

X Marks the Spot: The Archaeology of Piracy

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Popular culture continues to dwell upon and exploit the lure of buried or sunken treasure and attendant casts of colorful pirates parading with parrots, eye-patches, and peg legs. Americans have grown up reading the classics of pirate fiction, watching countless swashbuckling films and television programs; they have been treated to pirate comic books, toys, and board games and have even given American professional baseball and football teams names like "Pirates," "Buccaneers," and "Raiders." Popular with children at Halloween and with adults at Mardi Gras, the urge to dress up and act the part of a pirate has been perpetuated by the mass marketing of Disney and Las Vegas and by local chambers of commerce looking for weekend festival themes. Perhaps the legendary lure of loot that led sailors to become pirates connects with modern dreams of becoming rich overnight, or perhaps the pirates' notorious outlaw behavior appeals to secret desires to escape a routine existence or rebel against the boss at work. Romantic notions, gold fever, and dreams of getting rich all are part of human nature. How many times have archaeologists working on shipwrecks been asked, "have you found any gold?" Archaeologists often find themselves caught between the popular image of Indiana Jones and the reality of modern treasure hunting, especially if they elect to work on sites associated with, or at least purported to be associated with, pirates.

Editors Russell Skowronek and Charles Ewen have assembled a collection of insightful essays that explore the notion of identifying pirate sites, both on land and under the sea. The book is divided into three parts: *Pirate Lairs*, *Pirate Ships and Their Prey*, and *Pirates in Fact and Fiction*. A well-written introduction sets the stage

by defining the term piracy and the difference between pirates and privateers. A brief history of piracy, focusing on the Golden Age of Piracy (1690–1730), introduces the central underlying observation that, while there is no shortage of historical works about pirates, there is very little in the archaeological literature about piracy. Aside from the sometimes controversial association with pirates and treasure hunting, Ewen concludes that the reason more pirate sites have not been reported by archaeologists is that they are hard to find and difficult to recognize in the archaeological record. Hence, the genesis of *X Marks the Spot*.

Naturally, *Pirate Lairs* begins with a chapter on Port Royal, Jamaica, written by its principal excavator, Donny Hamilton of Texas A&M University. Reputed to be the "wickedest city in the world," the colonial English port succumbed to an earthquake in 1692, which caused a large portion of the town to become submerged. Hamilton recounts the brief history of the richest community in English North America and reviews the underwater archaeology conducted there in the last several decades. While Port Royal prospered with pirates and privateers alongside merchants who bought and sold their plunder, Hamilton points out that the port should be considered a mercantile center first and only second, a pirate lair. Although a wealth of artifacts have been recovered from the sunken townsite, archaeologists have found little that can be attributed exclusively to pirates and privateers, except for three shipwrecks that sank on top of the submerged town during a 1722 hurricane, one of which was a pirate ship called *Ranger*.

On the trail of Jean Lafitte, Joan Exnicios describes investigations of the remains of that notorious smuggler's base at Grande Terre Island in southern Louisiana. Early CRM work on the barrier island near New Orleans delineated a wave-washed midden of early-19th-century artifacts; subsequent surveys identified an historic shoreline, a canal, and the remains of docks or warehouses that represent the site of Lafitte's 1808–1814 "establishment." Exnicios acknowledges that without historical documentation of

Lafitte's lair on Grande Terre Island, the site might not have been recognized as anything more than an early settlement.

In the next two chapters, David McBride and Daniel Finamore discuss the history and archaeology of English logwood and freebooter sites on Roatan, in the Bay Islands of Honduras, and at Barcadares, Belize. On Roatan, surveys of the Port Royal town area and Fort George Cay turned up evidence of English military occupation during the 1740s. No evidence of earlier pirates or later logwood cutters was found. In Belize, excavations at the riverine logwood cutters' settlement of Barcadares produced low artifact densities, reflecting a relatively mobile and seasonal population that had access to smuggled exotic wares but was independent of the system that used them.

In the second part of the book, *Pirate Ships and Their Prey*, Patrick Lizé, who was part of a French team that salvaged the pirate shipwreck *Speaker*, describes and illustrates artifacts that were recovered during the 1980 project. *Speaker* was a former French warship captured by the English pirate John Bowen and wrecked off the coast of Mauritius in 1702. Another discovery in the Indian Ocean is the wreck of *Fiery Dragon*, originally thought to be Captain Kidd's *Adventure Galley*. John De Bry describes the results of initial excavations that led him to conclude an alternate identification of the vessel. Excavation of *Whydah*, a slave transport captured by the pirate Samuel Bellamy, is discussed for the first time in a scholarly format by Chris Hamilton who treats the sensational and controversial project as an opportunity to explore anthropological and archaeological issues raised by the 1717 Cape Cod, Massachusetts, shipwreck.

The recently discovered wreck off Beaufort Inlet, North Carolina, which is thought to be Blackbeard's flagship *Queen Anne's Revenge*, is the subject of two chapters. In the first, Project Director Mark Wilde-Ramsing assembles historical and archaeological data to make a case for a positive identification. In the second, Wayne Lusardi, the project's former artifact conservator,

describes the site's artifact assemblages that, to him, leave room for doubt. In the next chapter, Mark Wagner and Mary McCorvie investigate an Ohio River flatboat wreck alleged to have been the victim of river pirates who operated during the early 1800s from hideouts along the shore. Wagner and McCorvie believe there is another explanation for the wreck. In a concluding chapter the editors look at the historical response to piracy and its potential victims in the Caribbean, arguing that the patterns of settlement and trade were directly shaped by the *threat* of piracy and that the responses to that threat are more visible in the archaeological record than the pirates themselves.

Part 3, entitled *Pirates in Fact and Fiction*, presents two essays. In the first, Lawrence Babits, Joshua Howard, and Matthew Brenckle describe a distinctive pirate assemblage. Comparing weapons listed in documents entitled *Pennsylvania Pirate Inventory, 1718*, and *Alabama Pirate Inventory, 1818*, with those found on *Queen Anne's Revenge* leads them to conclude that the data are insufficient to determine the presence of pirates from an artifact assemblage. The concluding essay, by Russell Skowronek, examines the impact of popular culture today on people's perceptions of pirates by interviewing more than 300 adults in the Philippines and the United States.

X Marks the Spot gives readers a report on the status of archaeological inquiry into the history of piracy, a recapitulation of the images of pirates in popular culture, and a list of the inherent problems found in attempting to associate archaeological evidence with pirate sites. If archaeologists are being asked to recognize a pirate site by a public that has preconceived popular images of how pirates should be characterized, they need to come up with better data with which to construct patterns that define the archaeology of pirates.

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Skowronek, Russell K. and George R. Fischer (2009) HMS Fowey Lost and Found: Being the Discovery, Excavation, and Identification of a British Man-of-War Lost off the Cape of Florida in 1748. University Press of Florida, Gainesville. Skowronek, R.K., R. E. Johnson, R. H. Vernon and G. R. Fischer (1987) The Legare Anchorage Shipwreck Site-Grave of HMS Fowey. International Journal of Nautical Archaeology 16(4):313-324. May, W.E. (1958) The Wreck of HMS Fowey. Mariner's Mirror 44(1):320-324. Skowronek, R.K. (1984) Archaeological Testing and Evaluation of the Legare Anchorage Shipwreck Site, Biscay Russell K. Skowronek,, Ph.D. Professor of Anthropology & History. Department of History and Philosophy & Department of Sociology and Anthropology. College of Arts and Humanities. UT Pan American. When educators embrace the "teacher-scholar" model of education they bring their passion for a scholarly topic and the associated knowledge sets to students through engaged learning. I use the local place-based STEAM* field approach for my teaching and research and involve my students in scholarly enquiry on heretofore unstudied topics relating to the fields of anthropology and history. To do this I a Russell Skowronek. The archaeology of academia is not new. For decades both faculty and cultural resource management archaeologists have endeavored to reveal and salvage the ephemeral traces of these educational institutions and their surrounding community. Preparing a synopsis of the history and historical archaeology of New Spain's northwest frontier, not to mention its Pacific holdings, is not simply daunting, it is a Herculean task. At least hundreds of thousands of pages in thousands of books and articles have been published or are hidden in the "gray literature" on countless subjects relating to Russell Skowronek. Home. College of Arts and Sciences. 2015 was a good year for Russell K. Skowronek who taught at Santa Clara University from 1991-2009. On 14 February he was honored with the Norman Neuerburg Award, by the California Mission Studies Association. Presented in Ventura, California, the award recognizes outstanding contributions towards the study and preservation of California's missions, presidios, pueblos, and ranchos.