PIRATES: PAST AND PRESENT

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Selected Chronology of Global Piracy

- 1220–1186 BCE: The Sea People – dominated Mediterranean Sea
- 421–339 BCE: Peloponnesian Wars – Greek city-states used pirates to attack enemies
- 700s to 1000s: Viking raids
- 1200s: Wokou pirates from Japan threaten coast of China and Korea
- 1500s to 1700s: Barbary pirates and corsairs in Mediterranean
- 16th to 18th centuries: Golden Age of Piracy
- Modern piracy: 1980s to present
Essential Questions

- What is piracy?
- Who are pirates?
- Where do pirates go?
- What kind of social order do pirates form?
- Why is piracy significant in world history?
- How is piracy relevant today?
What is Piracy?
Some Definitions

- **OED:**
  - “The practice of attacking and robbing ships at sea.”

- **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS), Article 101:**
  - (a) any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by the crew or the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft, and directed:
    - (i) on the high seas, against another ship or aircraft, or against persons or property on board such ship or aircraft;
    - (ii) against a ship, aircraft, persons or property in a place outside the jurisdiction of any State
### Privateers vs. Pirates

**Privateers**
- Plundered ships, stole treasures, highly lucrative
- Hired by specific state to attack enemy nation’s merchant ships, especially during wartime
  - Activities bound by state
- Required to turn over part of plunder to the employing government, but allowed to keep the rest of the treasure
- Considered legal (by governments giving out the licenses)

**Pirates**
- Plundered ships, stole treasures, highly lucrative
- Started by individual initiative, attacked enemy ships indiscriminately
  - Activities not bound by state
- Pirates kept stolen treasure and divided it amongst themselves (crew members, etc.)
- Considered highly illegal
Who are pirates?
Diversity of Pirates

- Region and culture
- Profession and occupation
- Maritime and land activities
- Gender
- Age
- Coercion and choice
Where do pirates go?
Pirates At Sea, Pirates on Land

Sea

- Maritime trade routes
- The high seas
  - Outside traditional territorial jurisdiction of political entities (states)

Land

- Pirate bases – place of stable dwelling
- Pirate havens – places for resupply and repair of ships
  - Located in remote sea ports or islands
  - Places with limited governance
Regions in the Golden Age of Piracy
Buccaneers: The Caribbean

- 15th-16th century: Age of Discovery
- Exploration, expansion led to bitter rivalries between European powers
- During wartime, European gov’ts supported piracy to raid and attack other nations’ ships
- Buccaneers: pirates who specifically targeted Spanish ships
Barbary Pirates and Corsairs of the Mediterranean

- 6th-17th century
- Raided Mediterranean ships important to Ottoman, Spanish, and other Muslim merchants
- Corsair: English term referring to French or Muslim pirates in the Mediterranean
- Barbary: refers to Berber region in North Africa
- Occasionally had some ties to some Muslim states
- Engaged in slave trade in Mediterranean

Map of Europe and North Africa indicating the Mediterranean Sea and coastal regions.
Pirates of the South China Coast

- Golden age from 16th-19th century
- Grew at time of commercial growth
- Circumvented limits on private sea trade imposed by various Chinese emperors
Pirates of Southeast Asia

- Earliest record of piracy in 5th century
- Peaked in 18th-19th century
- Ideal region for pirates because of rich trade routes
  - No strong states or navies to protect merchant ships
- Some local leaders supported pirates to gain wealth and power
Piracy in the Indian Ocean

- Pre-European era: lucrative trade in Arabian Sea attracted pirates long before European arrival
  - Pirates patrolled seas regularly
    - Made own code of laws to maintain order
- Arrival of the Portuguese, Dutch and English led to new establishment of European trading posts in Asia
  - Some Asian leaders welcomed the Europeans, but others resented European control of economic power
- With arrival of Europeans, pirates also attacked the newcomers
Pirate or Privateer?

The Story of William Kidd
William Kidd:
From Privateer to Pirate

- Born: 1645 in Scotland
- Came from poor family
- Left home to become sailor at young age
- 1689: privateer in the Caribbean on board French ship
- 1701: Executed for piracy
The Quedah Merchant
Kanhoji Angria:

Pirate of the Arabian Sea
Who was Kanhoji Angria?

- Born: 1669 in western India
- Died: 1729 in India
- Son of Maratha naval officer
- Joined the Maratha navy in youth
  - Deputy commander in 1690, admiral by 1698
  - Personally took charge of patrolling western Indian coast
  - Made foreign merchant ships pay for trade pass (*dastak*)
- Considered a pirate by Europeans
Kanhoji vs. the EIC

- After 1702, targeted EIC ships
  - Wanted weapons from English in exchange for cooperation
- Kanhoji briefly targeted Portuguese merchant vessels
  - Backed off when Portuguese considering joining forces with the English to deal with pirates
- 1712: temporary treaty with English
  - Allowed English ships to trade in all Malabar ports for a tax
- By 1716, Kanhoji began attacking English ships again
  - Successive efforts by English to stop Kanhoji failed
- Died in 1723 without ever being defeated
Cheng I Sao

Female Pirate of the South China Sea
About Female Pirates

- No typical female pirate
- Some had to disguise themselves as men, others were recognized as women in a typically male-dominated world
- Variety of motivations: desire for mobility, driven by poverty, projection of power
- Served variety of roles in piracy: deck hands, cooks, informants, spies, etc.
Who was Cheng I Sao?

- Born: Canton, China, 1775
- Died: Canton, China, 1844
- Little known about early life
- Prostitute prior to marriage
- Married Chinese pirate chief Cheng I (1765-1807)
- Together, built a large (and very successful) pirate fleet
The Cheng Pirate Empire

- Vietnamese coast in 1700s, Southern China 1800s
- Chengs targeted highly profitable opium trade
  - Technically illegal but British traders still found loopholes
  - Portuguese also competed with British merchant ships
  - 1804: Chengs’ naval blockade on Portuguese colony Macau
  - British efforts to protect merchant ships did little to counter Chengs
- By 1805, established huge federation of pirates (controlled around 1200 ships!)
  - Divided into six fleets (each represented by different color)
    - Red Flag Fleet – 200 ships
- 1807: Cheng I Sao took over command after husband died in a storm
Cheng I Sao and Pirate Code

- Strict code of laws for pirates under Cheng fleet
  - Helped maintain order and discipline among pirates
- Rules and agreements between pirates on various aspects of life on the sea
  - How to divide up treasure
  - Treatment of captives
  - Deserters
- Used to maintain unity of Cheng pirate federation
A Chinese Pirate Junk
Terror on the Chinese Coast

- Often raided coastal villages for food and supplies
  - Demanded protection money from villages
  - Harsh retribution on villages that refused to subordinate
- Charged “protection fees” from merchants and fishermen who wanted safe passage through the South China Sea
- Qing Dynasty rulers dismayed with disorder
  - Sent imperial navy to eliminate pirates, but unsuccessful
  - Qing rulers eventually asked the British and Portuguese to help defeat the pirates
Ransom Demands...
Cheng I Sao’s Surrender

- Qing Emperor took advantage of dissent among pirate confederacy
- 1810: Cheng I Sao decided to surrender, but only if she could negotiate her own terms from the emperor
  - Fewer than 400 of her pirates punished
    - 60 temporarily banished from China
    - 151 permanently exiled
    - 126 executed
  - Remaining pirates forced to give up weapons and ships but were allowed to keep stolen goods
    - Those willing to join imperial navy allowed to do so
- After retiring from piracy, Sao gained even more wealth from running brothels and gambling houses
Piracy Today
PIRACY AND ARMED ROBBERY AGAINST SHIPS
ICC INTERNATIONAL MARITIME BUREAU

TOTAL INCIDENTS PER REGION
JANUARY–DECEMBER 2016

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Piracy: Decline and Resurgence

- Decline in 19th century due to strong government efforts to stamp out piracy
- Resurgence in 1970s and 80s
  - Globalization and restructuring of manufacturing
  - Separation of consumption and production areas
- Proliferation in the 1990s and 2000s
  - Universalization of shipping
  - 90% of world trade carried on shipping containers
  - Mechanization of ships make them vulnerable
Today’s piracy hotspots:

- Caribbean, Gulf of Aden, Malacca Straits, and South China Sea
  - Areas with significant shipping channels
  - Areas with high number of failed states
  - Areas with significant poverty
  - Geography
The Final Points

- Piracy and privateering are deeply interconnected forms of maritime violence.
- Pirates in the past and present, as non-state actors, have been a nuisance to major maritime powers, and have caused significant disruption to oceanic trade.
- Piracy is enduring because the ambiguity of legal jurisdiction in the open sea makes it difficult for state actors to eradicate its practice.


