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Class, Authority and Gender on Early-Modern Indian Ocean Ships: European and Asian Comparisons

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Abstract

This article provides a preliminary comparison of class, authority and gender on European as compared with Asian ships in the Indian Ocean in the early modern period. The argument is that on European ships aspects of familiar landed class divisions were evident, enforced by draconian punishments. These broke down when the ship was in danger, or when booty was to be had. On Asian ships there was a much more relaxed atmosphere, with only mild punishments and in general a spirit of cooperation. It may be that the presence of women on many Asian ships contributed to this, for there were many more women on Asian ships than on European ones. Other possible explanations for what seems to be a strong contrast between European and Asian ships are the length and danger of the various voyages, or even the beginnings of 'modernity' in northern Europe as compared with 'Asia'.

Keywords: Indian Ocean; sailing ships; women at sea; Asian ships; Dutch and English trading companies; Portuguese ships; discipline at sea.

Narratives of early-modern voyages in the Indian Ocean divide easily into those by newly arrived Europeans, and those by local people. Further divisions could distinguish between European accounts by religious authorities, servants of the Portuguese state, employees of the trading companies, and private traders. While we have a comparative plethora of Europeans' stories of voyages from the early-modern period, there are also some indigenous accounts which enable comparison. Some of these are actually European descriptions of Asian ships, others are by Muslim travellers, most notably Ibn Battuta, and in a later period we even have Indians describing their travels on European ships. I will follow Edwards here, who says that 'my concern has been with writers reporting on real events at sea which they had participated in'.[1]

There is a wide range of literature, not just 'European' as compared with 'Asian'. Many firsthand accounts have a self-serving or an exemplary or didactic purpose, seen most clearly in times of danger. The Asian ones are all by Muslims, and with the exception of Ibn Majid none

1. P. Edwards, *The Story of the Voyage: Sea Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 220. References to the works cited in this section will be found in the bibliography.

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are sailors, though all sailed. They tend to be infused with Islamic piety – Allah is all present, all powerful, all merciful. Storms come up and they are saved by Allah, the weather is pleasant thanks to Allah (then they quote a verse from the Quran) but there are only glimpses of life on board, interaction. Qazvini is a little different, as his is a detailed didactic account of travel for the hajj; as one would expect, his account also is suffused with religiosity. With one exception, none of them give very much information on what happened on board, apart from vivid accounts of storms. My impression is that they are much more concerned with terrestrial affairs. Several of them (Sulaiman, Abd er Razzack, Ibn Battuta) have very valuable comments on land matters, and especially port cities, but say little about the sea; one gets the impression they find it hostile, or beyond comprehension, even though these three, and especially Ibn Battuta, travelled very extensively by sea. Nor do any give any sailing directions, except for Ibn Majid's famous navigational treatises.

The second category is European accounts of travel on Asian ships: there are some excellent ones here such as those by Fr. Manuel Godinho and Carletti, who is especially full and useful, albeit irretrievably ethnocentric. Then later there is the mirror image of this, that is Indian Muslims on European ships. The accounts by Dean Mahomet and Abu Taleb Khan may show the backdrop of growing British power in India.

Then there are the voluminous European accounts, of which I have only scratched the surface even after all these years. I have no access to Dutch work; Nigel Worden's paper in this volume reminds me yet again what a huge gap this is. Without going into too much detail, one could note especially the Hakluyt Society series, which continues to today. They include some translations of Portuguese and even Dutch material, though many of these are rather flawed; for example Linschoten and Gama. Boxer's two *Tragic Histories* stand as exemplary editions of Portuguese texts. There are also published diaries of particular voyages, many again in the Hakluyt series. One could add accounts by East India Company employees, and Portuguese correspondence, though most of these are land focussed. The travellers' account are often especially valuable for life on board, more so than are the log books of the sailors. Some of the latter are published, but many remain in MS in the India Office library.

Religion is suffused through many of these accounts.[2] There *may* be a Roman Catholic/Protestant difference here: possibly the Catholic ones show a bit more religiosity. Saint Francis Xavier is constantly invoked, and certainly the accounts by priests, like Lobo, are as one would expect very religious; but then secular accounts often are too, as the *Tragic Histories* show. It seems that on Catholic ships, and also Muslim ones, God responds directly to supplications, and grants specific requests; most obviously these involve not being wrecked. God responds to prayers to the Virgin, or the use of relics of St. Francis Xavier, and in the Muslim case, where of course relics are not used, prayer can be efficacious. The Protestant accounts seem to make God less instrumental. He is praised for his mercy, and excused for his punishments, but is not susceptible of being directly petitioned. I remain agnostic on the vital matter of which method, or which God, worked best.

2. For a fascinating account by Fr. Godinho of the rites employed by Muslims, Hindus and Catholics on a particular voyage see J. Correia-Afonso, ed., *Intrepid Itinerant: Manuel Godinho and his Journey from India to Portugal in 1663* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1990), 74–78.

In the body of this article I will sketch the roles of class and discipline on European ships, and then on Asian ones. A study of gender will follow, again comparing European and Asian examples. At the end I will put forward some tentative explanations for the very obvious differences.

As we look at the social space of an early-modern ship in the Indian Ocean, space itself is crucial. Greg Dening, in *Mr. Bligh's Bad Language*, suggests that what happened on the *Bounty* was directly related to the ship's spatial organisation. Indeed Dening in general notes: 'Much of my work concerns spaces, symbolic and real, and how they shape human behaviour.'[3] Doreen B. Massey has also written extensively on this.[4] Arrangements of space make important symbolic statements about social groupings and social relationships, or as Simmel put it in 1896: 'All social interactions could be characterized by their relative degree of proximity and distance among individuals and groups.' [5]

So far I do not have enough data to be able to recreate the spatial organisation of an early-modern ship, except for the obvious point that the elite had more space and better food, as one would expect. (Nigel Worden shows that Dutch scholarship is far advanced on this matter.) The early-modern ratio on European ships was roughly one sailor for four or five tons of carrying capacity.[6] When one adds in passengers, things could get very crowded. On VOC ships there was on average 180 to 250 on board, and this on ships only 40 or 50 metres long.[7] On the Portuguese naus bound for India some 600 people would be crammed together, on galleons perhaps 400. Most travelled in extreme discomfort. Even the elite in the superstructures in the stern were in narrow half decks, with only about a metre between ceiling and floor. As Disney says, life was 'extraordinarily cramped and uncomfortable'. [8] As Bernardim noted on a French ship in 1768, the crew, 'man in the raw', were 'lodged under the forecastle and between the decks, a dismal prison where you can see nothing'.[9] Jesuits left extensive accounts of how bad it was. However, the captain and pilot, and other senior sailing personnel, had cabins opening out to the poop deck, and so were much better off.[10] Similarly on VOC ships; where one lived revealed hierarchy very clearly. Those on board included the master, other officers such as mates and lieutenants, then petty officers, seafaring craftsmen like the sailmaker, the ship's clerk and the boatswain, and then the majority, the sailors, and on warships soldiers and marines. Captain and officers, and some petty officers, lived and worked in the poop at the stern. Seamen were forward, and soldiers on

3. G. Dening, 'Deep Times, Deep Spaces: Civilizing the Sea', in B. Klein and G. Mackenthun, eds, *Sea Changes: Historicizing the Ocean* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 21.
4. D.B. Massey*, Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) is just one example. See also of course H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).
5. G. Simmel, 'The Sociology of Space', www.csiss.org/classics/content/75, accessed 25 July 2008.
6. D. Kirby and M.-L. Hinkkanen, *The Baltic and North Seas* (London: Routledge, 2000), 189.
7. J.R. Bruijn and E.S. van Eyck van Heslinga, 'Mutiny: Rebellion on the Ships of the Dutch East India Company', *The Great Circle*, 4, l (1982), 1–3.
8. A.R. Disney, 'The World of Long-Distance Voyaging in the Seventeenth Century: The Lisbon-Goa Fleet of 1629 as a Case Study', in K.S. Mathew, ed., *Studies in Maritime History* (Pondicherry: University Press, 1990), 146; J.H. van Linschoten, *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies*, 2 vols (London: Hakluyt Society, 1885), I, 10.
9. J.-H. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Journey to Mauritius*, trans. and intro. by Jason Wilson (Oxford: Signal Books, 2002), 68, 75.
10. T.B. Duncan, 'Navigation between Portugal and Asia in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in C.K. Pullapilly *et al*, eds, *Asia and the West: Encounters and Exchanges from the Age of Explorations: Essays in Honor of Donald F. Lach* (Notre Dame: Cross Roads Books, 1986), 3–5.

lower decks. 'In short, there was a clear division; each group had its own space.'[11] This allocation of space then represents visibly social groupings and social relationships.

Apart from space and accommodation, food also reflected social status. Sometimes fresh food was never provided at all, and if it was it was soon finished and the crew had to survive on a very unhealthy diet of bread, oil, water, wine, vinegar and onions, with salt and salt meat. On the voyage of 1629 which Disney has studied, the biscuit was one year old when it was loaded on board in Lisbon, the dried fish was inedible and had to be thrown out, the wine was undrinkable, and water was in very short supply.[12] Taking one's own supply of fowl and animals on board was common among those who could afford it, and indeed this continued to be the case until the advent of refrigeration late in the nineteenth century. In the fleet of 1629 one of the captains had many chickens, numerous sheep, and even a cow. To supplement this he had supplies of dried fruits, almonds, preserves, wine, oil, sugared candies and cheeses. Life for officers and merchants could be quite social, with lots of drinking, eating and entertaining. When possible, officers would transfer to another ship in the fleet for dinner, and then have themselves rowed home quite drunk. The English fleet that carried ambassador Sir Thomas Roe to India was a convivial affair indeed, at least for the officers. When the weather was calm in the Atlantic they sent from one ship to another 'a live sheep, some silk strings for a viol, and a hundred oysters'. Later a lamb and a barrel of pickled oysters were exchanged. They also had themselves rowed from one ship to another for dinner: thus Keeling wrote in his log: 'My Lord came and dined with me at a fatt pigge.' Della Valle noted that in his fleet the captains spent a lot of time going from one ship to the other, sometimes becoming 'a little more merry than ordinary (because the Captain of the Dolphin dining with us that day, he had drunk pretty freely)'.[13] Drink seems to have been readily available, and much consumed, by the elite, but the following incident shows again a clear status and class differentiation. Captain Keeling was in Malaya, and the local king plied him with liquor: 'onlie his exceeding welcome constrained us all to exceed the boundes of temperance in drinking …' Yet the very next day, 'I sent for Dier and Burrough aboord to be ducked for their extreame drinke ashoare'.[14]

However, it seems that some of the elite realised this sort of discrimination was likely to arouse resentment among half-starved and poorly accommodated crews. Abbé Carré described how on an EIC ship he was invited to all the parties and festivities of the officers. The captains and principal officers 'regaled themselves in a splendid manner, but with so much propriety that I could not but admire the wisdom and decorum they displayed in their entertainments and feasts. They are careful not to let the crew hear or see what takes place in these gatherings. For that purpose they hang hatch-covers, carpets, or sails, across the part of the poop where the officers hold their entertainments, to cut it off from the rest of the vessel.'[15]

There was then a clear differentiation with space and food. The way in which these officers tried to disguise their privilege raises the central matter of class and discipline on board ships.

11. J.R.Bruijn, 'Seafarers in Early-Modern and Modern Times: Change and Continuity', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 17, 1 (2005), 2–3.
12. Disney, 'World of Long-Distance Voyaging'. Linschoten describes inadequate food, embezzlement by officers, foul water etc: *Voyage*, I, 13–15.
13. E. Grey, ed., *The Travels of Pietro della Valle in India*, 2 vols (London: Hakluyt Society, 1892), I, 4, 6.
14. M. Strachan and B. Penrose, ed., *The East India Journals of Captain William Keeling and Master Thomas Bonner, 1615–1617* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 35–6, 136, 137.
15. C.H. Fawcett, trans. and ed., *The Travels of Abbé Carré in India and the Middle East*, vol. III (London: Hakluyt Society, 1947), 685.

It seems that class divisions from land were transferred to the ship, though many claim that the cramped space meant they were concentrated, or magnified. For some the ship is a miniature geography, for others a total institution. Conrad wrote of 'the ship, a fragment detached from the earth'.[16] Tagore travelled extensively by sea, and perceptively wrote:

> It seems that the ship has torn off a slice of the domestic world as it sailed away from the shore. On land people have the chance of preserving distance between one another; but the space here is limited, people live in close proximity. And yet it is hard to know them. Everytime before boarding the ship this thought oppresses my mind – this distance of the nearness, this association without companionship.[17]

Foulke commented in similar terms, but noticed also class divisions.

> At sea all are compressed within a single, unchanging, society, and one traditionally and sensibly marked by a rigid hierarchy at that. It is often possible to choose a solitary life ashore, or at least to regulate contact with others, but at sea, the absolute isolation of the vessel makes adapting to the fixed society on board unavoidable.[18]

A related notion is of a ship as an example of a total institution: Moss writes that, 'Several historians comment that ships are what the sociologist Erving Goffman has defined as "total institutions", places such as asylums and prisons where inmates are completely enclosed and, within that enclosure, completely public'.[19]

Hierarchy was clearly revealed by the low opinion of the crew which was held by the officers and other observers. It was considered that for the crew 'cursing, swearing, whoring, debauchery and murder are the merest trifles'.[20] Another verdict on the common sailors of the VOC held that 'they behave like wild boars; they rob and steal, drink and go whoring so shamelessly that it seems to be no disgrace with them'. For this reason they must be ruled with a rod of iron, 'like untamed beasts'.[21]

Often the punishments were extreme. Marcus Rediker writes that violence underpinned '*all* of the main transatlantic institutions', but the situation in the Indian Ocean was not quite as dark.[22] On VOC ships mutiny, sodomy and murder were considered the most heinous. A murderer would be thrown overboard, often tied to the body of his victim. If a sailor pulled a knife, he was punished by having his hands pinned to the mast with the knife; he could only free himself

16. J. Conrad, *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (London: Dent, 1997), 22–23.
17. R. Tagore, *The Diary of a Westward Voyage*, trans I. Dutt (Bombay: Asian Publishing House, 1962), 12.
18. R. Foulke, 'Odysseus's Oar', in D. Finamore, ed., *Maritime History as World History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 190–191.
19. S. Moss, 'Class War and the Albatross: The Politics of Ships as Social Space and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, in B. Klein, ed., *Fictions of the Sea: Critical Perspectives on the Ocean in British Literature and Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 79–80.
20. C.R. Boxer, 'The Dutch East-Indiamen: Their Sailors, their Navigators, and Life on Board, 1602–1795', *Mariner's Mirror,* 49, 2 (1963), 98–102.
21. C.R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), 70.
22. M. Rediker, 'The Red Atlantic', in Klein and Mackenthun, eds, *Sea Changes*, 120.

by pulling the knife through his palm. Less serious offences received sentences of a diet of bread and water, or flogging, or fines.[23]

This may present an unduly harsh picture. On Bontekoe's VOC ship things were much more mild. On one occasion, 'our Domine fell to scuffling with one of the helpers, both were put in irons. The 16th being Easter Day they were both set free.' Once his ship was in great danger as it caught fire. Some of the crew and the landsman, the Merchant, got in the longboat and yawl and sailed off, leaving captain Bontekoe and the rest of the crew to their fate. Finally the ship blew up when the fire reached the gunpowder, but then the errant sailors came back and rescued Bontekoe. Amazingly, they were not punished for this desertion. The two small boats were far from land, and after a while some of the crew began to discuss the need for cannibalism: fortunately they reached land after 13 days.[24]

On English ships punishments were also usually harsh, though like Bontekoe some officers were more humane than others. Captain Keeling sailed for India in 1607–8. To keep the crew happy he had them perform theatricals. At Sierra Leone they did *Hamlet*, and, during a calm at sea, *Richard III*. Later, at Socotra, they did *Hamlet* again.[25] Yet on the same voyage on other occasions men were ducked, whipped, and put in irons.

It is curious to find that on Portuguese ships discipline was enforced in a much less draconian way. I say 'curious', for many authors note that those on board the great *naus* on the *Carréira* were often jail birds, beggars, and generally the lowest sectors of society. One would then assume that severe treatment would be needed to quell any recalcitrance, or indeed merely to teach them a modicum of sailing lore and practice. Yet it is revealing that, as just one specific example, the Portuguese used a much more humane version of keel-hauling than did the Northern Europeans. Classic keel-hauling involved tying the victim to a rope and dragging him under the bottom of the vessel from one side to the other. Even if the victim did not drown, he would be lacerated, probably fatally, by the barnacles on the ship's bottom. However the Portuguese version merely involved towing the offender behind the ship for a time, and then hauling him in. It could be that the Catholic clergy on Portuguese ships contributed to maintain discipline. They played a mediating role between officers and men, and often provided medical treatment and even food for the crews. Hence tension was dispersed.

Class solidarity was sometimes threatened by internal conflicts. Nigel Worden's article reveals this among the sailors and soldiers on the voyage he has studied. We will soon discuss the fragmentation of authority when danger threatened or booty was on offer, but even in 'normal' times Portuguese sailors at least worked to rule rather rigidly.[26] There were also divisions within the elite between people whose power was based on landed prestige, as compared with those with maritime knowledge. On Portuguese ships the former were dominant, at least in terms of status.

23. E.M. Jacobs, *In Pursuit of Pepper and Tea: The Story of the Dutch East India Company* (Amsterdam: Maritime Museum, 1991), 41. Also see C.R. Boxer, 'For Love of Gain', *Hemisphere*, 23, 3 (1979), 134. For Danish ships, very similar to Dutch, see J. Olafsson, *Memoirs of Jon Olafsson, Icelander and Traveller to India, 1622–25, With the Story of Mads Rasmussen, Chaplain on the Perlen 1623–26*, I. Barnes, ed. and trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6–17.
24. W. Ysbrantsz Bontekoe, *Memorable Description of the East Indian Voyage 1618–25*, trans. C.B. Bodde-Hodgkinson and P. Geyl (London: Routledge, 1929), 37–55.
25. Keeling and Bonner, *The East India Journals,* 'Introduction', 24–25.
26. Linschoten, *Voyage*, II, 232. See Abbé Carré, *Travels*, III, 679–684 for a long paean of praise for English crews. He goes on and on about the skill of the seamen, the cleanliness of the ships and the apprentice system where boys learnt their trade or seamanship.

At the top of the landsmen was the captain, a noble always, or a returning governor or viceroy, who had a whole retinue and mini court around them. Then there were the *fidalgos*, merchants, religious and wealthy passengers, all of whom were 'superior' to the master, the pilot, and all the other sailors. As one example of what this meant, on one occasion a noble girl fell overboard. The captain, a landsman, wanted to try to save her, but the pilot and master, seamen, said there was no chance of saving her, so the voyage should proceed. The land won, the ship put about and went back, but the girl drowned anyway. On the doomed VOC ship, the *Batavia*, there was intense personal antagonism between Francisco Pelsaert, who was the commander of the fleet, that is the VOC's representative, and the captain, Ariaen Jacobsz. These two had a history of antagonism already; and they also disputed areas of authority over who had the ultimate say. Readers will remember that in the opening scene of *The Tempest* Shakespeare shows similar land/sea divisions, on this occasion with the mariners treating the landsmen with contempt and scorn.

The account of the voyage of the VOC captain Bontekoe contains many examples of conflict between him and the Merchant, that is the landed person. On one occasion most of his crew were sick, so he was eager to find land and let them recuperate. He was responding to the pleas of the crew, for 'the men persisted and almost with clasped hands besought me to bring them on land, so that in the end I let my heart be softened and consented'. The merchant was still opposed to incurring such a delay, so Bontekoe defiantly said: 'Then I will take it on myself. I will bring them on land.'[27]

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Yet more often than not we find harmony within the elite on board European ships. Consensus was reached by means of quite formal consultative processes. Typically on Portuguese ships the elite would meet and decide on a course of action. Lobo was on a ship in dire straits, so a council of all the officers, more experienced seamen, the religious and some others were called together to decide what to do. The purser administered an oath on the Gospels, and then all agreed to make for Mozambique.[28] In 1559, another ship was in distress near the Cape of Good Hope. It was taking on water, so everyone, even the gentlemen, helped man the pumps 'with great care and assiduity in these tasks'. Finally, in extremis, they decided to lighten the ship by throwing the cargo overboard, but this was done only after getting 'the solemnly sworn advice of the ship's officers'. The ship was still in danger, so a council of 'the pilot, master, boatswain, assistant-pilot, and all the other ship's officers' decided to head for Natal and run the ship ashore. On these and other occasions decisions were reached by a process of consensus, and were written down and signed by all who had participated.[29] Most of the time it seems that the aim was to spread blame if anything went wrong, a familiar enough tactic in any large organisation.

The elite on other European ships behaved in a similar way. An English ship in 1673 met contrary winds off SE India, so,

> [t]he captains and chief mates [of the fleet], seeing that we had made very little progress in the twelve days since our departure, all met on Tuesday the 3rd in the commodore's ship for a Council, to discuss what

27. Bontekoe, *Memorable Description*, 28–29, 34, 98–99.
28. J. Lobo, *The Itinerary of Jerónimo Lobo*, trans. Donald M. Lockhart (London: Hakluyt Society, 1984), 315 f.n.
29. C.R. Boxer, *Further Selections from The Tragic History of the Sea, 1559–1565* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1968), 29–44.

should be done, as the winds kept on being changeable and against us. They resolved to approach the island of Ceylon….'[30]

The situation was similar on VOC ships. The regulations laid down that the captain was in charge of navigation, but in case of dispute the matter was settled by a council of the captain, two mates, the senior merchant and perhaps one other. On other occasions it seems there was no formal council, but rather the captain had to consider the 'sentiment' of the mates.[31]

Often those on board had their authority limited by landed influences. Portuguese masters had to follow precise sailing directions, and regulations about cargoes, which were laid down by officials in Goa and Portugal, and similarly on the ships of the Dutch and English trading companies strict control was attempted, at least, though not always successfully, by the directors of the companies. The difference, however, is that these Europeans were far away from their ostensible masters, and thus could act more independently than could those on Asian ships only a matter of days or weeks away from their masters.

The strict hierarchical order was sometimes subverted. Lammers makes a useful distinction between two sorts of acts of resistance. One is what he calls a 'promotion of interests movement', which usually takes the form of a work stoppage or strike. The other is more serious, being in his words a 'seizure of power movement', in other words a mutiny.[32] Indeed the word 'strike' comes from the sea; the first thing a rebellious crew would do was strike the sails to show they were in control. Disobedience on board ship was caused by several factors. Poor food and drink was a common complaint. But there are still some large gaps in our knowledge of events. For example, one would expect mutinies to be more common on the voyage out to the Indian Ocean, when the ships carried bullion, as compared with the return voyage when only goods were on board. We have no data yet to support or deny this, except to note that Duffy's voluminous study claims that he has never found an instance of a mutiny on a Portuguese ship. Similarly, it would be expected that the polyglot crews on these European ships would be less likely to combine against the officers, but again we do not yet have information bearing on this matter, nor indeed on mutinies in general in the Indian Ocean. We do know that it was foreigners who were most likely to mutiny on VOC ships. Bruijn and Heslinga have details on 250 VOC mutineers, and 80 per cent of those involved were not Dutch.[33]

Here are some examples of opposition and crews combining from ships in the Indian Ocean. When Francis Xavier was on his way to India in 1545, all the sailors on his ship wanted to go east of Madagascar and so straight to India. However, the soldiers on board, of whom typically there were a good number, refused, and they won out; the ship went west of the island and had a stopover in Mozambique.[34] Gama on his first voyage was several times confronted with vehement opposition to his actions from not just the elite but also the crews.[35]

English captains also sometimes faced crew opposition. Best's fleet fought with Portuguese ships off Surat, and then withdrew. Four of his men tried to desert to the Portuguese, but were

30. Abbé Carré, *Travels*, III, 685
31. Boxer, 'Dutch East-Indiamen', 87; Els Jacobs, *In Pursuit*, 38.
32. C.J. Lammers, 'Mutiny in Comparative Perspective', *International Review of Social History*, 48 (2003), 473–482.
33. Bruijn and Heslinga, 'Mutiny', 8.
34. G. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier: His Life, His Times*, vol. II, India (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1977), 8, 43 and fn.
35. Vasco da Gama, *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco da Gama* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1898), 58–64.

captured and brought back to the English ships. Best then called a meeting of all the men to decide whether to go back and fight the Portuguese, or stay where they were. Both the ships' companies wanted to continue the fight. They then asked for mercy for the deserters: 'both the companies was so importune, and did so earnestlie entreat for them, that att last he was content to give libertie unto thre of them, if we would be content to lett him hange William Perffey, the chief ringleader …', but finally Best gave in and freed all three, and then beer was served to all of them.[36] Best seems to have consulted very widely throughout his expedition. On one occasion when a decision had been reached, Best 'caused the purser to maik a writtinge tending to such effecctt, that they companye [that is the ship's company] migh assigne unto yt'.[37]

On two occasions order broke down completely: when the ship was in danger, and when booty was available. Rediker's theme, now worked to death, is conflict – seas are sites not only of man against nature, but more importantly of man against man. And this seems to apply to the Indian Ocean. We will present many examples of this absence of community presently, but we can start on a positive note with a few cases where all aboard, regardless of class or status, combined in the face of common danger: a recognition indeed that harmony was necessary.[38] It will be remembered that in the opening scene of the *Tempest* the sea is presented as the great social leveller, at least in times of crisis. There are a handful of accounts of all on board a ship, even gentry and women, helping to save ships in distress. Linschoten's ship was in distress near the Cape of Good Hope. In this crisis all helped to man the pumps and hold the rudder, 'not one excepted'.[39] On another occasion a Portuguese ship was taking lots of water. The former governor Francisco Barreto was on board, and he 'made people work at the pumps and bail out the water which was pouring in through the numerous leaks. The gentlemen on board likewise participated with great care and assiduity in these tasks, Francisco Barreto being the foremost.' In extremis they began to throw goods overboard, but this was done only after Barreto got 'the solemnly sworn advice of the ship's officers'.[40]

Contrary examples of extreme selfishness are all too common. There are many examples of a ship in a fleet refusing to assist another ship which was in danger. In 1598, a Dutch ship sailed right past another one which was in trouble 'without paying attention to their signals and even pretended not to see them'.[41] On another occasion, in 1662, a fleet left from Batavia. One of the ships got into trouble, but those on board were relieved when they sighted another VOC ship. 'We sent a signal and fired 5 or 6 shots. We were overcome with happiness as we thought that we would receive help. The ship was on course, but when they saw us in need they put up their sails and navigated with the wind and let us lie helpless.'[42] On another melancholy occasion a Portuguese ship was in danger of sinking, and sent a message to an accompanying ship that they needed help. The captain of this ship, a nobleman, was keen to help. However, 'Neither the pilot

36. Standish's account in Thomas Best, *The Voyage of Thomas Best to the East Indies, 1612–14* (London: Hakluyt, 1934), 126–127.
37. *Ibid*., 141.
38. I have in mind here Serres's notion of Necessary Harmony: M. Serres, *The Natural Contract*, trans. E. MacArthur and W. Paulson (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1995).
39. Linschoten, *Voyage*, II, 244.
40. Boxer, *Further Tragic,* 29–31.
41. S. Panyandee, *The Dutch Odyssey: Encounter with Mauritius* (Moka: Mahatma Gandhi Institute, 2002), 1, 78.
42. *Ibid.*

nor the master nor the other officers were willing to obey this order of the captain [to help]', so he had to give in and sail away, leaving his compatriots to their fate.[43]

Most often in moments of extreme danger neither existing class and hierarchical divisions, nor the exhortations of the religion, could prevent a Hobbesian situation of each man for himself. Russell-Wood, in a chapter revealingly titled 'Men under Stress', opens his discussion of conditions on board ship by noting

> the more controversial topic of the extent to which the social environment aboard replicated that ashore, diverged from the terrestrial model in detail rather than substance, or provided the matrix for the creation of a sub-culture. Part of the answer to the last question may lie in the phenomenon of shipwreck and its aftermath which may reveal the preservation or disintegration of the traditional social structure once institutional restraints had become attenuated or absent.[44]

Australian and Dutch readers will be familiar with the morbid events following the wreck of the *Batavia* in 1629 off the Western Australian coast. The marooned crew engaged in, or suffered, an orgy of rape and murder.[45]

Portuguese accounts often leave an impression of a total breakdown in times of trouble. Duffy censoriously claimed that of the twelve shipwrecks he studied, in half of them the elite set off in the lifeboats and left the common folk to drown.[46] He wrote that most of the tales of shipwrecks do not show the Portuguese as heroes. For example, in 1552, the *São João* was wrecked off the South-East African coast. Manuel de Sousa Sepúlveda was on board, and most Portuguese accounts treat him as a hero. Duffy vehemently disagreed.[47]

One account of a shipwreck leaves an impression of complete anarchy, at least for a time, until a priest intervened. This interesting account may serve to modify Duffy's criticisms, for the disorder was finally quelled and cooperation restored. The ship 'had hardly struck before the seamen were pillaging chests, robbing cabins, and tying up bundles, bales, fardles and packages. And these were all taken ashore.' A meeting was called to decide what to do. Present were the captain, Father, pilot, master 'together with some of the most prudent and sensible persons, in order to take council as to what should be done for the good of all. This meeting started a muttering and excitement among the common people.' Harmony and cooperation were restored after Father Manuel Álvares gave a long speech urging unity. They all agreed to this and swore loyalty to the captain. Then they salvaged more goods from the ship. 'Everything thus recovered was placed in a heap, while everyone worked equally hard irrespective of rank and in spite of the scorching heat, which burnt their bones.'[48]

On one occasion a life boat was launched from a sinking Portuguese ship. It was over laden, so the weaker passengers were unceremoniously heaved over the side to drown.[49] Goods also

43. Boxer, *Further Tragic*, 37.
44. A.J.R. Russell-Wood, 'Men under Stress: The Social Environment of the Carréira da India, 1550–1750', *II Seminário Internacional de História Indo-Portuguesa*, Actas (Lisbon, Centro do Estudos de História e Cartografia Antiga, 1985), 21.
45. M. Dash, *Batavia's Graveyard: The True Story of the Mad Heretic who Led History's Bloodiest Mutiny* (London: Widenfeld & Nicolson, 2002); M. Sturma, 'Mutiny and Narrative: Francisco Pelsaert's Journals and the Wreck of the Batavia', *The Great Circle*, 24, 1 (2002), 14–24. There is even a controversial opera, 'Batavia'.
46. J. Duffy, *Shipwreck and Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 26–36
47. *Ibid*., 123–124, 126–129.
48. Boxer, *Further Tragic,* 72–76.
49. *Ibid.,* 57–65.

often had to be sacrificed to lighten a ship in danger, but Linschoten noted that on these occasions when goods were to be jettisoned in a storm it was the poor swabbers' chests which went over first, as theirs were stowed on hatches and came to hand first, and they were there because they could not afford to pay a porter to stow their chests in better places.[50] In such situations there often was conflict over whose goods were to go overboard. Another ship in grave danger needed to be lightened by throwing the cargo over the side. There was uproar over whose goods were to be sacrificed, the crew came to blows with cutlasses, and the captain finally had to put many of them in irons. This account is from the travels of Pyrard de Laval, and earlier, on a French ship, he had an even worse experience. The ship was in imminent danger of sinking on an atoll near the equator.

> I could not sufficiently wonder that, in the midst of our misery, many of the sailors and mariners ceased not to drink and eat, and to consume the ship's victuals even beyond the necessities of nature, saying to the others of us who remonstrated, that we were all as good as lost, and that they preferred to die in that fashion. Then they swore and fought, and some broke open the chests of the others whom they saw at their prayers (having ceased to think more of the things of this world), and no longer acknowledged their captain, making no more account of him than of their comrades, and saying that, as the voyage was at an end, they were no longer bound to obey him.[51]

A Dutch example again confirms a complete lack of cooperation in time of danger. A ship had to be abandoned. The sloop was put in the water first, but it 'rowed from the ship in order to prevent others from getting in'. They put 120 men in another boat, which left just before the ship sank; the 40 men left on it drowned. The boat being overcrowded, they finally heaved four men overboard

> believing that God would approve of it, we threw four men overboard including a black man from Ambon. He managed to swim back and catch hold of the boat but he eventually let go, drifted away, and drowned with the other three. [52]

The officers kept on demanding that at least 40 more be sent over the side to drown, but the crew refused. Finally just one man was heaved out, joining those who died from drinking sea water.

In 1609, there was confusion and looting as an EIC ship sank. The captain noted that 'there would be a mutinie (as commonly there is att such times)'. Some men were not ashamed to try to profit from danger. Tavernier in 1648 was on a ship in trouble off the west coast of India. Two men from Hamburg offered to save him, 'but if God permitted us by His grace to reach the land I must reward them for their trouble'.[53] Finally, we may note an amusing, and then melancholy, event in 1654. An English ship was severely damaged in an encounter with a Dutch fleet. The English captain asked for and got quarter, and its carpenters tried to repair the holes in the ship, the *Endeavour*. However the sailors on board went below to drink the Shiraz wine which was in the hold, and the carpenters joined them. The Dutch then boarded the ship, went below and drank with the English. Then the ship sank and all on board drowned.[54]

50. Linschoten, *Voyage*, II, 233 and 242, an example of exactly this on his return voyage in 1589.
51. François Pyrard de Laval, *The Voyage of François Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies*, 2 vols (London: Hakluyt Society, 1888), I, 292, 54–55.
52. Panyandee, *Dutch Odyssey*, 78–81.
53. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India*, 2 vols, trans. V. Ball, ed. W. Crooke (New Delhi: Manohar, 1977), II, 243.
54. *Ibid*, I, 251–252.

We are seeing here a breakdown in social control, a weakening of the usual constraints based on class and enforced by rigorous discipline. It is not a matter of seeing these early-modern seamen as particularly lawless, but rather that in extremely stressful situations they often tried to overthrow hierarchy in order to save themselves: necessary harmony was absent. This also occurred when booty was to be had. These abused and ill-paid men often seized the chance to grab what they could. In a rational world it could be argued that economic motives would produce harmony, for conflict threatens trade and booty. Yet in fact when we investigate what happened when prizes were taken we find quite the reverse: most often it was every man for himself. Crews were always eager to seize another ship, even if it was not really an enemy. Pyrard was on a Portuguese galiot as a prisoner, on their way to Goa. However, 'we had the misfortune to meet a large merchant vessel of Malabar. Our galiot was anxious to board her (they are always anxious to be the first on board, as well for the profit as for the honour).'[55] Another incident reveals very clearly how things worked. A ship trading outside the Portuguese system was caught. The crew offered to surrender if the lives of those on board were spared. The Portuguese captain agreed to this, but the Portuguese sailors then mutinied. They preferred to board a hostile ship and loot it, for in the ensuing confusion there was much more chance of picking up valuable booty. Once a ship was taken and the most obvious treasures taken out by the officers, the crews claimed the right to 'rummage' it and keep whatever hidden treasures they happened to find.[56]

We have many other examples. Lancaster's fleet took a very rich Portuguese ship in the Bay of Bengal in 1592: 'After that the mariners had disorderly pilled this rich shippe, the captaine, because they would not follow his commandment to vnlade those excellent wines into the Edward, abandoned her and let her driue at sea, taking out of her the choisest things that she had.' The wine was 'three hundred buts of Canarie wine and Nipar wine, which is made of the palme trees, and rasin wine, which is also very strong …'.[57] Another account provides more, and interesting, detail. The Portuguese ship was a large one, of 900 tons capacity, and had on board 600 people. The English went to some pains not to sink it. Lancaster had all the chief men of the prize taken on board his ship,

> and onely placed but foure of our men aboord the prize: for feare of rifling and pillaging the good things that were within her; and those foure suffered none other to come aboord. And their charge was, if anything should be missing to answer the same out of their wages and shares: for when the shippe was unladen the boatswaine and the mariners of the same [ie. The Portuguese] shippe did wholly vnlade her, and none of ours came within her to doe any labour. Onely they receiued the goods into their boates and carried them aboord such shippes as the generall [Lancaster] appointed them to doe: so that by this order there was neither rifling, theeuing, pillaging, or spoiling, which otherwise would hardly haue been auoyded in such businesse as this. … The generall would neuer goe aboord to see her, and his reason was, to take away suspicion, both from the mariners that were there and the merchants that were at London, least they might charge or suspect him for any dishonest dealing by helping himselfe thereby.[58]

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55. Pyrard, *Voyage*, I, 441–442.
56. Rummage here means searching for booty, that is ransacking. See, for example, IOP/MAR/B/313M, under 27 March 1755 and 26 July 1756.
57. Barker's account in J. Lancaster, *The Voyages of Sir James Lancaster to Brazil and the East Indies 1591–1603* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1940), 14.
58. *Ibid*., 92–93.

We now turn to Asian ships, and follow roughly the same order as we have for European ships. We will sketch command structures, then conduct in times of danger, and finally introduce gender, where there is again a clear contrast. There is a distinction to be made between, on the one hand, the huge Mughal ships bound from Surat for the Red Sea and the vast Chinese ships trading from Malabar to China, and the many humble coasting craft of the Indian Ocean. On Ibn Battuta's Chinese ship the 'owner's factor on board ship is like a great amir. When he goes on shore he is preceded by archers and Abyssinians with javelins, swords, drums, bugles and trumpets.'[59] On Indian ships the authority of the *nakhuda* over both passengers and crew was supreme once the ship set off. 'It was his 'awesome dignity' and stern intervention which could preserve peace on the ship'. 'Each nakhuda was a little god on his own ship and displayed the waywardness of immortals.' 'He lived and behaved like a minor prince.'[60] However, on some of the large Asian ships based at Surat the authority of even the *nakhuda* or the *sarang* was subject to the wishes of the land-based owners, just as we noted for European captains also. Early in the eighteenth century the Surat magnate Abdul Ghafar had 17 ships, and their *nakhudas* were either his relations or merchants connected to him; they were under his very strict control concerning trade and sailing directions.[61] So also the *nakhudas* on the great Mughal *hajj* ships, some of whom were in fact imperial *mansabdars*, and so ultimately responsible to the Mughal court.

On these great *hajj* ships the elite lived very well indeed, precisely mirroring the behaviour of European elites. We noted Europeans entertaining each other and having rather alcoholic dinner parties; the elite on the greatest of the local Indian Ocean ships in the early-modern period abstained from alcohol but otherwise did much the same. In 1701 some Dutch ships, in order to ward off pirates, were escorting Mughal ships bound for the Red Sea. The *nakhuda* of one of the Mughal ships sent to a Dutch ship

> some fish caught by his boat, and asked whether the Dutch officers would honour him with a visit. The invitation was, of course, accepted. On a fine morning, probably April 22, the Dutchmen appeared on board the *Fateh Shahi* and were most hospitably received. Hajji Fazal [the nakhuda] took Dirck Clercg by the hand and led him into his own cabin, where everybody was seated and served with coffee and numerous kinds of Persian fruits. As the company settled down to the repast, they were entertained by musicians playing Moorish instruments.[62]

These great ships were sailing in a sea where the vast majority of other ships were humble craft indeed. Some of these, about whom we know little, were all Asian, others had some Europeans on board. While crews on the Europe-Asia voyage were mostly Europeans, on Indian Ocean voyages the vast majority of the crews were Asian, usually Muslim. Jean Aubin analysed a log book of a voyage from Goa to Hurmuz in 1520. The ship was owned by a Portuguese, but the crew of 128 were almost entirely Muslims, including even the vital pilot and gunners.[63] European

59. I. Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta,* 4 vols, trans. H.A.R. Gibb (Cambridge: Hakluyt, 1958–94), IV, 813–814.
60. A. Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500–1800* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 370–371. See also Abbé Carré for the authoritarian *nakhuda* on his ship bound for the gulf: *Travels*, III, 795.
61. A. Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat c. 1700–1750* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1994, reprint of 1979 edition), 13.
62. Das Gupta, *World*, 373.
63. J. Aubin, 'Un voyage de Goa a Ormuz en 1520', *Modern Asian Studies*, 22, 3 (1988), 422. For Canarin sailors on Portuguese ships, a surprising number of them, see A.P. Fernandes, 'Goans in Portuguese Armadas during Medieval Times', in C. Borges and M. Pearson, eds, *Metahistory: History Questioning History* (Lisbon: Nova Vega, 2007), 107–114.

ships with Asian crews seem to have differed markedly from those with all European crews. Carletti's account is very revealing, for it seems to show a rather different hierarchy. The ship he travelled on was crewed by

> Arab, Indian, Turkish, and Bengali sailors, who gladly serve for so much per month, taking care of their own expenses under the rule of their head man, who commands them and whom they call their saranghi [sarang], and who also belongs to one of the aforesaid nations. They make their understandings with him, recognize and obey him, so that even the Portuguese captain, the master and pilot of the ship, is commanded by this saranghi.[64]

G.A. Nadri's work on the Dutch in Gujarat shows the role of *sarangs* and *tindals* in recruiting crews for VOC ships. We can assume they also played a decisive role when the ships were at sea. On the Malabar 'pirate' ships there was even more democracy, this of course lending weight to the common notion that pirate ships were much more egalitarian than other ships. Certainly what Pyrard found shows a pronounced discontinuity as compared with other Asian ships, let alone the vast gulf between this and European ships. 'While at sea they are no respecters of persons further than this: they choose a chief when they set sail; when they return the chief is so no longer, and has no more power.'[65]

Jan Qaisar has given us by far the best account of a humble Indian Ocean ship. On this pilgrim ship a variety of food was brought on board. Common items were rice, ghee, dal, salt fish and butter, also smoked fish, breads, fruits and so on. Some better off people took goats and fowls on board, which were slaughtered as needed. Eggs were preserved by being kept in finely ground salt. Passengers had a choice of traveling either on deck, or in a cabin, but in either case they had to provide their own food. There is no mention of liquids like coffee, and nor of course of wine, but Qazvini does recommend tobacco smoking. Water was provided for all, stored in big cisterns, but the wealthy brought their own too. Being a Muslim ship, this was not a matter of Hindu pollution problems but simply of accessibility and purity. Indian ships had big tanks near the mast, and drew water out of it just like from a well. But passengers were advised in addition to take their own water. If they had to use the ship's water they could add lemon to make it more drinkable. If all the water ran out, more could be distilled from sea water. However, on most Asian voyages the land was always close, and the ship could simply put in and collect more water and food. Life was quite pleasant on board. People studied, and held discussions on devotional and didactic matters. There were poetry recitals and music sessions, while some just relaxed in their harems, or gambled.[66]

Ibn Battuta sailed on a huge Chinese ship which had a complement of 1 000 men. He wrote admiringly 'and it has cabins, suites and salons for merchants; a set of rooms has several rooms and a latrine; it can be locked by its occupant …'.[67] A few decades after Ibn Battuta's travels, the great expeditions under Zheng He set out for the Indian Ocean. Thousands of men traveled on these huge armadas, and the authorities made strenuous efforts to look after them. Food and

64. F. Carletti, *My Voyage Around the World*, trans Herbert Weinstock (London: Methuen, 1965), 185–186. He found the presence of women on board to be 'no less indecent than filthy and unseemly'.
65. Pyrard, *Voyage*, I, 44.
66. A. Jan Qaisar, 'From Port to Port: Life on Indian Ships in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in A. Das Gupta and M.N. Pearson, eds, *India and the Indian Ocean, 1500–1800* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1987), 331–349.
67. Ibn Battuta, *Travels*, IV, 813–814.

water was given out and one medical attendant was provided per 150 men: but even so mortality was high.[68]

Discipline was exercised rather leniently. Serjeant's study showed that the *nakhuda* dealt with disputes and offences, such as fighting, theft, or troublesome passengers. Anyone found guilty would be confined to the place where bilge water is collected. Alternatively, a crew member could be beaten, with each member of the crew giving him one lash, or fined, or even dismissed.[69]

What happened when an Asian ship was in danger? Jan Qaisar wrote that 'I have so far not found any instances of a crew mutinying on an Indian ship …',[70] and generally his important chapter makes no mention of discord or violence on board a ship bound for the Red Sea from Surat. Das Gupta's many studies of India's maritime history make no mention of mutiny or even much in the way of disorder. Sulaiman's extended account of his voyage again gives no hint of discord. Rather what Ibn Battuta found seems to have been the norm, a situation of equality, which seems to reflect nicely Islamic theory on the equal merit of all believers. In 1329 he was on a small ship near Oman.

> My food during those days on that ship was dried dates and fish. Every morning and evening [the sailors] used to catch fish … They used to cut them in pieces, broil them, and give every person on the ship a portion, showing no preference to anyone over another, not even to the master of the vessel nor to any other, and they would eat them with dried dates. I had with me some bread and biscuit … and when these were exhausted I had to live on those fish with the rest of them.[71]

Even in times of extreme peril it seems that people cooperated. An account from Ibn Battuta is revealing, and may be contrasted with the European accounts, especially the Portuguese ones, which we noted earlier. He was off the Coromandel coast when his ship went aground. He, his slave girls, and the crew all cooperated for the common good. One of his slave girls said she was a good swimmer, so didn't need a place on a life raft.[72] Even the acerbic Dr John Fryer, usually extremely ethnocentric, had good things to say. He wrote that

> the lascars, or seamen of the country … they are a shame to our Sailors, who can hardly ever work without horrid Oaths and hideous Cursing and Imprecations: and these Moormen, on the Contrary, never let their Hands do any Labour, but that they sing a Psalm, or Prayer, and conclude at every joint Application to it, Allah, Allah, invoking the name of God.[73]

When a ship was in danger they would altruistically throw their goods overboard to lighten the ship, without the class distinctions we noted on board European ships. Fa Hsien's account of a ship in a storm from the fifth century CE says that the 'merchants were terrified, for death was close at hand; and fearing that the vessel would fill, they promptly took what bulky goods there were and threw them into the sea'.[74] So also on a Muslim ship in similar danger about a millennium later.

68. Ma Huan, *The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores*, trans. J.V.G. Mills (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1970), 31–32.
69. R.B. Serjeant, 'Maritime Customary Law off the Arabian coasts', in M. Mollat, ed., *Societes et companies* (Paris: SEVPEN, 1970)..
70 Qaisar, 'From Port to Port', 345.
71. Ibn Battuta, *Travels*, III, 393.
72. *Ibid*., IV, 857.
73. Quoted in Qaisar, 'From Port to Port', 346.
74. P. Wheatley, *The Golden Khersonese* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1961), 38.

The different grades of passengers who inhabited this floating house threw out upon the waves riches of great value, and, after the manner of the Sufis, voluntarily stripped themselves of their worldly goods. Who could give a thought to the jeopardy in which their money and their stuffs were placed, when life itself, which is so dear to man, was in danger?[75]

The Geniza documents show that when a ship was in danger, or threatened by a pirate, goods were thrown overboard, but, by both Muslim and Jewish law, all owners of cargo on board a ship shared in the losses of any particular merchant.[76]

Sidi Ali Reis's ship was caught in a whirlpool off the Gujarat coast in 1554. It seems however that order was preserved, in strong contrast with similar occasions involving Europeans. The rowers left their seats, the crew took off their clothes and took leave of each other. Sidi also stripped entirely and gave his slaves their liberty and vowed 100 florins to the poor of Mecca, but then the ship was saved. More generally, Serjeant notes that if there was a storm after a set period of time all the sailors and the *nakhuda* may agree to jettison cargo.[77]

Even when booty was seized it seems that good order was maintained. Pyrard commented generally: 'It is a thing worthy of admiration how these people, whether at sea or in their towns, although they have no masters, nevertheless agree so well together that no dispute, quarrel, or discord arises among them.' If a Malabar 'pirate' ship made a prize, 'before coming ashore, they search every man on board and the whole ship. The captain and chief men lay hands on everything, and account conscientiously to the owner of the galiot or pados'.[78]

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Recent discussions claim that women are much more important in maritime spaces than has been generally recognised. Klein and Mackenthun quote the authors of the book *Iron Men, Wooden Women*, as saying 'gender is a fundamental component of seafaring', and its inclusion in studies of oceans and voyagers 'changes our view of the history and culture of seafaring as a whole'.[79] As one example of the sorts of reorientations we may need to make, Vanessa Smith provides a modulated discussion of women cross-dressing and thus serving on board ship. Some of the studies she quotes claim it was very common in early-modern navies and armies.[80]

Few women or children travelled to the Indian Ocean on European ships. This may run contrary to my claims above that shipboard society, while more concentrated, essentially mimicked and carried to sea terrestrial society. One could note that some men on land also did without women; men working away for long periods, in prison, or soldiers. Yet these men still had access to women, even if not their legal partners. Thus on European ships the relative absence of women does seem to differentiate the social space of the ship from that of the land.

There were specific reasons for the absence of women, and these were underlain by a pronounced misogyny among sailors. Women were seen as bad luck, and fickle creatures in the extreme. Bontekeo wrote of his troublesome crew in Madagascar that 'they had too much traffic

75. Abd er Razzack, 'Narrative of the Journey of Abd-er-Razzak', in R.H. Major, ed., *India in the Fifteenth Century* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1857), 46.
76. S.D. Goitein and M.A. Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza ('India Book')* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 163.
77. Serjeant, 'Maritime Customary Law', 205.
78. Pyrard, *Travels*, I, 447, 450.
79. Klein and Mackenthun, *Sea Changes*, 4.
80. See V. Smith, 'Costume Changes: Passing at Sea and on the Beach', in *Sea Changes*, 41.

with the women, who with their seeming fair promises had drawn their hearts to stay with them, for women are mighty instruments to ensnare men, whereof the examples are unnecessary to recall. Think only of Samson, David, and Solomon.'[81] Some of the French Huguenots on Rodrigues thought 'it was a strange resolution to submit oneself voluntarily to an unending servitude … this precise slogan of married persons will remain true: for one pleasure, a thousand pains'.[82]

Apart from the hazards of the voyage and an underlying misogyny, there were three major discouragements to women travelling to India. First, the Portuguese state authorities were opposed. Second, this opposition was enforced by the religious. They tried to stop women from undertaking this long and dangerous voyage, yet even so many women of 'suspicious' character got on board somehow. Once found, the priests encouraged the captain to send them ashore. In 1555 a woman of 'bad repute' was discovered on board, and was kept locked up in a special chamber for the whole voyage to Goa.[83] Third, there are strong hints that ordinary seamen believed that women on board brought bad luck. After one wreck some of the seamen complained, 'saying that we should kill the women and children and make our way along the land, and uttering a thousand other similar invectives against the women as also against those who had allowed them to embark in Portugal'.[84]

Accounts of the famous wreck of the VOC ship the *Batavia* off the western Australian coast also have a *cherchez la femme* element. There was discord between the VOC (landsman) representative and the captain of the ship, respectively Francisco Pelsaert and Ariaen Jacobsz. The presence of a young and apparently attractive young married woman on board also caused, it seems, much competition and scandal.[85] The Abbé Carré left a much more positive account of women on EIC ships. He had a very pleasant voyage, for,

> [t]hey invited me to all their parties and on the visits which they make to one another's ships, taking with them some lovely English ladies, who were the most attractive dish of their feasts. They had brought twenty-two of them this year from England, good-looking girls with fine figures.[86]

Regardless of positive or negative results of having women on board, the central point is that on the long distance voyages from Europe very few were on board. The vast majority of men on board did not have their women with them. In the Portuguese case, we get very occasional glimpses of women on board the long distance Carréira ships. According to C.R. Boxer very few were on board. A typical nau in the sixteenth century would have some 800 men on board, and perhaps ten or fifteen women.[87] On one stressful occasion women and children, and some slaves, were rescued first.[88] Presumably these favoured slaves were servants of the elite women.

This was not the case on 'Asian' ships. Elite Asian travellers took their harems with them, albeit they were kept out of sight, indeed virtually imprisoned. Qazvini and Villiers noted this, as did the Abbé Carré once his ship left Surat.

81. Bontekoe, *Voyage*, 143.
82. *Rodrigues: The First Settlement, 1691*, C. Millard, ed. and trans. (Mauritius: Christian Heritage Ministries, 2004), 73–75.
83. K.S. Mathew, 'The Jesuits and the Services on board the Ships of the India run during the Sixteenth Century', in Borges and Pearson, eds, *Metahistory*, 447.
84. C.R. Boxer, *Tragic History of the Sea* (London: Hakluyt, 1959), 75.
85. Sturma, 'Mutiny and Narrative', and Dash, *Batavia's Graveyard.*
86. Abbé Carré, *Travels*, 685.
87. Boxer, *Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, 53.
88. Boxer, *Further Tragic*, 72.

The ship's stateroom had been hired before departing for 1,000 écus [£225] by our rich Persian merchant for his half-dozen wives, as he wished to keep them out of sight of the rest of the passengers and under his eye. The two middle-sized cabins under the poop each cost 300 écus [£67.5], and other small places and corners six or seven hundred livres [£45–47.5]. Rich merchants were paying such sums to keep their wives in seclusion; and as there were a great number of the latter on this voyage, there was considerable difficulty in finding accommodation for them.[89]

This is not dissimilar to European practice, but what is different is that it seems that on many Asian ships, crew members also brought their families along; this is then a striking difference from the Portuguese ships where the officers and religious strove to keep women out. Linschoten, for example, wrote about the crews of local Portuguese ships: 'These Abexijins and Arabians … commenlie have their wives and children with them in the shippe wherein they are hyred, which continually stay with them, what voyage soever they make, and dresse their own meat, which is Rice sodden in water with salt fish among it.'[90] Carletti similarly noted that 'And they all embark with their wives or concubines …'. On one 'Portuguese' ship, a quite humble vessel going from Goa to Hurmuz, the vast majority of the crew of 128, including even the pilot and the gunners, were local Muslims. Also on board were four women and their companions, making in all a total of eight. One of these had two female servants, and another an elderly relative, a son and an infant. This one was probably a local convert to Catholicism, and was joining her husband in Hurmuz. The other two women were definitely local converts, and one of them may have been the pilot's wife. There was also one female stowaway.[91]

In an earlier time, Marco Polo said: 'These pirates take with them their wives and children, and stay out the whole summer.' Finally, Ibn Battuta much admired the huge Chinese ship that he sailed on. It had a complement of 1 000 men and any set of private rooms 'can be locked by its occupant, and he can take along with him slave-girls and wives. The sailors have their children living on board ship …'.[92] My strong impression is that the presence of whole families served to reduce conflict and anxiety. What little data we have may show that on coastal sailing ships belonging to Europeans there was a similar social space, obviously in fact given that most of the crew were 'Asians'. In short, it could be that the uniquely long and dangerous Europe-Asia voyage was the reason that so few women came out from Europe; no Asian woman had to face such perils and this could be why they, and their men, were happy for them to travel or even live on board ship.

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I have presented a very emphatic contrast between Asian and European ships. I consider that the data, sketchy as it may be, does bear out my depiction. How then can we explain this? We need first to remember that there are different seas and oceans. The Mediterranean is a sea, tiny as compared with the great oceans, so that one maybe could expect much more imbrication with the land as compared with the global reach of the Atlantic and Pacific. And as Steinberg reminds us, maritime spaces have historically one important bifurcation. Territorial waters, close to land, are one thing; the vast oceanic expanses something else entirely. Conrad wrote lyrically on this. The obvious difference is between coastal sailing and long-distance blue-water voyages. The

89. Abbé Carré, *Travels*, III, 792–795.
90. Linschoten, *Voyage*, I, 267.
91. Aubin, 'Voyage', 426.
92. Ibn Battuta, *Travels*, IV, 813–814.

harsh conditions which could produce a breakdown in discipline, and even violence, are magnified on long voyages such as those from Europe to the Indian Ocean. For Portuguese naus the norm for days at sea was 180 days to India, and 200 back to Portugal, and a total time away of 500 days. The point is that Portuguese sailors could expect to be at sea, in appalling conditions, for six months at a stretch.[93] Not surprisingly, European maritime powers found it much easier to get crews for shorter voyages within Europe as compared with the months-long route to the Indian Ocean. Even the longest voyages in the Indian Ocean were comparatively short. A voyage from Surat to the Persian Gulf or Red Sea usually lasted only about 40 days. The contrast is with coastal sailing, chaffering along and calling in often, even in fact every night up and down the Indian coast or in the Mediterranean. Conditions were obviously much more benign, with for example no threat from scurvy or lack of water. This was much more routine sailing, and left open the strong possibility of continuing to live a normal family life. Sailors did not acquire the 'tanning of travel' which set off long-distance sailors. And most importantly, there is obviously more chance of the evolution of a distinctive 'ship' society on a long voyage, much less when one is on land as much as on the water.

Even when long voyages are being considered, there is a major difference between the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. By and large Atlantic sailing was governed by the trades, and the doldrums, which meant that voyages were less certain and predictable. In the Indian Ocean the monsoon system meant that it was possible to estimate rather precise times of departure and arrival. Voyages were thus commonly shorter and less stressful. A crude continuum listing degrees of difficulty, and thus possibilities for stress, would put the Europe-Indian Ocean voyage at one end (remembering that the hardest part of this voyage was in the Atlantic, including rounding the fearsome Cape of Good Hope), then the trans-Atlantic to the Americas, then the Indian Ocean, and coastal sailing, cabotage, at the other extreme.

It is a matter of the degree of difficulty. So at one end of the continuum we have European ships travelling from Europe. On these dangerous voyages there was an obvious need for discipline, health; especially the risk of scurvy, was a constant problem, and there were good chances of plunder given inter-European rivalry, while the cartaz system created Asian victims. As we saw, the prospect of booty often led to a subversion of hierarchy. On these ships there was necessarily a much more defined command structure. The captains and navigators sailed under strict directions from the king or the Company.

Next on the continuum are the huge Mughal and Chinese ships. Their passages were shorter, more predictable, and relatively benign sailing with the monsoons. Consequently there was less stress, little concern about health, and no concern with plunder. On the other hand, piracy remained a constant threat, and this did cause anxiety for all at sea.

Finally there is undifferentiated cabotage in the Indian Ocean on a variety of ships, some European-owned, most not. Chaffering up and down the coasts, there was little stress, except again from pirates. They could land for food and water as needed. The *sarangs* and *tindals* recruited the crews, and effectively commanded them at sea. The presence of families helped to create a relaxed environment not dissimilar from that on land. The chances of plunder were small. Shipwreck in the relatively beneficent Indian Ocean (as compared with the Cape passage) was not very common, especially as the navigators had behind them centuries of knowledge of the winds and currents and navigational aids of the ocean. All this seems to apply also to European-owned

93. T. Bentley Duncan, 'Navigation', 6–7.

ships in the ocean. As we noted, the crews were mostly locals, and it seems from Aubin and Carletti that there was no need, or maybe no possibility, of enforcing the rigid command structures found on ships coming from Europe.

We are then putting the case for the overwhelming influence of climate and geography. A final suggestion would take a very different approach. Europe in at least the seventeenth century was beginning the process that Marshall Hodgson called 'The Great Transformation', with important advances in science and technology, which in turn underlay later industrial developments. Could it be that Europeans were beginning to be task-oriented, in a Weberian sense more 'rational'? This may apply to ships belonging to trading companies, whose aim was solely profit, as compared with the mixed motives of the Portuguese. And, Weber again, is it significant that the former were Protestant, the latter Catholic? Does this help to explain the pronounced differences between the social space of a company ship as compared with an Asian one?

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