

MEN ARE CHEAPER THAN GOLD:  
ENGLISH SAILORS AND THEIR IRRELIGIOUSNESS TOWARDS SOCIETY,  
1560-1642

by  
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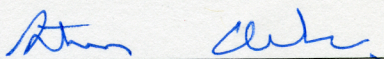
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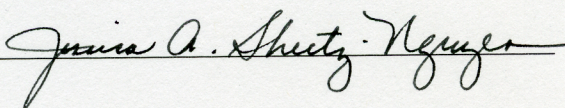
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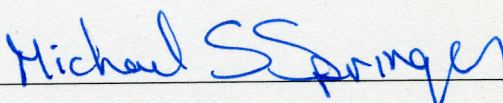
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## Abstract

### *Men are Cheaper than Gold:*

*English Sailors and their Irreligiousness towards Society, 1560 – 1642*

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The English common sailor rose from his humble beginnings to the pinnacle of renown and fame during the repulsion of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Afterwards, with the rise of the privateer and the merchant ships, the Royal Navy found it difficult to retain quality mariners. Following many decades of deriding and dehumanizing the tar, the men engendered and reproduced an attitude of irreligiousness towards religion in general and Christianity in particular, mocking the officers who represented the society, which denigrated them. This paper will explore the practices and transmission types of this irreligiousness and the way the state attempted to utilize the seamen to extend their power while simultaneously minimizing their importance to society.

Using mainly sailor memoirs or pamphlets from the period, the paper also examines how contemporary historians and those of successive generations viewed the irreligiousness of the seamen. In the mid-sixteenth century, authorities initiated intensive regulations and discipline, which historians later labeled as Biopower, in shaping and controlling the behavior of the British sailor for the good of the state, which in turn led the men to exhibit agency, in the forms of irreligiousness, employment choice, and their very lifestyle, in resisting this drive to become high society's view of "British."

In due course at the beginning of it all, the hypocrisy of the established society juxtaposed against the sailor who enjoyed life to the fullest in an attempt to handle the stresses of this never before seen deep sea lengthy voyages demonstrates two differing tales of this early age

of sail for the English. One story depicts the dashing officer rallying men onward to capture the prize or prevail against the raging storm, afterwards asking all to bow their heads as they thanked God for their deliverance. This same yarn shows the exasperated lieutenant, trudging from tavern to brothel, searching for the able but alcoholic tar and beseeching him to sign on for a voyage, for his own good, so he could attain some money for himself and perhaps his future. The other tale relates overbearing officers, usually hapless but mostly cruel, looking for their own gain on the backs of sailors and slaves, all the while committing the same kinds of acts he admonished the men for doing. The truth, as anyone looking back over so many centuries and relying on manuscripts and journals can detect, most likely resides somewhere in the middle but probably nearer to the cruel officer theme. British society did engage in applying Biopower to controlling the sailors and that the seamen used agency in their irreligiousness to fight back.

This paper shines a light on an aspect of mariner agency that has been often overlooked. Their very lifestyles and indifference to prudent living such as savings, church-going, and other forms of high society shows they fought against the system which sought to control them with their very lives and minds.

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## ***Introduction***

Jumping a ship in the middle of the night and swimming for shore; drinking alone in in tavern until they spent their last shilling; striding past the church to the brothel to be with a woman whose only interest was his ability to pay, offer snippets that describe many Early Modern English sailors who sought control over their lives. In mid-sixteenth century, authorities initiated intensive regulations and discipline in shaping and controlling the behavior of the British sailor for the good of the state and in service of the newly emerging capitalistic impulses. These pressures led the men to exhibit agency, by their disregard for religion, in their unconventional employment choices, in their very lifestyle decisions, in resisting compliance with the prevailing mores of British society, especially those established by Protestant Nonconformity.<sup>1</sup> The lifestyle choices made by these men match so clearly with what Karl Marx wrote, in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, that “men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do make it under circumstances of their own choosing, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”<sup>2</sup> Despite all their resistance to social conformity, this transformation of men into sailors proved successful enough that most nations envied the British Royal Navy and the seamen’s labor helped fuel the building of the world’s largest empire. This thesis will explore the practices and transmission types of this irreligiousness, or a belief in the inefficacy of religion, towards Christianity, and the way the state attempted to utilize the seamen to extend their power while simultaneously minimizing

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<sup>1</sup> A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 371-3; According to Notestein, the nonconformist movement more “than any single factor” differentiates the English from continental cousins. Walter Notestein, *The English People on the Eve of Colonization, 1603-1630* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), 170.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: Progress Publishers, 1937), 5.

their importance to society. The religiousness of sailors, so frequently minimized by most naval historians, reveals and shines a light on an aspect of marine agency that has been often overlooked. Their very lifestyles and indifference to prudent living such as savings, church going, and other forms of proper society shows they fought against the system, which sought to control them with their very lives and minds.

The English common sailor rose from humble beginnings in the Middle Ages to the pinnacle of renown and fame during the Navy's repulsion of the Spanish Armada in 1588.<sup>3</sup> Afterwards, with the rise of privateer and commercial ships, the Royal Navy found it difficult to retain quality mariners. Following many decades of deriding and dehumanizing the tar, the men engendered and reproduced an attitude of irreligiousness, mocking the officers who represented the society, which denigrated them. To combat this trend, the burgeoning British Empire unwittingly utilized the ideas of Biopower, or the use of disciplinary and normative authority over individuals to increase compliance and productivity of the body's labor, beginning in the late fifteenth century. French thinker Michel Foucault's seminal work, *Society Must be Defended*, introduces and expands on the concept of Biopower and provides the theoretical framework for understanding how the government increased control over the workers of the ships while expanding Empire.<sup>4</sup> Biopower views the state, as opposed to individuals or corporations, as the main actor on the world stage. It utilizes disciplinary and normative power to regulate citizens, especially sailors, for its own benefit, often arguing the force applied and punishments inflicted actually improved the moral character and health of the individual. By

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<sup>3</sup> The navy did not become the more widely known Royal Navy until 1660, after the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II. See Cheryl A. Fury, "The Elizabethan Maritime Community," in *The Social History of the English Seaman, 1485-1649* (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 117-40.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the College De France, (1975-76)* (New York: Picador, 1997).

using these methods, the nation strengthened itself in relation to other actors and enabled increased success on the world stage. It sees humans as a species and seeks to increase all the vital statistics of the population. These elements of analysis included reduced sick days, work accidents, and infant mortality; and increased longevity, productivity, and efficiency by workers.<sup>5</sup> This endeavor builds on the theoretical underpinnings of Foucault and applies them retroactively to understand the mechanism of the early spread of British influence and the politico-economic needs of the government to discipline and regulate the lowest members of the power-projection apparatus, namely the mariner. In turn, it will also examine how the tar reacted to the controlling power. The theory's emphasis on the role of exerting willpower on another group of people, either internally with sailors or externally with other countries, provides a cogent explanation for Britain's international interests after the age of exploration. As relative power increased, the state pushed harder against anyone standing against possible material and geopolitical gain. To the British, they had to defend their society and way of life from all others who would threaten its survival and dominance, including the tars. England's desire to achieve imperial ambitions fueled the Biopower engine.

In examining London's imperialism during this period, of all the major schools of thought, Michael Parenti's definition, which heavily leans upon John Hobson's *Imperialism, A Study* and, to a lesser extent, from Lenin's "Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism," lends itself best to their particular understanding of imperial domination.<sup>6</sup> He defines imperialism as "the process whereby the dominant investor interests in one country bring to bear their economic and military power upon another nation or region in order to expropriate its land, labor, natural

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<sup>5</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 13.

<sup>6</sup> John A. Hobson, *Imperialism, A Study* (New York: George Allen & Unwin, 1902), 1; Vladimir Illyich Lenin, "Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism," Pamphlet, 1917.



resources, capital, and markets in such a manner as to enrich the investor interests.”<sup>7</sup> The key to understanding rests on the capitalist investor interests in England’s major cities. This contentious and fractious group pursued influence and eventually, after the Civil War, exercised hegemonic control over the reins of state power. They utilized this influence to direct public resources toward endeavors that privately benefited them. Parliament consistently requested the Crown provide escorts for their merchant ships as protection from foreign privateers and the enemy navy. This concept of a nuanced direction of power in achieving merchant goals stands in stark contrast with Joseph Schumpeter’s *The Sociology of Imperialism*, which views imperialism as “domination for the sake of domination.”<sup>8</sup> He explained empire as instinctual and erroneously neglects the allure of accumulating wealth and prestige for personal and national esteem. Perhaps some aristocrats and wealthy merchants reveled in the influence they earned through sea power and trade, but the affluence gained from the merchant trading no doubt took center stage. To secure this stimulating realm, Daniel Headrick’s *The Tools of Empire* highlights the tools and techniques the investor interests developed to further their own force projection.<sup>9</sup> The concept of Biopower explains how this class of state controllers, including companies such as Lloyd’s of London and Trinity House, used their levers of power to not only shape their own people but also wedge themselves into other domains for their own benefit. The ingenious part of their schemes resided in their officious claims for working in the interests of their country, equating their own aggrandizement on par with the grandeur of the empire. To promote the commonwealth meant helping them, and assisting them meant increasing the commonwealth. With so many of the aristocracy involved in both the government and merchant worlds, they utilized both sides to

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Parenti, “What do Empires Do?” *Michael Parenti Political Archive* 1 (2010): 2.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph A. Schumpeter, “The Sociology of Imperialism,” *Modern History Sourcebook*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Headrick, *The Tools of Empire* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), 14.

enrich and empower themselves and their families, usually at the expense and denigration of the seamen.<sup>10</sup> During these many decades of deriding and dehumanizing the tar, another name for the common sailor, in order to justify the application for corrective power, the men engendered and reproduced an attitude of irreligiousness towards Christianity, mocking the officers who represented the society that maligned them. In the beginning of this meteoric ascent, the development of sailing technology gave rise to increased shortages of able seamen, the workers of the sea that enabled the lifeblood of English capitalist trade.

Contemporary historians who shaped the early understanding of the British sailor in the mid-sixteenth through mid-seventeenth century remain Brian Lavery and N.A.M. Rodger. Writing sweeping and engaging narratives, these men paved the way for other scholars in the early history of the Royal Navy. In Rodger's *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain*, the researcher traces the early English meanderings along the coast all the way up to the proper beginnings of the modern navy.<sup>11</sup> The facts and analysis for why the power of the sea eventually surpassed the grip of land power for Britain lend vital background information to any specialized academic. He shows that after the demise of the Spanish Armada, the new English merchant navy competed successfully against the decaying feudal government in attainment of men and resources. As to the irreligiousness of the sailors, he only acknowledges that society had perceived them as "without religion or morality" for centuries and quickly moves onto describing their work ethic and clothing, without elaborating on this broad statement.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, Brian Lavery's book, *Royal Tars: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy*, depicts life for the

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<sup>10</sup> James Evans, *Tudor Adventures: The Voyage of Discovery that Transformed England* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2014), 5.

<sup>11</sup> N. A. M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain, 660 – 1649* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea*, 324.

common sea worker, replete with their views on society, character, and the aristocracy.<sup>13</sup> In this long-spanning volume, he understandably spends just two paragraphs describing how some pray during a storm and rarely consulted the heavens during calm. He makes no mention of the origin of this minimal religiousness.<sup>14</sup> Some of these men had wives and children back home and depended upon prompt payment of wages for survival. These words also show an outsider's view on the efficiency and workings of the feudal administration. To understand the mind of the tars as they ask for their back pay, one must read works that highlight their writings.

A sizable group of maritime historians offers little consideration of deckhands' lives or perspectives on spirituality, with none giving any discussion to origins. Historian George E. Ellis's *The Puritan Age and Rule in the Colony of the Massachusetts Bay, 1629-1685*, published in 1885, claims most sailors of the period as more brute than human, constantly seeking to shock the Puritans making the voyage to the New World.<sup>15</sup> Other authors include Christopher Lloyd's *The British Seamen 1200-1860: A Social Survey*, published in 1970, which rarely discusses religion but endorses the view that faith could not move the tar to do his duty for country.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, Kenneth R. Andrews's *Elizabethan Privateering 1583-1603* focuses on the economic and political implications of the sailors' actions but does not investigate their spiritual outlook on life.<sup>17</sup> This paper seeks to fit within the panoply of past works as a way to explore a possible explanation to the sailors' acts of agitation against the dominate culture and employer.

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<sup>13</sup> Brian Lavery, *Royal Tars: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 875-1850* (New York: Naval Institute Press, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Lavery, *Royal Tars*, 47.

<sup>15</sup> George E. Ellis, *The Puritan Age and Rule in the Colony of the Massachusetts Bay, 1629-1685* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1888), 146.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher Lloyd, *The British Seamen 1200-1860: A Social Survey* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1970), 38.

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth R. Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering 1583-1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 79.

The idea that British traders only sought honest business glosses over any hypocrisy, permeates even modern monographs, with James Evans's *Tudor Adventures: The Voyage of Discovery that Transformed England* stating that England just desired peaceful exploration of lands for trade, quoting Edward VI's proclamation that "friendship might be established among all men, and everyone seek to gratify all... [Englishmen] shall not touch any thing of yours unwilling unto you."<sup>18</sup> Yet the other side of this rising tide of capitalism involved the use of disciplinary and coercive forces, Biopower as described by Michel Foucault, to shape the mariner and, through him, the people colonized.<sup>19</sup> No other study covering this time applies or even mentions the rise of Biopower in the Early Modern period. Vincent Patarino's essay, entitled "The Religious Shipboard Culture of Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century English Sailors," also introduces Foucault's idea of heterotopic space for "understanding how elements from land-based English religious cultures interacted and overlapped with the experiences of life at sea to construct an entirely new paradigm: shipboard culture."<sup>20</sup> He argues that due to the remoteness of the ocean-going ship and its intersections with so many foreign cultures and ports, a new kind of culture formed that combined folklore, both from domestic and international sources, along with religion. The worthy essay leaves it to others to tackle or investigate the origins of irreligion and states, "It is difficult to tell if early sixteenth century common seamen

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<sup>18</sup> James Evans, *Tudor Adventures: The Voyage of Discovery that Transformed England* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2014), 8.

<sup>19</sup> Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the College De France, (1975-76)* (New York: Picador, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> Vincent Patarino, "The Religious Shipboard Culture of Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century English Sailors," in *The Social History of English Seamen, 1485-1649*, ed. Cheryl A. Fury (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 149.

were inclined to the extremes of spirituality, to either irreligion or Lollardy.”<sup>21</sup> He guesses that they most likely possessed moderate views but also does not differentiate between the officers and the tars, placing them all together. Other writings nearer the same period, which include the works of the reverend John Newton, attest to the moral responses many seamen made regarding the consequences of capitalism’s rise.<sup>22</sup> His journey from unwise hedonist to favored reverend demonstrated the ethical quandaries all sailors faced when they entered the environment of the profession and viewed the unvarnished truth about the costs associated with maintaining and expanding the British Empire. In addition, the *Black Book of the Admiralty*, published by Sir Travers Twiss, provides illumination and understanding of the increased and codified discipline onboard.<sup>23</sup>

The privateering voyages of the Elizabethan era raised the profit profile of seafaring and, combined with the Spanish Armada victory, enticed many citizens and nobles alike toward a life onboard the wooden world.<sup>24</sup> Along with the high wages of the merchant fleet, the state-blessed pirates, and their promises of Drake-like fortunes, all further drained resources and tars away from the Navy. These ships preyed on other nation’s transports and served as a de facto and, if diplomacy required, officially deniable offensive thrust.<sup>25</sup> During the late sixteenth century,

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<sup>21</sup> Vincent Patarino, “The Religious Shipboard Culture of Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century English Sailors,” in *The Social History of English Seamen, 1485-1649*, ed. Cheryl A. Fury (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 164.

<sup>22</sup> John Newton, *An Authentic Narrative of Some Remarkable and Interesting Particulars in the Life of W.J. Newton Communicated in a Series of Letters to the Reverend Mr. Hawlis* (London: S. Drapier, T. Hilsh and P. Hett, 1765).

<sup>23</sup> Sir Travers Twiss, *Black Book of the Admiralty* (London: Longman & Co., 1873).

<sup>24</sup> Christopher Lloyd, *The British Seamen 1200-1860: A Social Survey* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1970), 38.

<sup>25</sup> Sir William Monson, *The Naval Tracts of Sir William Monson from 1630* (London: Navy Records Society, 1902), 329.

England put the world on notice that its men and vessels matched any fleet on the seas.<sup>26</sup> With experienced veterans in such high demand, the mariners exhibited agency as they navigated the complex hiring environment. The merchants with their high pay, the privateers' promises of rich bounties, and the Royal Navy's impressment of seamen, all percolating throughout society, the mariners sought the most profitable course of action.<sup>27</sup>

The Royal Navy, always hard pressed for funds, used forced impressment to gather recruits since they offered usually the lowest pay and worst living conditions when compared to the merchant fleet and the privateers. To avoid the press officers, the experienced sailors took advantage of their corruption and paid a bribe to avoid forcible recruitment. Some captains, told to gather their own mariners to fill vacant spots, did not receive even their own wages promptly, causing many to perceive the bribes as a kind of interest payment on the involuntary loan to the Crown.<sup>28</sup> To gather still their assigned quota, the press master would compel green recruits to the ships who could barely tie a rope, much less handle complex rigging. Once onboard, bad victuals and delayed payment then soured the reputation of working in the Navy.<sup>29</sup> If a person arrived onshore sick from a voyage, he must fend for himself as "such is the Charity of the People ashore, which they shall sooner dye then find Pitty, unless they bring Money with them."<sup>30</sup> With the dissolution of so many charitable organizations and Christian monasteries during Henry VIII's tenure, services for the poor and sick declined significantly and the abused Navy seamen

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<sup>26</sup> Christopher Lloyd, *The British Seamen 1200-1860: A Social Survey* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1970), 38.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Lloyd, *The British Seamen 1200-1860: A Social Survey* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1970), 38-9.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Lloyd, *The British Seamen 1200-1860: A Social Survey* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1970), 39.

<sup>29</sup> Sir William Monson, *The Naval Tracts of Sir William Monson from 1630* (London: Navy Records Society, 1902), 216-7.

<sup>30</sup> Sir William Monson, *The Naval Tracts of Sir William Monson from 1630* (London: Navy Records Society, 1902), 217.

bore the brunt of society's failure to address this pressing need. The failings of the feudal homeland in providing and taking care of the sailors and their families would assist in the seamen choosing the capitalist infused system of the merchants over the Royal administration. Yet the first break between the mariner and the state occurred when he found no use for his home's religion and actively mocked it. Exploring the practices and transmission types of this irreligiousness, the reasons behind the mariners' preference to work the trader ships over the Crown's vessels, and the ways both the state and merchants utilized the coercive and regulating effects of Biopower over the seamen to extend their authority while simultaneously minimizing the tar's importance to society should prove a fruitful endeavor and offers new insights to men who worked on the high seas to support themselves and their families.

***Chapter 1: “Old Nick’s Academy” - How the sailors showed their irreligiousness as civil disobedience to English society***

Interpreting the cultural and political proclivities of the seafarers challenges most historians. This wooden world acted as a nexus for many divergent forces and influences, almost as a microcosm of society that changed over time as authorities asked the mariners for more labor and courage as they faced the unknown dangers of deep-sea sailing. As mentioned earlier, Vincent Patarino, in his essay, entitled “The Religious Shipboard Culture of Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century English Sailors,” states the ship represented a distinctive space around which home, ports, and sea intertwined to form a shipboard culture.<sup>1</sup> From England, the men received a tradition of mixing religious background with folklore or even magical understandings of the world.<sup>2</sup> As the tars traveled around the world to different cities, they met many strange customs and religions that they integrated into their own worldview. Even some of the sailors, foreign born, intermixed with the men to provide new insights into the realms.<sup>3</sup> Yet the sea workers clung to their land-based religious customs of taking Sacraments, but due to the smallness of the vessel, combined with the length of the voyages common in the seventeenth century, the officers usually skipped them. Reading from a prayer book or singing a psalm

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent Patarino, “The Religious Shipboard Culture of Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century English Sailors,” in *The Social History of English Seamen, 1485-1649*, ed. Cheryl A. Fury (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 150.

<sup>2</sup> See especially Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> Vincent Patarino, “The Religious Shipboard Culture of Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century English Sailors,” in *The Social History of English Seamen, 1485-1649*, ed. Cheryl A. Fury (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 153-4.



during the morning or evening watch shift usually composed the daily religious undertakings.<sup>4</sup> The official reports and memoirs of the officers claiming faithful adherence to regulations remain doubtful since the authorities usually required by common law for spiritual practices at sea and the commanders wished to appear obedient to any reader. As the Crown in the early to mid-seventeenth century sought to regulate the seamen into their idea of a “British” tar, this shipboard culture evolved into an increasingly hostile environment with commanders on one side and the common sailors on the other. To justify this increased regulatory space, many government officials sought to depict them as desperate degenerates who only worked to accumulate enough money to drown themselves in a river of booze and broads. The phrases, “curse like a sailor” or “drink like a sailor” come to mind when thinking of their depictions. Only by looking at the writing of some of the seventeenth century mariners can one perhaps see an alternative glimpse of their character. These men truly blazed the path into deep-sea sailing across the ocean. The English came late to the ocean-faring quests and were not the “heirs of an ancient seafaring tradition, but the first generation of their compatriots ever to venture across the great oceans... [where] it was lawless and violent, offering great opportunities for the lucky and unscrupulous.”<sup>5</sup> A more equitable peek into their lives should prove a worthy endeavor.

Remarkably, the historians closer to the period viewed the sea workers with more balance and marveled at their strength and lack of religion. Richard Braithwait penned, “The breadth of an inch-boord is betwixt him and drowning, yet hee sweares and drinks as deepely, as if hee

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<sup>4</sup> Vincent Patarino, “The Religious Shipboard Culture of Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century English Sailors,” in *The Social History of English Seamen, 1485-1649*, ed. Cheryl A. Fury (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 154.

<sup>5</sup> Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea*, 326.

were a fathom from it.”<sup>6</sup> During fierce weather in the open sea, an observer could hear the tar praying “so amethodically, as it argues that hee is seldome vers’d in that practice. Fear is the principall motive of his devotion.”<sup>7</sup> He also agreed that the sea taught him “another rhetoricke” that played at odds against the civility of society.<sup>8</sup> Some even noted their place in the machinery of society, a “necessary instrument of action” as a means to a societal end.<sup>9</sup> Yet, in all the contemplations of the seamen’s life, Braithwait wonders aloud at the inconsistencies:

They sleepe without feare of loosing what they enjoy; and in enjoying little, they share in the lesse burden of cares. Yet it is much to bee wondred at, that our sayler should have such frequent occasion to erect his eye upward, and retaine such servile dejected thoughts inward. Singular notions derives hee from them, meane time hee is blind to Him that made them. He sliceth the depths, and is ignorant of Him that confines them; he cutteth the surging swelling waves, and thinks not of Him that restraines them; he coasteth by the shelves, and forgets Him that secures him.<sup>10</sup>

Ned Ward, for example, an erudite ex-sailor, noted that they viewed their job as “the great bridge of the ocean, conveying over to all habitable places, death, pox, and drunkenness; and bringing back, in return, all the foreign vices that we are strangers to in our own country.”<sup>11</sup> These men, most likely more than any other people in the history of the world, traveled farther and met more cultures than anyone else had ever done. No one had ever spent so much time in one confined ship as these sailors, sometimes travelling for months before seeing land.<sup>12</sup> The English did not send their best onto these vessels, they comprised “the New-bridewell of the

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Braithwait, *Whimzies* (London: Garland Publishing, 1631), 86.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Braithwait, *Whimzies* (London: Garland Publishing, 1631), 87.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Braithwait, *Whimzies* (London: Garland Publishing, 1631), 86.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Braithwait, *Whimzies* (London: Garland Publishing, 1631), 86.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Braithwait, *Whimzies* (London: Garland Publishing, 1631), 89-90.

<sup>11</sup> Ned Ward, *The Wooden World Dissected: In the Character of a Ship of War* (London: James Graham & Sunderland, 1708), 1.

<sup>12</sup> Vincent Patarino, “The Religious Shipboard Culture of Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century English Sailors,” in *The Social History of English Seamen, 1485-1649*, ed. Cheryl A. Fury (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 149.

nation, where all the incorrigible rascals are sent, to wear out ropes, and make more work for the hempen whores in London.”<sup>13</sup> Many judges offered criminals a choice: sea service or jail. Most picked the sea. The new deckhand faced an almost impossible task, maintaining their belief systems, especially one imbued with Christianity, when surrounded by so much “sinful” behavior. Some claimed that sea-going ships represented “old Nick’s academy, where the seven liberal sciences of Swearing, drinking, thieving, whoring, killing, cozening, and backbiting, are taught to full perfection.”<sup>14</sup> To survive in such an environment, any young and impressionable sailor would look up to the charismatic and wizened older hands, especially if they could teach essential skills. This academy taught the next generation repeatedly. Even those citizens who could not pay back their debts or had fallen into running prostitutes, the justice system sent them all to work on the docks and ships. In effect, these water-borne platforms of purgatory became “the Christian sanctuary for all non-solvent debtors, and unfortunate whoremasters, who are no less secured here than miscreants of old at the horns of the altar.”<sup>15</sup> Just as some prisons and jails could sometimes teach the petty criminal how to achieve crime-lord status, these academies of the ocean could teach the minor offender how to revel and rouse with the best of them. With an influx of debtors, petty criminals, and young men, some voluntary, and some through impressment, the academy never lacked for new students in the science of discarding religion for a more hedonistic lifestyle.

Despite the plentiful amount of primary sources from the late sixteenth to early seventeenth century attesting otherwise, the British tar received a glowing societal endorsement from some of the early twentieth century historians, no doubt rehabilitating the mariner for the

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<sup>13</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 2.

good of Empire. In Charles Napier Robinson's tome, *British Tar in Fact and Fiction*, he describes, "softening manners and the new graces of later times have eliminated from the personality of the seaman certain features of violence and cruelty which were found in the medieval mariner."<sup>16</sup> These men proved themselves "men of resource and decision, alert in observation and action, with an independence of character which impelled them to bold and adventurous courses, and never bade them shrink from enterprise or peril."<sup>17</sup> He mentions that the men followed the edicts of "no blaspheming of God, no detestable swearing, no communication of ribaldry, no filthy tales, nor ungodly talk... neither were there to be dicing [or] carding."<sup>18</sup> These rules, purportedly all followed by the men, countered what some contemporaries of the day wrote in that sailors committed unruly behavior. Yet, in reality, a rule against blaspheming God or swearing meant the actions existed in the first place. Such broad and sweeping rosy generalizations rang true to the English readers at the height of British world power but the truth of society's view of the tar during his period remains far from this glowing endorsement. These descriptions of the perfect mariners demonstrate high society's views on how a tar should act and provides evidence of the vision they pressed onto the men with the utilization of Biopower discipline and regulations. Groaning under the pressure, the sailors resorted to dismissing the efficacy or desirability of the homeland's religion.

Before outlining the roots of the sailors' irreligiousness, the ways historians have depicted the religiousness of sailors in naval history books should prove enriching. The writers tend group themselves into two ways of thinking. Historians Marcus Rediker, Michael Oppenheim, and others argue that seamen usually thought of the pleasures of this life and not

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<sup>16</sup> Charles Napier Robinson, *British Tar in Fact and Fiction* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1909), 42.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Napier Robinson, *British Tar in Fact and Fiction* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1909), 43.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Napier Robinson, *British Tar in Fact and Fiction* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1909), 51.

about their souls. Examining courts-martial records, Oppenheim writes that drunkenness and excessive swearing appears often, from all ranks, and “very few indications of the existence of Puritan fervor or even of ordinary religious feeling.”<sup>19</sup> The mass of men and officers “aimed at pay and prize money, gave strenuous service when the former was punctual and the latter plentiful... always much more interested in their material prosperity in this world than the prospects of their future welfare in the next.”<sup>20</sup> Rediker, writing about early eighteenth century pirates and privateers, calls for more study on the early seventeenth century origins of irreligiousness in tars and quotes a sailor who states he is “the very antithesis of a priest. Among sailors, irreverence, free thought, sensuality, and action trumped piety, doctrine, celibacy, and contemplation.”<sup>21</sup> He cites sailor Edward Coxere, who stated, “But the Lord suffered it so to be, for there was little of fear of God amongst us” after losing a battle against the Spanish which they should have won.<sup>22</sup> Even the role of staffing a slave ship illustrates the juxtaposition of Christianity with profits. Rediker writes the seamen who kept “watch” while sailing in Africa had to keep a different kind of wariness when slaves came aboard, forcing the sailors to take on the role of prison guard, something that surely ached wrongly in them.<sup>23</sup>

The other way of contemplating the religious life of sailors involves portraying them as primitively religious with a fragile and child-like faith. These workers, so far from home and faced with the immensity of the ocean, the splendor of the night’s sky, and the breath of a touch

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<sup>19</sup> M. Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy and of Merchant Shipping in Relation to the Navy* (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1896), 355.

<sup>20</sup> M. Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy and of Merchant Shipping in Relation to the Navy* (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1896), 355.

<sup>21</sup> Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 134.

<sup>22</sup> Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 169; Edward Coxere, *Adventures by Sea of Edward Coxere* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 43.

<sup>23</sup> Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 45.

away from mortal danger, from weather to other ships, sought the company of God.<sup>24</sup> Historians Tzvetan Todorov and Samuel Eliot Morison depicted these seamen as possessing a special contact with the Almighty. These humans lived in such a precarious state of existence that they did not have time for deep spiritual thought but kept their ideas of the world at a basic minimum. These historians argue they had a much deeper faith in their spirituality than the more comfortable priests and church officials possessed on land.<sup>25</sup> The truth about the nature of their religiousness, wise pragmatism or child-like faith, still does not explain a possible root cause of the divergence from society. The first avenue of inquiry will examine how shipboard life contributed to their perceived fall from grace and the other will demonstrate the effects land society had on the tars. Before looking internally at the ship crew, one potential irreligious source comes externally: the rise of cannon technology.

One foundational aspect of the sailors' irreligiousness resided in the suddenness of a battle death, which started in the early sixteenth century with the introduction of heavy cannons. In 1512, the Frenchman Pregent de Bidoux attacked an English fleet commanded by Lord Admiral Howard off the coast of Brest. The newly wrought heavy ordnance the French brought to bear frightened the Englishmen. Lord Howard wrote to the King that the men thought the battle "the most dangerous enterprise ever heard of" and the enemy fire "a thing marvelous and might

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<sup>24</sup> Vincent Patarino, "The Religious Shipboard Culture of Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century English Sailors," in *The Social History of English Seamen, 1485-1649*, ed. Cheryl A. Fury (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 165.

<sup>25</sup> Vincent Patarino, "The Religious Shipboard Culture of Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century English Sailors," in *The Social History of English Seamen, 1485-1649*, ed. Cheryl A. Fury (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 144; Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of the America: The Question of the Other* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 25; Samuel Eliot Morison, *The European Discovery of America, The Southern Voyages A. D. 1492-1616* (Oxford, Oxford University Press 1974), 79.

have sunk any of their ships without the slightest annoyance from them.”<sup>26</sup> Incredibly, he concluded that, “all the captains and masters think it unadvisable to return” and engage the enemy.<sup>27</sup> In an ancillary private missive to Lord Chancellor Cardinal Wolsey, Howard confessed, “all are in great fear of the [French] galleys, and had as like to go to Purgatory as to the Trade.”<sup>28</sup> The admiral, not participating in the first battle, did not understand the reason for the men’s fears. Battles where most of the combat consisted of ship-to-ship boarding with arrows and “noisy crossbows” firing, presented a mariner with foresight of coming danger that certainly required preparations. Yet with the larger cannons, the seamen, amidst the shouting and hubbub of battle, could perceive little sound of the incoming round and, all of a sudden, a blast could kill. The imminent doom without so much of a second to think of the afterlife caused a change in thinking for many seamen, causing them to suffer a condition called “sparkylled,” or sitting around in a daze.<sup>29</sup> The powerful cannons were not selective in choice of victims and the Christian or the heathen could die in an instant or survive when everyone around them perished violently. When they saw the faithful die suddenly, it is no wonder that some began to question the efficacy of religion. Yet when their own officers displayed duplicity in their faith, especially in regards to the rise of capitalist slavery, the men doubted their faith even more.

Far from the shores of England, one of the first terrible highlights of history and hypocrisy involved John Hawkins setting sail in 1562 on a slaving mission, considered one of the

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<sup>26</sup> Lord Admiral Thomas Howard to Henry VIII (7 May 1513) in J. S. Brewer (editor), *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII Volume I: 1509 - 1514* (London: Institute of Historical Research, 1920), 843.

<sup>27</sup> Lord Admiral Thomas Howard to Henry VIII (7 May 1513) in J. S. Brewer (editor), *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII Volume I: 1509 - 1514* (London: Institute of Historical Research, 1920), 843.

<sup>28</sup> Lord Admiral Thomas Howard to Wolsey (7 May 1513) in J. S. Brewer (editor), *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII Volume I: 1509 - 1514* (London: Institute of Historical Research, 1920), 844.

<sup>29</sup> Lord Admiral Thomas Howard to Wolsey (7 May 1513) in J. S. Brewer (editor), *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII Volume I: 1509 - 1514* (London: Institute of Historical Research, 1920), 844. ‘Sparkylled’ sounds like one of the earliest accounts of the “Shell shocked” concept so prevalent in later wars.

first ever by an Englishman. During this endeavor, he laid down a simple dictum: “Serve God duly, love one another, preserve your victuals, beware of fire, and keep good company.”<sup>30</sup> Cruising up and down the Guinea coast near Sierra Leone, his mariners sought to find villages of ‘Negroes’ and capture them for transport to Spain.<sup>31</sup> The Africans fought back fiercely, killing and wounding dozens of his men. They captured many people into slavery but had to leave as sickness spread throughout the tars, after only six days on the coast.<sup>32</sup> After resting at a nearby island, the slavers espied a black man in a white coat gazing upon them from a cliff on the mainland. They quickly rowed to capture the man but he fled. Later that day, they heard from a Portuguese trader that they had chased after the King of Sierra Leone who had hurried from his capital to see the kind of men who attacked and captured his people. That evening, the sailors, anchored far out in the bay, saw “such a monstrous fire, by the watering place, that before was not seen.”<sup>33</sup> The men knew if they had stayed another day on the shore, the army of Sierra Leone would have destroyed them. Hawkins thanked God for their escape: “God, who worketh all things for the best, would not have it so, and by him we escaped without danger, his name be praised for it.”<sup>34</sup> Hawkins does mention that some of the tribes cannibalized the remains of others and hints that some African tribes are “more civil” than other groups due to their previous

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<sup>30</sup> Clements R. Markham (editor), *The Hawkins' Voyages during the Reigns of Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth, and James I* (London: T. Richards, 1878), 9.

<sup>31</sup> Clements R. Markham (editor), *The Hawkins' Voyages during the Reigns of Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth, and James I* (London: T. Richards, 1878), 51.

<sup>32</sup> Clements R. Markham (editor), *The Hawkins' Voyages during the Reigns of Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth, and James I* (London: T. Richards, 1878), 21-3.

<sup>33</sup> Clements R. Markham (editor), *The Hawkins' Voyages during the Reigns of Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth, and James I* (London: T. Richards, 1878), 24.

<sup>34</sup> Clements R. Markham (editor), *The Hawkins' Voyages during the Reigns of Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth, and James I* (London: T. Richards, 1878), 24.



encounters with the Portuguese or French.<sup>35</sup> They soon departed for the West Indies. After many days in doldrums, where he worried about the death of Negroes and his crew for lack of water, “almighty God, who never suffereth his elect to perish, sent... the ordinary breeze.”<sup>36</sup> After many delays in the Spanish New World, they sold their human cargo and brought home to England a hefty profit, showing the way for others the triangle trade that persisted for centuries.<sup>37</sup> No passages in this journal discuss the humanity of the Africans or question the Christian morality of their actions. At the end, he praises God for the large profit earned during the voyage.<sup>38</sup> With the frequent mentioning of God’s guidance and protection, Hawkins believed his mission, sailing a ship called the *Jesus*, ordained by the Almighty to capture and sell humans for profit.<sup>39</sup> The tars though, seeing the frightened slaves wrenched from their homeland and sold to a life of unending toil and hardship, most likely did not see the Christian ideal in the endeavor, further fueling their mockery of religion.<sup>40</sup> The opening up of a new market of flesh perhaps caused the seamen to lament the hypocrisy of their society that heaped praises of adoration on their commanders as they unloaded the many wondrous goods from afar, all purchased on the backs of black men.<sup>41</sup> With all this wealth emanating from Africa, corruption seeped increasingly into many officers’ lives and did not escape the notice of the tars.

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<sup>35</sup> Clements R. Markham (editor), *The Hawkins’ Voyages during the Reigns of Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth, and James I* (London: T. Richards, 1878), 21.

<sup>36</sup> Clements R. Markham (editor), *The Hawkins’ Voyages during the Reigns of Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth, and James I* (London: T. Richards, 1878), 25.

<sup>37</sup> Clements R. Markham (editor), *The Hawkins’ Voyages during the Reigns of Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth, and James I* (London: T. Richards, 1878), 32.

<sup>38</sup> Clements R. Markham (editor), *The Hawkins’ Voyages during the Reigns of Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth, and James I* (London: T. Richards, 1878), 65.

<sup>39</sup> Clements R. Markham (editor), *The Hawkins’ Voyages during the Reigns of Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth, and James I* (London: T. Richards, 1878), 50.

<sup>40</sup> Charles Napier Robinson, *The British Tar in Fact and Fiction* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1909), 62.

<sup>41</sup> Clements R. Markham (editor), *The Hawkins’ Voyages during the Reigns of Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth, and James I* (London: T. Richards, 1878), 64.

According to Ned Ward, some senior officers failed to set a high personal standard for their own Christian conduct and led many sailors to mock the commanders' beliefs. Alcohol would loosen some mouths and the officers would "tell you a thousand wicked stories of them [captains] in his cups... but when he's sober again, he furiously curses the freedom of his tongue."<sup>42</sup> Lieutenants, far from the ear of the captain, would complain with the crew and "rail the most against Captains, though he is the first of any that hopes to be one."<sup>43</sup> This hypocrisy pervaded many ships. In the presence of the chaplain, officers would act the "sheep" but as soon as they are alone with the men, the "sheep should so suddenly all at once turned to a tiger."<sup>44</sup> The solitary nature of deep ocean sailing fueled this type of behavior. Always wary of the threat of mutiny, the state gave captains nearly absolute powers.<sup>45</sup> The harsh treatment of seamen to maintain discipline did not sit well with some high-ranking visitors on the ship or to chaplains. No doubt, the commanders portrayed a kinder and gentler façade to assuage the sensibilities of the clergy. The tars though saw through the act. A leader would attempt to ingratiate himself with the men and proclaimed that he is "no hypocrite as to his vices, that is certain; for he'll tell you a hundred times over without asking, what a notable lewd fellow he is... he has made more cuckold holds than bowls of punch; and believes there is no more sin in taking a spell with a whore, than in pumping a leaky vessel."<sup>46</sup> The camaraderie, won at the expense of a Christian image, would certainly fade away as discipline and orders soon flew about the decks. In such a little

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<sup>42</sup> Ned Ward, *The Wooden World Dissected: In the Character of a Ship of War* (London: James Graham & Sunderland, 1708), 17.

<sup>43</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 17.

<sup>44</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 16.

<sup>45</sup> Charles Ward, "A Continuation of a Voyage to New England," *The Universal Spy: or, The London Weekly Magazine*, April 1739, 95. This article reprinted, in serial form, the mid-seventeenth century trip to New England.

<sup>46</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 21.

space on the vessel, everyone on the ship usually learned each person's predilections. Some, once in port, would take to land, go after the women, and try to avoid the husbands. Yet, the man "has made many attempts of both kinds... [he] seldom coming off from the one without a clap, as from the other a beating."<sup>47</sup> Many seamen and officers alike used the navy as a way to escape from domestic problems. Even if the local authorities sought the person, the crew would still welcome an able sailor, feigning ignorance to any shore crimes. Sailing out of the bay or down the Thames, the ship "buries all in oblivion."<sup>48</sup> Deep-sea voyages took so many months, by the time the offender returned, tempers had cooled. The backsliding to Christianity did not cease on the craft though. While at sea, in "lieu of whores, [he] makes cards and dice his serious entertainment."<sup>49</sup> With many hours sitting on watch, the men would gamble their earnings away for a bit of sport. Serious discussion of life's purpose or spiritual health faded into the background as many just sought to persist to the next sighting of land.<sup>50</sup> With danger all about from leaks, pirates, ship impressment, storms, and sickness, the men desired survival. The tar and the officer both "as little thinks of going to heaven, as to Jamaica."<sup>51</sup> Even when the Admiralty furnished chaplains to stem this sinful tide, they usually assigned only the most desperate or troubled.

By the Commonwealth period and certainly by the English Restoration, specific military regulations and the inclusion of the chaplain in a formal ship's hierarchy brought religion more

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<sup>47</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 22.

<sup>48</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 22.

<sup>49</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 22.

<sup>50</sup> Vincent Patarino, "The Religious Shipboard Culture of Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century English Sailors," in *The Social History of English Seamen, 1485-1649*, ed. Cheryl A. Fury (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 165.

<sup>51</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 22.

into focus for shipboard life.<sup>52</sup> Yet, when a ship did have a chaplain, they seldom proved any higher in stature. One fellow, “in his junior days was brought up in the fear of the Lord; but the university reasoned him out of it at last, and he oft-times thanks his good stars for it.”<sup>53</sup> Usually the clergy held a position at a church or other community organization. Rarely the most devout or, usually, the least competent took up the post of ship’s chaplain. Small to medium vessels could not afford their services; they were reserved for the larger war crafts. Usually ships required prayers at morning and noon with a psalm read in the evening. Some captains tried to instill a more religious atmosphere but the sailors usually resisted such attempts. Some of the priests would joke with the crew and would proclaim they should “seldom be oppressed with the drudgery of prayers; once a day were an intolerable burden.”<sup>54</sup> When questioned by the crew for unchristian behavior, the chaplain could “make a text point as many ways as the compass... to comfort his heart with upon any carnal occasions.”<sup>55</sup> Tars, usually wise to the ways of the world, saw through the justification of behavior, no matter how well dressed in reason the Bible scholar utilized. These examples from the officials of the church help explain how the sailors justified their lascivious existence and viewed religion as just a way to get ahead in the world. Every time an officer or chaplain engaged in the same behavior as the men, an irreligious attitude developed as to the uselessness and pretentiousness of Christianity. The officers tolerated the bashing of Catholics so it proved a short jump to deride equally Protestantism.<sup>56</sup> In the instances where those in command would act in one way in front of an admiral or high-ranking church official

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<sup>52</sup> Vincent Patarino, “The Religious Shipboard Culture of Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century English Sailors,” in *The Social History of English Seamen, 1485-1649*, ed. Cheryl A. Fury (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 162.

<sup>53</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 23.

<sup>54</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 24.

<sup>55</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 24.

<sup>56</sup> Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea*, 407.

and then act another way to the mariners, the seamen perhaps could take pride in the fact they did not display such hypocrisy. The tars not only reproduced and taught the irreligious behavior from one generation to another, the officers and chaplains also gave credence to the same ideas in their very hypocritical acts.

The chaplains or senior commanders did not have a monopoly on ill-advised unchristian acts. The example of junior ship officers meant much to the sailors and contributed to their disdain for the faith. An erudite sailor, William Monson confessed that:

whether it be the sea... or a liberty you feel ashore after you have been penned up in ships, like birds in a cage, or untamed horses when they are set loose... [nothing] can show more extravagant lewdness, more dissolute wildness, and less fear of God, than your carriage discovers when you come ashore and cast off the command of your superior officers had over you.<sup>57</sup>

He further explained that even when the sailors promised God a reform in behavior during tough times, these promises, soon forgotten, held no sway over the debauchery.<sup>58</sup> His advice to “reducing them to goodness” rested with the commanders for they should follow the rules also. If not, then the superior officer is “like a harp that sounds pleasantly to others, and enjoys no part itself.”<sup>59</sup> He concludes, “Example is of greater force than persuasion with many men, and when these men shall see your life concur with your admonitions it will be the strongest force and motive for their conversion.”<sup>60</sup> This avenue of analysis indirectly condemns all the commanders who deride their sea workers for not behaving in a respectful manner. If the officers set a good

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<sup>57</sup> Sir William Monson, *The Naval Tracts of Sir William Monson from 1630* (London: Navy Records Society, 1902), 386.

<sup>58</sup> Sir William Monson, *The Naval Tracts of Sir William Monson from 1630* (London: Navy Records Society, 1902), 387.

<sup>59</sup> Sir William Monson, *The Naval Tracts of Sir William Monson from 1630* (London: Navy Records Society, 1902), 388.

<sup>60</sup> Sir William Monson, *The Naval Tracts of Sir William Monson from 1630* (London: Navy Records Society, 1902), 388.

example across the board, then perhaps the men would also strive for a Christian-like lifestyle. Apart from shipboard life, events on the ground also contributed to the sailors' ill view of Christian society.

Even though authorities excused some grafting, they expected officials, both on land and on sea, to fulfill their duties. The case of Sir John Trevor brings to light an example of the shady dealings. Trevor, appointed surveyor of the Navy in 1598, held the power to determine from which companies the Crown would purchase goods. Kickbacks from an organization that provided inferior and expensive Baltic masts and supplies enriched the official while his relation to their owners through marriage secured his safety from discovery. The laundered money, valued at a year's salary, enriched him immensely. He also bought large amounts of timber through a personally owned but cleverly disguised front company and then sold them to the Navy at hugely inflated prices.<sup>61</sup> After purchasing a shipment of used rigging, he rebranded them as new and sold them at higher prices. Even worse, Trevor utilized the long existent practice of 'dead pays,' whereby "both wages and victuals were supplied for non-existent mariners who sometimes constituted over a quarter of a ship's crew."<sup>62</sup> As long as he received a cut in the dead pay, he would not report their use. Any ship resupplying in one of the ports he oversaw usually found the process much smoother if a bribe came into his hands. Appointments for positions within his domain came with a price and further enriched Trevor.<sup>63</sup> He also used workers on the

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<sup>61</sup> Alan Patrick McGowan, *The Jacobean Commissions of Enquiry, 1608 and 1618, Volume 116* (London: Navy Records Society, 1971), 35.

<sup>62</sup> Andrew Thrush and John P. Ferris (editors), *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1604-1629* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 309; Commissioners of the Navy to the Marquis of Buckingham, Lord Admiral (March 1618) in Earl Cowper, *Reports of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts: The Manuscripts of the Earl Cowper* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1888), 105.

<sup>63</sup> Alan Patrick McGowan, *The Jacobean Commissions of Enquiry, 1608 and 1618, Volume 116* (London: Navy Records Society, 1971), 107.

Crown's salary and government supplies to repair and outfit his own private ships. Eventually his dealings came under scrutiny but the King just admonished him to do his duty more faithfully.<sup>64</sup> All in his demesne, no doubt, knew of the acts done by Trevor and shook their heads when he only received an insignificant punishment when discovered. No wonder the men did not listen very well when told to follow the rules and not value money over duty to the country.

Even though grafting and corruption has always been part of government, in the late Elizabethan era and beyond it proved to reach a high watermark. The rising cost of modern warfare, first illustrated by France, exposed the weaknesses in collecting taxes under the old medieval system. To compete on this new capitalist-driven and ocean-spanning stage, countries' expenditures far exceeded their ability to collect revenue. Spain, using the huge influx of New World silver, could compete with France's state consolidation of power and taxation. England, with few resources coming from North America, found itself in arrears in most accounts and at odds with merchants. These traders demanded government protection of their convoys and the cash-strapped Crown could not comply since they preferred conducting land-grab wars on the Continent. When the government did not pay their bills or salaries, men in positions believed justified in peddling their influence to make up for long-delayed revenue.<sup>65</sup> This lack of pay trickled down to the seamen who also believed he possessed a right to scrimp and scramble for any way to make a living. The tension between the demands of geopolitical realpolitik and the inefficiencies of the medieval system provided a crumbling foundation for the English Civil Wars. This corruption though went to the highest echelons of government and showed few

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<sup>64</sup> Alan Patrick McGowan, *The Jacobean Commissions of Enquiry, 1608 and 1618, Volume 116* (London: Navy Records Society, 1971), 8. This mild punishment came after a lengthy interview and numerous reports read detailing his activities.

<sup>65</sup> Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea*, 341.

remained immune to the lure of profit, especially in reference to undeclared wars like the practice of privateering.

Privateering possessed many aspects of double-dealing and influenced the seamen against the desires and values held by official society. Many in high office, including the Lord Admiral, controlled the Admiralty courts and used that influence to excuse friends and family from suits. Some of the ships with letters of marque included joint ventures with the leading administrators of the time.<sup>66</sup> When a ship engaged in piracy and did not have an official letter, one could purchase them rather cheaply. Queen Elizabeth herself participated in some privateering expeditions against the Spanish and overlooked others who engaged in the piracy.<sup>67</sup> When people brought a case to the Admiralty court, the Lord Admiral would take a percentage of the prize as a fee for adjudication.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, no matter which way ruled, he would always receive money.<sup>69</sup> Even the Earl of Warwick's 1627 voyage across the Atlantic utilized his Protestantism as justification for piracy and slaving. He sought to strike a blow against Catholic Spain and bring valuable slaves to America to bolster the land God favored. Most knew, and even applauded, that he developed these pretensions as a way to justify his actions to gain money.<sup>70</sup> This drive for money above all else "undermined that sense of unity and devotion that had shone in the hour of crisis [Spanish Armada invasion]; the pernicious influence... was a manifestation of the disease inherent."<sup>71</sup> Greed trumped most Christian moral rules and further demonstrated to those in all

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<sup>66</sup> Kenneth R. Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering 1583-1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 79.

<sup>67</sup> Kenneth R. Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering 1583-1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 94.

<sup>68</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, 167.

<sup>69</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, 22.

<sup>70</sup> Claire Jowett, *The Culture of Piracy, 1580-1630* (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 70-1.

<sup>71</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, 237.



levels of society that taking care of business meant taking care of one's self first. In 1627, while waiting for wind to allow the traversal of the Duke's army across the sea, an officer lamented in a letter "such a rotten miserable fleet set out to sea no man ever saw. Our enemies seeing it may scoff at our nation."<sup>72</sup> From such a high enthusiasm during the defeat of the Spanish Armada, in one generation the inefficiencies of the medieval system wrecked the English naval tradition into a former shadow of itself. Yet the line between military, commercial, and the administration proved very thin and shadowy, allowing the right connected people to profit over the booming trade missions.

Once the trade routes flourished, corruption played a role in the seamen's view of naval administration. In the seventeenth century, whether a high-ranking official proved "dishonest is not in one sense of much importance, since it is admitted that he was skillful as a seaman, and efficient as an administrator."<sup>73</sup> People in good positions often took advantage of the perquisites to attain "discounts, commission on contracts, and other such emoluments" to gather wealth.<sup>74</sup> As more wealth came into the system, the Crown demanded more oversight, which opened the doors to increased confiscation and double-dealing. The salary administrators earned usually barely met the required traveling expenses. The Crown tolerated some profit for the position, just not too much or at the expense of fulfilling the duty assigned.<sup>75</sup> One letter noted the use of ships to provide some officials with places to pay their retinues and dead pays. For the practice of

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<sup>72</sup> John Ashburnham to Nicholas (26 Oct 1627) in John Bruce (editor), *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series of the Reign of Charles I, 1627-1628* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, Roberts, 1858), 409.

<sup>73</sup> M. Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy and of the Merchant Shipping* (London: J. Miller and Son, 1896), 392.

<sup>74</sup> M. Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy and of the Merchant Shipping* (London: J. Miller and Son, 1896), 393.

<sup>75</sup> M. Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy and of the Merchant Shipping* (London: J. Miller and Son, 1896), 393.

hiring a retinue, the officer, for example, instead of hiring a real boatswain, would pay a family friend and take a kickback. With dead pays, the captain would collect wages for men not even on the ship. The shipmasters complained that when they lost battles, the lack of trained tars onboard usually accounted for the defeat.<sup>76</sup> Many ships did not even sail from a secure bay and just anchored to collect easy treasure. Sometimes a vessel would “thrust into some harbor where the companies run ashore and scatter, and yet charge His Majesty with wages and victuals as if they were fed and in service.”<sup>77</sup> Though many charges proved true upon investigation, some accusations of corruption, usually made through anonymous letters, originated from disgruntled ex-officials desiring to gain back their lost positions. To the sea worker, nicking a little profit from time to time usually meant they were acting like their officers. Richard Hawkins, an excellent seaman who rose into the Crown ranks, exemplified this idea. As long as the workers did the job, the authorities tolerated, and some even encouraged, earning some extra treasure as a reward.<sup>78</sup> Yet, when some commanders condemned the men for going outside of the rules, and usually confiscated the illegal goods, while they themselves did the same, feelings of hostility and anger resulted. The tars though, having traveled to many ports and no doubt talked with many other nationalities, knew the rising tide of trade, privateering, and war produced double-dealing everywhere.

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<sup>76</sup> Commissioners of the Navy to the Marquis of Buckingham, Lord Admiral (March 1618) in Earl Cowper, *Reports of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts: The Manuscripts of the Earl Cowper* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1888), 105.

<sup>77</sup> Commissioners of the Navy to the Marquis of Buckingham, Lord Admiral (March 1618) in Earl Cowper, *Reports of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts: The Manuscripts of the Earl Cowper* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1888), 105.

<sup>78</sup> M. Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy and of the Merchant Shipping* (London: J. Miller and Son, 1896), 397.

Apart from witnessing English examples of hypocrisy, the geography of the ocean and ports during this exploding expansion of trade and exploration enabled the sailors to witness wide-ranging diversity.<sup>79</sup> Due to the efforts of Prince Henry the Navigator of the Portuguese, sailing around Africa and across the Indian Ocean proved feasible. The Spanish plied the Atlantic, pulling valuables out and pouring limited resources into the New World. With the triangle trade routes established, a mariner could sail from England to the coasts of Africa, across the Atlantic to the Caribbean, and then back through the Straits of Florida to Europe, all in the span of two years, traveling more miles than most coastal tars could their entire lifetime.<sup>80</sup> These long voyages away from the reassurances of seeing land must have wearied the cooped up sea workers. The constant threat of storms and vessel failure surely led to increased stress.<sup>81</sup> Before trans-oceanic voyages, since most trading occurred along the coasts, these ships possessed a fighting chance to flee to safety of a bay or inlet if a sudden tempest flared or an enemy sail sighted. The ocean voyage, through a vast expanse, would appear to offer some safety. In cases of attempts to find certain fleets, namely the ‘Treasure Fleet’ of the Spanish, it did provide seclusion. As the decades of the sixteenth century rolled onward, various chokepoints emerged. Sea-lanes, such as the Florida Straits, allowed determined foes to cruise back and forth searching in a relatively small area. The availability and need of fresh water permitted enterprising hunters to stake out areas in the Azores, the Tenerife, and the Antilles islands. The Azores, a useful nearly midway point across the Atlantic, assisted those skilled enough to find them with supplies.

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<sup>79</sup> Richard Braithwait, *Whimzies* (London: Garland Publishing, 1631), 91.

<sup>80</sup> See Clements R. Markham (editor), *The Hawkins' Voyages during the Reigns of Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth, and James I* (London: T. Richards, 1878) for a detailed account of this very trading mission, earning enormous profits for the venture backers.

<sup>81</sup> Vincent Patarino, “The Religious Shipboard Culture of Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century English Sailors,” in *The Social History of English Seamen, 1485-1649*, ed. Cheryl A. Fury (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 156.

Tenerife, off the coast of Morocco, provided a waypoint for those traveling to the Bights of Africa looking to capture humans and sell them into slavery. The Antilles of the Caribbean enabled vessels to trade for victuals and enjoy some respite from the long voyage. As more countries and companies mounted these expeditions, there remains little doubt the tar witnessed spectacular vistas and horrible sights floating in his wooden world, as well as acts of hypocrisy. As the divide between the officers and seamen grew, the administration turned to discipline, religion, and coercion to shape the sailor into a proper “British” man who should always put Queen and Country in front of his own desires.

This distaste for the mariners moved some masters to view the men underneath them as unfit for normal life on land and attempted to utilize religion or punishment as a way to moderate them, almost always failing. John Hawkins, after successfully leading a charge to put out a raging fire onboard, persuaded the men to give up swearing, “which amongst the common sort of Mariners and Sea-faring men, is too ordinarily abused.”<sup>82</sup> He devised a small cane, which was “kept by the last man swearing, until he could find another to pass it on to. The man who held it in the evening or at morning prayer was to have three blows with it.”<sup>83</sup> Captain Martin Pring, writing to the East India Company, lamented he had “difficulty of governing this irregular and almost incorrigible scum of rascals, whom the land hath ejected for their wicked lives and ungodly behavior.”<sup>84</sup> He goes on to deride them as “sea-apes” and they “come to sea with few clothes and many diseases... many honest men robbed of the little money they had brought to

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<sup>82</sup> Sir Richard Hawkins, *The Observations of Sir Richard Hawkins, Knights, in his Voyage into the South Sea* (London: John Jaggard, 1593), 65.

<sup>83</sup> Lavery, *Royal Tars*, 42.

<sup>84</sup> Captain Martin Pring to East India Company (23 Mar 1619) in W. Noel Sainsbury (editor), *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, East Indies, China and Japan, 1617-1621* (London: Longman and Co., 1870), 266.

sea by those wicked villains.”<sup>85</sup> In his mind, the seamen came to the ship already debased. The few upstanding sailors who came before the mast would quickly descend into the same pit of behavior as these fellows. His use of the word ‘sea-ape’ insinuated a process of dehumanization of the sailor, by claiming they are an “other,” or a separate group from the mainstream. The ‘land’ provided to the officers a normalized and idealized view of proper seamen. This “dehumanization appears when spontaneous aggressiveness, envy, hostility, etc. are ‘enriched’ by the elements of rational, planned and organized patterns of social activity.”<sup>86</sup> The conclusion rests that the “main cause of dehumanization appears to be an ideological commitment... [to] ‘idealistic’ images of the world.”<sup>87</sup> In the officers’ minds, an image of the ideal ship and crew emanated from society. When reality did not fit this mold, the tars, who only acted like themselves, essentially like humans, received corrective punishment mixed with deriding comments and attitudes. The “master wants uniformity, predictability, and severity, and will censor and recreate others in its drive to achieve these goals.”<sup>88</sup> By labelling all of them as ‘scum’ and rejects from society, the master then justified his use of force to correct the behavior of these sub-humans. To be sure, the sea salts did not appreciate or invite this type of program to improve themselves. One of the tools utilized by the authorities to correct or moderate behavior involved religious instruction, but as the shocking Puritan transport ship examples below proves, the mariners had ways to handle most any kind of coercion techniques.

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<sup>85</sup> Captain Martin Pring to East India Company (23 Mar 1619) W. Noel Sainsbury (editor), *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, East Indies, China and Japan, 1617-1621* (London: Longman and Co., 1870), 266.

<sup>86</sup> Adam Podgorecki, *Multi-Dimensional Sociology* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 268.

<sup>87</sup> Adam Podgorecki, *Multi-Dimensional Sociology* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 269.

<sup>88</sup> Steven Morrison, “Dehumanization and Recreation: A Lacanian Interpretation of Federal Sentencing Guidelines,” *Dartmouth Law Journal* (2006): 120.

The ferrying of English passengers from England to the New World provides an insightful glimpse into resolving the dispute between the tar as pragmatic person and the seamen as a backward yet primitive spiritualist, the two major views historians have offered to explain their religiousness. When the Protestants, sharply attuned to any remarks against God, embarked across the Atlantic, some encountered shocking sights and sounds. They first encountered the Captain, “a Commander, when at Sea, a marine deity; his Will is his Law, and the Power of Punishing solely in his own Hands.”<sup>89</sup> They likened his self-image as to a Roman prefect when Puritan Charles Ward wrote, “He has a wooden world at his mercy, wherein there is no way to be happy, but by due Obedience: For he that knoweth his master’s will, and doth it not, shall be beaten with many Stripes.”<sup>90</sup> Observing the sailors, he wrote “brandy and tobacco are the soul of a seamen” and will turn “thief or beggar” if not in possession of either.<sup>91</sup> The tars looked upwards, not at God, but instead trusted the sun, moon, and stars to guide them to “bodily salvation... [and] a safe harbor.”<sup>92</sup> One transport commander, Captain Squeb, a “merciless man,” after enduring the passengers’ expounding of the Word of God every day for ten weeks, deposited them not up the Charles River as the contract stated, but on Nantucket Point many miles away, and left them “in a forlorn place in the wilderness.”<sup>93</sup> They eventually, after help

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<sup>89</sup> Charles Ward, “A Continuation of a Voyage to New England,” *The Universal Spy: or, The London Weekly Magazine*, April 1739, 95. This article reprinted, in serial form, the mid-seventeenth century trip to New England.

<sup>90</sup> Charles Ward, “A Continuation of a Voyage to New England,” *The Universal Spy: or, The London Weekly Magazine*, April 1739, 95. This article reprinted, in serial form, the mid-seventeenth century trip to New England.

<sup>91</sup> Charles Ward, “A Continuation of a Voyage to New England,” *The Universal Spy: or, The London Weekly Magazine*, April 1739, 95.

<sup>92</sup> Charles Ward, “A Continuation of a Voyage to New England,” *The Universal Spy: or, The London Weekly Magazine*, April 1739, 96.

<sup>93</sup> Roger Clap, *Memoirs of Roger Clap* (Boston: David Clapp, 1844), 41.

from Indians, made it to Charlestown. Even on the august *Mayflower*, William Bradford, epitomizing the sanctimonious attitude of many Christians of the day, wrote:

There was a proud and very profane young man, one of the seamen, of a lusty, able body, which made him the more haughty; he would always be contemning the poor people in their sickness and cursing them daily with grievous execrations; and did not let to tell them that he hoped to help to cast half of them overboard before they came to their journey's end, and to make merry with what they had; and if he were by any gently reproved, he would curse and swear most bitterly. But it pleased God before they came half seas over, to smite this young man with a grievous disease, of which he died in a desperate manner, and so was himself the first that was thrown overboard.<sup>94</sup>

After the Puritans had arrived and civilization developed, another example of Christian superiority arose. The English ship *Mary Rose* exploded in the Boston harbor from a gunpowder accident. In response, John Winthrop smugly wrote, “this judgment from God upon these scorners of his ordinances and the ways of his servants (for they spake very evil of us, because they found not so good a market for their commodities as they expected).”<sup>95</sup> The sailors most likely sold not just physical commodities but also the carnal and lascivious kind. Bostonian Joseph Endecott, upon hearing of their demise, judged the accident a “stroake of God’s hand upon... some atheistical passages and hellish profanations of the Sabbaths and deridings of the people and wayes of God... [and] many drinkings” upon the Lord’s Day.<sup>96</sup> These religious people, though perhaps intentionally provoked by the young crew, give valuable insight into answering the question of the divine leanings of the ship’s crew. The judgment remains safe that the tars mocked dependence upon faith and embraced the *carpe diem* lifestyle. This idea fits within the context that they encountered dangers on a daily basis and may not survive to the next

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<sup>94</sup> William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation 1620-1647* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1856), 58.

<sup>95</sup> John Winthrop, *The History of New England from 1630 to 1649* (Boston: Thomas B. Waite and Son, 1826), 12.

<sup>96</sup> George E. Ellis, *The Puritan Age and Rule in the Colony of the Massachusetts Bay, 1629-1685* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1888), 146.

day; they should live life to the fullest and not restrain anything from their hands.<sup>97</sup> Even on land, the sailors lived out this life, showing themselves consistent on both sea and society.

When all attempts at reforming the sailors failed, many leaders of the time decried the traits in their men that they possessed in plentiful abundance themselves. Sir Walter Raleigh wrote,

We find it in daily experience, that all discourse of magnanimity, of national virtue, of religion, of liberty, and whatsoever else hath been wont to move and encourage virtuous men, hath no force at all with the common soldier, in comparison of spoil and riches. The rich ships are boarded upon all disadvantages, the rich towns are furiously assaulted, and the plentiful countries willingly invaded. Our English nation have attempted many places in the Indies, and run upon the Spaniards headlong, in the hope of their royals of plate, and pistolets; which, had they been put to it upon the like disadvantages in Ireland, or in any poor country, they would have turned their pieces and pikes against their commanders.<sup>98</sup>

Throughout recorded history, leaders of humans marshalled resources to vie for land or riches. Using the allure of tribal, religious, national, or cultural superiority, they have stirred passions in subjects to risk life and limb for attaining treasures that usually flowed to someone else. When these same commanders ridicule their fighters for only stirring themselves when they smell profit, they exhibit high hypocrisy. Another captain, Sir George Carew of the *Mary Rose*, proclaimed he commanded “a sort of knaves, whom he could not rule... these so maligned and disdained one the other, that refusing to do that which they should do, were careless also to do that they ought to do, and so contending in envy perished in forwardness.”<sup>99</sup> Nathaniel Boteler, in 1608, described his men as “a ragged regiment of common rogues” with the fleet “manned

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<sup>97</sup> Vincent Patarino, “The Religious Shipboard Culture of Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century English Sailors,” in *The Social History of English Seamen, 1485-1649*, ed. Cheryl A. Fury (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 165.

<sup>98</sup> Sir Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World: In Five Books* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Co., 1820), 273-4.

<sup>99</sup> J. S. Brewer, *Calendar of the Carew Manuscripts, 1515 - 1574* (London: Longmans, Green, 1867), 31.



with aged, impotent, vagrant, lewd, and disorderly companions.”<sup>100</sup> One later naval officer explained that these “disorders arose mostly from men who had not the right spirit of the sea, and who, not having been brought up to it from boyhood, were drafted on board the ships and served only from greed to gain... nothing bred disorder in sailors as liberty and over-much clemency.”<sup>101</sup> All of these condescending attitudes played into the sailors’ view that the authorities looked upon them as means to the end of profit. The world is a mirror for these leaders which means they see and detest the bad traits in others that they have in themselves. These tars’ singular desire for money only reflects the society from which they emerged. As the Crown sought to increase influence and wealth, most of the subjects worked toward that end with some, usually of higher social rank, striving more enthusiastically than others did.

The mariners did not sit idly by and take the abuse heaped by those in the government ranks. They voted with their feet and, as desertions from Royal ships increased, the authorities curtailed the rights of men for shore leave when in port. The fleet had ordered captains not to allow seamen to go ashore for fear they would not come back on time. The harsh punishments promised for tardiness actually proved a disincentive for the sailors to come back at all. If the tar gave into temptation and stole ashore for a quick drink, then, once sober, they so feared the commander would catch them and inflict pain that they decided to desert. Other reasons powered the departures from the monarch’s ships. The government used their martial power to force the seamen on to their vessels, decreasing the pool of available workers, and the merchants responded with increasing the offered wages, in effect enticing, or even encouraging, sailors to

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<sup>100</sup> M. Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy and of the Merchant Shipping* (London: J. Miller and Son, 1896), 188.

<sup>101</sup> Charles Napier Robinson, *The British Tar in Fact and Fiction* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1909), 54-5.

jump ship. For those that remained loyal to country and completed a voyage, the tars did not have permission to go ashore and enjoy themselves. Captains routinely transferred them to another vessel, which would sail away on a two to three month excursion.<sup>102</sup> Once allowed to leave the finished contract, some commanders did not have money on hand to pay off the sea workers. They issued tickets, which they could redeem later. Some clerks and officers took advantage of these men, buying the tickets at discount, preying on the hungry, lustful, or thirsty sailor looking for access to quick cash.<sup>103</sup> With merchants competing successfully against the government, the privateers' lure of a windfall profit also enticed sailors to come aboard their enterprises.

Even during a seemingly happy time, when the sailors on privateers captured a prize, the news, and land sharks, traveled fast once the men made anchor. A country fair atmosphere erupted around the docks while “merchants, shopkeepers, and goldsmiths flocked to the ports to pick up staggering bargains from the simple sailors.”<sup>104</sup> The authorities also rushed down to claim the Crown's share but usually before they could restore order, the men had moved through a sizable amount of transactions.<sup>105</sup> In this simple act of capturing a ship and unloading the contents, the complexities and intersections of power emerged. Many groups vied for the lucre: tars, officers, owners, merchants, harbor masters, customs officials, and the Crown. The monarch possessed the most power but could not enforce its will on actions already taken and, more

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<sup>102</sup> Lavery, *Royal Tars*, 88.

<sup>103</sup> Lavery, *Royal Tars*, 89.

<sup>104</sup> J. E. Neale, *Best Tales of Terror* (London: University College Press, 1946), 331. This book, written by a historian, examines the life of Elizabeth from her birth to death. The title gives a sense of his sympathetic judgment on her travails as a prominent female monarch.

<sup>105</sup> Christopher Lloyd, *The British Seamen 1200-1860: A Social Survey* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1970), 36.

importantly, undocumented.<sup>106</sup> The sea workers and officers hid many items themselves in their sea chests and other belongings, unloading them as soon as possible upon reaching the dock, loudly proclaiming ancient rights of privacy if asked for a thorough search. The officers, after paying a handsome bribe to the harbormaster, also had to give a share to the customs official so the rest of the haul could go by unnoticed or unsearched. The merchants and shopkeepers, with ready cash in hand, made quick deals with all the mariners who longed to liquidate their assets hastily and make tracks to the local entertainment establishments. Usually last, the Crown arrived and sought to claim the King's share of the loot using naked power as the buying instrument. The seamen and officers made sure all levels of society received at least some of the loot or the authorities would turn up the heat to intolerable levels.<sup>107</sup> Despite how dependent the landed people grew upon these sailors for their profits and wealth, denigration abounded against them to justify ill treatment.

Society denigrated the seamen for his irreligiousness, behavior, and overall greed yet they did not see their causal effect upon them. The mariner, living such a life where authorities sometimes did not pay wages on time and could impress them to service at any time, storms could arise suddenly, hostile ships attacked unexpectedly, sickness raised its spectral visage, surrounded by potential thieves and bullies, and the ever-present fear a fire could erupt, lived in such anxiousness that their physical beings must have ached in tenseness. They worked as the sinews of capitalism and trade and represented the British society aboard in extraordinarily new work conditions. The modern day idea of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder no doubt applied to

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<sup>106</sup> Christopher Lloyd, *The British Seamen 1200-1860: A Social Survey* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1970), 37. The capture of *Madre de Dios* in 1592, brought to Dartmouth, yielded over 100,000 pounds, most of it going into private pockets, bucking the Queen's rule of allowing only twenty shillings per man for his share.

<sup>107</sup> J. E. Neale, *Best Tales of Terror* (London: University College Press, 1946), 331-2.

many, if not all, of the deep-sea sailors of that time. The harsh life and abuses the seamen suffered illustrate the wisdom gained by Samuel Pepys when he wrote in 1683:

What can show more the difficulties of a seaman's life, than that no man will stay in it longer than till he hath got a competent estate. No man that hath so much learning of any kind as he thinks he can get a living with, will stay at sea, or go thither, but keep on shore: so the generality of those that go and stay there are either poor or illiterate, or desperate people; at least, such as being by force or chance brought thither betimes are, by custom, hardened in it, and continue, knowing no better way.<sup>108</sup>

The tars operated at a distinct disadvantage compared to the officers, the state, and even the merchants. Yet they continued to exhibit agency and voted many times with their feet, opting for one ship versus another, and strived as well as they could to live a life of their own choosing. Usually rejected by the very society that they served, held as an object of ridicule by the same men who practiced the same vices yet hid it well, the mariners formed an unusual bond in their rejection of the pretentious religiousness of their home society and found ways to reproduce this attitude in each generation of worker.

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<sup>108</sup> Samuel Pepys, *The Life, Journals, and Correspondence of Samuel Pepys* (London: Samuel Bentley, 1841), 407-8.

## ***Chapter 2: “Villain out for a mutineer” - How English society sought to reform the mariner and how he resisted***

The captains and other officers reflected the rising ambitions of English society and acknowledged the significant changes brought about by the opening of the new world. To those in command, the seamen represented a means to an end, a burden suffered on the way to the lucre. Since so many officers arose from the upper class and the burgeoning middle class of merchants, they viewed the lower strata of men, although necessary and wanting of good qualities, nevertheless represented a faceless, anonymous cog, almost interchangeable. The tars, faced with such overwhelming pressure to conform by officers at sea and by society on land, found various ways to resist and also taught the next generation of men how to engender irreligiousness as an act of disobedience. They reacted to the capitalist mindset that perceived the world as a “standing reserve, a resource supply center, a waste reception site.”<sup>1</sup> As the ships sailed over oceans and around continents, the ruling class perceived that “nature then provides human markets with many different sites for the productive use of resourced flows of energy, information, and matter, as well as the sinks, dumps, and wastelands for all the by-products that commercial products leave behind.”<sup>2</sup> Broken down or injured tars, dumped at the nearest port, found themselves one of these by-products of commercialism. This view of nature, including men, as required ingredients for monetary wealth reduced the equation to a simple calculation:

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Luke, “Eco-Managerialism: Environmental Studies as a Power/Knowledge Formation” in *Living with Nature: Environmental Politics as Cultural Discourse*, ed. Frank Fischer and Maarten Hajer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 105.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Luke, “Eco-Managerialism: Environmental Studies as a Power/Knowledge Formation” in *Living with Nature: Environmental Politics as Cultural Discourse*, ed. Frank Fischer and Maarten Hajer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 105.

how to extract as much profit from an endeavor as possible, regardless of the cost to others. This mindset, amplified in the ensuing centuries, rose up during the Crown's treatment of the sailors in the late medieval period.

In the mid-fourteenth century, some sailors mutinied over lack of pay or adverse conditions. In one illuminating example, a successful work stoppage occurred when shipmasters refused to enter the harbor to carry Sir Walter Mauny's army across the Narrow Sea for an invasion unless they were paid.<sup>3</sup> Asking for pay after the men completed the work usually met with delays and outright refusals. Only by stopping the labor in the first place, or even in the middle, could effective negotiations take place for the seamen. Englishmen also saw foreign mariners leave off an attack for failure to give wages. For example, the Genoese sailors sent representatives to their French paymasters asking for back wages. Philip VI, who had ordered prompt payments to the Italian leader Ayton Doria, refused to compensate directly the seamen. The squadron then mutinied and sailed from France back to Genoa when news came of their agents' arrest. Later, officials discovered Doria had skimmed major amounts off the top and blamed the French for shorting the mariners' wages.<sup>4</sup> Only by refusing to work or fight did the sea workers stand a chance in protecting themselves from the oppression of the authorities. The Laws of Oleron, accepted by Englishmen and courts during this period, gave more protection to the mariners than in later centuries. For example, if a master strikes his man, the man should take the blow without retaliation. Yet if another blow comes, the sailor can defend himself and strike

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Sumption, *The Hundred Years War I: Trial by Battle* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 392.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Sumption, *The Hundred Years War I: Trial by Battle* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 265.

back.<sup>5</sup> As more people journeyed on ships across the deep seas, these protections for tars lessened. Officers perhaps argued they needed more leeway and authority to keep the men inline for such long expeditions. Alternatively, perhaps they just took the power and hoped the distance and time between the act and judgment would dull the memories and cause recollections in the admiralty courts to dim. In any case, the Crown's ships oppressed the men much more after the fifteenth century. In contrast, the private merchants and privateers continued to follow the ancient customs where some of the ship possessed partial ownership of the cargo or even had private stores to carry their own trade goods. The Law of Oleron instructed all who had a stake in the ship to make decisions together with the master. If the master overrode the collective decision, he would compensate every other part owner if harm came to the vessel.<sup>6</sup> This kind of mutual support withered away in the Royal Navy as the state took more ownership of all the ships.

Later, Henry VIII set the tone for how future monarchs should regard the merchant fleet. In 1545, the Scots attacked English shipping and the masters cried out to the King for relief. He responded that "it were over burdensome that the king should set ships to defend all parts of the realm and keep the Narrow Seas withal."<sup>7</sup> It was the "business of the ship owners to protect themselves; it ill became the majesty of a king to concern himself with such sordid details."<sup>8</sup> The monarch, still playing the ancient role as war chief, failed to see the importance of the merchant

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<sup>5</sup> Travers Twiss, *The Black Book of the Admiralty* (London: Longman and Co., 1871), 105. This tome is an English translation of a fourteenth century French text. The English translation of the original French shows how far spelling standardization had yet to achieve: "yf the maister smyte any of the maryners, the maryner ought to abyde the fyrste buffet, be it with fyst, or flat with his hande, but yf he smyte any more he may defend him."

<sup>6</sup> Twiss, *The Black Book*, 89-90.

<sup>7</sup> N. A. M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain, 660 – 1649* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997), 184.

<sup>8</sup> Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea*, 184.

navy. By not protecting these ships and, instead, pursuing conquest aims, the capitalist men realized the government did not seek their protection or livelihoods. In later centuries, most notably the eighteenth and nineteenth, private interests in general drove the public course of money and resources. Yet in this small beginning of capitalism in the early sixteenth century, Henry VIII turned his back on the very segment of his economy that future kings would depend upon so much for their revenue. This pattern of state interests conflicting with private interests never fully sorted itself out until after the English Civil Wars completed and capitalism took its place among the driving forces of government.

Henry VIII also set in motion the idea of taking the bottom of society and forcing them into the King's naval service. In 1544, he proclaimed to all that "ruffians, vagabonds, masterless men, common players and evil-disposed persons to serve his majesty and his realm in these his wars in certain galleys."<sup>9</sup> The courts also sent criminals to work the oars. They did receive pay and society did not classify them as slaves. The authorities intended the order to discourage people from lazing about doing nothing, living by begging and handouts. The experiment though failed as these impressed men did not work, understandably so, as efficiently as free men.<sup>10</sup> Yet the stigma remained and the threat used by judges and law officers reinforced the societal stereotype that men who worked on ships could possess shady backgrounds and decent folk should not trust them. The state's inability to compete with the merchant navy and privateers for able sailors caused them to take this first step towards dehumanizing the seamen in an attempt to control their behavior for their own good. Rodger argues that an "alliance of interests distinguishes English naval affairs" in the sixteenth century with private merchant captains

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<sup>9</sup> R. W. Heinze, *The Proclamations of the Tudor Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 195.

<sup>10</sup> Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea*, 211.



playing the role of Royal captains in war or private interests renting state vessels for their own purposes during times of peace.<sup>11</sup> This analysis, though accurate, overlooks that this alliance took on a matter of convenience. Rodger admits the partnership remains unequal but does not explain that when the king sought to aggrandize his estates and engage in war, he forced the merchant fleet to assist, with either ships or men, and, when finished, left them to their own defense. The monarchs perceived the merchant fleet almost as a development league for his naval ambitions. In peace, they trained and grew; in war, he would borrow from them to further his aims. The merchants rarely finished ahead in this deadly and costly game but the administration forced them to play.

From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, the sea workers bore the brunt of this cold cunning and viewed it at odds with the professed Christian obligation to “love one another.”<sup>12</sup> Once a mariner broke down physically, he could access few societal resources to help him survive. Yet when the men resorted to the same kind of determined scheming to get ahead in life, the captain marked him as a “villain out for a mutineer” and labelled him so it would “sit like pitch on his skirts for ever after.”<sup>13</sup> The officers, in essence, would blacklist a resisting sailor and make sure he could not find easy employment. Even though the ship represented a unique and enclosed intersection of men from all social strata, all working to the ends of furthering capitalism and Empire, any feeling of shared danger quickly evaporated as the shore, with its rigid lines of hierarchy, revealed itself. War ships protected and expanded commercial ports, privateers engaged in limited skirmishing with potential belligerents, while transport ships carried the goods; they all reinforced the notions of projected power. Once the mariner served or

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<sup>11</sup> Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea*, 226-7.

<sup>12</sup> John 13:34, Bible.

<sup>13</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 8.

proved unable to perform his purpose, little of the Christian's ideal nature in forgiving or showing mercy to a fellow human resided in the masters' hearts.

The captain and other officers, as representatives of privileged society, played a large role in the alienation of the sailor against the dominant religion with their penchant to consume the men's labor and discard when no longer compliant or functioning. As Ned Ward wrote of his experiences before the mast, "this ruler of the roost, has so little Christian honesty, as to force sailors not only to work, watch, and fight, but even starve too, for his sole advantage... and afterwards fends them to the Devil for a reward, if they but barely offer to ask one."<sup>14</sup> When the head officer bent the rules for his own gain or ordered others to fight in his stead, the Christian ideal of laying down your life for another faded into the background.<sup>15</sup> The officers jealously guarded their perquisites usually with the king's advice and consent. Ironically, the monarch always wanted to prevent "foolish fractions and divisions" in splitting up the loot so most of the share went to the king and the captain yet when it came to petty theft, harsh beatings ruled the day.<sup>16</sup> The sailors derisively lamented that their high and mighty lords will not do simple math for plunder dividing but if a "half-starved sailor sharpened a pair of old shoes from him, he would surely drub the pilfering Cur to death for it."<sup>17</sup> Even with the victuals that kept his fighting men healthy, unscrupulous masters remained "more intent on cramming his bags than filling the sailors bellies; if they starve, tis no matter; it is but pressing for more at home."<sup>18</sup> Some captains

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<sup>14</sup> Ned Ward, *The Wooden World Dissected: In the Character of a Ship of War* (London: James Graham & Sunderland, 1708), 8.

<sup>15</sup> John 15:13, Bible.

<sup>16</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 8.

<sup>18</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 9.

even cooperated with gunners to sell excess gunpowder to profit, purposively over reporting usage.<sup>19</sup>

Even in the late sixteenth century, both the officers, against the Crown, and the common tars, against everyone, used stealing and deception to fight back against what they perceived as an unfair distribution of the captured goods. The men in charge sometimes thought justified in cheating the sailors as they usually witnessed the seamen pillaging and looting a prize before proper accounting and division of spoils could occur. One officer advised to “watch and look never so narrowly, they will steal and pilfer.”<sup>20</sup> Yet, in the same letter, he wrote he had secured “four or five pipes of wine and vinegar privily hoisted over board, of which I have some understanding of, and... your Honour shall have further knowledge of what is become of them... so they are not inventoried.”<sup>21</sup> Then, having told his commanding officer these facts, he continues, “I have left out of the inventory 4 pipes of wine...for if it be not their pleasures to bestow the said two pipes on me, I will pay... for in no case... would I use any deceit.”<sup>22</sup> The mariners witnessed and understood how officers failed to count certain high value items. Their taking of items before the authorities arrived in the enemy hold represented their ability to fight back against the system. In return, the officers saw the pilfering and decided to award themselves certain spoils in retaliation. By using stealing and false accounting, both the tar and the officers used agency to secure more for them against the Crown’s share. Yet since the administration

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<sup>19</sup> Sir William Monson, *The Naval Tracts of Sir William Monson from 1630* (London: Navy Records Society, 1902), 242.

<sup>20</sup> George Cary to F. Walsyngham (29 August 1588) in John Knox Laughton (editor), *State Papers Relating to The Defeat of The Spanish Armada, 1588* (London: Navy Records Society, 1894), 186.

<sup>21</sup> George Cary to F. Walsyngham (29 August 1588) in John Knox Laughton (editor), *State Papers Relating to The Defeat of The Spanish Armada, 1588* (London: Navy Records Society, 1894), 187.

<sup>22</sup> George Cary to F. Walsyngham (29 August 1588) in John Knox Laughton (editor), *State Papers Relating to The Defeat of The Spanish Armada, 1588* (London: Navy Records Society, 1894), 187.

controlled most of the press and writing outlets, the public only perceived their frequent laments about the churlish behavior of the deckhands while keeping their own deeds in the dark. This lopsided reporting helps to explain the negative attitude toward the mariners and the more favorable view of the commanders.<sup>23</sup>

During the turn of the seventeenth century, the rise of the capitalists and their quest for higher profit margins squeezed wages downward and devalued the tars and land-based laborers even more.<sup>24</sup> The seamen resisted the discipline and normalization of the officer-class and fought back against their masters, in war and peace. With the royal coffers frequently empty, the men complained loudly, and correctly, that the Crown underpaid and always delivered money late, sometimes months in arrears. The monarchs responded with accusations of greediness and treachery, implying the old salts only sought to enrich themselves.<sup>25</sup> Since the deep-sea workers resided on a virtual sailing city, with the captain invested with the powers of both mayor and sheriff, they discovered and propagated ways to show their disapproval of the entire situation. The perception that the Royal Navy labored at the behest of the merchants also pointed to the hypocrisy of the notion of fighting for “God and the Empire.”<sup>26</sup> By rejecting the Puritan sentiment of sobriety, investment, and religious observation, these deckhands utilized their very lifestyle as a form of resistance to the new ethos of making profits no matter the principle trampled.<sup>27</sup> One chaplain exclaimed that “there is such swearing at sea as if both hell, the

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<sup>23</sup> Edward Fenton, *The Troublesome Voyage of Captain Edward Fenton: 1582-83* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 150-9.

<sup>24</sup> Christopher Lloyd, *The British Seamen 1200-1860: A Social Survey* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1970), 33-4.

<sup>25</sup> Lavery, *Royal Tars*, 30.

<sup>26</sup> Monson, *The Naval Tracts of Sir William Monson from 1630*, 293.

<sup>27</sup> B. S. Capp, *Cromwell's Navy: The Fleet and the English Revolution, 1648-1660* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 243-9.

damned and all the devils in it were let loose... were I a commander, if fair means and sweet persuasions would not prevail, I would hang them up.”<sup>28</sup> Another observed that when sailors came scrambling off a ship into port, no one showed more “extravagant lewdness, more dissolute wildness, and less fear of God.”<sup>29</sup> Some though, such as George Kendall, Clerk of the Survey of Deptford Yard, foresaw the coming conflicts with workers and chastised the Admiralty in 1653, listing out many complaints, including impressment, late wages, and bad provisions, as reasons for “much heart-burning between seamen” and their masters.<sup>30</sup> Despite these warnings, the empire regulated the behavior of the Navy in order to project consistent power into the far-flung borderlands. Some even argued the honor of the nation rested upon the tars performing their duty, free of charge, for the motherland. The combination of the Crown’s poverty and the concept of the divine right of kings engendered this belief.<sup>31</sup> The laws promulgated by the administration reflected and deepened the sentiment that those in charge had succeeded in life and all those standing in the way of their prosperity and control fought a losing battle. Despite needing the sailors to perform their tasks, the authorities frequently failed to provide the bare necessities for the trading ships.

Providing foodstuffs, especially beer, to the sailors proved an important but often neglected task for the Crown as they considered feeding the sailors an expense that should be reduced. Based upon estimates provided earlier by supply officials, most of the drying and salting of meat took place in the wintertime. When unexpected expeditions arose or the Navy

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<sup>28</sup> John F. Battick, “Richard Rooth’s Sea Journal of the Western Design, 1654-55,” *Jamaica Journal* 5 (1971): 15.

<sup>29</sup> Monson, *The Naval Tracts of Sir William Monson from 1630*, 386-7.

<sup>30</sup> Samuel Gardiner, “Letters and papers relating to the First Dutch War: 1652-1654,” *Publications of the Navy Records Society* 13 (1930): 276-7.

<sup>31</sup> Lavery, *Royal Tars*, 43-4.

required additional men, the victuallers scrambled to find any additional tons of sustenance. The desperateness to find supplies forced many officers to secure rancid and less drinkable substances. One sailor's victuals for a month required a quarter ton of stowage with beer taking up most of the weight. Usually the manning guides proposed at least one mariner for every ton and a half of ship weight, which, when combined with the load of armament and ammunition, meant maximum cruises of two to three months.<sup>32</sup> Since most of the fighting season occurred in the summer months and the holds did not have much in the way of capacity, the meat and other vegetables roasted and generally grew more inedible each day. Therefore, the establishment of bases around the English Channel and beyond proved a worthwhile pursuit since they could provide a place to restore victuals. Yet since these posts, usually small, did not receive much warning about an incoming fleet, they could not provide a full resupply to a medium-sized or larger flotilla. As a result, usually the ships would cruise around their posts, looking for easy prey and, if not found, return home for lack of victuals.<sup>33</sup>

As so much skimming of funds took place causing the quality of provisions to suffer, the Royal Navy mariners believed their wellbeing mattered little to the authorities. As long as the work and sailing continued, the rise in complaints just represented a dull background roar that officials usually ignored. To the seamen, as the engines of the valuable work of protecting the shores and ferrying the army, this lack of detail to their food and drink represented society's dismissal view of their worth. One of the sailors' own, writing a tract calling for reform, suggested the victual supplier who fails in "goodness or quantity" should answer with his life.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea*, 236.

<sup>33</sup> Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea*, 236-8.

<sup>34</sup> Sir William Monson, *The Naval Tracts of Sir William Monson from 1630* (London: Navy Records Society, 1902), 242.

He further recommended, borrowing the idea of the baker's dozen, that providers carry a "surplus of victuals transported in other ships, to be exchanged, if upon the other prove to be ill-conditioned."<sup>35</sup> The quality of food differed between their superiors and the sailors. When tars observed officers drinking fine wine and good feasts served by the captain's private cook, the idea that all are equal before God grew dim. Some officers did argue for better supplies to the men but when the situation grew dire, they rallied together and kept the higher quality foodstuffs for themselves. Beer, or rum, represented the most important item for the captain and officers to placate the sailors.<sup>36</sup> The men received upwards a gallon ration each day, usually given in the morning and evening. The alcohol calmed the sea workers and perhaps allowed some alcoholics to survive the long period of separation from a local tavern. Without a doubt, some men may have joined the navy to secure the daily ration. Rum became more popular since it represented a major staple of export from the West Indies. The Royal Navy started placing barrels of rum on ships. The Navy did water down the beverage in an attempt to reduce the ill effects yet the officers handed out tots as a reward for good service or as a way to stiffen the spine and calm the nerves before a tough engagement.<sup>37</sup> Even Lord Byron once wrote of the relationship between rum, religion, and serenity for the sea salts:

That even the able seaman, deeming his  
Days nearly o'er, might be disposed to riot,  
As upon such occasions tars will ask  
For grog, and sometimes drink rum from the cask,  
There's naught, no doubt, so much the spirit calms  
As rum and true religion; thus it was,  
Some plunder'd, some drank spirits, some sung psalms,  
The high wind made the treble, and as bass

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<sup>35</sup> Sir William Monson, *The Naval Tracts of Sir William Monson from 1630* (London: Navy Records Society, 1902), 242.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Hamilton, *Rums of the Eastern Caribbean* (Miami: Tafia Distribution, 1995), 33.

<sup>37</sup> Edward Hamilton, *Rums of the Eastern Caribbean* (Miami: Tafia Distribution, 1995), 34.

The hoarse harsh waves kept time; fright cured the  
 Qualms  
 Of offen all the luckless landmen's sea-sick maws:  
 Strange sounds of wailing, blasphemy, devotion,  
 Clamour'd in chorus to the roaring ocean.<sup>38</sup>

Even though society sometimes glorified the high-ranking captain or admiral, some captains did not set a good example of bravery or integrity for the men. Even if a tar saw mostly good captains, the few who exhibited unworthy traits allowed the mariners to rail against them all as not worthy of their post. In contemplating a notion to gain booty, the captain possessed many "hair brained Enterprises" for he is as "prodigal as the Devil of other men's blood, when Money is in the way."<sup>39</sup> The ruthlessness the officers would show concerning the removal of any obstacles in their way illustrated to the mariners what truly mattered in their world. Even in the choice of ship, true colors emerged. The captain "had rather have a good runner, than a ship of great force; for if he can't take, he can leave, and there is no honor lost, if he can come off with his bacon."<sup>40</sup> In sight of quarry, the vessel gave chase and the commander "Looks as fierce and eager as a tiger pursuing a deer; but if... his enemy... is better fleshed than he thought for, the Belle-Air unfortunately then deserts him."<sup>41</sup> Rare captains though, such as Sir Francis Drake, engaged the enemy when odds stacked against him. Yet, overall, most captains looked first to survival and a much distant second on securing the objective. When the crew did take a prize, the captain, who usually did not have "one hand in the taking, he will sure to have both in the disposing of the Prize."<sup>42</sup> Even the captain's wife could sometimes desert him. Officers would

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<sup>38</sup> Lord Byron, *The Works of Byron, Volume 7* (Philadelphia: Henry Carey Baird, 1853), 157-8.

<sup>39</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 7.

<sup>41</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 8.



joke about a disliked commander who had “some kind neighbor in the parish, hearing of her [the wife’s] solitary circumstances, very Christianly endeavors to stop up all discontent betwixt them.”<sup>43</sup> When even the high officer’s spouse could betray her Christian vow of marriage after months of solitude, the tars did not see anything wrong with their hedonistic lifestyles. They prided themselves in not living like a hypocrite. A captain’s moral authority, especially during deep-sea cruises, mattered immensely when issuing corrective punishments. Any default or crack in the armor provided fodder for the men to question his fitness to lead. Especially as society viewed the officers as paragons of religious rectitude, any slight or disparaging remark about their character just fueled the perception of hypocrisy and diminished the chances of Christian lifestyle observation by the sea tars.

The officers, as representatives of the King in the Royal Navy, highlighted the traits that truly mattered most in the feudal system. From a grand perspective, the sailors realized their little home represents “the grand patron of all mechanic traders, by sinking and destroying one half of their manufactures, to bring the other half to a good market.”<sup>44</sup> They knew that their work usually drove up prices for goods back home and profited the merchants immensely. Usually during battles, the officers watched from the upper deck as the crew “sweat and fight” and then, when the spoils are divided, the captain, standing in for the King, “epicurizes his pocky carcass for ever after.”<sup>45</sup> Valor in combat, especially ship-to-ship boarding, mattered less than surviving to split the spoils. In terms of dealing with the men, the “hungry shark” exhibited that “gold has a far more powerful virtue over him” and would prefer the weight of “four ounces” of gold than

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<sup>43</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 7.

<sup>44</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 8.

“four ton of honesty.”<sup>46</sup> Repeatedly, the mariners perceived correctly that money, not Christian virtue, ruled the waves. In another instance, the captain sometimes would wash his cabin with fresh water and let his sailors thirst in the heat; he can make to feed the hogs in preparation for his dinner tables instead of feeding the sailors.<sup>47</sup> The ship could replace sailors at most ports but the safety and comfort of the officers required others to make sacrifices.

The captain usually barely tolerated the crew even though the ship’s operations required their hardy work. The captain gave “Christian charity” for those poor souls who died at sea with no next of kin: he would forge their signature on an “indenture servant” contract and then take all their belongings and pay. He would claim to hold it in case any relatives came looking for it. Some organized grand dinners for any captain met at sea, for an excuse to have a big meal.<sup>48</sup> However, the Navy captain possessed a mortal aversion to the merchant skipper for their “presumptuous assumption of his proper title.”<sup>49</sup> The aristocracy that operated the King’s vessels showed disdain to the very people who funded and fueled their national endeavors through customs and import duties taxes. This kind of mockery from the failing feudal state against the rising capitalist order showed the lack of understanding where the true power resided. Besides the merchant commander, the crew or even petty officers rarely shared in such captains-only meals yet all the food and alcohol would go to someone who does not even work on the ship, showing value to a relative outsider than to the men the officers depend upon for success. Even the commander’s very presence mattered highly. The captain in his “Sanctum Sanctorium

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<sup>46</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 9.

<sup>47</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 9.

<sup>48</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 10.

<sup>49</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 12.

[cabin]” remained always guarded like a “bird of paradise” and no one permitted inside.<sup>50</sup> To walk the quarterdeck announced a “prostitution of his presence, he thinks, weakens his authority, and makes his worship less revered by the ship’s crew.”<sup>51</sup> When coming and going around, a captain exacted “infinitely more ceremony from his Lieutenant, than he will allow to God Almighty.”<sup>52</sup> By placing himself so much higher than the rest of the crew, the captain projected an air of arrogance and hierarchy, which undermined the idea of Christian brotherly love. The demands of keeping order and discipline outweighed the ideas of compassion or comradeship. To make everyone treat the officers with such high ceremony yet “every officer must run at midnight to receive their chief, though he comes aboard as drunk as a beggar” makes a mockery of religion and authority.<sup>53</sup> With so few tars able to read, any talk of the commanders not following the Bible usually met with stern rebuke. Sailor Ned Ward sums it up as “He complies with his printed instructions as precisely as the chaplain does with the rules of the Gospel. His will is a Law, that is certain, and it is his will to act contrary to Law; for who dare say to him, ‘What doest thou?’”<sup>54</sup> With his near dictatorial powers at sea, the authority usually went to the captain’s head and caused breaches of trust. Yet, once one did “Remove him ashore, and his brains grow settled, and he becomes your humble servant in an instant.”<sup>55</sup> Pride is the only seasickness the captain has while on ship, yet once ashore he is humble again. Acting one way in the middle of the ocean and then acting differently onshore around others showed the mariners that appearances matter more than substance and that Christianity represented window-dressing

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<sup>50</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 4.

<sup>51</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 5.

<sup>53</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 6.

<sup>54</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 9.

<sup>55</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 5.

and that they, with their carousing and swearing, represented true men honest to themselves and others.

The captain usually brought aboard an entire entourage, especially on the larger war ship, much to the annoyance of the crew. A tailor, a barber, perhaps even musicians, all in the name of civilizing the long voyage and bringing some culture to an otherwise barbaric adventure. When the sea workers witnessed the soft retinue coming aboard, they thought “what discouragement gives not this to right-bred tars from entering volunteers, where they find a scoundrel tailor, or rascally barber, meet with ten times better entertainment, and never touch a rope for it?”<sup>56</sup> The captain usually kept the services of these men to himself or to those favored among the other officers. In other ways, the captain made use of these non-seamen. After the captain would hire his shoe-shiner, tailor, personal cook, he would signify them as “able seamen” to give them pay, even though they did not know how to sail.<sup>57</sup> Each ship usually rated a set amount of able seamen. By utilizing these positions for his entourage, the tars remaining had to divide the increased workload. Any complaints met with indifference or punishment.

The captain’s ire and scheming extended to junior officers also. After taking a prize ship at sea, many commanders would “strip him [the junior officer] of all, when the prey is taken, that the world may not think that the young squire’s courage was mercenary.”<sup>58</sup> The lieutenants and other officers would lose their share upon the pretense of demonstrating that their vigor in battle reflected their love of king and country, not some desire for personal wealth. This blatant hypocrisy, seen by all in the close confines of the vessel, caused sailors to doubt the precepts of religion. They perceived the old rule that faith served power, not the other way around. This type

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<sup>56</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 12.

<sup>57</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 12.

<sup>58</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 8.

of grandstanding and obvious greed rebounded against the ship's master. The lieutenants sometimes would "pray for his Captain's death most unfeignedly" so he could assume the post.<sup>59</sup> Others joined in with the crew as they blasphemed the head officer to ingratiate themselves to the common men. A second lieutenant, usually a young teen, learned the ropes in a year and soon proved an "able, roaring, threshing fellow, and fit to be sent upon pressing."<sup>60</sup> They quickly mastered the art of swearing, beating, and forcing others to do his will. During this apprenticeship, the officers passed down to the next generation the ability to exploit those around them for personal gain, with any young mariners observing closely.

As the cycle of men worked through the vessels, the seasoned tars could reproduce the distinctive irreligious maritime culture as a reaction to all the scorn heaped upon them from officers and society alike. Few older men worked the ships, with most sailors of ages 30 and younger. The kind of people who joined as tars had "little to lose and much to hope for."<sup>61</sup> Some did not have a permanent home but just lived in lodgings at whichever port they disembarked, waiting for the next job. The one trait that nearly all the men shared included a penchant for freedom. Starting with the Elizabethan admirals, who sometimes disobeyed the monarch in favor of their joint-stock company's interests, the officers complained it was difficult to "govern and command the dissolute mariner from his riot."<sup>62</sup> Another complained that the soldiers "cry out for clothes" yet, following orders, the captain could not give them anything. They "continue to

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<sup>59</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 16.

<sup>60</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 19.

<sup>61</sup> Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea*, 319.

<sup>62</sup> Fulke Grenville and Sir Richard Leveson to the Lord Admiral and Robert Cecil (8 July 1602) in R. A. Roberts (editor), *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House, Volume 12: 1602 – 1603* (London: Institute of Historical Research, 1910), 217.

broil and mutiny” and, even if he gave in to their demands, he feared they would still run away.<sup>63</sup> One mariner “stabbed his officer” and the rest threatened to assault others if the authorities did not address their grievances. These younger folks demanded better treatment and were not used to deprivations. Captain Joseph May wrote the sailors had such high expectations that they “shame not to say that they go to sea to rob all nations, and unless the captain consents thereto, he is not fit.”<sup>64</sup> After taking a valuable French ship, May faced a mutiny unless he split the spoils presently or they would have “stowed me under hatches” and done the task themselves.<sup>65</sup> The fresh tars, growing up hearing the most likely exaggerated exploits of older men, went to the sea looking for their fortunes. Most often, when life did not meet these rising expectations, they grew resentful and thought the system cheated them. Captain Luke Foxe wrote in 1625, mindful of these contentious youth, that he avoided seamen who “hath not undergone the most offices about the ship, and that hath not in his youth been both taught and inured to all labours; for to keep a warm cabin and lie in sheets is the most ignoble part of a seaman.”<sup>66</sup> The life at sea was to “endure and suffer, as a hard cabin, cold and salty meat, broken sleeps, mouldy bread, dead beer, wet clothes, [and] want of fire.”<sup>67</sup> Foxe, who voyaged throughout the upper parts of Canada looking for the Northwest Passage, only took seasoned and older men, ever wary of the brashness and untempered spirit of the youth. He wanted other captains to burn the chaff off the green recruits while he only took the real tars into his difficult voyages. Just like in any

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<sup>63</sup> Sir Edward Wynfield to Sir Robert Cecil (2 July 1602) in R. A. Roberts (editor), *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House, Volume 12: 1602 – 1603* (London: Institute of Historical Research, 1910), 208.

<sup>64</sup> Joseph May to Lord Cecil (8 June 1603) in M. S. Guiseppi (editor), *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House, Volume 15: 1603* (London: Institute of Historical Research, 1930), 125.

<sup>65</sup> Joseph May to Lord Cecil (8 June 1603) in M. S. Guiseppi (editor), *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House, Volume 15: 1603* (London: Institute of Historical Research, 1930), 126.

<sup>66</sup> Luke Foxe, *North-west Foxe* (London: B. Alsop, 1635), 34.

<sup>67</sup> Luke Foxe, *North-west Foxe* (London: B. Alsop, 1635), 34.

profession, the young come into the job full of zeal and possessed of ready ideas on how to improve the environment. Often they proposed suggestions to improve and, if rebuffed, started to complain and grumble. The apprentice sailors did not just receive all the instructions and inculcation from the senior members of the ship. They also offered their own ideas. Frequently rejected, those that remained for many years in the sea life usually hardened and engendered an embittered attitude toward their lot in life.<sup>68</sup> They engendered the irreligiousness and reproduced it to willing recruits as a form of resistance to the authorities and as a show of their discontent.

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<sup>68</sup> Charles Napier Robinson, *The British Tar in Fact and Fiction* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1909), 59.

***Chapter 3: "Grieve any man's heart" - The Seamen's view of English society from afar and the choice they made***

What subjects can make their King and country more happy than you, by the offensive and defensive services you may do them at sea? What wealth is brought in or carried out of the kingdom but must pass through your hands and by your help? What honour has England of late years gained, and all by your adventures and valour, which has made you excellent above all other subjects and above all other nations?<sup>1</sup>

The highly skilled and in-demand British sailors from the seventeenth century represented a valuable chess piece between the two players at the table: those who held power through land holdings and those who were in the process of acquiring power by capital investments. Capitalists, in the form of the trading companies, leveraged their seemingly unceasing sources of money and utilized soft, or persuasive, power to offer more incentives to a new community of laborers whose ties to the land they had cut – mostly through the dissolution of the monasteries and the enclosure movement. The nobility relied on impressments and coupled these tactics with a vigorous dehumanization campaign against sailors based on nationalism and divine right. As the entire country, including the monarchy, nobles, and clergy increasingly depended upon the capitalist engine for vitality, the power of trade profits and taxation rivaled and then dominated the old feudal prerogatives over land use fees and other

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<sup>1</sup> Sir William Monson, *The Naval Tracts of Sir William Monson from 1630* (London: Navy Records Society, 1902), 386.



rights.<sup>2</sup> The English Civil War and the execution of Charles I proved the King had failed to rule effectively and economically without Parliament; the capitalists essentially bought their place among the rulers.<sup>3</sup> The government retained the use of hard power to coerce mariners onto their ships but the alluring and ultimately more democratic soft power of the capitalists won over the deckhands. Hard power's use of the whip, imprisonment, and physical force yielded short-term wins for the Crown but ultimately lost to the use of higher wages, better victuals, and more humane treatment. Impressed sailors reluctantly boarded Crown vessels but they escaped in droves at ports and signed onto private companies as soon as they could.<sup>4</sup> Even when the government closed down a port until all the King's ships acquired a full complement, the private transports made do with what they had and acquired deserting Royal Navy seamen in future ports.<sup>5</sup> By voting with their feet, the tars indirectly acted in their own best interests. Just as companies and monarchs make decisions for their own wellbeing, these sea workers chose the system that provided best. These thousands of faceless and mostly unremembered people provided a unique societal view from their ships sailing so far from home and helped shape a change from the feudal system to a capitalist-driven society. As the work force utilized by both the merchants and the government, they saw firsthand the way each overlord treated their subjects. The mariners provide the first moral choice on which platform future society would rest upon. They ultimately chose the avenue that most adhered to the religious ideal of treating others

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<sup>2</sup> M. Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy and of Merchant Shipping in Relation to the Navy* (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1896), 225-6.

<sup>3</sup> M. Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy and of Merchant Shipping in Relation to the Navy* (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1896), 226.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Anne Everett Green (editor), "James I, - volume 185: March 1625," *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1623-1625*, British History Online, 502-3.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Anne Everett Green (editor), "James I, - volume 185: March 1625," *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1623-1625*, British History Online, 503.

as one would treat one's self. Merchants sometimes viewed sailors as a means to an end but it was bad for business to have ill-treatment rumors spread throughout the ports as the workers could blacklist them easily and without fear. Without access to the threat of violent impressment, traders resorted to kinder and gentler forms of persuasion. Yet the sailors' reputation once soared high above the coasts of southern England as they saved the mother country from a seemingly invincible foe. Loyalty to the feudal government boomed. The descent from these heights illustrates the inability of the government to cope with the changing geopolitical landscape and causes its demise.

The root cause of the disabled mariner's suffering during Elizabeth's reign and afterwards derived partially from Henry VIII's confiscation of the church lands during the 1530s. Pope Clement denied the King's request to annul his marriage with his queen, Catherine. The English monarch split the English church from Rome. He then requested Parliament pass an Act that stated, "If the Pope attempts war, the King shall have a moiety of the temporal lands of the Church for his defense."<sup>6</sup> He also ordered that "if the Pope attempts to vex the King or realm, by interdict or otherwise, for the marriage, in that case no subject shall pay him [Pope]" and that the people should instead give money "to the King for his defense."<sup>7</sup> After the Pope retaliated by excommunicating the monarch, the monarch selected his own people into any vacant ecclesiastical posts throughout, subsequently packing the House of Lords with his appointees.<sup>8</sup> With the voice of the Catholic Church diminished, the dissolution of the monasteries and diversion of the Rome-bound tithes to the Royal Treasury caused his advisors to boast that the

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<sup>6</sup> Henry VIII to his attorney (29 October 1533) in James Gairdiner (editor), "Henry VIII: October 1533, 26-31," *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, British History Online, 550.

<sup>7</sup> Henry VIII to his attorney, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, 550.

<sup>8</sup> Albert Frederick Pollard, *Henry VIII* (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1919), 317.

King would attain the title of “richest monarch in Christendom.”<sup>9</sup> With these enormous funds, Henry would “distribute among the gentlemen of the kingdom the greater part of the ecclesiastical revenues to gain their goodwill.”<sup>10</sup> The realm, along with the sailors, no doubt perceived many worthwhile organizations and poor outreach programs sacked in favor of lining the pockets of the aristocracy. The Crown dismissed many monks, nuns, and other church leaders and did not anticipate the consequences for the public. With so many religious places closed down and their social work and help with the poor diminished, services for ailing people and sailors alike, including widows and orphans, suffered substantially.<sup>11</sup> Even some mayors, among them from Norwich, posted letters to the Council requesting less monetary obligations to the Royal Navy as “they were so distressed as to be unable to maintain the poor.”<sup>12</sup> Over the next hundred years, starting with Elizabeth’s reign, assistance to the lower class deteriorated even more as the monarchy spent the funds on other endeavors. As the government could not provide the means to take care of the most vulnerable, and even taking away societal resources that did perform the tasks, the feudal system put a further nail into its own coffin as they strayed further away from the religious ideal they so seriously professed to uphold and defend.

In October 1587, Elizabeth set the giant recruiting machine in motion to mobilize the national navy against the oncoming Spanish Armada. She issued a general stay of all “vessels able to cross the seas” and brought private ship crews onboard as mariners for the Royal Navy.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Pollard, *Henry VIII*, 318.

<sup>10</sup> Chapuys to Charles V (10 September 1534), Vienna Archives in James Gairdiner (editor), “Henry VIII: September 1534, 6-10,” *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, British History Online, 448.

<sup>11</sup> Pollard, *Henry VIII*, 339.

<sup>12</sup> John Bruce (editor), “Charles I - volume 35: September 1-17, 1626,” *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic: Charles I, 1625-26*, British History Online, 418.

<sup>13</sup> John Roche Dasent (editor), *Acts of the Privy Council of England: 1587-1588*, v. 15 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1897), 254.

The merchants could only accede to the command as their livelihood depended upon the good graces of the monarch. Yet the queen did not have to arm-twist too much: the realm united around defense against the hated Spanish Catholics. Invasion from Scotland seemed remote as they were dealing with their own Reformation and in no mood for further forays. In addition, a budding sense of national unity, at least against Catholics, appeared and the English thought that Scotland would not aid, directly or indirectly, any attack against the island from a foreign power.<sup>14</sup> The authorities vigorously recruited deckhands for service. The kind of men recruited exceeded all expectations, as they believed the Crown would keep their promise to pay. Even though Elizabeth's father had spent the windfall of money received from the sale of confiscated monastery lands, she skillfully concealed her relative lack of funds from the public. One high officer noted he had seen "the gallantest company of captains, soldiers and mariners that I think was ever seen in England."<sup>15</sup>

Elizabeth managed to find the cash and made sure everyone received at least some of their wages though her treasure remained low. In just one generation, the bonanza from Henry VIII's seizure of the church's land and money approached exhaustion and Elizabeth experienced trouble in her ambitions not matching her means. It is ironic that the money derived from land confiscation gave rise to outsized ambitions for the fleet but also created the environment where returning sailors wounded and sick from these battles found few charitable church organizations existed to assist them in recovery. The Naval logistical system though still could not get victuals to the men, presaging difficult times to come when the administration completely lacked the funds. Yet, according to the English, God reached down and passed judgment on the invaders.

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<sup>14</sup> Lavery, *Royal Tars: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 875-1850*, 37.

<sup>15</sup> Lord Howard to Burghley (28 May 1588) in John Knox Laughton (editor), *State Papers Relating to The Defeat of The Spanish Armada, 1588* (London: Navy Records Society, 1894), 190.

With more storms than lead destroying the Iberian vessels, the English succeeded and the sailor, the wooden wall defending the realm, reached his apex in popularity. Bards wrote songs and the tars celebrated. With the crisis averted, the Queen quickly turned her attention elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> As the old saying goes, everybody wants to go to the party, nobody wants to stay and clean up. Elizabeth set a pattern that later monarchs emulated as she relatively ignored the very men who gave her success in the desire to spend money on new adventures. As the men petitioned the authorities for the rest of their pay, they received a rude lesson in government priorities.

Elizabeth defeated the Spanish Armada but failed to pay her sailors promptly. With their work completed, she noted that “men are cheaper than gold” and stopped pay so she could focus on other efforts.<sup>17</sup> Resting high in the social stratification, she knew the mariners, many of them sick and wounded, could not mount any serious response to her move. The Queen exhibited a quintessential feudal response to her situation of limited funds by betraying the warriors but, in the long-term, a capitalist tactic of honoring the contract would have favored her more. In business, not fulfilling contracts eventually leads potential customers to avoid future business dealings. As the feudal monarchs continued along the path set by Elizabeth, merchant ships found it relatively easy to compete for human resources. Yet for the Queen’s abandoned seamen, little resources went toward their relief. One officer asked for “money to discharge those that be sick here.”<sup>18</sup> With a scarcity of medical aid, food, and shelter, many seamen died in the streets of

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<sup>16</sup> M. Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy and of Merchant Shipping in Relation to the Navy* (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1896), 224-5.

<sup>17</sup> M. Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy and of Merchant Shipping in Relation to the Navy* (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1896), 225.

<sup>18</sup> Lord Admiral Charles Howard to William Cecil (10 August 1588) in John Knox Laughton (editor), *State Papers Relating to The Defeat of The Spanish Armada, 1588, Volume II* (London: Navy Records Society, 1894), 96.

Margate, the easternmost town on Britain, with no one to receive them.<sup>19</sup> The situation grew so dire that Lord Admiral Charles Howard, the commander of the English forces so successful against the Spanish Armada, went ashore to assist. After struggling with logistics and funds, he could only secure “barns and outhouses” for lodging.<sup>20</sup> He reflected that the suffering would “grieve any man’s heart to see them that have served so valiantly to die so miserably.”<sup>21</sup> Many stayed on the ships, as they did not have place on shore to live. Others kept on the vessels as a protest method, arguing they would not leave until paid. The diseases then continued to spread among the seamen, despite many attempts to clean. The authorities realized it must have remained within the clothes of the tars and the Lord Admiral thought it a “marvelous good way” for the Crown to send funds for new outfits or “else, in very short time I look to see most of the mariners go naked.”<sup>22</sup> The authorities ignored the plea. Even some of the older friends of Elizabeth’s chief advisor, Sir Francis Walsingham, wrote a beseeching letter exclaiming one ship did not have enough victuals to “scant carry him home to London” and that “if you have cause to employ me further, let all my wants be supplied.”<sup>23</sup> Reading between the lines, the old friend warned the Crown that he would no longer provide supplies out of his own expense in order to do his duty. Many high-ranking officers made loans to the Queen, confident of payment later. Even these well-placed lords spent large amounts of time haranguing the Treasury for funds. Lord Admiral Howard, arguing that seamen desertion would harm the ships more than the

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<sup>19</sup> Howard to Cecil, *State Papers Relating to The Defeat of The Spanish Armada, 1588, Volume II*, 96.

<sup>20</sup> Howard to Cecil, *State Papers Relating to The Defeat of The Spanish Armada, 1588, Volume II*, 96.

<sup>21</sup> Howard to Cecil, *State Papers Relating to The Defeat of The Spanish Armada, 1588, Volume II*, 96.

<sup>22</sup> Howard to Cecil, *State Papers Relating to The Defeat of The Spanish Armada, 1588, Volume II*, 97.

Research could not find any record indicating if the Crown sent the money. From the spirit of the times, it is rather doubtful Elizabeth would send money for sailor clothing.

<sup>23</sup> Lord Henry Seymour to Sir Walsingham (18 August 1588) in John Knox Laughton (editor), *State Papers Relating to The Defeat of The Spanish Armada, 1588, Volume II* (London: Navy Records Society, 1894), 127.

enemy, even suggested to the Council of War splitting up the fleet stationed in the Narrow Sea in order to gain fresh victuals from two different locations as the supply could run out quickly in one port.<sup>24</sup> The monarch refused this idea, as it would make her fleet too weak to vanquish solidly any continental foe. So many wealthy men made loans to the Queen to accomplish the goals set out for them.<sup>25</sup> When the officers wrote asking for their men's payments, they also implied about their outstanding loans coming due. One admiral wrote to the Queen that "poor men of the coast towns... cry out for money, and they know not where to be paid" and that either the town or the admiral, upon "my word and honor," will see them paid, even from his own pocket.<sup>26</sup> Without this promise, he warned that they would have run away from Plymouth by the thousands.

With additional fleets outfitted for the various wars Elizabeth engaged, the bifurcation between the relatively well-stocked and maintained merchantmen and the cheap and unhealthy Royal war vessels grew apparent to all seamen. Sir Walter Raleigh noted, "In many times they go with great drudging to serve in His Majesty's ships, as if they were to be slaves in the galley, for so much do they stand in fear of penury and hunger, the case being clear contrary in all merchants' ships."<sup>27</sup> As the monarch requested additional seamen for each expedition, less care and oversight of the logistics around seamanship prevailed. The authorities believed they could go repeatedly to the labor pool and extract however many men needed to outfit the expedition.

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<sup>24</sup> Lord Admiral Charles Howard to the Council of War (22 August 1588) in John Knox Laughton (editor), *State Papers Relating to The Defeat of The Spanish Armada, 1588, Volume II* (London: Navy Records Society, 1894), 141.

<sup>25</sup> Seymour to Walsingham (19 August 1588), *State Papers Relating to The Defeat of The Spanish Armada, 1588, Volume II*, 127.

<sup>26</sup> Lord Admiral Charles Howard to Sir Walsingham (9 August 1588) in John Knox Laughton (editor), *State Papers Relating to The Defeat of The Spanish Armada, 1588, Volume II* (London: Navy Records Society, 1894), 93.

<sup>27</sup> Sir Walter Raleigh, *The Works of Sir Walter Raleigh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1829), 344.

They pushed their coercive powers continuously higher as they searched out towns for suitable subjects. A tension developed between authorities and the sea workers. The private companies valued their men as profit-making workers and paid them well whereas the government viewed them as an expense and easily replaceable. Due to the government holding all the state power, fear of any retaliation did not enter into their minds. The seamen realized that for those who held the Bible up as the paragon of righteous living, the idea of helping the least of them in society did not occur.<sup>28</sup> The tactics for avoiding the Crown's press gang emerged during this early seventeenth century period.<sup>29</sup> The seamen did not meekly follow the master onto the Royal ship. They exhibited agency in many ways to further their own interests. This mistreatment of the Royal Navy would come back to haunt the monarch.

One aspect of bitterness involved a comparison between the Elizabethan privateer and Royal Navy discipline. The predatory vessel usually included a share given to each member with those possessing more responsibility gaining more shares. With everyone a part owner of the enterprise, sailors demanded the captain and other officers hear their voices. On a state-operated expedition where the authorities paid the sea workers, a top-down approach of following orders reigned. Discussion, questioning, and any other type of consensus building proved foreign to the Crown and the seamen.<sup>30</sup> Receiving usually harsh corrective actions on a Royal vessel and then breathing in the relative fresh air of the more collaborative privateer environment, the tars gained

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<sup>28</sup> Matthew 25:44-45. Bible. "Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did we not take care of You?' Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me. These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'"

<sup>29</sup> Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (New York: Beacon Press, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> N. A. M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain, 660 – 1649* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997), 322.



a higher disregard to the Royal authorities. Once seeing a glimmer of the capitalist-operated endeavor, they could see what they missed and then heaped more scorn upon the usually inexperienced Crown officers.<sup>31</sup> Yet before even coming aboard, the government found its agents hunting down able seamen to force them into involuntary indentured servitude which further alienated them.

One aspect of society's degradation of the mariner's reputation involved impress reports containing complaints in regards to their tactics in avoiding capture. The idea that a state could forcibly retain people and compel them to work for months at a time upon a non-negotiated salary seems foreign to the modern reader. Few would ponder why the sailors invented new ways to get around state kidnapping. Tactics included drinking until "so drunk, that except they were carried aboard, they of themselves were not able to go one step," feigning sickness, and accumulating massive debts that the officer would have to pay to get their services.<sup>32</sup> When the press master would hand out a cash advance to secure the seamen's prompt arrival at the dock, to do any of these delaying actions involved a breach of trust, theft of money, and possibly a criminal offense causing the authorities to search for the offending seaman. Most upper class people perceived the tar's actions as an offense to the "owner, victuallers, and company... [and] commonwealth."<sup>33</sup> These men, the dominant narrative of the day concluded, only pulled their weight for the country when forced by their betters. The Crown deemed their oath or explanation as "lost labor and offence to God" and usually not admissible in court proceedings or in any

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<sup>31</sup> Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea*, 323.

<sup>32</sup> Sir Richard Hawkins, *The Observations of Sir Richard Hawkins, Knights, in his Voyage into the South Sea* (London: John Jaggard, 1593), 14.

<sup>33</sup> Sir Richard Hawkins, *The Observations of Sir Richard Hawkins, Knights, in his Voyage into the South Sea* (London: John Jaggard, 1593), 14.

affidavits.<sup>34</sup> To get a sense of the swirling forces at work during this period, the anchoring, and liquidation, of a captured vessel provides an illuminating account.

One particular noteworthy incident involves the taking and distribution of the Spanish carrack *Madre de Dios* in 1592. After capture of the richly laden ship, the bill of lading mysteriously disappeared before it arrived at port. The Queen's advisors investigated all on board and could not find any information on the number or types of goods. They ordered a search of all chests and barrels unloading from the ship but found very little. Men accused each other of hoarding items and the authorities searched lodgings, finding some items but not nearly all suspected. The inquiry, after consulting the purser of the ship, revealed that the seamen embezzled up to half of the booty. In response, the Privy Council issued an order which stated the authorities should "forbear to deliver any wages" until the loot returned.<sup>35</sup> Once delivered, the captain would give the mariner the pay, plus an extra twenty shillings, and their fair share of the spoils. Considering the prize carried a reputed fortune in jewels, most seamen and officers walked away from the offer.<sup>36</sup> In this context, the officers and the commoners scrambled to secure their own private fortune and shield it from the grasping hand of the Crown. The Privy Council, seeing so much money slip through their fingers, must have denigrated the low morality of the seamen for not giving them their proper due as the provider of the attacking ship. This distrust of the worker provided fuel for the widespread vilification of the money-grubbing 'thieves.' This example, though an early indicator of the conflict between the sea workers and

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<sup>34</sup> Sir William Monson, *The Naval Tracts of Sir William Monson from 1630* (London: Navy Records Society, 1902), 293.

<sup>35</sup> John Roche Dasent (editor), *Acts of the Privy Council of England: 1592*, v. 23 (London: Mackie and Company, 1901), 218.

<sup>36</sup> John Roche Dasent (editor), *Acts of the Privy Council of England: 1592*, v. 23 (London: Mackie and Company, 1901), 219.

government, presaged one of the largest breaking points in English Naval history, the Battle of Cadiz and its aftermath.

One of the “greatest disasters” in the history of the British navy occurred in 1625 against the Spanish port of Cadiz.<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, this expedition served as a breaking point between the sailors and the Crown. After a series of impressments that produced many “lame, impotent, and unable men unfit for actual service,” the officers pushed the poorly paid men onto decrepit and badly fitted ships.<sup>38</sup> The “few professional sea captains” warned the authorities about the “unpromising material in men and supplies being collected.”<sup>39</sup> It is hard to believe that the government spent such little care for the actual warriors in the upcoming battle. For a national project of such stature and importance, one would think the authorities would spend more planning and resources. The failures of feudalism manifested themselves in this expedition. With little ability to raise funds and small endorsement from the merchant class, the administration conducted the mission on the cheap. The high officers loudly and “continually warned the Council of War and Buckingham of the results to be expected from the quality of men and provisions and want of clothing.”<sup>40</sup> The vessels were “leaky and their gear defective; the *St George* was fitted with sails which were used by the *Triumph* in 1588.”<sup>41</sup> The bad conditions led one officer to exclaim that “there was a great wrong done... by pretending the ships were fit to go to sea.”<sup>42</sup> Most of the general productivity of the realm went toward the merchant fleet. The

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<sup>37</sup> Lavery, *Royal Tars: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 875-1850*, 54.

<sup>38</sup> Sir John Ogle to Secretary Conway (March 1625) in Mary Anne Everett Green (editor), “James I, - volume 185: March 1625,” *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1623-1625*, British History Online, 47.

<sup>39</sup> Ogle to Conway, *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1623-1625*, 47.

<sup>40</sup> Ogle to Conway, *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1623-1625*, 47.

<sup>41</sup> Blundell to Buckingham (March 1625) in Mary Anne Everett Green (editor), “James I, - volume 185: March 1625,” *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1623-1625*, British History Online, 15.

<sup>42</sup> Blundell to Buckingham, *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1623-1625*, 15.

feudal system did not receive enough funds to maintain even their fleet. Even the unthinkable occurred: “the casks were so faulty that beer came up in the ship’s pumps so that by November they were reduced to beverage of cider that stinks worse than carrion.”<sup>43</sup> Under such dismal conditions, by the time they arrived off the shore of Cadiz after a twenty-one day voyage, “one fourth of the men on six of the men-of-war were on the sick list.”<sup>44</sup> The seamen perceived the Crown viewed their lives rather cheaply. Since the merchant navy hoped to turn a profit for each voyage, whereas the King just sought success for the littlest amount of expenditure, it is no wonder the sailors preferred any other option but service on the war fleet. Whole vessels abandoned the flotilla, for example, as two transports with 300 soldiers on board deserted and turned pirate.<sup>45</sup>

As modern historian Brian Lavery summarizes, “disease, incompetence, and bad provisions that caused the problem, rather than enemy action.”<sup>46</sup> The government clearly showed it was unfit to command the resources of the nation. The administration of the fleet, which required many competent men, far exceeded the lax and bribe-infested halls of the capitol. The captains saw that the men “are so out of order and command and so stupefied that to punish them or beat them they will scarcely stir.”<sup>47</sup> Any general who would run his army into the ground and show up at the battle and hardly even fight would surely receive summary judgment and removal. Yet for some strange reason during the early seventeenth century, favorites of the King

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<sup>43</sup> Cecil to Secretary Conway (March 1625) in Mary Anne Everett Green (editor), “James I, - volume 185: March 1625,” *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1623-1625*, British History Online, 39.

<sup>44</sup> Blundell to Buckingham, *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1623-1625*, 49.

<sup>45</sup> Secretary Coke to Buckingham (March 1625) in Mary Anne Everett Green (editor), “James I, - volume 185: March 1625,” *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1623-1625*, British History Online, 41.

<sup>46</sup> Lavery, *Royal Tars: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 875-1850*, 54.

<sup>47</sup> John Glanville, *The Voyage to Cadiz in 1625. Being a journal written by John Glanville, secretary to the lord admiral of the fleet (Sir E. Cecil), afterward Sir John Glanville, speaker of the Parliament* (London: Nichols and Sons, 1883), 18.

could throw away enormous amounts of treasure in failed attempts with some coming back, like the Duke of Buckingham, and start another mission. In contrast to the capitalist merchant navy, such incompetence quickly saw the person sacked. Results, not position, determined the order of the day in a capitalist society. The tottering feudal system of privilege and rank seemed ripe for change. Reflecting in the late nineteenth century, British naval historian M. Oppenheim wrote in the English understated way, “Perhaps the Cadiz expedition indicates the low water mark of English seamanship.”<sup>48</sup> He concludes that this disaster “is an indictment against the government of James I which had allowed the seamanship of Elizabeth to die out in this generation.”<sup>49</sup> Oppenheim fails to acknowledge that the King simply followed the Queen’s example in treating the sailors as commodities, used and discarded like an old shoe. Since Charles’s father, James I, did not utilize many vessels in the Royal Navy, the uproar over their ill treatment never rose to any appreciable levels. There simply were not enough men to threaten the monarch. The few who did serve though “had reason to be mutinous and discontented under their scanty fare and uncertain wages.”<sup>50</sup>

The Duke of Buckingham, a favorite of Charles I, neglected logistics and ill outfitted the vessels for the attack on Cadiz. The old feudal practice of the administration discharging a responsibility to a person, along with the necessary funds, revealed the greed of those in charge. One observer noted, “Among the higher officials... their chief desire was to get money sent to them on some pretext – purchase of clothes or arms, payment of wages, etc. – and that they could then trust to their own ingenuity to account for its expenditure, possibly for the benefit of the

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<sup>48</sup> Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy*, 220.

<sup>49</sup> Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy*, 220.

<sup>50</sup> Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy*, 223.

service, certainly for their own.”<sup>51</sup> Instead of entering into contracts with supply companies, whose stockholders and board of directors would see to the profitability and reliability of the services provided in the hopes of future contracts, the government relied on older practices of engaging single individuals for the work. Bribery and cronyism ruled the day as these supply officers consisted mostly of “merchants or court officials, unacquainted with naval matters.”<sup>52</sup> Without any kind of refrigeration, it took someone with experience and skill to insure the victuals provided remained healthy and consistent. Unfortunately, these men worked for private companies and the government provisions proved “infinitely more deadly to our men than the steel and lead of the enemy.”<sup>53</sup> The expedition suffered so much that they had almost no chance of succeeding. When the fleet arrived off the coast of Cadiz, the commander, an Army officer, ordered everyone back to England, as the men were too sick and dying to fight effectively. This obvious decision took significant courage for the officer as it certainly doomed the expedition to failure and the authorities would blame him. Some vessels though, with so many ill, had insufficient men even to operate.<sup>54</sup> When they arrived home and anchored offshore among many towns, mayors forbade the contagious sailors from coming onshore for fear of the sickness spreading to the general population. Cries went up from local authorities, sailors, and families for the King’s assistance to those loyal to the Crown’s wishes.<sup>55</sup> The Crown did not give much help. This poor treatment of seamen helps explain the reasons why the Royal Navy sided with

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<sup>51</sup> Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy*, 223.

<sup>52</sup> Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy*, 224.

<sup>53</sup> Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy*, 224.

<sup>54</sup> Mary Anne Everett Green (editor), “James I, - volume 185: March 1625,” *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1623-1625*, British History Online, 63.

<sup>55</sup> Green, *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1623-1625*, 33.

Parliament in 1642 against Charles I.<sup>56</sup> In the meantime, the legislature, composed of many merchants, sought to impeach the Duke of Buckingham for incompetence. Rather than accept their actions against his best friend, Charles I dissolved it and steered the country towards eventual civil war. Again, the conduct of the private companies with their attention to detail, fair treatment of workers, and accountability, appeared in stark contrast against the chaotic feeding frenzy for the Crown's finances. The courtiers, special liaisons, and the like took each position as an opportunity for personal profit and skill did not rank high. These officials judge "men, as they do ships, by the outside; and he that is of the most gilded appearance, the most certainly the happiest."<sup>57</sup> Few believed the success of the Cadiz voyage would officially enhance their own prospects so each ate at the pie until little remained for the actual sailors and ships going on the operation.<sup>58</sup> When the mission failed, the monarch did not punish those responsible for the disaster but abandoned those sailors who bore the brunt of the system's greed.

In response to the hostility of Parliament, Charles I implemented the Ship Money tax of 1634 as a means to secure funding for his Royal Navy.<sup>59</sup> He declared that "when the good and safety of the Kingdome in general is concerned and the whole Kingdome in danger" the Crown can "command all the Subjects of this his Kingdome at their charge to provide and furnish such number of Ships with Men Victuals and Muniton."<sup>60</sup> This statement goes to the heart of the feudal state's weakness. Only with war could the monarch attempt to justify his procurement of

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<sup>56</sup> Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy*, 223; Charles Napier Robinson, *British Tar in Fact and Fiction* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1909), 75.

<sup>57</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 17.

<sup>58</sup> Jess Stoddart Flemion, "The Dissolution of Parliament in 1626: A Revaluation," *The English Historical Review* 87 (1972), 784.

<sup>59</sup> Charles I, 1640: "An Act for the declaring unlawfull and void the late proceedings touching Ship money and for the vacating of all Records and Processe concerning the same," *Statutes of the Realm: Volume 5: 1628-80* (1819), 116-117.

<sup>60</sup> Charles I, 1640, *Statutes of the Realm: Volume 5: 1628-80*, 116.

resources. Therefore, during this period and in many times to come, the interests of the feudal system and the merchant class diverged. The King, as war chief, constantly sought to conquer new lands but clashed with the capitalist desire for peaceful new markets. The company owners desired ship protection through convoys and the suppression of pirates. They wanted the administration to help open up markets and grease the engines of trade. The Crown though had other ideas. He went further than just calling for the realm's assistance. He stated, "By Law the King might compell the doing thereof in case of refusall or refractarinesse and that the King is the sole Judge both of the danger and when and how the same is to be prevented."<sup>61</sup> He essentially reserved for himself the right to judge when a threat to the country occurred and how much each city should give him in treasure. His exercise of the feudal prerogative as war chief caused the people and nobility to meet this measure with determined resistance. John Hampden, a gentleman from Buckinghamshire, fought against the decree for lacking precedence. His challenge to the King lost in court, though the government later overturned the decision.<sup>62</sup> The court agreed that when an imminent threat occurred, the monarch should have the ability to draw upon resources to defend the realm. They just could not agree on the limits to this power. Alongside this tax, the authorities commenced impressment from the merchantmen more than from towns. The old system of hiring local officials to find suitable men had failed, as the wily seamen found new ways to avoid press officers, including the use of bribes and other monetary transactions. The ruling elite railed against these tactics as subversive and dirty even though the seamen only reflected how the officials used the same bribery to ascertain lucrative supply positions. Even some cities fought against the rising cost of providing vessels for defense of the

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<sup>61</sup> Charles I, 1640, *Statutes of the Realm: Volume 5: 1628-80*, 117.

<sup>62</sup> Charles I, 1640, *Statutes of the Realm: Volume 5: 1628-80*, 117.



realm by claiming economic hardship and the price of providing for the poor precluded funds for the navy.<sup>63</sup> They claimed that the ending of the Christian organizations pushed more charity work upon the local administrations and that the seemingly endless naval expeditions brought back higher amounts of injured and sick. The cycle involved the closures providing money for more expeditions, which generated more sick and injured which caused more charity work for the local governments. The Crown rejected most of these well-reasoned arguments, further showing the inability to function properly to take care of their citizens.

To add insult to injury, the authorities even created an early form of the “Black List” to bar sailors from employment if they had escaped Royal Navy service. A proclamation forbade “all shipowners to employ seamen who have entered foreign service, disobeyed the impress, or abandoned the service.”<sup>64</sup> As the old maxim states, rules are only made to stop behavior already taking place. Mariners joined foreign merchant crews as they provided conditions that are more favorable. Others simply did not show up for an impressment muster or, worse, took the advanced money and did not appear at the rally place. Lastly, others joined the Crown’s ship and jumped offshore at the earliest opportunity once they had seen the deplorable conditions. Once a sailor’s name appeared on this list, the state revoked their rights as an Englishman and they were liable to instant kidnapping and transport onto a vessel while under watchful guard. The designation severely hampered their ability to receive money for their labor. The administration even pursued trade transport crews. A local official could “take but one or two men at most out of the company of any small bark, and generally to use such discretion in the choice that His

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<sup>63</sup> Samuel R. Gardiner, *History of England from the Accession of James I to the Outbreak of the Civil War, 1603-1642* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1886), 227.

<sup>64</sup> Green, *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1623-1625*, 503.

Majesty may be served, and yet trade and fishing as little hindered as may be.”<sup>65</sup> With quotas given to each official to recruit, he frequently gathered many private seamen and hindered trade and fishing. His concern revolved around the bonus for achieving his goal and he disregarded the repercussions to the realm due to lack of men for the sea trades. Yet some press masters exhibited abuses of power while the sailors fought back. A wife of a sailor met an official at the door and “to quiet him, freely let him examine every hole he can find out, and then marches off well satisfied.”<sup>66</sup> Other tactics involved alcohol and subterfuge: they would try and get him drunk with free booze and, if that did not work, would bring out young boys and try to pass them off as sailors. After many instances of these abuses, the sailors likened the press agents as “far from being a kidnapper, as a hangman is from being a cut-throat.”<sup>67</sup>

With all these conflicts and chasing occurring in the streets of London, the Duke of Buckingham, uncaringly, ignored all the requests for better treatment of the mariners, and busily set about raising another fleet for attack and did not give any attention or “clothes, victuals, or medical aid” to the sick.<sup>68</sup> He desperately sought to make amends to this unmitigated disaster at Cadiz. Lacking any long-term view, he flushed down the remnants of the last expedition and turned to the next endeavor, all in an effort to revive his flagging fortunes. To a private company, a disaster of the proportions Cadiz exhibited would demand investigations and accountability. Those in charge had wasted lots of money with no discernable gain. Yet since the Duke and others used public money instead of their own, no such investigations took place, even though

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<sup>65</sup> Letter from Duke of Buckingham to the constables, “Instructions to the constable for impressing of mariners issued under the authority of the Duke of Buckingham,” ADL/J/3, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, England, 1626.

<sup>66</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 19.

<sup>67</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 19.

<sup>68</sup> Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy*, 223.

Parliament demanded them. With a very unchristian like attitude, all in the name of security, the administration abandoned the returning sailors as failures. The sailors, seeing “men dying daily,” entertained mutinous schemes.<sup>69</sup> The Duke, after learning that Scottish ships had attacked merchantmen around London recently, focused on outfitting a new fleet.<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile, the Crown had ceased to give redress to the seamen. If they petitioned the Duke directly for pay and supplies, he ordered them to the Commissioners. They, in turn, referred them to the Navy Board, the group responsible for repairs and supplies, whose reply consisted of “there are many other ships in the same predicament.”<sup>71</sup> The unending bureaucracy bought the Duke some time for his new endeavor to develop. Yet the amount of men who went on the Cadiz expedition proved too much for the authorities. When no grievance hearings can take place for the afflicted, they take matters into their own hands. Ship crews started to mutiny and abandon their posts with officers running after them literally begging for a resumption of duties.<sup>72</sup> Others vowed to take their requests directly to the London aristocracy, vowing that, “they would no longer shiver on board, but would lie in the best beds in the town.”<sup>73</sup> Incredibly, the seamen suffered, and eventually gave into, rising expectations. In a stroke of genius by the authorities, they doubled down on their promises to the tars. When the government realized they did not have money enough to pay for the common wages of all the men for the Cadiz expedition, they actually raised the salary for the next recruitment drive. This raise succeeded in recruiting more tars. Thoughts of making more money persuaded the Cadiz veterans to stay their retributive spirits. The authorities hoped

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<sup>69</sup> Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy*, 224.

<sup>70</sup> Green, *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1623-1625*, 67.

<sup>71</sup> Green, *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1623-1625*, 24.

<sup>72</sup> Pennington to Buckingham (March 1625) in Mary Anne Everett Green (editor), “James I, - volume 185: March 1625,” *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1623-1625*, British History Online, 33.

<sup>73</sup> Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy*, 225.

the higher amount would give the seamen more patience in waiting for their pay.<sup>74</sup> Many jumped at this chance and forestalled their protests and demands for back pay in the hopes of further riches. Eventually though the administration ran out of time and the deckhands moved to action.<sup>75</sup> Many portray the tars as victims of authority, always running around avoid the prest agent, skipping off a mismanaged ship, or fleeing from the local sheriff, but in the Cadiz aftermath, the sailors organized and took justice into their own hands.

A year after Cadiz, with pay still not sent, the sailors took to the streets, marching for pay. Various sailor troops streamed into London and threatened the Duke of Buckingham. They shouted, “Their wives and children were starving and they perishing on board.”<sup>76</sup> Only by “stealing their daily bread” could they survive, waiting on their duly earned pay.<sup>77</sup> The Crown weighed down on the men in a pincer formation. By not paying them, the deckhands possessed no money to live from day to day. Yet when they stole food and drink, the local authorities would chase them down and clap them into irons. Having heard enough of the Duke’s efforts to revive his nation’s glory by attempting a new voyage, they angrily “made an attempt against his gate to pull it down” and attempted to assault the Duke’s compound.<sup>78</sup> They made it into the front foyer when an aid of the Duke, who was not in residence, gave into their demands and promised to pay them all if they ceased the assault. Miraculously, the men quickly calmed down and dispersed, perhaps calling to mind ideas of decent behavior. Only after this physical assault

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<sup>74</sup> Duke of Buckingham to Secretary Coke (September 1626) in John Bruce (editor), “Charles I - volume 35: September 1-17, 1626,” *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic: Charles I, 1625-26*, British History Online, 422.

<sup>75</sup> Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy*, 225.

<sup>76</sup> Pennington to Buckingham (March 1625) in Mary Anne Everett Green (editor), “James I, - volume 185: March 1625,” *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1623-1625*, British History Online, 48.

<sup>77</sup> Mary Anne Everett Green (editor), “James I, - volume 185: March 1625,” *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1623-1625*, British History Online, 44.

<sup>78</sup> Yonge, *The History of the British Navy*, 123.

did the government agrees to pay them out of subsidy money.<sup>79</sup> With their immediate needs met, the seamen then dispersed, many perhaps to take care of their carnal needs and for some, their families. After this episode, the deckhands learned that only by aggressive force could they get the wages they had earned. This lesson, utilized repeatedly in the future, would aid them in coming struggles. Parliament members also took note as the English Civil War brewed.

Despite this mollification, a fresh batch of unpaid tars clamored for their money in September 1626. Evidence for the lack of care for the Navy abounded as the supplies for ships continued to deteriorate. Captain John Pennington wrote that he had sent several letters to Buckingham explaining that the “wants of the fleet breed great disorder... there are no ‘hammakers’ [hammocks] to lodge the people in, nor cans nor platters for them to eat or drink out of” and that he had received no replies.<sup>80</sup> One officer demanded in a letter that the administration pay £13,540 to the Portsmouth seamen immediately.<sup>81</sup> The Council, mindful of the looming unrest, responded with a promise to give a larger portion of captured prize goods at Portsmouth to the aggrieved sailors, but this promise did not mollify the workers. Some grew so disheartened they tried to run away.<sup>82</sup> The administration warned Buckingham that, “If these sums are not provided, the wants of the seamen will force them to mutinous courses.”<sup>83</sup> Mindful of their success in the last encounter, they resorted to the same tactic as before. As more and

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<sup>79</sup> Yonge, *The History of the British Navy*, 123.

<sup>80</sup> Captain John Pennington to the Duke of Buckingham (September 1626) in John Bruce (editor), “Charles I - volume 35: September 1-17, 1626,” *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic: Charles I, 1625-26*, British History Online, 422.

<sup>81</sup> Sir William Russell (September 1626) in John Bruce (editor), “Charles I - volume 35: September 1-17, 1626,” *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic: Charles I, 1625-26*, British History Online, 422.

<sup>82</sup> Robert Lord Willoughby to Nicholas (September 1626) in John Bruce (editor), “Charles I - volume 35: September 1-17, 1626,” *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic: Charles I, 1625-26*, British History Online, 423.

<sup>83</sup> Navy Commissioners to the Duke of Buckingham (September 1626) in John Bruce (editor), “Charles I - volume 35: September 1-17, 1626,” *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic: Charles I, 1625-26*, British History Online, 424.

more men filtered into the square, their anger grew so forcefully that the Commissioners could not meet “without clamour and danger” and for fear the sailors would “break the doors down.”<sup>84</sup> Buckingham responded that the Crown would pay the sum from selling the “King’s plate appointed to be sold or coined.”<sup>85</sup> Authorities, sensing a legitimate grievance from the sea workers, backed off and did not suppress the vigorous, but peaceful, protest. The shipwrights from Chatham even surrounded the government building and besieged them for twenty days.<sup>86</sup> Others complained they had not procured “one penny” and how the Treasurers refused to give living allowances.<sup>87</sup> A week later, Buckingham provided a small fraction of the coin in arrears and promised to pay more. His efforts proved unconvincing to many tars and officers alike.<sup>88</sup>

Buckingham’s ill treatment of his sailors ultimately proved his demise. After another disastrous expedition to relieve British allies in the French port of La Rochelle, the administration repeated the same script of neglecting the returning tars.<sup>89</sup> This time though, Lieutenant John Felton of the Royal Navy, which owed him £80, believed vengeance should strike down the man who forced so many to surrender involuntary loans in the service of their country and that his country would consider his act a “great service” for punishing Buckingham for his sins.<sup>90</sup> According to the account of eyewitness Lord Percy, on 23 August 1628, between

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<sup>84</sup> Navy Commissioners to Buckingham, *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic: Charles I, 1625-26*, 425.

<sup>85</sup> Navy Commissioners to Buckingham, *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic: Charles I, 1625-26*, 426.

<sup>86</sup> John Bruce (editor), “Charles I - volume 35: September 1-17, 1626,” *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic: Charles I, 1625-26*, British History Online, 426.

<sup>87</sup> Petition of Ensign Robert Smith to the Council of War (September 1626) in John Bruce (editor), “Charles I - volume 35: September 1-17, 1626,” *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic: Charles I, 1625-26*, British History Online, 426.

<sup>88</sup> Robert Lord Willoughby to Nicholas (September 1626) in John Bruce (editor), “Charles I - volume 35: September 1-17, 1626,” *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic: Charles I, 1625-26*, British History Online, 426.

<sup>89</sup> John Bruce (editor), “Charles I - volume 118: October 1-18, 1628,” *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic: Charles I, 1628-29*, British History Online, 349.

<sup>90</sup> Lord Percy to the Earl of Salisbury (September 1628) in G. Dyfnallt Owen (editor), “Cecil Papers: 1628,” *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House, Volume 22: 1612 – 1688*, British History Online, 246.

nine and ten in the morning, as the Duke proceeded through his parlor, with various dignitaries in attendance, to go to his coach for a meeting with the King, Felton stabbed him through the chest and into his lung. Felton, as an officer, could mingle with the other high lords and officers unlike the common mariners he came to represent. The high lord fell against a table and cried out “villain!” but died soon thereafter in the arms of his attendants, blood gushing from his mouth and wound. Felton walked quietly amid the uproar to the kitchen to avoid capture, but the men soon found him and intended to kill him. He drew his sword to fight to the death, but a small group of men quickly disarmed him and fought back against all the aspiring avengers. The men then had to stand guard over him to prevent his murder until the guards arrived and brought Felton to justice.<sup>91</sup> Many lords did not shed a tear over the Duke’s death. One even believed that Buckingham “was never friend to anything but his own ends, and so I leave him as yet unlamented.”<sup>92</sup> A scramble for the Duke’s many offices and titles commenced with many hoping that the monarch would “confer them upon more deserving men.”<sup>93</sup>

The example of the Duke of Buckingham’s fate illustrates the bankrupt institution of the Royal Navy and of the feudal system. While most scholars view the 1625 Battle of Cadiz as the low point of the British Navy in the Early Modern period, the aftermath provides a more subtle and effective analytical point. As previously mentioned, once the squadron returned from their failed attack, the sick and injured seamen looked to their promised wages to help sustain them. Little of the modern day obligation to provide for injured service members, free of charge,

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<sup>91</sup> Percy to the Salisbury (September 1628), *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House, Volume 22: 1612 – 1688*, 247. The Crown hanged Felton on 29 November 1628. Alexander Dumas fictionalized the assassination of the Duke of Buckingham in his novel *The Three Musketeers*.

<sup>92</sup> Percy to the Salisbury, *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House, Volume 22: 1612 – 1688*, 248.

<sup>93</sup> Percy to the Salisbury, *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House, Volume 22: 1612 – 1688*, 249.

existed at that time.<sup>94</sup> As the sailors saw frequently during their travels, the contract ruled supreme and they relied on the payment to help alleviate their suffering. When delays mounted and some of those in charge insinuated the tars should exhibit continued gratefulness and patience since they had discharged patriotic duty, the men grew angry and desperate at the overall one in command, the Duke of Buckingham. That common sailors could assault the ducal residence, tear down the gates, demand their back pay, and, more importantly, receive the money spoke volumes on the breakdown of the feudal government system.<sup>95</sup> Even some modern historians, including N.A.M. Rodger, hold that “Buckingham behaved throughout with energy and great gallantry and failed by a narrow margin.”<sup>96</sup> This whitewashed view only reflects the geopolitical hue of the situation and fails to elaborate on the Duke’s moral failings in his endeavors. The ruling class that so often derided the sea workers for only looking out for themselves, while hypocritically doing the same, amazingly possessed a limit to their own exploitive code. The tars, though playing the moderate role so lucidly described in Crane Brinton’s exemplary revolution framework, backed up their ultimatum with violence.<sup>97</sup> The Parliament portrayed the radical side and the Crown the reactionary camp. The mariners just wanted government to function. As force so often accompanied their tenure during voyages, they instinctively knew that despite all the appeals to high standards and civility, brute strength could win the day. The usual grumblings of late pay and mistreatment did not provide the fuel for a frontal attack against the ruling class. The specter of hunger, for both themselves and their

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<sup>94</sup> C.D. Yonge, *The History of the British Navy* (London: Richard Bentley, 1866), 122-3.

<sup>95</sup> Vincent Patarino, “The Religious Shipboard Culture of Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century English Sailors,” in *The Social History of English Seamen, 1485-1649*, ed. Cheryl A. Fury (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 183; C.D. Yonge, *The History of the British Navy* (London: Richard Bentley, 1866), 123.

<sup>96</sup> Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea*, 360.

<sup>97</sup> Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1938), 67.



families, fired a drive to attack. They fought against the dehumanizing grip of poverty and refused to allow the state to repress them back into animals, fighting for every scrap of sustenance and shelter.<sup>98</sup> The lack of the state's response to counter the aggressive petitioners as they assaulted a high lord denoted their empathy for the pleas. This new interpretation of this revolutionary event yields insights into the seamen's role as the tip of the spear point thrust into the heart of the failing feudal system.

These moderates just wanted the state to function as Brinton argues.<sup>99</sup> For the sailors after the Battle of Cadiz, once they forced Duke of Buckingham to pay them, they quickly dispersed, eager to spend their hard-earned money. These sea workers resembled the Zapatistas in the Mexican Revolutionary war in the 1920s where, after successfully overthrowing the tyrannical regime, swiftly moved to establish their own provincial administration, content with shaping their own lives.<sup>100</sup> Just like the Zapatistas, who eventually lost their newfound autonomy, the tars also lost their influence with the authorities after the Cadiz uprising and rapidly found themselves making involuntary loans to the state. Numerous times the monarch owed them back pay, sometimes two to three years in arrears. Most seamen knew that if they failed to repay a loan to the authorities, swift punishment resulted. Yet when the government did not live up to their end of the employment contract, excuses and delays could extend indefinitely. Survival remained the goal, just like in the twentieth century when the Chinese protagonist in the book *Revolution is not a Dinner Party* witnessed her parents reduced from respected and diligent professionals important to their community to mere Cultural Revolution survivors constantly

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<sup>98</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Group, 1963), 50.

<sup>99</sup> Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution*, 138.

<sup>100</sup> Stuart Easterling, *The Mexican Revolution: A Short History 1910 – 1920* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 98.

under stress, worrying about their physical and mental safety from the government.<sup>101</sup> Likewise, a tar entered into an employment contract respectfully and counted on prompt payment of earned wages. When forced into poverty for failure to hand over the pay, the authorities essentially reduced their employees to mere survivors also. Each of these revolutions shaped many moderates who persistently strove to provide for themselves and their families, seemingly divorced from the ideological wars during the time. The sea workers represented the moderates in capitalism's assault on the feudal system. Their descent from the "wooden wall of the ocean" preeminence achieved after the defeat of the Spanish Armada to literally assaulting the Duke of Buckingham's residence asking for back pay showed the high dysfunction of the government and likewise the force of the tars' agency.

This need for steady pay to sustain themselves and family resonates with other moderates throughout history. Georges Lefebvre demonstrates in *The Coming of the French Revolution* that the reasonable men took over the reins of power and sought after accommodations in an attempt to return life back to a more improved normal.<sup>102</sup> After the failure at Cadiz, the state reeled about aimlessly looking for a way to redeem itself without first taking care of the previous expedition's warriors. This desire for normalcy and human decency pervaded throughout society yet rarely attained. Likewise, after the Revolutionary War, the Americans quickly resumed, as described by historian Robert Allison, trade relations with the British so business could proceed apace.<sup>103</sup> These people wanted the government to function correctly. When the mariners saw the old feudal system fail to provide what they desired, they quickly resorted to violence to attain their

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<sup>101</sup> Ying Chang Compestine, *Revolution Is Not a Dinner Party* (New York: Square Fish, 2007). 95-9.

<sup>102</sup> Georges Lefebvre, *The Coming of the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>103</sup> Robert Allison, *The American Revolution: A Concise History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

demands. Their use of force provided a mirror to the authorities' use of power against them. No one represented the absolute position as the master of a vessel at sea. These actions by the tars demonstrated the failures of the feudal system and provided fuel for their rejection of societal religion in favor of their own hedonistic style of living, which always seemed to be ready and available. The older men frequently made sure the younger ones learned the ways to resist and methods to reproduce their irreligious thinking during all the long watches at sea, talking beneath the stars.

As these sailors cast their lot with the merchants, and hence Parliament, even before the English Civil War broke out, they served as the first casualties between the Crown and Parliament over who would run the country. The King represented the old feudal prerogative of the divine right of monarchs in that people should obey since God himself put the administration in charge of affairs. The Parliament represented the rising power of capitalism.<sup>104</sup> Since the authorities had demonstrated they could not properly outfit, pay, or address the needs of the Royal Navy, the nation witnessed the inability of the regime to function at the basic level of national defense. When an authority cannot perform its purpose for whatever reason, the populace begins the process of developing a new method of governing. Charles I saw this change coming and tried, unsuccessfully, to fund his military adventures without popular support. When he finally relented and summoned what history remembers as the Long Parliament in 3 November 1640, they quickly moved to limit the monarch's power and impeached many of the royal councilors, an act unheard of in a feudal monarchy.<sup>105</sup> They also passed the Triennial Act that required the King to assemble Parliament at least once every three years and gave the Lord

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<sup>104</sup> Lavery, *Royal Tars: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 1650-1850*, 44.

<sup>105</sup> Pauline Gregg, *King Charles I* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 383.

Keeper of the Great Seal and twelve of his peers the right to call Parliament without the Crown's approval.<sup>106</sup> Fearing the dissolution of his divine right to rule, the monarch left London and formed the Oxford Parliament in an effort to dissolve the London Parliament.<sup>107</sup> His tactic to preserve the feudal system ultimately proved futile and sparked the English Civil War in 1642.

As Charles I's administration struggled to collect funds to pay the mariners and supply the vessels, the administration found the nation's purse strings slipping through their fingers. The rise of the capitalist and the bourgeois with their seemingly unlimited sources of wealth shifted the power away from the land and to the seas. Individual ships and, eventually, fleets sailed around Africa and brought home exotic goods for an enormous profit. To control these sea-lanes required large expenditures of treasure, much more than any previous realm had to outlay before. The rise of the kingdom in the late middle ages allowed for bigger armies but the kind of money required for merchant fleet protection brought expenditures to a new level. The sailors' attack of the Duke of Buckingham's residence and, eventually, his own life signaled that power rested more with the sea and not with those of the land. Since the administration could not adequately supply the needs of the seamen in the Battle of Cadiz and the struggle for La Rochelle, the Duke's indifference to the plight of the seamen and of the country's image as a whole reflected poorly upon his best friend, the King. As Lieutenant Felton, representing the downtrodden mariners, stabbed the Duke through the chest, Parliament stabbed into the heart of feudalism during the English Civil War and brought capitalism into full bloom as the guiding force of England for the near future. The plight of the seamen forced them to choose between the older

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<sup>106</sup> Conrad Russell, *The Fall of the British Monarchies 1637-1642* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 225.

<sup>107</sup> Gregg, *King Charles I*, 186.

feudal government and the ascendant capitalist-infused government. Their agency allowed them to choose the system that best suited their needs.

## ***Chapter 4: “Defense of the realm” - England successfully regulates the sailor and the colonized for power and profit***

The rise of capitalism and the weakening of the absolute monarchies, underpinned by their nobility, formed the groundwork and justification for society’s strident belligerence against sailors and colonial people alike in an attempt to control their behavior for power and profit. As early as the seventeenth century, Britain realized the importance of the fleet in controlling trade and the means of production as John Evelyn explained: “Whoever commands the ocean, commands the trade of the world, and whoever commands the trade of the world, commands the riches of the world, and whoever is master of that, commands the world itself.”<sup>1</sup> They believed that control first started with the men, then ships, then money and prizes, then of high seas itself. As the mariners chose capitalism over the feudal system for their future, the merchants used their newfound power in Parliament to regulate and discipline the tars into an image of “Britishness.” Aristocrats and merchants sought the establishment and expansion of British influence worldwide for the purposes of trade and commercialization.<sup>2</sup> During the Age of Discovery and onward, the influence of the state increased in tandem with a Protestant ethos as articulated by Puritans.<sup>3</sup> Trinity House and companies like Lloyd’s of London gathered large amounts of information on ships, officers, ports, and trade to perfect their risk assessments for insurance since they understood that “knowledge, no less than money, was a form of capital to be pooled

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<sup>1</sup> John Evelyn, *Navigation and Commerce, their Origin and Progress* (London: Benjamin Tooke, 1674), 32-3.

<sup>2</sup> James Evans, *Tudor Adventures: The Voyage of Discovery that Transformed England* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2014), 3.

<sup>3</sup> James Evans, *Tudor Adventures: The Voyage of Discovery that Transformed England* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2014), 5.

and invested... towards an important end.”<sup>4</sup> As England discovered the power of bookkeeping and data analysis, they utilized this centralized awareness as a way to control the behavior of sailors and colonists. For instance, the authorities used the census to gather information about seamen to improve impressments when needed.<sup>5</sup> At the start of the Early Modern period, the relatively weak English traded as lesser partners with many other countries. After an infusion of technique, knowledge, and technology, the balance of power tipped towards England. They started to dictate the terms of trade with others. After Parliament wrestled control of authority away from the King, the government steered the ship of state toward a view of geopolitics as a means to protect and increase trade. Eventually, a more ambitious position emerged, which viewed the world as economic functionality, of owning or controlling the means of production.<sup>6</sup> With the unwitting development and use of Biopower, the power brokers shaped their society to compete against often-hostile countries, which possessed larger amounts of resources. The Spanish power base relied on New World riches, the French upon their idea of absolute monarchy, but the English’s unwitting development and use of the coercive and disciplinary Biopower proved the strongest force. Tracing the origins of this power should prove fruitful in examining its effects on English society.

In the medieval era, before all this Biopower sprang onto the world stage, sailors possessed more rights than in the subsequent centuries. With corporal punishment, according to the *Black Book of the Admiralty*, “if the master strike one of the crew of the ship, the latter ought to support the first blow either of fist or palm of the hand, and if he strikes any more he may

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<sup>4</sup> James Evans, *Tudor Adventures: The Voyage of Discovery that Transformed England* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2014), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Lavery, *Royal Tars: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 875-1850* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011), 53.

<sup>6</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 14.

defend himself.”<sup>7</sup> With ships much smaller and retaining usually just one deck, physical separation by responsibility was not feasible. As the ships travelled along the coasts, sailors gained local knowledge based on long experience. Literacy was not required since maps and charts were either not available or, if at hand, usually not accurate. Formal navigation and other specialized sciences did not exist; hence, any seaman, regardless of education, could hope to rise to the level of master.<sup>8</sup> Merchant ships usually acted in partnership with the workers receiving a share of the proceeds. The master acted more as a senior partner, or trusted and experienced advisor, than as an enforcer for the bourgeois as he later became.<sup>9</sup> The even-handedness of the era to sailors resided in the fame of the court at Oleron, which administered Maritime Law. This body was so renowned that “mariners of other countries were in the habit of resorting to the court of Oleron for the sake of obtaining its judgment upon their disputes.”<sup>10</sup> This relatively free age ended as the importance of technically savvy sailors to the state and the profitability of international trade to the merchants rose in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and companies sought to regulate, formalize, and control the human resources needed to conduct profitable trade.

The first signs of regulation occurred in the late fourteenth century. As the kings of England needed more and more seamen for the increasingly larger ships, the impressment and discipline of sailors’ behavior first entered into law. In 1379, Parliament passed the first decree regulating seamen behavior entitled “Against mariners departing the King’s service without

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<sup>7</sup> Twiss, *Black Book of the Admiralty*, 225.

<sup>8</sup> Lavery, *Royal Tars*, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Lavery, *Royal Tars*, 23.

<sup>10</sup> Twiss, *Black Book of the Admiralty*, 27.



license.”<sup>11</sup> It stated that mariners arrested for the “King’s service” and in “defense of the realm” should not flee out of said service without license.<sup>12</sup> If they did so, the state would punish up to one year in jail and a fine of double the amount pay received.<sup>13</sup> Even though the state navy forced seamen into contract work for wages, if they left without consent, loss of freedom and a substantial fine waited for them. The lesson the authorities conveyed was clear. For defense of the nation, the sovereign can regulate the subjects’ behavior. The ships grew larger in response to wider geographical distances covered since the discovery of the New World and the rounding of Africa by the Portuguese. As the demand for skilled men grew, some sailors who could read or had education could hope to ascend into the realm of the officer class.<sup>14</sup> Before the domination of capitalism, the Venetian ambassador wrote, in 1551, that England possessed a “very great quantity both of ships and sailors, and are very powerful at sea.”<sup>15</sup> Yet once disciplinary power showed its profit-making potential, the country developed its reach to all aspects of their Empire, including the colonies the tars visited frequently.

In the late fourteenth century and into the fifteenth, the complexity of the ships reached new heights, requiring better-trained sailors who demanded higher wages. With so many countries vying for far-off lands across huge expanses of water, an explosion of creativity and

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<sup>11</sup> T. B. Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and other Crimes and Misdemeanors from the Earliest Period to the Present* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, & Brown, 1743), 1342.

<sup>12</sup> T. B. Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and other Crimes and Misdemeanors from the Earliest Period to the Present* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, & Brown, 1743), 1342.

<sup>13</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason*, 1342.

<sup>14</sup> Lavery, *Royal Tars*, 29.

<sup>15</sup> Giacomo Soranzo, *Report of England made to the Senate by Giacomo Soranzo, late Ambassador to Edward VI and Queen Mary (Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, 1534-1554)* (London: Rawdon Brown, 1873), 351.

ingenuity echoed across Europe.<sup>16</sup> The designers added more sails, which required the seamen to traverse and understand the more elaborate rigging. As merchants sailed around Africa to India and across the Atlantic to the New World, the wooden worlds increased in size. With these larger vessels, specialized and well-paid tars appeared including the master gunner, who understood the treatment of gunpowder and gun aiming.<sup>17</sup> The commanders entered into a generational long process of replacing soldiers as the mainstay of offensive power with sailors operating guns. This tactical switch replaced colliding, grappling, and boarding with staying at distance and pounding the enemy with solid shot until surrender or sinking.<sup>18</sup> By the dawn of the seventeenth century, mariners made up the majority of men on board with soldiers present only as a bulwark against enemy boarding.<sup>19</sup> This design move to larger ships, lower in water, with more guns created a divide between the Royal Navy and the merchant fleet.<sup>20</sup> Before the seventeenth century, monarchs could impress an entire craft, load it with fighters, and then send it off to crash and board the enemy. As the Navy's ships specialized in size and guns, the power of the trader fleet decreased and forced the authorities to recruit, and eventually impress, the most competent individual sailors. To the company men's anger, they usually plucked the best and the brightest to serve their country.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Brian Lavery, *Royal Tars: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 875-1850* (New York: Naval Institute Press, 2011), 27-8.

<sup>17</sup> Brian Lavery, *Royal Tars: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 875-1850* (New York: Naval Institute Press, 2011), 28.

<sup>18</sup> Aiming proved notorious since many cannons moved after firing. Reloading took a relatively long time with most crews firing two to three times an hour, making movies and television shows of today remarkably inaccurate.

<sup>19</sup> Brian Lavery, *Royal Tars: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 875-1850* (New York: Naval Institute Press, 2011), 29.

<sup>20</sup> Brian Lavery, *Royal Tars: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 875-1850* (New York: Naval Institute Press, 2011), 35.

<sup>21</sup> Brian Lavery, *Royal Tars: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 875-1850* (New York: Naval Institute Press, 2011), 30.

The high tide of the merchant and Crown relationship occurred during the Elizabethan age. Many joint-stock companies outfitted privateers and plied the waters looking for vulnerable bounties during wars. Many nobles in government partook in the private enterprises, most notably Sir Francis Drake, and public and personal interests converged numerous times. A few aristocrats attempted to ingratiate themselves with their crews and treat them fairly. Lord Howard in 1588 commented to Walsingham “it should be marveled at how we keep our men from running away... for I see men kindly handled will bear want and run through fire and water.”<sup>22</sup> One high officer strained his hand hauling rope with the common sailors to demonstrate his solidarity and willingness to perform the same jobs (and, more interestingly, surreptitiously dropped this hint to his superior).<sup>23</sup> The imminent invasion from the Spanish united commoner and lords alike in a common bond against the foreign foe. Service for the Crown at sea proved a “symbol of national pride and a point of national identity” which drew all men in defense.<sup>24</sup> Upward mobility and achievement of fame and fortune resided on a wooden ship for many in this period.

In the Elizabethan era, the merchant fleet during periods of war turned to piracy and other forced requisitioning of foreign goods to make up for the loss of trade. As they perceived how the Crown forcibly recruited their ships into fleets for attack and defense, many owners pooled their money and sponsored privateering adventures with the hopes of profit, usually from the

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<sup>22</sup> Lord Howard to Francis Walsingham (13 June 1588) in John Knox Laughton (editor), *State Papers Relating to The Defeat of The Spanish Armada, 1588* (London: Navy Records Society, 1894), 198.

<sup>23</sup> Lord Seymour to Francis Walsingham (23 June 1588) in John Knox Laughton (editor), *State Papers Relating to The Defeat of The Spanish Armada, 1588* (London: Navy Records Society, 1894), 224. He noted to his superior that his secretary wrote in his stead since he injured his hands hauling so much rope assisting the tars with the rigging.

<sup>24</sup> N. A. M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain, 660 – 1649* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997), 310.

Spanish silver fleet.<sup>25</sup> Most times though the endeavors captured mundane items like fish, salt, tar, wine, sugar, and hides.<sup>26</sup> When sailors observed the stealing of other people's cargo on the pretense they are from a belligerent country and therefore fair game, perhaps the flippancy of life came to mind. Some seamen knew each other and worked on many different ships, no matter the nationality. Ned Coxere, who sailed in the mid-seventeenth century, wrote that he "served the Spaniards against the French, then the Hollanders against the English... served the English against the Hollanders; and last I was taken by the Turks, where I was forced to serve then against English, French, Dutch, and Spaniards, and all Christendom."<sup>27</sup> To haul rope and risk lives with a man among the sails and then to capture and steal their livelihood just because of the color of flag hoisted must have confirmed their jarring suspicion that concepts of decency and brotherly love only existed in an romantic's mind. These deckhands, seeing the many wars fought between the powers and sides switching sometimes yearly, perhaps saw the real motivator of it all: greed, a very unchristian trait. Yet during this period in the late 1500s, certain aspects of the merchant navy cooperated with the Crown's war objectives. Decades later, these interests diverged markedly and affected the amount of money paid to the men.

The wages offered to seamen by the administration and the traders continued to diverge. As the capitalist engine gained momentum, private companies offered higher salaries to attract the best recruits. Once the ship sailed, the lack of communication allowed them to evade any impressment or state oversight. By the late sixteenth century, the seaman could expect half as

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<sup>25</sup> K. R. Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering: English Privateering During the Spanish War, 1585-1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 141-2.

<sup>26</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, 133, 141.

<sup>27</sup> Edward Coxere, *Adventures by Sea of Edward Coxere* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 25. Coxere, a British seaman, sailed in the mid sixteenth century.

much pay on a Royal ship as merchant.<sup>28</sup> The decaying feudal system could not keep up with the dynamism that profit forces created and used their powers of coercion to strong-arm citizens into involuntary indentured servitude.<sup>29</sup> Officers lamented how men joined privateers and chased after money instead of performing their duty for the country.<sup>30</sup> One in particular sought to determine “how far it shall be met to suffer private men’s reprisals so long as her Majesty continueth her wars.”<sup>31</sup> The monarch always attempted to accomplish tasks as cheaply as possible.<sup>32</sup> When told to stay in the harbor so the authorities could ascertain if the Navy needed the trade ship’s mariners, many of them sailed out in the dead of night, knowing any reprisals could be months or even years in the future, after the profit achieved. That people of considerable wealth would denigrate common people, who pursued their own fortunes in privateering or in working for higher wages, most likely did not escape the notice of the king. It appears that when the authorities wish others to join a national war, appeals to virtue and duty resound throughout the land.<sup>33</sup> The aristocrats appealed to heavenly ideals to get others to fight for less money yet when it came time for the division of spoils and the handing out of rewards, the old feudal hierarchy stepped in and the nobles made sure they received more than their fair share. At the same time, the captains of trade only had to use the persuasive power of a timely paid and competitive wage to lure any seamen they wished.

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<sup>28</sup> Maxwell Schoenfeld, “The Restoration Seaman and His Wages,” *American Neptune* 25 (1965): 278.

<sup>29</sup> Lavery, *Royal Tars*, 42.

<sup>30</sup> Fulke Grenville and Sir Richard Leveson to the Lord Admiral and Robert Cecil (19 July 1602) in R. A. Roberts (editor), *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House, Volume 12: 1602 – 1603* (London: Institute of Historical Research 1910), 229.

<sup>31</sup> Grenville and Leveson to Lord Admiral and Cecil, *Calendar of the Cecil Papers*, 230.

<sup>32</sup> Lavery, *Royal Tars*, 43.

<sup>33</sup> Sir Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1614), 318.

One of the first signs of the split between monarch and merchant occurred in 1544. Henry VIII started a massive shipbuilding campaign in the mid-1550s following the Protestant Reformation of 1534. In the spring of 1544, the monarch had “arrested all ships at present in all the harbours of this realm, and is about to assemble and put in order more than 150 sail.”<sup>34</sup> This confiscation of vessels and, when needed, the mariners on board demonstrated the interests of the monarch overrode the needs of the merchant class. This usurpation of the trader’s livelihood sent a message to all that the monarch’s aims must be the country’s desires. He essentially bypassed the medieval hierarchy and integrated the rising middle class of merchants into his power base.<sup>35</sup> The capitalists grew their power to establish commercialization and trade and resented Henry VIII’s cooption of their hard-earned capabilities toward conquering lands that frequently only enriched the Crown. Though the King could pay his sailors promptly, using all of the confiscated monastery land, his covetous eye rested upon the burgeoning commercial fleets and he sought to use these vessels to bolster his own strength.<sup>36</sup> During the infancy of capitalism, the traders could not compete against the wealthy Henry VIII for the seamen’s services. To compensate, some captains who captured the enemy could force the prisoners to work down in the “drudges” without needed any Crown approval, but this bone thrown at them did not prove sufficient to temper the rising dismay over the government’s appropriation of qualified seamen.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Chapuys to Charles V (2 March 1544) in James Gairdner (editor), *Letters and Papers: Foreign and Domestic, Calendar of Henry VIII* (London: Mackie and Co., 1903), 89.

<sup>35</sup> Henry VIII to Admiral William Woodhouse (July 1544) in James Gairdner (editor), *Letters and Papers: Foreign and Domestic, Calendar of Henry VIII* (London: Mackie and Co., 1903), 120.

<sup>36</sup> Brian Lavery, *Royal Tars: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 875-1850* (New York: Naval Institute Press, 2011), 31.

<sup>37</sup> Henry VIII to Admiral William Woodhouse (July 1544) in James Gairdner (editor), *Letters and Papers: Foreign and Domestic, Calendar of Henry VIII* (London: Mackie and Co., 1903), 121.

Over the ensuing decades into the early seventeenth century, the capitalist class, perhaps seeing how functional the market system worked in relating supply with demand, shook their collective heads at how much the feudal system did not understand how to achieve tasks in the newly wide-open and increasingly connected world. As historian K. R. Andrews notes, when the Crown took to impressment, it emerged as a competitor to the merchants. The continued ill-treatment of these men “by reducing masses of seamen to sickness, penury and endemic mutiny,” caused the merchants to resent the government for the destruction of their carefully nurtured and maintained workforce.<sup>38</sup> When the citizens had to choose sides in the English Civil War, most of the sailors rallied around the side that treated them better, namely the Parliament with their numerous merchants.<sup>39</sup> On one side, the gentlemen captains came from the Royal Navy, as shaped by Charles I, and would support “the dignity of the Crown and overawe foreign princes.”<sup>40</sup> The merchant captain belonged to a different social and political class. They represented the “trade which the Navy did not protect, the parliamentary politics which the king had suppressed, and the anti-Catholic foreign policy which he had rejected.”<sup>41</sup> At the core, the King represented “High Church” with the usually fruitless attempts at aggrandizement through war and the merchant captains and owners resided in Presbyterianism, forms of Puritanism, and the desire to establish and protect trade and markets. The aristocracy viewed this trading and business as beneath their dignity whereas the ideas of conquest seemed befitting the attention of kings and nobility. The capitalist class developed another view of the world. They saw trade as

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<sup>38</sup> K. R. Andrews, *Ships, Money, and Politics: Seafaring and Naval Enterprise in the Reign of Charles I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 83.

<sup>39</sup> K. R. Andrews, *Ships, Money, and Politics: Seafaring and Naval Enterprise in the Reign of Charles I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 82.

<sup>40</sup> Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea*, 410.

<sup>41</sup> Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea*, 410.

the bedrock of their society and rightfully pointed out that their activities actually provided the only source of funds for any kind of conquest. In the interconnected world of trade and capitalism, they saw themselves as the frontier, developing new markets and contacts. They perceived the medieval state as a drain on their resources without much payback in new markets or in protection.

As the status and importance of the merchant fleet rose in the kingdom, many sailors resented the ‘gentlemen’ captains onboard many of the Royal ships. Captains oversaw the general welfare of the ship and crew, usually leaving the running of the mechanical aspects of sailing to the master. As the Crown desired results and began the process of promoting able seamen to the ranks of masters and even captains, the aristocracy, so encouraged to pursue a life at sea to discharge their duty to God and Country, despised having commoners so close to their personage. Yet many noblemen could not serve as captain of a ship as they did not possess the experience. To remedy this situation, the Admiralty created the rank of lieutenant (or as the men called them, “courtier captains”), a position below captain but certainly above the plebian position of master.<sup>42</sup> Some even worried that with so many non-nobles in command at sea, the aristocracy would disdain serving in this capacity.<sup>43</sup> The business people grumbled that when the Crown sought to attack a foreign power or defend from such, all must help in the endeavor but when a pirate or corsair fell upon the merchantman, no Royal ship was in sight. With this anger in mind, one captain reported, “No ships are more stubborn and unwilling to give his Majesty’s

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<sup>42</sup> M. Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy and of the Merchant Shipping* (London: J. Miller and Son, 1896), 226. It is interesting to note that the modern day army has the same arrangement. The captain of a company is usually competent, with the lieutenant usually fresh out of officer school. The enlisted-man sergeant, usually a long-time veteran, has to help ‘train’ the young officer who is, in effect, his superior.

<sup>43</sup> K. R. Andrews, *Ships, Money, and Politics: Seafaring and Naval Enterprise in the Reign of Charles I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 76-8.



ships respect than our own merchants. They hate all gentlemen, especially such as serve his Majesty at sea.”<sup>44</sup> Owners remained reluctant to lend their ships on contract to the Crown as they could make more money trading or even by renting to a commercial enterprise. With the added risk of not knowing when the authorities would pay, most avoided the authorities’ visits like the plague.<sup>45</sup> This situation could not last and soon other countries, along with the traders, got into the act of recruiting England’s best sailors.

By 1632, the government could not keep their sailor pay competitive with the Dutch and the French, much less their own merchant fleet. One captain wrote that an “abundance of our [prime] seamen are flocking daily to Dover and other parts, with intent to get over to France or Holland to hire themselves, hearing of great wages offered there.”<sup>46</sup> He then recommended a proclamation sent out forbidding any ship to carry more than their usual complement of seamen, therefore to prevent men from hitching a ride to foreign ports to enter their labor market. To keep the men of the King’s ships satisfied, the Lords of the Admiralty even ordered the Mayor of Portsmouth to release a ship-keeper, all charges dropped, so he could resume his duties onboard, which included cleaning, victualing, and repairs.<sup>47</sup> Soon the government realized their losing battle with other actors in the ‘marketplace’ for the mariners’ services. In 1636, Sir Henry Palmer warned the Admiralty, “So long as open freedom is given to merchants of the choice of the ablest men, with the great enticement of so great wages, no terror of punishment or death will

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<sup>44</sup> K. R. Andrews, *Ships, Money, and Politics: Seafaring and Naval Enterprise in the Reign of Charles I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 78.

<sup>45</sup> K. R. Andrews, *Ships, Money, and Politics: Seafaring and Naval Enterprise in the Reign of Charles I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 79.

<sup>46</sup> John Bruce (editor), *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, of the Reign of Charles I. 1633-1634* (London: Longman, Green, 1863), 508.

<sup>47</sup> John Bruce (editor), *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, of the Reign of Charles I. 1633-1634* (London: Longman, Green, 1863), 510.

restrain mariners from abandoning his Majesty's service."<sup>48</sup> The punitive action of the late medieval government proved no match to the material enticement of the rising capitalist system. Palmer hints at wage controls as a way to keep some of the more able sailors available to the state. This tension between the desires of the medieval state for self-aggrandizement, represented by the Crown, and the capitalist desire for safe and secure access to markets, represented by the merchants, rose to a crescendo until resolved by the English Civil Wars.

As Parliament continued to push against the monarch, the King decided to implement a tax on municipalities that would provide financing for a fleet. Almost from the beginning, corruption abounded. Algernon Percy, the Earl of Northumberland and the Lord High Admiral, wrote to the King in 1636 about abuses in the Ship-Money fleet. He argued that some ships, so old and worn out, provided continuous and lucrative employment for ports by having them constantly repaired.<sup>49</sup> Second, those that did get repairs, the men did such a shoddy job that the cracked masts and leaky hulls made the vessels unworthy of sailing in rough seas. He also decried the greedy practice of purchasing six months of low-quality victuals at one time as the food would spoil within two months and make the rest of it wasted. Further, the paymaster, usually having a limited amount of funds and not pay all the mariners at once, reveled in his ability to select whom to pay, which bred corruption as bribery ruled the day and honest men left without wages.<sup>50</sup> The paymaster also collected two shillings as a 'fee' for assisting creditors in docking the seaman's pay. Finally, he derided the officer practice of loaning money or supplies

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<sup>48</sup> John Bruce (editor), *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, of the Reign of Charles I, 1635-1636* (London: Longmans, Green, 1866), 332.

<sup>49</sup> G. E. Manwaring (editor), *The Life and Works of Sir Henry Mainwaring* (London: Navy Records Society, 1920), 248.

<sup>50</sup> G. E. Manwaring (editor), *The Life and Works of Sir Henry Mainwaring* (London: Navy Records Society, 1920), 246.

to tars and then charging exorbitant interest.<sup>51</sup> Sir Henry Mainwaring, writing about the Earl's letter, makes note that the young Lord Admiral is "young and full of zeal for the King's service," perhaps indirectly noting the naiveté of the nobleman.<sup>52</sup> These types of practices, all to gain money, did not reflect well on the Christian ideal prevalent in the period. Any tar in a ship could have accurately predicted the King's response to the Lord Admiral's petition. Mainwaring writes the King and his council, with Northumberland present, recommended measures for remedying abuses and only agreed that the master of pay should not charge two shillings for docking the seamen's pay for the creditors.<sup>53</sup> This lack of redress for the deckhands further tipped them against the ruling feudal monarch when the time came for choosing sides.

Once Parliament fought openly against the King in 1642, they raised taxes considerably to outfit their own Navy. Since they received considerable political support, the Houses increased their money flow to the ships by seven to eight times the normal 'Ship Money' revenue the Crown received earlier.<sup>54</sup> Some might wonder at a contradiction here. How could people act so reluctantly to fund the King's wars yet pour money into the coffers for the Parliament's war? The merchants believed that once they brought the King to heel, they could steer national policy towards furthering their interests, including using the fleet to protect shipping and trading. To that end, they enthusiastically supported the New Navy. The civil war snapped the ever-rising tension between the medievalists and the capitalists and, through both Houses, England

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<sup>51</sup> G. E. Manwaring (editor), *The Life and Works of Sir Henry Mainwaring* (London: Navy Records Society, 1920), 246.

<sup>52</sup> G. E. Manwaring (editor), *The Life and Works of Sir Henry Mainwaring* (London: Navy Records Society, 1920), 246.

<sup>53</sup> G. E. Manwaring (editor), *The Life and Works of Sir Henry Mainwaring* (London: Navy Records Society, 1920), 251.

<sup>54</sup> Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea*, 424.

perceived a new way to fund the Navy.<sup>55</sup> Even with the monarch on the run, the seamen still missed some aspects of the Royal life. In a petition, they lamented the loss of a “settled form of divine worship, no communions, little or no preaching on board but by illiterate and mechanic persons... are bound in conscience to do something for the recovery of our own rights, and re-establishment of religion, according to the word of God.”<sup>56</sup> The tars preferred the prompt pay and better victuals but they also missed the attempts at religious inclusion the monarchy performed. In the bigger picture though, this governmental switch to a capitalist-focused regime highlighted that a crucial uptick in the competitive nature of the world powers had occurred and the English fought a Civil War in order to answer the call and thrive.

As the Age of Discovery broadened the horizons of the world and capitalism stepped into the fray to service the ever-increasing demands for the expensive and dangerous trans-oceanic trips, this crucial period of history shows the expiration of the old order and the strident assumption of power by the new system. The echoes of this transition remain with society today as some argue that governmental policy consists solely at the behest of the ruling merchants.<sup>57</sup> The costs to build and maintain such a fleet exceeded the revenue capabilities of Early Modern England. As the capitalist class rose in importance, their requests for protection turned into demands. The monarchy resisted protection duty as it appeared the merchants controlled policy, something any tradition-bound noble would reject out of hand. The King then continued to pursue war aims, playing the game of nations, while Parliament refused to pay for what they perceived as wasteful warring extravagance. The medieval tax system, unable to fund both

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<sup>55</sup> Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea*, 424.

<sup>56</sup> Granville Penn, *Memorials of the Professional Life and Times of Sir William Penn* (London: James Duncan, 1833), 271.

<sup>57</sup> See any work by Michael Parenti.

Parliament demands and the King's desires for the Navy simultaneously, broke down. After the English Civil Wars, a new era of funding by the people, where Kings heed their subjects' calls better, came into the world. The sailors, voting with their feet against the Royal Navy ships, proved an early warning sign of the medieval state's demise. They possessed the means to move to where the system functioned. The merchant fleet, and to a lesser extent the privateers, showed themselves a much more capable administration on the seas. Concepts like impressment, ship money, anti-corruption campaigns, all proved to consist of dying grasps by the flailing system. In the end, the chief business of the English people was business.<sup>58</sup>

Underlining all of these first-hand accounts, Foucault's theoretical framework of power argued that Britain, after Parliament's triumph over the King, in the early seventeenth and into the eighteenth century, relied on the government's protection of the right to exchange goods.<sup>59</sup> The officers and sailors of each ship worked together to project the power of the British economy into the world. A partnership, for a short period, developed between privateers and the authorities. For example, the Mayor of Exeter, in 1610, impressed men and ships for the "suppression of pirates, in recompense whereof they are permitted to keep for their own use the vessels and goods of such pirates as they shall seize."<sup>60</sup> This idea of power is "a relationship of force... [and] is not something that is given, exchanged, or taken back, that it is something that is exercised and that it exists only in action."<sup>61</sup> Despite the authorities issuing detailed instructions on how to act, sometimes the men on the actual edge of action and confrontation decided for

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<sup>58</sup> Calvin Coolidge, "The Press Under a Free Government" (Speech, Society of American Newspaper Editors, Washington, DC, January 17, 1925). His original quote, "The chief business of the American people is business."

<sup>59</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 13.

<sup>60</sup> Mary Anne Everett Green (editor), *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic: James I, 1611-18* (London: Institute of Historical Research, 1858), 177.

<sup>61</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 14-5.

themselves how to proceed. When the British traded with the Chinese in the 1700s, force relations was decidedly in favor of the Middle Kingdom. As the British grew in strength relative to China, their demands developed increasingly strident. Eventually, the merchants dragged London into a war to protect their right of opium trade. By utilizing their advancing ship and cannon technology and the detailed bookkeeping knowledge from companies like Lloyd's of London, the empire created "structures of power as global strategies that traverse and use local tactics of domination."<sup>62</sup> For example, one local tactic in China involved the steam-powered warship, which could go upstream and project force in the upper parts of a river that heretofore thought they were safe from a ship's guns.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, it is important to examine "how actual relations of subjugation manufacture subjects" for the country.<sup>64</sup> As the British people utilized ships and sailors to subjugate various far-flung lands, one can see "the various operators of domination support one another, relate to one another, at how they converge and reinforce one another in some cases, and negate or strive to annul one another in other cases."<sup>65</sup>

As England increased their naval presence around the globe, they gained technology and techniques from foreigners. They then refined and reproduced those pieces of expertise, and applied them to other technical and geographic areas to further gain, which produced more ideas, which they processed and distributed, thus continuing the cycle. The British utilization of market expansion and careful recordkeeping assisted them in analyzing and applying these lessons to other hinterlands. In all of these aspects of development, the mariner remained the centerpiece of this power projection system.

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<sup>62</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 45.

<sup>63</sup> Headrick, *The Tools of Empire*, 56.

<sup>64</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 37.

<sup>65</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 39.

After their defeat at the hands of the Dutch in 1652, the Rump Parliament passed additional disciplinary codes and granted court martial authority to the commander-in-chief, all in an effort to increase the power of captains to enforce normative behavior on the tars.<sup>66</sup> The authorities passed regulations that forced sailors into contracts and placed clear punishments for “running away.”<sup>67</sup> On ships, the Admiralty installed hammocks and claimed the innovation helped to preserve the men’s health. General well-being did improve but the ultimate motive behind the new addition involved adding more seamen in the vertical spaces of the hold, literally packing them up to the ceiling like sardines.<sup>68</sup> Clearly, the state, after witnessing their increased power from implementing disciplinary actions for the sailors’ own good, believed normalization and professionalization of behavior would lead to better results against other naval powers. This competition among state powers spurred the English into standardizing their ranks as much as possible to yield victories at sea. The authorities told people that these improvements helped everyone have a better and safer workspace and society.<sup>69</sup>

The government continued to use normative and disciplinary power against the vital mariners but also against the various colonized people, including slaves. Foucault argued that power is “essentially that which represses: nature, instincts, a class, or individuals.”<sup>70</sup> The East India Company established control over a portion of India by practicing repressive politics for “God’s glory and our comfort.”<sup>71</sup> The suppression of individuality and freedom on the ship

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<sup>66</sup> J. R. Powell, *Robert Blake: General at Sea* (New York: HarperCollins, 1972), 193.

<sup>67</sup> Historical Manuscripts Commission, *The Manuscripts of F. J. Savile Foljambe* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1897), 69.

<sup>68</sup> M. Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy and of the Merchant Shipping* (London: J. Miller and Son, 1896), 134.

<sup>69</sup> J. R. Powell, *Robert Blake: General at Sea* (New York: HarperCollins, 1972), 194.

<sup>70</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 15.

<sup>71</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 48.

transferred to the oppressed on shore, all for the benefit of the mother country. Since each command or directive held the unstated threat of violence against non-compliance, the British proved Foucault's statement that "politics is the continuation of war by other means," either on the ship or in a town.<sup>72</sup> To this end, he wrote, "law is born of real battles, victories, massacres, and conquests... in burning towns and ravaged fields."<sup>73</sup> Politics, trade, customs, mariner guidelines, inspections, all these regulations are just another form of war, backed up by implied violence, which showed that at the end of the day, all these imperial relations were based upon power. From the colonized and deckhand perspective, "law is not pacification, for beneath the law, war continues to rage in all the mechanisms of power... war is the motor behind institutions and order... peace is a coded war."<sup>74</sup> This idea of Biopower arose first during the shaping of the sailors' behavior to fit the aims of the merchant-class and then they extended this methodology to colonization. The idea that societies and races all competed with each other infused this mindset. The British viewed themselves as part of the "one true race, the race that holds power and is entitled to define the norm, and go against those who deviate from that norm."<sup>75</sup> This idea of race struggle permeated seventeenth century British society and in their relations with the subjugated; they practiced "a principle of exclusion and segregation... as a way of normalizing society."<sup>76</sup> The new idea became that "we have to defend society against all the biological threats posed by the other race, the subrace, the counterrace that we are, despite ourselves, bringing into existence."<sup>77</sup> By engaging in trade with all of these foreign cultures, the state sought to take and

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<sup>72</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 15.

<sup>73</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 50.

<sup>74</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 52.

<sup>75</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 59.

<sup>76</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 61.

<sup>77</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 60.



utilize worthy ideas while simultaneously resisting any influence by these lands and people. Sailors and other lower people of the empire see the appearance of “state racism, a racism that society will direct against itself, against its own elements; the internal racism of permanent purification... of social normalization.”<sup>78</sup> The tar, so influenced by interactions with distant ports, both helped and threatened the idea of ‘Britishness’ and these ambivalent thoughts towards them help explain how the government could so vilify and dehumanize the very men their society rested upon. The authorities liked the power and profitable aspects of the seasoned tars interactions with foreign people and cultures but simultaneously resented these same influences, which caused the sailor to deviate from the norm that society wished all men would conform. This type of repression worked against any who stood in the way of those private interests, which controlled public power. A British sailor or a foreign worker, they all had to conform to the notions of Biopower or discipline commenced upon them until they complied, for the good of British society.

The people and sailors subjugated by the British aristocracy did not go quietly; they continued to resist in myriad and minute ways. They created a skirmish line though “the whole society, continuously and permanently, and it is this battlefield that puts us all on one side or the other... no such thing as a neutral subject, we are all inevitably someone’s adversary.”<sup>79</sup> The natives, sailors, and authorities all armed themselves with various rights as seen from their perspective. Seamen exercised their liberties when they walked to pubs or brothels, openly mocked Christianity, or just strode away from the next expedition in the face of a captain’s stern order to sign on. The government, in response, claimed its power based on “family or race, the

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<sup>78</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 60.

<sup>79</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 51.

right of superiority or seniority, the right of triumphal invasions, or the right of recent or ancient occupations.”<sup>80</sup> All of these clashing entitlements produced a maelstrom of vitriolic anger in resistance and oppression. When the oppressed people spoke of their liberty, they spoke “the truth, [and] that truth is no longer the universal truth of the philosopher” but of the common person, living their lives as they see fit.<sup>81</sup> Any attempt to describe this conflict, by contemporary onlooker or distant historian, took on a “perspectival discourse” and saw issues from their own point of view. All the people involved in struggles used “a truth that can be deployed only from its combat position, from the perspective of the sought victory and ultimately of the survival of the speaking subject.”<sup>82</sup> Residing with a side in a conflict enabled the people to “interpret the truth, to denounce the illusions and errors that are being used, by your adversaries, to make you believe we are living in world in which order and peace have been restored.”<sup>83</sup> The authorities told the mariners that if they would only follow commands then life would improve for all, but the tars knew the officers spoke from their perspective alone. The creed these subjugated people lived was “the more I decenter myself, the better I can see the truth; the more I accentuate the relationship of force, and the harder I fight, the more effectively I can deploy the truth ahead of me to fight, survive, and win.”<sup>84</sup> Therefore, one can read about the sailor or colonized perspective and juxtapose their viewpoints against those of the capitalist or officer class. Each standpoint projects a view that supports their position, leaving it to the reader or historian to draw conclusions. As the government could force and harangue tars to behave, and write about how they refused to do their duty, the other side would fight all the more harder and defy all the

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<sup>80</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 52.

<sup>81</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 52.

<sup>82</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 51.

<sup>83</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 53.

<sup>84</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 53.

religious, civil, and moral aspects of the oppressing society. As the feudal system pressed harder on the men, they resisted mightily in any way they could, including discounting the dominant sect of Christianity. To read any one side as factual could cause an injustice against the other perspectives.

Along with the overseer class's attempts at controlling the narrative in the Early Modern period, they utilized the techniques of navigation and capitalism, which arose in Europe and England, respectively, to exert normative power over the ship's crew. This science, which has an "aspiration to power," invested much authority into the expensively trained naval officers, especially the captain.<sup>85</sup> The British Empire invested many rights, privileges, technical skills, and knowledge into their naval officers. The authorities trained only the officers in deep-sea navigation as a method of controlling the rest of the ship. For instance, if a mutiny occurred in the open ocean, only an officer could successfully guide the ship to a port.<sup>86</sup> This compartmentalization of knowledge insured some measure of influence over even very dismal situations. Likewise, the captain usually kept the destination of the ship a secret to discourage an overthrow. In this similar vein, the officers kept official and business contacts, including prices paid and expected, separate from the crew. Therefore, if a crew mutinied, they could only guess what the contract contained and, if the merchant discerned through their impersonation ruse, his best interests forced him to notify the authorities so they could arrest the mutineers and the trader could purchase the goods at a reduced discount. Restricting this knowledge left everyone but the

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<sup>85</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 9.

<sup>86</sup> Sir William Monson, *The Naval Tracts of Sir William Monson from 1630* (London: Navy Records Society, 1902), 199.

authority figures on the ship in the dark.<sup>87</sup> In this manner, the state and the capitalists successfully utilized exclusive knowledge as a powerful tool for insuring normalized and compliant behavior by all on the ship.

In opposition to these restrictions, the early seventeenth century sailors believed in the democratization of monarchical sovereignty into “rights” where all the citizens shared in collective rule. The state made sure that all these civil liberties remained “heavily ballasted by the mechanisms of disciplinary coercion.”<sup>88</sup> Once coercive constraints came into full force, sovereign power went into the instruments of the juridical apparatus. For the tars, they could only enforce their claims on a ship through the court system on land, sometimes months or years in the future. The officers exercised control between these two limits of power: the sailor and the rules of discipline.<sup>89</sup> Ship corrective action “will define not a code of law, but a code of normalization, and will necessarily refer to... the field of human sciences.”<sup>90</sup> The officers and mariners taught and enforced behavior not by written law, but by the way they thought a proper ship should operate based on not only the experience of the officers but also on critical knowledge from other ships’ experiences based on British data gathering techniques and analysis.<sup>91</sup> The seasoned men demonstrated that “power is exercised through both right and disciplines, that the techniques of discipline and discourses born of discipline are invading right, and that normalizing procedures are increasingly colonizing the procedures of law, which might

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<sup>87</sup> Sir William Monson, *The Naval Tracts of Sir William Monson from 1630* (London: Navy Records Society, 1902), 199.

<sup>88</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 37.

<sup>89</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 37.

<sup>90</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 38.

<sup>91</sup> Richard Braithwait, *Whimzies* (London: Garland Publishing, 1631), 45.

explain the overall workings of what I would call a ‘normalizing society.’”<sup>92</sup> Since the captain and officers did not have a juridical apparatus nearby, they became the “law” which meant they could enforce rules in any way they saw fit to promote the norm of the ship. They were the agents of the merchants and the Crown and used their knowledge and experience to shape the ship into a projection of power to accumulate wealth and project influence for England against other foreign countries. Perhaps even the older deckhands used these same methods to instruct the novice tars.

The power of the officers, backed by societal law and bourgeoisie rights, pressed down severely on the tars, yet there are numerous cases of mariners using the judicial system to strike back at abusing officers.<sup>93</sup> Ocean-going seamen, so strung out on the fringes of the empire, possessed an inherent disadvantage to the more organized officers and merchants, armed with bookkeeping knowledge and laws. Some sailors even kept diaries or wrote memoirs and attempted to “shift the balance, accentuate the dissymmetry” of life on board a ship.<sup>94</sup> Workers labored so far from the center of society, essentially were the first to get that far away, they saw the naked aggression of capitalism in all its unvarnished truth, away from polite company. Official reports would gloss over and ignore abuses.<sup>95</sup> Yet the tars witnessed the depths officers and capitalists would go in using “truth as essentially part of a relationship of force, of dissymmetry, decentering, combat, and war.”<sup>96</sup> The common people resisted the judicial

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<sup>92</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 39.

<sup>93</sup> Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 143.

<sup>94</sup> See especially Ned Ward, *The Wooden World Dissected: In the Character of a Ship of War* (London: J. Graham, 1795); Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 53.

<sup>95</sup> Richard Hawkins, *The Observations of Sir Richard Hawkins* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1622), 41.

<sup>96</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 53.

discourse of “pacified universality” and sometimes questioned or cynically ignored it.<sup>97</sup> Only by understanding a group’s use of truth as a weapon in waging war or resistance can a more accurate description of the battles occurring on ships and, later, in colonized areas proceed. To move toward an understanding of the complete picture requires “explaining things from below” and using “what is most confused, most obscure, most disorderly, and most subject to chance.”<sup>98</sup> Historians should not ignore the commoners’ diaries, scribbled notes, or whimsical lyrics in favor of government documents and transcripts. The principle of society interpretation rests in the “confusion of violence, passions, hatreds, rages, resentments, and bitterness; and it is the obscurity of contingencies and all the minor incidents that bring about defeats and ensure victories.”<sup>99</sup> This maelstrom of perspectives on merchant or naval ships, ports, or even society itself, requires keen discernment and wisdom, or the reader will believe the official discourse that most tars are lazy hedonists who only wish to drown their pathetic lives in beer and prostitutes, only able to work productively by the boot of his betters. Inquiring of this official discourse for overall truth is like asking, “The elliptical god of battles to explain the long days of order, labor, peace, and just; Fury is being asked to explain calm and order.”<sup>100</sup> Only by understanding all the groups’ perspectives, passions, and plans could one hope to understand the cauldron of dominance and resentment that took place on these remote edges of empire, the ship, and the ports. These conflicts came between many sides including capitalist and captain, captain and sailor, and even the ship’s crew versus native workers. In all these struggles, truth serves the passion and goals of each actor in the narrative. Finding the approximate truth requires careful

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<sup>97</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 53.

<sup>98</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 54.

<sup>99</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 54.

<sup>100</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 54.

analysis and judicious weighing of text, an almost impossible task, but one that historians engage in during their pursuits.

As these ships plied the seas and touched various aspects of the nascent British Empire, the best way to understand the power of the state is to look at these front edges, the extremes where they transferred force onto the subjugated, especially on warships.<sup>101</sup> From these various interactions, an “ascending analysis of power” would show how everything is “invested, colonized, used, inflected, transformed, displaced, extended, and so on by increasingly general mechanisms and forms of overall domination.”<sup>102</sup> The British learned from these encounters, generalized the concepts, and applied them elsewhere.<sup>103</sup> England’s capacity for bookkeeping and regulation enabled them to quickly consume outsider ideas, propagate them throughout the periphery, which enabled them to continue farther into expanding empire. The captain and admiral, all alone out on the fringe but invested with enormous latitude, possessed the “power of a Roman dictator in the fleet, and represented the sovereignty of the State there and to act and command in all things as if the State itself were there.”<sup>104</sup> Assisting them in this large endeavor of data analysis, British recordkeeping improved immensely in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. This new mechanism of power “applies primarily to bodies and what they do rather than to the land and what it produces... it made possible to extract time and labor, rather than commodities of wealth, from bodies.”<sup>105</sup> These accountants demanded explanations for sickness and delayed shipping. This kind of control derived from “constant surveillance” and a “closely

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<sup>101</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 55.

<sup>102</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 29.

<sup>103</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 32.

<sup>104</sup> Herman Theodore Colenbrander, “Bescheiden Uit Vreemde Archieven Omtrent Te Grootte Nederlandsche Zeeoorlogen 1652-1676,” *Rijks geschiedkundige* 18 (1919): 277. Sir George Downing letter, in English, to Arlington, 28 Jul 1665 concerning English interactions with Dutch ships and colonies.

<sup>105</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 33.

meshed grid of material coercions rather than the physical existence of the sovereign.”<sup>106</sup> Lloyd’s of London and Trinity House canvassed ports throughout with their agents, sending notes, information, and analysis to the home office, attempting to understand and profit from the situations.<sup>107</sup> The ships, the armies, the mariners, all had to accomplish the tasks the authorities, both private and public, demanded with minimum expenditure and maximum efficiency.<sup>108</sup> This observation and recordkeeping, also known as “disciplinary power” and perhaps the greatest invention of the British bourgeois, provided the “basic tool for the establishment of industrial capitalism and the corresponding type of society.”<sup>109</sup> As these techniques generated economic profit, they became “colonized and supported by global mechanisms and, finally, by the entire system of the State.”<sup>110</sup> The authorities sought a “set of mechanisms whereby delinquents are controlled, kept track of, punished, and reformed” and, eventually, they developed “actual instruments that form and accumulate a knowledge, the observational methods, the recording techniques, the investigative research procedures, the verification mechanisms... these delicate mechanisms of power cannot function unless knowledge, or rather knowledge apparatuses, are formed.”<sup>111</sup> It is no wonder then that the rise of the British Empire corresponds substantially with the well-deserved reputation of the English for their impeccable recordkeeping and accounting practices. The example of Lloyd’s of London and their profitable use of all their knowledge provided a shining case for utilization of normative control to corral this vital human resource.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 35.

<sup>107</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 57.

<sup>108</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 36.

<sup>109</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 36.

<sup>110</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 33.

<sup>111</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 33.

<sup>112</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 57.



Ironically, economic gain flowed out of the colonies under the guise of peace and order. These colonized people, even in relative calm, continued to battle in a myriad of ways. Using both direct and indirect means, they struggled to express their dissatisfaction with the prevailing masters. The British Empire used Biopower to not only regulate their own frontlines sailors but also to bend the native laborers into their vision of an orderly society where value and gain flows to the masters in England. Since the “rights” genie had escaped the lamp, proclaimed by Parliament during the Civil War in 1642, the authorities utilized discipline and normalization to control their workers, arguing that the rules and laws actually benefited the ruled. Their well-being, and the life of the dominion, rested on their obeying orders. These directives gave wealth and prestige to the privileged few in London. By marrying capitalist economic gain with the stirring concept of British nationalism and superiority, the oligarchs wielded Biopower to create the largest entity the world has ever seen.

As has been seen in history, hope rested on the smoldering ruins of the crumbling empire. After World War II, when the British gave up most of their overseas dominions, the colonized severely curtailed the upward flow of value. Ultimately, the lasting effects of imperialism reside in the cultural, political, and economic ties that continue to bind former colonies with their master. The continued friendship between Britain and India, and even the French coming to the aid of their former colony in Mali against terrorists, all show that these interactions, though often brutal, did allow the cultures to intermix. The frontline of these interactions, though almost forgotten today, are the British tars who kept the connections throughout the Dominion and whose friendly actions, no doubt, enabled congenial relations between former master and colony long after the ties that bind had severed. As noted in almost any serious historical paper, the British generated opinions and ideas on almost every corner of the world due to the enormous

size of their influence. This type of global cultural exchange, channeled through one of the most impressive metropolises in the world, London, gives hope to a lasting world peace. On a lighter note, judging from the myriad of high quality Indian restaurants in London today, the interactions between colony and colonizer yielded one good effect all can agree: a tasty dish of good Tandoori Chicken. Perhaps under the long lens of history, the British Empire, through her sailors, brought people together from all over the world and, perhaps, will yield more positive than negative effects for everyone.

**Chapter 5: “Men are Cheaper than Gold” – Even after the British Empire is established, the sailors lived daily to disprove this statement**

Prolonged separation from family and friends back home is a huge source of stress for people in isolated, confined environments. In a psychologically healthy group, about five percent of people experience clinically significant psychological symptoms such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse problems, sleep disorders and adjustment disorders relating to not getting along with crewmates. The Biosphere 2 group eventually sought and received psychological counseling via telephone.

– Mars 520-d mission simulation study report<sup>1</sup>

The tar during the late sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century represented a valuable resource for the government but eventually moved into the role of opposition to the floundering feudal system. The Crown’s failure to adequately victual and pay wages promptly opened the door for the more efficient and better-managed capitalist system to emerge as the sailor’s employer of choice. As the cost to outfit and maintain a fleet of warships severely taxed the authorities relying on traditional methods of funding, they demonstrated to the citizens and the world that England could not keep up with the rise of the French national state and silver-flushed Spain.<sup>2</sup> Only by developing and employing Biopower to humanly discipline and shape behavior could the merchants and, eventually, the state hope to compete with other national actors. The

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<sup>1</sup> Mathias Basner, “Mars 520-d Mission Simulation Reveals Protracted Crew Hypokinesia and Alterations of Sleep Duration and Timing,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110 (2013): 2. That a specially selected and trained group spending a year and a half alone to simulate life on a ship to Mars suffered such psychological problems they required counseling just to finish the mission, reveals much about sixteenth and seventeenth century sailing crews and their challenges. No wonder they sought the nearest pub upon landing.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel R. Gardiner, *History of England from the Accession of James I to the Outbreak of the Civil War, 1603-1642* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1886), 227.

mariners fought back against this repressive force with their feet, irreligious mouths, hedonistic lifestyles and some with their writing pens in hand.

The English society and the officers attempted to control and normalize the seamen and, through them, the colonized and other port relations. By enlarging and strengthening the codes of conduct, they sought to regulate how the ship should operate. Detailed accounts of punishments and listing out of crimes demonstrated the authority's desire for order. The captain and others held increasingly large latitudes to perform justice or issue their own directives. As the voyages in the late sixteenth century grew longer and more distant and the capitalists' investment grew larger, the fear of mutiny and subsequent loss of the vessel and goods loomed significantly in the minds of both merchant and Crown. By lending the majesty of a divine person to the captain, with the certainty of their actions and behavior that comes with always doing right, the capitalist, backed by the state, yearned for a tame, predictable, and fruitful voyage.<sup>3</sup> Yet their wishes for precision and order, while keeping all the profits and any spoils from war, backfired as the seamen used various methods to fight back against their efforts at control and domination.

The mariners resisted, using a hedonistic lifestyle and an irreligious attitude towards Christianity, while voting with their feet to move to the place that best served their interests. New sailors quickly learned the "seven liberal sciences of Swearing, drinking, thieving, whoreing, killing, cozening, and backbiting" from the older hands.<sup>4</sup> No doubt, they showed the wide-eyed recruit the best brothels and taverns to attend at every port. They pointed out which captains proved fair and which cheated as soon as they could. Talk of which merchant companies paid promptly and which underpaid echoed through conversations on ship and land. Techniques on

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<sup>3</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Ward, *The Wooden World*, 1.

how to avoid the press gang, how to collect overdue wages, and how to sleep during duty coursed through a typical night's watch onboard between bored men. Underlying it all though, discussions of officer hypocrisy and sinfulness permeated the wooden world and proved their superiors remained no better than the common seamen did. The history books center on London, the merchant companies, and the state but the action and decisions that produced profound consequences to everyone happened on many vessels in the hands of tars. These men exhibited substantial amounts of gumption and forthrightness in fighting for their share of life and their comfort, mirroring the nobles' and merchants own desires for fame and riches. The commoners brought this lust for life attitude to the foreground while high society usually hid it behind closed doors yet the close confines of the ship provided a unique space for the revelation of just how similar the two groups of men were. Despite all the struggles between tars and their society, Biopower eventually won the battle and the men and women of England enjoyed a reputation as an orderly and no-nonsense kind of people, highly valued for their business-minded spirit and detailed record keeping.

In due course at the beginning of it all, the hypocrisy of the established society juxtaposed against the sailor who enjoyed life to the fullest in an attempt to handle the stresses of this never-before-seen-deep-sea and lengthy voyages demonstrates differing tales of this early age of sail for the English. One story depicts the dashing officer rallying men onward to capture the prize or prevail against the raging storm, afterwards asking all to bow their heads as they thanked God for their deliverance. This same yarn shows the exasperated lieutenant, trudging from tavern to brothel, searching for the able but alcoholic tar and beseeching him to sign on for a voyage, for his own good, so he could attain some money for himself and perhaps his future. The other tale relates overbearing officers, usually hapless but mostly cruel, looking for their

own gain on the backs of sailors and slaves; all the while committing the same kinds of acts, he admonished the men for doing. The truth, as anyone looking back over so many centuries and relying on manuscripts and journals can detect, most likely resides somewhere in the middle but probably nearer to the cruel officer theme. The English society and their strict adherence to hierarchy and social mores translated to the sea, even with such closely confined spaces. As the commanders sought to distance themselves from the deckhands, either side could not help but witness the other fully, without the filter of society.<sup>5</sup> Where in sixteenth and seventeenth century England could aristocrats, serving onboard ships, mingle so closely with a person barely above the level of a beggar? Even those nobles leading an army could count on the victor capturing and ransoming them. Yet, this could not match the common fate of sinking that befell all at sea who lost a battle with elements or foe. This proximity, this relative intimateness, allowed the tars to see their ‘betters’ for who they really were, men just like them, with more affluence but certainly not more virtue. These mariners, most of them unknown, fought back with the tools they possessed: their feet, their mouths, their hands, and their loins. In finding their way to the best ships and employers, dismissing the religious edicts of their oppressors, and finding solace at the bottom of a cup or in the arms of a hired prostitute, these hardy men sought to carve a space in the world that they controlled, no matter what the authorities desired. These mariners, who provided the labor for the eventual rise of the largest Empire known to the world, exhibited agency and initiative in the face of often overwhelming normative power. They responded to Queen Elizabeth’s statement that ‘men are cheaper than gold’ with a resounding call that their

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<sup>5</sup> Vincent Patarino, “The Religious Shipboard Culture of Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century English Sailors,” in *The Social History of English Seamen, 1485-1649*, ed. Cheryl A. Fury (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 152.

lives were more expensive than gold and they practiced that creed at every port, trading their hard-earned money for fulfilment as they saw fit, demonstrating and practicing freedom to anyone willing to witness it.

This research project provides a seedbed for a further doctoral dissertation. A topic for additional consideration includes changing social attitudes from 1588 to 1642 toward the seamen. In view of the longer deep-sea trips, it remains possible that the increased harshness of the officers against the mariners resulted from desire for more discipline in far-flung places. Another possible consideration meriting further study includes examining the greater societal changes occurring in religion with the rise of groups like the Levellers, Quakers, Puritans, and Roundheads. The religious institutions popping up around the sailing quarters of London's east side most likely produced increased tension between the common people and their superiors.

Sources taken from newspapers, naval logbooks, enlistment records, trial records, pamphlets, and census records would yield evidence that is more concrete. This quantitative analysis would provide a sense of scale to the research and give the reader an understanding of the areas of England affected by these societal changes. One particular fruitful avenue of inquiry would relate to if society's increasing distaste for these adventuresome men represented these men fairly. Were they good people trying to make the best of their circumstances? Alternatively, were they completely unchurched, unschooled, and uncouth men who did not mind being unfairly dehumanized by their superiors and public authorities?

This thesis is malleable and further research and analysis could take it further. Narrowing the scope down to a shorter period or taking one aspect of society and tracing their changing views of the sailors over time could help to tighten the scope. Another important aspect could reside in shifting the period to later in the seventeenth century, which would open up more sailor

and government documents for perusal. In light of this additional research, the conclusion of this paper's thoughts could change and open up fresh new directions in the social history of maritime workers.



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#### Historical Notes

HO 42/33/53 - Folios 118-119. Letter from Paul Le Mesurier, Lord Mayor of London, telling of an alarming riot at the White Lion, Shoe Lane, Fleet Street, where recruits induced to enlist by crimps are believed to be concealed. The Lord Mayor asks for orders regarding the source of military assistance that he expects to need in keeping the peace.

HO 42/28/145 - Folios 381-382. Letter from Mr. Farquharson encouraging the Home Secretary to procure the issue of orders from the king to Lord Amherst,

Commander-in-Chief, approving Lieutenant Colonel Sir Robert Stewart's proposal for raising a regiment. Farquharson reassures the Home Secretary that Stewart and his officers would not need to resort to the use of crimps.

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