass military shipping. Ancient Greece, the Ottoman Empire, late eighteenth-century Vietnam, and the European nations of Spain, England, the Netherlands, and France, to name a few, all relied heavily on privateers in war-time. Privateers often greatly aided their countries. Some privateers, such as Englishman Francis Drake (1540–1596), were considered heroes and went on to prestigious careers in their countries. Other privateers, however, took a very different path. When wars ended, they found themselves armed, equipped with sea vessels, and highly skilled at raiding enemy ships, but suddenly unemployed. Many simply continued to raid ships as

pirates. The nations that had originally enlisted the privateers' services soon found they had no control over their activities, and often had to muster new naval forces to pursue them.

The many names for sea raiders—corsairs, buccaneers, filibusters, freebooters, picaroons, sea rovers, sea dogs—all signify people who raid at or from the sea, but whether they mean “pirate,” “privateer,” or a little of both may differ in context.

Coverage and features

Pirates Through the Ages: Biographies profiles twenty-six pirates and privateers. Included are some of the most famous pirates of the golden age, such as Blackbeard, William Kidd, and Bartholomew Roberts; fierce corsairs of the Barbary Coast, including Barbarossa and Dragut Reis; and English and American privateers such as Francis Drake, John Paul Jones, and Jean Lafitte. Also featured are buccaneers such as Henry Morgan and William Dampier; female pirates Cheng I Sao, Anne Bonny and Mary Read, and Grace O'Malley; and pirate hunter Woodes Rogers. The volume includes more than fifty photographs and illustrations, a timeline, sources for further reading, and an index.

U•X•L Pirates Through the Ages Reference Library

Pirates Through the Ages: Almanac presents a comprehensive history of the major pirate eras throughout history and around the globe. The volume's twelve chapters cover ancient and medieval pirates, the Barbary corsairs, the privateers of Spanish Main and the United States, the buccaneers of the Caribbean, the golden age of piracy, piracy in Asia, modern piracy, and pirates in popular culture. Each chapter features informative sidebar boxes highlighting glossary terms and issues discussed in the text. Also included are nearly sixty photographs and illustrations, a timeline, a glossary, a list of research and activity ideas, sources for further reading, and an index providing easy access to subjects discussed throughout the volume.

Pirates Through the Ages: Primary Sources presents eighteen full or excerpted written works, poems, interviews, or other documents that were influential throughout the history of piracy. Included are the tale of the kidnapping of Julius Caesar by pirates, a letter from a captive of the

Barbary corsairs, a pirate trial transcript, and an example of ship's articles. Also featured are literary works such as *Treasure Island* and *The Corsair*, and interviews with Somali and Strait of Malacca pirates. More than fifty photographs and illustrations, a timeline, sources for further reading, and an index supplement the volume

A cumulative index of all three volumes in the U•X•L Pirates Through the Ages Reference Library is also available.

Comments and suggestions

We welcome your comments on *Pirates Through the Ages: Biographies* and suggestions for other topics to consider. Please write: Editors, *Pirates Through the Ages: Biographies*, Gale Cengage Learning, 27500 Drake Road, Farmington Hills, Michigan 48331-3535; call toll free: 1-800-877-4253; fax to 248-699-8097; or send e-mail via <http://www.gale.cengage.com>.

Words to Know

A

act of reprisal: A document granting permission to individuals to raid the vessels of an enemy in response to some harm that enemy had done.

admiralty court: A court that administers laws and regulations pertaining to the sea.

antihero: A leading character or notable figure who does not have the typical hero traits.

artillery: Large weapons, such as cannons, that discharge missiles.

asylum: Refuge or protection in a foreign country, granted to someone who might be in danger if returned to his or her own country.

B

barbarians: People who are not considered civilized.

barge: A large, flat-bottomed boat used to transport cargo, usually over inland waterways.

barnacle: A shell-like marine animal that attaches itself to the underwater portion of a ship's hull.

barque: A simple vessel with one mast and triangular sails.

bey: The word for a local ruler in Tripoli and Tunis.

bireme: A swift galley ship with two banks of oars, and sometimes a square sail.

blunderbuss: A short musket with a flared muzzle.

bond: A type of insurance in which one party gives money to another party as a guarantee that certain requirements will be followed. If

these requirements are not followed, the party that issued the bond keeps the money permanently.

booty: Goods stolen from ships or coastal villages during pirate raids or attacks on enemies in time of war.

buccaneer: A seventeenth-century sea raider based in the Caribbean Sea.



caravel: A small, highly maneuverable sailing ship.

careening: A regular process of cleaning the bottom of a ship.

cat-o'-nine-tails: A whip with nine knotted cords.

cleric: A member of the clergy, or church order.

clinker-built: Construction for boats using overlapping wooden planks.

city-state: An independent, self-governing city and its surrounding territory.

coast guard: A government agency responsible for enforcing laws on the seas and navigable waters.

commerce raiding: Also *guerre de course*, a naval strategy in which a weaker naval power attacks its stronger opponent's commercial shipping.

convoy: A collection of merchant ships traveling together for protection, often escorted by warships.

copyright laws: Laws that grant the creator the exclusive right to distribute, copy, use, or sell his or her product.

corsair: A pirate of the Barbary Coast.

cutlass: A short, heavy, single-edged sword.



dey: The word for a local ruler in Algiers.

digital technology: A data technology system that converts sound or signals into numbers, in the form of a binary format of ones and zeros.

duel: A prearranged fight with deadly weapons to settle a quarrel under specific rules.

dynasty: A succession of rulers from the same family line.

E

Execution Dock: The place in London where pirates were hanged; their bodies were often displayed to discourage others from turning to piracy.

extortion: The use of authority to unlawfully take money.

F

failed state: A state without a functioning government above the local level.

flintlock pistol: A small and comparatively lightweight gun that loads through the front of the barrel.

flota: A Spanish treasure fleet that transported goods and riches from the New World to Spain every year.

frigate: A three-masted, medium-sized warship.

G

galiot: A small, fast galley using both sails and oars.

galleon: A large, square-rigged sailing ship with three or more masts that was used for commerce and war.

galley: A long, low ship used for war and trading that was mainly powered by oarsmen, but might also use a sail.

grapeshot: A cluster of small iron balls usually shot from a cannon.

grenado: An early form of hand grenade comprised of hollow balls made of iron, glass, or wood and filled with gunpowder.

guild: An association for people or towns with a similar trade or interest.

H

harem: The area of a Muslim household historically reserved for wives, concubines, and female relatives.

high seas: The open waters of the ocean that are outside the limits of any country's territorial authority.

hijack: To take over by force.

hypocrisy: Pretending to have qualities or beliefs one does not really have.

I

impalement: A process of torture and execution by inserting a long stake through the length of the body and then leaving the person to die a slow and painful death.

impressment: The practice of forcibly recruiting sailors to serve in the navy.

indentured servant: A person working under a contract that commits him or her to an employer for a fixed period of time, typically three to seven years.

intellectual property: A product of someone's intellect and creativity that has commercial value.

J

junk: A Chinese form of sailboat.

jurisdiction: The sole right and power to interpret and apply the law in a certain area.

K

keel: A strong beam that extends along the entire length of the bottom of a ship and supports its frame.

knight: A man granted a rank of honor by the monarch for his personal merit or service to the country.

L

letter of marque: A document licensing a private ship owner to the seize ships or goods of an enemy nation.

M

mangrove: A tropical tree or shrub characterized by an extensive, impenetrable system of roots.

maritime: Relating to the sea.

maritime law: The set of regulations that govern navigation and trade on the seas.

maroon: To strand an individual on a deserted island or shore with few provisions.

matchlock: A musket in which gun powder is ignited by lighting it with a match.

melodrama: A drama, such as a play, film, or television program, characterized by exaggerated emotions, stereotypical characters, and an extravagant plot.

mercenary: A seaman or soldier hired by a government to fight its battles.

militia: A volunteer military force made up of ordinary citizens.

monopoly: Exclusive control or possession of something.

musket: A muzzle-loading shoulder gun with a long barrel.

mutiny: An open rebellion by seamen against their ship's officers.

myth: A traditional story that is partly based on a historical event and serves to explain something about a culture.

N

nautical mile: A unit of distance used for sea navigation. One nautical mile equals 6,080 feet (1.9 kilometers). One mile across land equals 5,280 feet (1.6 kilometers).

navigator: A person who charts the routes of ships at sea.

nostalgia: A bittersweet longing for something from the past.

O

organized crime syndicate: A group of enterprises run by criminals to carry out illegal activities.

P

pagan: A person who does not accept the Christian religion.

parody: A spoof, or a work that mocks something else.

patent: A government grant that gives the creator of an invention the sole right to make, use, and sell that invention for a set period of time.

piragua: A dugout canoe.

pirate base: A place where pirates lived under their own rule and maintained their own defense system.

pirate haven: A safe place for pirates to harbor and repair their ships, resupply, and organize raiding parties.

plunder: To rob of goods by force, in a raid or in wartime.

prahu: A swift, light, seagoing vessel propelled by oars and used by the pirates of Southeast Asia.

privateer: A private ship or ship owner commissioned by a state or government to attack the merchant ships of an enemy nation.

prize: The goods, human captives, and ships captured in pirate raids.

R

rack: A piece of equipment used for torture; a person tied on a rack is slowly stretched by the wrists and ankles, causing extreme pain.

ransom: A sum of money demanded for the release of someone being held captive.

reprisal: An act of revenge against an enemy in wartime.

rigging: The system of ropes, chains, and other gear used to support and control the masts and sails of a sailing vessel.

rudder: A vertical, flat piece of wood or metal attached with hinges to a ship's stern (rear) that is used to steer the ship.

S

sack: To plunder a captured city.

scurvy: A disease caused by a lack of vitamin C, characterized by spongy and bleeding gums, bruising, and extreme weakness.

sea shanty: A sailor's work song.

ship's articles: The written sets of rules and conditions under which pirates operated on any given expedition.

ship of the line: A large, heavy warship designed for line of battle combat.

siege: A military blockade that isolates a city while an attack is underway.

sloop: A fast vessel with a single fore-and-aft rigged mast, meaning that the mast was positioned for sails set lengthwise along the ship.

smuggling: Illegally importing and exporting goods.

swashbuckler: A daring adventurer; also a drama about a swashbuckler.

T

tanker: A ship constructed to carry a large load of liquids, such as oil.

territorial waters: Waters surrounding a nation over which that nation exercises sole authority.

terrorism: The systematic use of violence against civilians in order to attain goals that are political, religious, or ideological.

timbers: The frames or ribs of a ship that are connected to the keel and give the hull its shape and strength.

trawler: A fishing boat that uses open-mouthed fishing nets drawn along the sea bottom.

tribute: Payment from one ruler of a state to another, usually for protection or to acknowledge submission.

Tower of London: A fortress in London, England, that was famously used as a prison.

V

vigilante: Someone who takes the law into his or her own hands without the authority to do so.

W

walk the plank: A form of punishment in which a person is forced to walk off the end of a wooden board extended over the side of a ship and into the sea.

war of attrition: A conflict in which a nation tries to wear down its opponent in small ways, hoping to gradually weaken the enemy's forces.