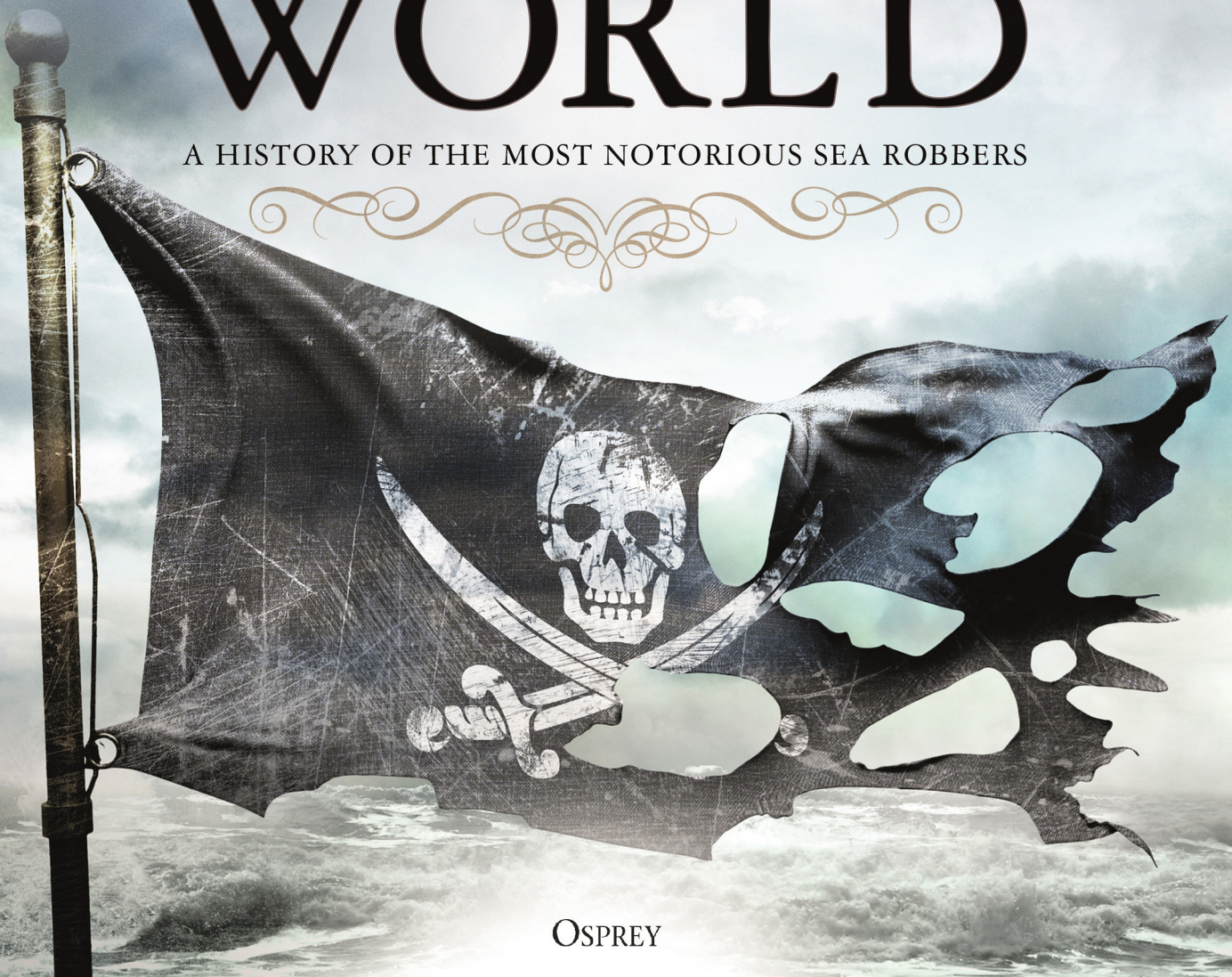
ANGUS KONSTAM

THE PIRATE WORLD

A HISTORY OF THE MOST NOTORIOUS SEA ROBBERS



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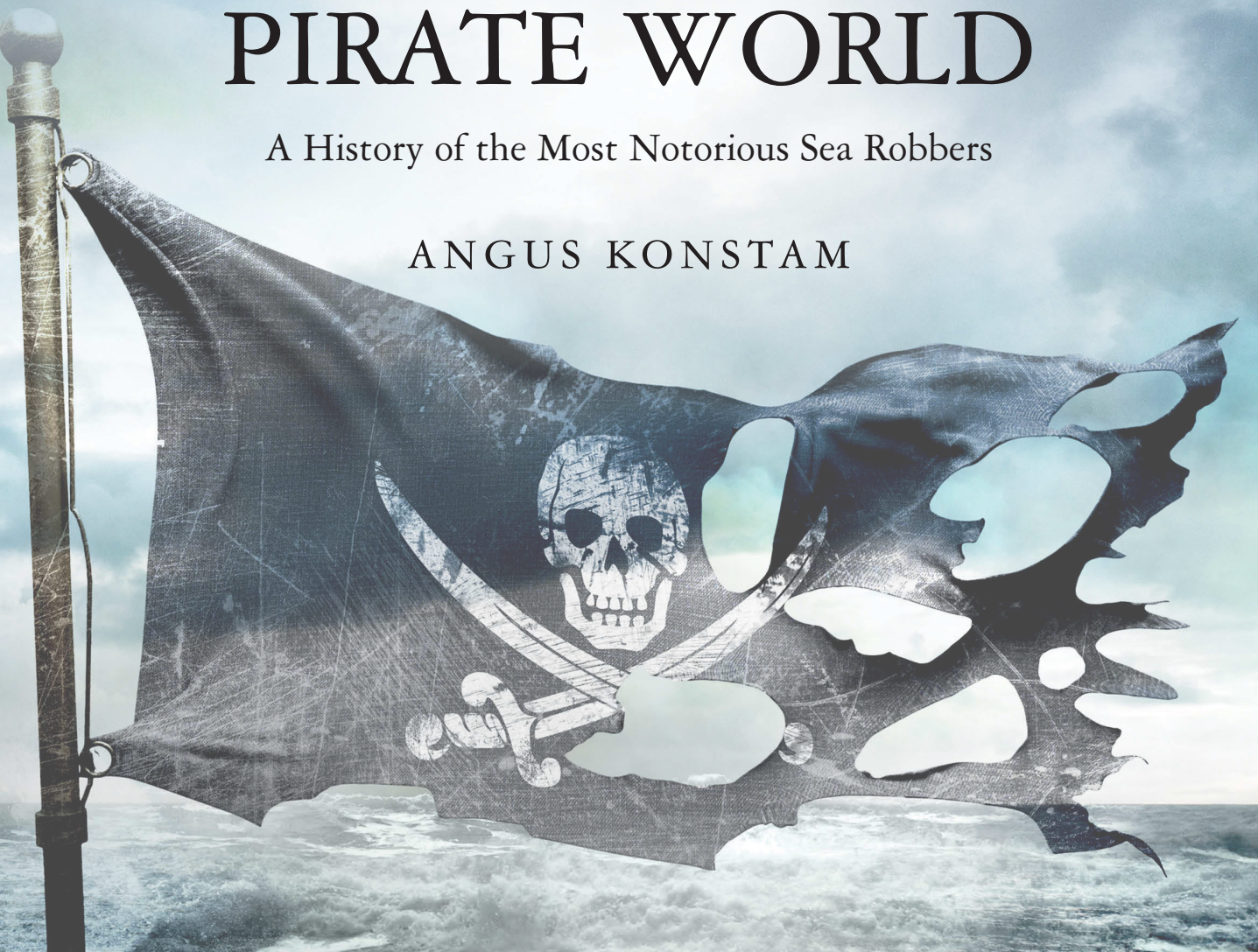

OSPREY PUBLISHING
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
PO Box 883, Oxford, OX1 9PL, UK
1385 Broadway, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10018, USA
E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com
www.ospreypublishing.com

OSPREY is a trademark of Osprey Publishing Ltd

First published in Great Britain in 2019

This electronic edition published in 2018 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

This volume is based on material previously published as *Piracy: The complete history* by Angus Konstam (Osprey, 2009).

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB 978 1 4728 3097 5; eBook 978 1 4728 3096 8; ePDF 978 1 4728 3098 2; XML 978 1 4728 3099 9

Maps by Nick Buxey
Index by Zoe Ross

Front cover and page header images from iStock.

Unless otherwise specified, all images in this book are from The Stratford Archive.

Osprey Publishing supports the Woodland Trust, the UK's leading woodland conservation charity.

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INTRODUCTION

Crime, and the public's fascination with it, are as old as civilization itself. So, it wasn't surprising that in 1724, when a London publisher produced a book called *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates*, this lurid pirate exposé became a best-seller. It 'lifted the lid' on a world of violent criminals operating on the high seas. It told of men (and a few women) who rebelled against society, and who lived by their own piratical code. Of course it also helped that most pirates met a colourfully violent end. Three centuries later the fascination with them still remains.

For most people the word 'pirate' conjures up an image of a slightly comical seaborne ruffian with a parrot, a peg leg and a bandana. This comes from a century or more of cartoonish depictions of pirates in *Peter Pan*, *Treasure Island* and *The Pirates of the Caribbean*. Nowadays these sanitized pirates are used to sell everything from rum to home insurance. Similarly, like the pirate himself, his skull and crossbones motif has become an instantly recognizable symbol whose meaning is far removed from its dark and sinister origins.

In fact, all this began long before *Treasure Island*, with Captain Charles Johnson, the author who wrote that bestseller back in 1724. His descriptions of Blackbeard and 'Black Bart' Roberts, of 'Calico Jack' Rackam and Charles Vane, captured the public imagination, and have ensured that his book is still in print almost three centuries later.

His pirates, though, were real people. Nowadays, fictional pirates are usually portrayed either as romantic characters, or as figures of fun. Even historians have added to the problem by using a term that conjures up romance rather than the grim reality of robbery on the high seas. The phrase 'the Golden Age of Piracy' was first coined by the creators of pirate fiction rather than by people who experienced piracy for themselves. There was nothing golden or romantic about the real thing. Still, the term serves as a useful historical shorthand for a time when some of the best-known pirates in history were sailing the world's oceans in search of prey.

Even the term 'pirate' has been changed over the years. Scriptwriters continually manage to confuse the name with others, such as 'privateer', 'buccaneer', 'filibuster', 'corsair', 'freebooter' and 'swashbuckler'. All of them have their own separate

meanings. A 'privateer' was a government-sanctioned pirate who did not attack his own people. The French called these people 'corsairs', although even this term became associated with Mediterranean 'pirates' instead of 'privateers'. A 'buccaneer' was a 17th-century raider who preyed on the Spanish in the Caribbean, while a 'filibuster' (or 'freebooter') was simply a French word for a 'buccaneer'. As for 'swashbuckler', the term meant a 16th-century brigand, or a 17th-century swordsman, but in the 20th century it was adopted by the writers of pirate fiction, and then by Hollywood. In the piratical heyday most of these terms were never used the way they are today. Finally, there were 'pirates'. The dictionary specifies that a 'pirate' is someone who robs from others at sea, and who acts beyond the law. Usually, they attacked whatever ships they came across, regardless of nationality. So that term at least should be pretty clear.

Sometimes, though, these 'pirates' themselves crossed the line from one category to another. For example, Captain Kidd was a 'privateer' who later turned to 'piracy'. Francis Drake was a 'privateer', although the Spanish simply called him a 'pirate'. To muddy the waters further, Henry Morgan was a 'buccaneer' operating as an English 'privateer', although technically much of the time he acted as a 'pirate'! While this all sounds pretty confusing nowadays, in fact for most seafarers from the past it all made perfect sense. One of my tasks in this book is to unravel it all, and explain just what piracy actually meant.

This book gives you a window into this piratical past. In these pages we'll cover the whole history of piracy, from the time of the Egyptian pharaohs to the present day. However, we'll be concentrating mostly on the real heyday of piracy. This falls neatly into two halves. The first is the colourful era of the 17th-century buccaneers who preyed on the Spanish Main – men like Henry Morgan or the bloodthirsty François L'Olonnais. The second is what we'll reluctantly call the 'Golden Age of Piracy'. This was the brief but heady period in the early 18th century when the likes of Blackbeard, Black Bart and Charles Vane roamed the seas. So, while giving you an overall picture of piracy through the ages, we'll also look more deeply at these two key periods, and explain why piracy was so prevalent back then.

The main aim of this book is to strip away the myths and inventions from these historical figures to reveal the brutal but utterly fascinating world of piracy as it really was. This book tells the story of the real pirates of history – the men for whom shipwreck, starvation, disease and violent death were a constant threat, and whose careers were usually measured in months rather than years. The notion that their lives were in any way romantic would have been hugely amusing to them.

Angus Konstam
Edinburgh, 2018

Chapter One

PIRATES OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

THE SEA PEOPLES

Piracy has probably been around since man first took to the sea. However, it first appeared in the historical records before the building of the Egyptian pyramids. As in any period, piracy in the ancient world flourished when there was a lack of central control, and in areas beyond the reach of major powers. The first known pirate group was the Lukkans, a group of sea raiders based on the south-eastern coast of Asia Minor (now modern Turkey). In the 14th century BC, Egyptian scribes recorded that they raided Cyprus, then allied themselves with Egypt's rivals, the Hittites. A century later the Lukkans drop from the records, their disappearance linked to the emergence of a new maritime threat. It is now believed that these pirates became assimilated into a confederation of maritime nomads known as the 'sea peoples'.

This colourful modern mural celebrates the capture of the young Julius Caesar by Cilician pirates in 75 BC. They held him hostage for just over a month, until his ransom was negotiated. Once freed, Caesar gathered a Roman punitive force together, captured the pirates in their island lair, and had them crucified.
(DEA PICTURE LIBRARY/Getty Images)

THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE SEA PEOPLES

Historians have blamed these sea raiders for the collapse of the Bronze Age cultures of the eastern Mediterranean, the end of the Mycenaean Greek civilization, and the destruction of the Hittite Empire. It seems that only the Egyptians weathered this storm. The term 'sea peoples' was first coined by Egyptian chroniclers, who claimed the invaders were migrating tribes who originated in the Aegean and Adriatic. These nomads raided and fought, but they also traded, developing sea routes that spanned the eastern Mediterranean. The same sources mention that the sea peoples were divided into several tribes – the Shardana, Denyen, Peleset, Shekelesh, Weshesh and Tjeker. Later

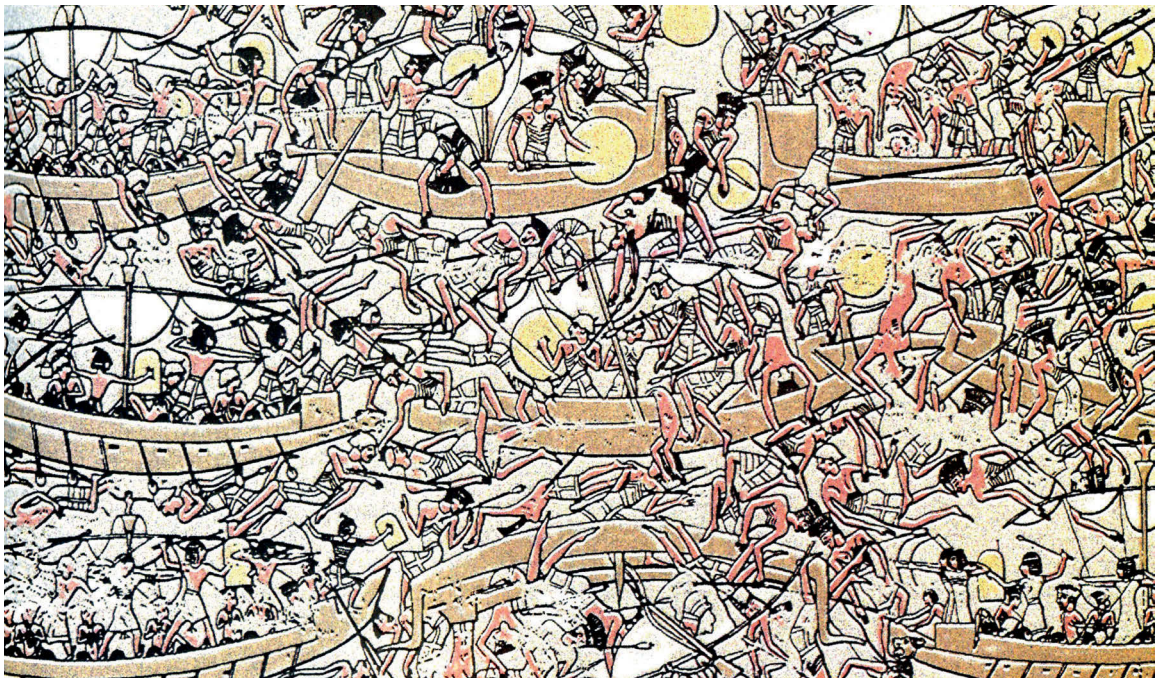
KEY

Trade routes ← Pirate raids ⚔ Battle

1. Around 1250 BC: Attacks into late Bronze Age Greece from northern 'barbarians' begin, and lead to the collapse of Mycenaean Greece.
2. When the 'barbarian' Dorian Greeks finally conquer the Greek mainland, Mycenaean Greek refugees flee to Crete, Cyprus and southern Italy.
3. The Lycians (or Lukkans) are the first of the sea peoples, and develop a reputation as pirates.
4. 1340 BC: The Lycians raid Cyprus.
5. 1285 BC: The Egyptians inflict a major victory on the Hittites at the battle of Kadesh.
6. Early 12th century BC: The Hittite Empire collapses after being invaded by barbarians who attacked it from the west.
7. Late 13th century BC: Desert peoples invade Egypt from the west, but are repulsed.
8. Around 1200 BC: Ugarit and other neighbouring cities are attacked and destroyed by the sea peoples.
9. 1200 BC: The Cypriot city of Enkomi is destroyed by the sea peoples, and the rest of the island ravaged.
10. Early 12th century BC: The sea peoples begin raiding the Egyptian coast.
11. *c.*1175 BC: The sea peoples are defeated in a decisive sea battle fought in the Nile Delta. The survivors flee from Egyptian waters, never to return.
12. The remaining sea peoples conquer the coast of what is now Israel and settle there. By the 6th century BC this evolves into Phoenicia, a growing maritime mercantile power.

historians added two more – the Tursha and Lycians (or Lukkans). The Shardana, Shekelesh and Peleset tribes may have originated in the northern Adriatic, but the Shardana have also been linked to Sardinia. Others probably came from Anatolia. Whatever their origins, these sea raiders formed the first known pirate confederation in history.

The best evidence for them comes from inscriptions in the great temple at Karnak and from the tomb of the pharaoh Rameses III 'the Great' at Medinet Habu. In Medinet Habu the inscriptions record a great sea battle fought off the Nile Delta around 1175 BC. In it, the Egyptian fleet led by Rameses III comprehensively defeated this pirate confederation. The bas-relief carving of the battle provides us with the first depiction of pirates in action, and the earliest illustration of a sea battle. Incidentally these inscriptions mention that the sea raiders allied themselves with Egypt's other enemies, but Rameses broke up this nascent alliance before it could threaten his empire. Although effectively the sea raiders operated like hostile migratory tribes with ships, their actions still represent piracy on a grand scale, and this is exactly how they were viewed by the Egyptians.



Around 1175 BC the Egyptian pharaoh Rameses III repulsed a major invasion by the sea peoples in a naval battle fought off the Nile Delta. This bas-relief from the temple of Medinet Habu was almost certainly produced to celebrate this victory, and so is probably the world's first depiction of pirates in action.

One of the Medinet Habu bas-reliefs tells us how these pirates fought. The 'sea peoples' are shown in smaller and flimsier ships than those of the Egyptians, and they appear to lack armour, bows and arrows. The carving supports the idea that the 'sea peoples' depended on light raiding craft, and their style of fighting relied on speed and stealth rather than on brute force. Still, Mycenaean accounts describe the 'sea peoples' as being great warriors and seamen, armed with long swords and helmets. They seem to have defeated everyone they came up against – until they met the Egyptians.

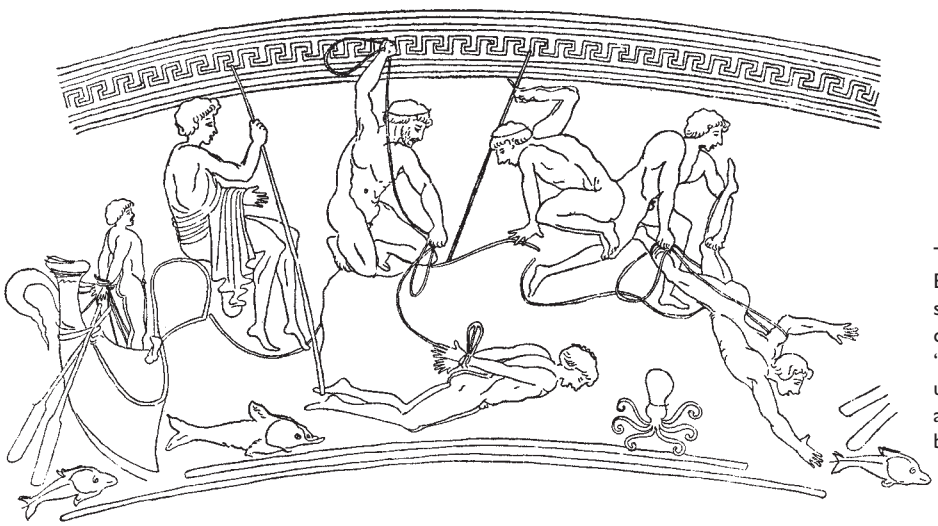
The battle with the Egyptians may well have marked the beginning of the end for the 'sea peoples'. The evidence suggests that from around 1220 until the battle in *c.*1175 BC they enjoyed an almost total control of the eastern Mediterranean. After the battle they quickly disappeared from history, which suggests that Rameses effectively put an end to the pirate threat. After their defeat the surviving 'sea peoples' settled in Palestine. The Tjeker tribe continued to trade throughout the region until the 9th century BC, and indulged in piracy on the side. The remains of Tjeker settlements found near Dor in Israel may therefore be the world's oldest surviving pirate havens. Trading eventually replaced piracy as their main source of income, and within a century the Tjekers had amalgamated with the Phoenicians, another major sea power of the ancient world.

THE PIRATES OF ANCIENT GREECE

Piracy was still commonplace throughout the eastern Mediterranean after the collapse of the 'sea peoples', and it would continue until the Romans finally managed to establish their control over the whole Mare Internum (the Inner Sea). While the Ancient Greeks are best remembered for their contribution to Western civilization, they also produced some of the most prenicious pirates of the ancient world. In fact, some Greek city-states actively encouraged piracy as a means of generating wealth. Others, such as the Athenians, formed anti-piracy fleets to keep the sea lanes clear for their own trading ships.

One of the first known pirate havens was Crete, which sat astride the sea lanes between Greece and the rest of the eastern Mediterranean. In the 10th century BC the last remnants of the Minoan civilization on the island were destroyed by the Dorian Greeks. The invaders then used the island as a base for pirate raids throughout the Aegean. Cretan cities such as Cydonia and Eleutherna became thriving marketplaces for slaves and plunder. In Homer's *Odyssey* the Cretans are described as being especially notorious pirates. They continued to be until the rise of Athens as a naval power in the 5th century BC. Then the rapacity of the Cretan pirates was greatly curbed by the Athenians, although they remained an irritant to mariners until the end of the 2nd century BC.

Further north, Plutarch told of the Samians, who were driven from their island by invaders, and so moved to Mycale, where they established themselves as pirates. The Athenians finally managed to crush the Samian pirates, and, following a raid on Athens by pirates from Lemnos, the Athenian navy campaigned to clear all pirates from the Aegean. Apart from Mycale and Lemnos, other pirate strongholds on Cithnos, Mykonos and the Sporades were



This detail of a 4th-century BC Greek vase decoration shows the execution of captured pirates by 'keelhauling': tying the victims up, throwing them overboard, and then dragging them beneath the hull of a ship.

In another decoration from a 4th-century BC Greek vase, two opposing groups of Greek hoplites (well-armoured infantry) do battle at sea, as oarsmen manoeuvre their galleys into battle. All naval battles or pirate attacks of this period were conducted in this manner.

destroyed by Athenian anti-piracy expeditions during the 5th century BC. Herodotus provides us with vivid accounts of pirate attacks, and of these Athenian anti-piracy operations.

During the 3rd century BC the Aetolian League became the dominant power in central Greece. Part of its success was due to its use of piracy as a means of waging economic warfare against its enemies. Soon Aetolian pirates dominated the waters of the Aegean basin. It was not until the League's defeat by the Romans in 192 BC that this particular piratical scourge came to an end. By then, though, many of the pirates had simply moved to Cilicia on the south coast of Asia Minor. These Cilician pirates would soon become the largest and most notorious pirate community in the ancient world.

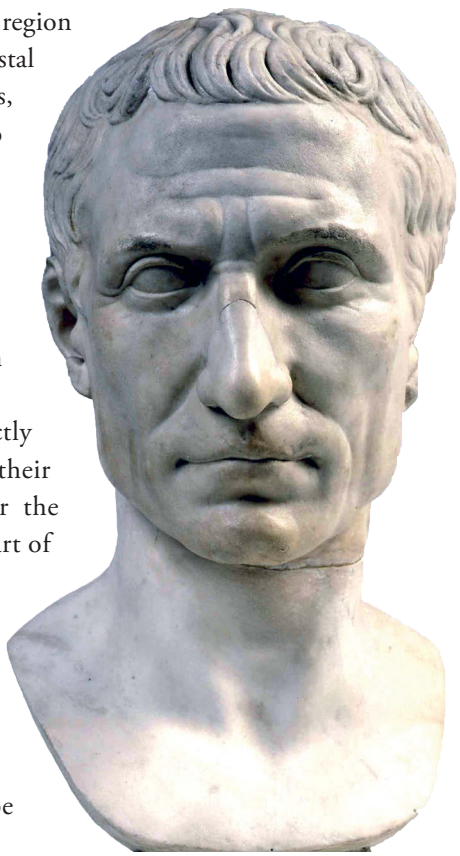
Piracy also flourished on the other side of Greece, along the eastern coast of the Adriatic. The Illyrians and Dalmatians raided the Greek and Italian coasts, and even ventured into the central Mediterranean. Their depredations reached a peak in the 3rd century BC. The Illyrian pirate menace was curbed somewhat when the Romans conquered the region, but even after the Roman annexation of Illyria in 168 BC the pirates continued their attacks from relatively secure bases on the Dalmatian coast, and from the islands of Corfu and Cephalonia.

During the 2nd century BC Roman punitive expeditions finally cleared most of the Dalmatian mainland of pirates, but they still maintained a presence in the islands until the mid-1st century BC, when 'Pompey the Great' dealt with the problem once and for all. During this period which saw the growth of Rome as a major power, piracy was also rife in the Tyrrhenian Sea, on the far side of Italy. In fact the very name 'Tyrrhenian' effectively meant the same as 'pirate'. As early as the 5th century BC Thucydides recorded several pirate attacks in these waters, carried out by 'barbarians' based on the islands of Elba, Corsica and Sardinia. These attacks continued for another two centuries. Other well-known pirate bases existed in the Lipari Islands off the north-east corner of Sicily, the Balearic Islands and the Ligurian coast of what is now the French

Riviera. This pirate activity was clearly no sudden phenomenon. Earlier Greek mythology tells how the god Dionysus was captured by Tyrrhenian pirates, who mistook him for the son of a wealthy merchant. Dionysus thought it all a hilarious escapade, but he still turned the pirates into dolphins as punishment for their temerity. Later, in the 3rd century BC, the Romans also accused the Sicilians of piracy, although in truth the Greek rulers of the island sanctioned legitimate privateering rather than piracy. However, the establishment of a Roman hegemony in the western Mediterranean finally ended any form of organized piracy in the region.

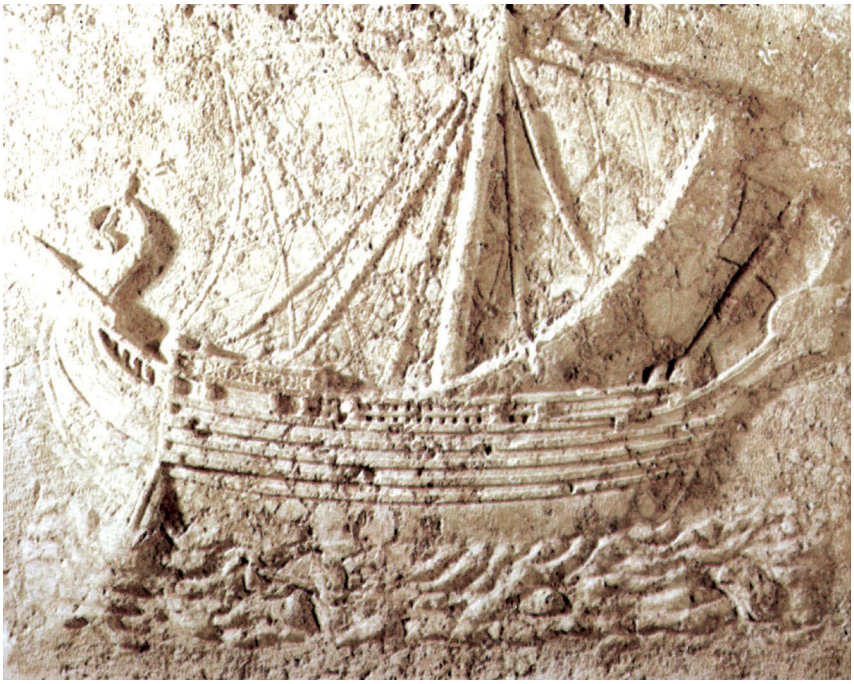
THOSE TROUBLESOME CILICIANS

If anywhere deserved the reputation of being the cradle of piracy in the ancient world, it was Cilicia. A narrow strip of land in Asia Minor (now south-eastern Turkey), Cilicia perched between the towering Taurus mountains and the Mediterranean Sea. This inhospitable region remained largely unsettled, apart from a few small coastal towns. The coastline itself was broken up by rocky headlands, hidden bays and well-protected anchorages. It was also ideally placed for attacks on shipping sailing between Syria and Greece or Italy, as pirates could strike unexpectedly, then quickly return to their secret hideaway before anyone could track them down. In effect this rocky coast was the perfect hideout for pirates. This was therefore the region that attracted the Aetolian pirates driven out of the Aegean in the early 2nd century BC.



As a young man, Gaius Julius Caesar (100–44 BC) was captured by pirates in the Aegean Sea, and held to ransom by them. On his release he returned to the pirate lair at the head of a punitive expedition, and crucified his former captors.

These Aetolian pirates began to arrive in Cilicia at exactly the same time that the Seleucid kings of Syria stopped their regular naval patrols. The decisive Roman victory over the Seleucids at Magnesia (190 BC) resulted in the western part of Asia Minor becoming a Roman protectorate. The Seleucid navy was withdrawn but the Romans lacked the inclination to maintain their own naval presence in the area. Consequently, the pirates were allowed to develop their power base without military interference. Their communities expanded, and soon they became strong enough to counter just about any naval force that could be sent against them.



This bas-relief carving from a Roman sarcophagus from Sidon in Lebanon shows a Roman merchant ship of the kind that plied the Mediterranean for much of the Roman era. Frequent civil wars and rebellions within the empire led to the re-emergence of pirates during this period, and ships like this were their prey.

At first the Cilician pirates limited their attacks to the eastern Mediterranean, gradually spreading their influence further along the sea lanes until they reached the shores of Crete, Palestine and Egypt. They also raided coastal towns, gathering captives whom they then sold in Cretan markets. Richer prisoners were held to ransom, while plunder was sold in the nearby cities of Miletus, Ephesus and Smyrna, all of which were within the borders of the Roman protectorate in Asia Minor. This continued for decades, until the expansion of Roman trade and influence into the eastern Mediterranean meant that the Romans themselves became the principal victims of piratical attacks. Their most celebrated victim was the young Julius Caesar, who was captured by them in 75 BC.

According to the Greek historian Plutarch, when the pirates demanded a ransom of twenty talents, Caesar volunteered to pay fifty. He was held prisoner for thirty-eight days, all the time threatening to crucify them once he was released. Once the ransom finally arrived from Miletus he was set free. Caesar sailed to Miletus, gathered a punitive expedition together, and returned to the pirate lair. He captured almost all of the pirates, took their plunder as spoils of war and imprisoned his captives. He then crucified them all, just as he had threatened to do while languishing as their prisoner.

During the early 1st century BC the Cilician pirates began to operate in the Aegean and Adriatic, areas the Romans regarded as their own. They even began raiding the coast of Italy in search of slaves. The Roman Senate responded by passing its first anti-piracy law. Now, pirates could no longer trade within the Roman sphere. The pirates, of course, simply took their plunder elsewhere. In 86 BC, a pirate squadron defeated a Roman naval force off Brundisium in south-east Italy, disrupting communications between Rome and Greece. The Romans sent warships to counter the pirate threat, and a succession of Roman provincial governors led punitive but ultimately indecisive expeditions against the pirates. Then, in 74 BC, Marcus Antonius Creticus (the father of Mark Antony) was defeated while attacking the Cretan pirates, and he died shortly afterwards. As a result, Roman attitudes hardened, especially when Cilician pirates supported the slave revolt led by Spartacus (73–71 BC). Roman punitive expeditions could temporarily subdue the Cilician pirates, but not eradicate the threat they posed. In order to properly protect Roman trade, a much more dramatic response was needed.

The bireme became the standard pirate-hunting ship in the Mediterranean. Not only was it fast and agile, but it carried a contingent of highly trained Roman marines. This bas-relief is from the Temple of Fortuna Primigenia in Praeneste.

POMPEY AND THE PIRATES

POMPEY AGAINST THE PIRATES

Today, Pompey the Great is best remembered as the bitter enemy of Julius Caesar during the Roman Civil War. Before that, though, Pompey was regarded as the 'First Man in Rome' and the saviour of the Roman Republic. Much of this acclaim stemmed from his successful war against the pirates, which effectively ended piracy in the Mediterranean. Following the revolt of Spartacus and the support given to him by the Cilician pirates, the Senate decided to completely eradicate piracy in the Mediterranean. This task would stretch the resources of Rome to its limits. Consequently, in 67 BC Pompey was offered an

KEY

Trade routes — Pirate raids — Pompey's voyage to Cilicia

1. The Roman Republic consolidates its control over Italy in the wake of the Second Punic War (218–201 BC).
2. The troublesome pirate dens along the Illyrian coast are cleared after Rome gains control of the region in the early 2nd century BC and it becomes a Roman province.
3. 146 BC: Rome gains control of Greece and Macedonia, and they become Roman provinces. As a result, the Achaean (or southern Greek) pirates are driven from the mainland and forced to re-establish themselves in the Aegean islands.
4. As Roman control extends into the Aegean, the pirates are driven east and establish themselves along the Cilician coast. In 133 BC this region becomes a Roman province, but the pirate scourge continues.
5. Mithridates of Pontus (134–63 BC) encourages piracy in the Eastern Mediterranean as a means of countering the expansion of Roman influence.
6. 75 BC: Julius Caesar is captured by pirates based on the island of Pharmakonisi. He is released when a ransom is paid, but he returns with a naval force and captures and crucifies the pirates.
7. 72 BC: Cilician pirates aid Spartacus, who is leading a slave revolt in Italy. Although Spartacus is defeated the following year, this pirate alliance galvanises the Romans to deal with the Cilician threat.
8. 67 BC: the Roman Senate awards Pompey the Great an *imperium* and unlimited funds, with orders to clear the Mediterranean of pirates.
9. 67 BC: Pompey divides the Mediterranean into 13 areas, and then moves eastwards, destroying pirate bases and driving the survivors ahead of him. By the end of the year all remaining pirates are concentrated in Cilicia, which he left open to them.
10. Finally, Pompey blockades Cilicia, and his troops methodically clear the region until they capture the final pirate stronghold at Coracesium (now Alanya). The Mediterranean is now completely free of pirates and will remain so for several centuries.

imperium (military dictatorship) and ordered to drive the pirates from the Mare Nostrum, or Mediterranean Sea.

Pompey's *imperium* granted him sweeping powers, an immense budget and a military force of some 500 ships including 200 war galleys, and 120,000 Roman legionaries. The sheer scale of this enterprise – the equivalent today would be the diversion of over half the US budget and armed forces – showed just how seriously the Roman Senate took the pirate threat. Pompey had fought the pirates before – and he knew exactly how to go about the operation. The majority of his pirate-hunting warships were fast enough to pursue the pirates on the high seas and trap them. These lighter craft

Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus (106–48 BC), or Pompey the Great, is best known for his opposition to Julius Caesar, but arguably his greatest achievement was to rid the Mediterranean of pirates.

were supported by a fleet of heavier warships, filled with veteran Roman legionaries. Pompey divided the Mediterranean into 13 districts, and he placed each of them under the command of a legate (deputy commander). In a co-ordinated strike, each legate led his forces against the pirate bases and blockaded them, then sent other ships to scout for unknown pirate lairs. Then Roman troops destroyed the pirate bases. Many pirates surrendered; while ringleaders were executed, others were interrogated, ransomed and released. The attacks were launched simultaneously throughout the Mediterranean, with the deliberate exception of Cilicia, which was not attacked.

Next, Pompey led his fleets in a sweep through the Mediterranean, working eastwards from Gibraltar, driving any surviving pirates ahead of him. Many pirates ran into the blockades established by the legates and were defeated. The rest were driven towards Cilicia. In 40 days Pompey had successfully cleared the Mediterranean of pirates, apart from Cilicia, which he now blockaded. All attempts to break out were repulsed. Then Pompey tightened the cordon, pushing inwards along the coast to reduce the size of the pirate enclave. Legionaries were sent ashore to explore every inlet and gully to make sure that nobody slipped through the net as the pirates were gradually driven towards the main pirate stronghold of Coracesium, sited on a remote Cilician peninsula. Then Pompey sent in his legionaries. The Cilicians were no match for Roman veterans, and within weeks they were forced to surrender.

Once again Pompey was surprisingly lenient, executing only the ringleaders and exiling the rest to the hinterland. Pompey returned to Rome in triumph. In three months he had destroyed 120 pirate bases, killed 10,000 pirates, captured 500 ships and secured a fortune in pirate booty, which was shared equally among Pompey, his men and the Senate. As a result, for the first time in history, the Mediterranean was cleared of pirates. In the Mare Nostrum, Roman shipping would remain safe from attack for another four centuries. The Pax Romana (Roman Peace) would break down only following the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, at which point the anti-piracy mantle was passed to the Eastern Romans. In the guise of the Byzantine Empire, the war against piracy would continue to be fought well into the Middle Ages – until Byzantium itself finally succumbed to the Turks. However, by then piracy was once again big business in the Mediterranean, although the centre of piratical activity had moved from Asia Minor to the shores of North Africa.

OPPOSITE A late Roman cargo ship of the 4th century AD in a mosaic showing the embarkation of exotic animals. As Roman military power declined, merchant ships of this kind became easy prey for a new breed of pirates, operating in the Adriatic and Aegean Seas.

Chapter Two

MEDIEVAL PIRATES

THE SEA RAIDERS

Most people don't always think of the Vikings as pirates. They rarely robbed at sea, although certainly there were those who made their living from piracy. Rather, they were sea raiders, raiding coastal targets. Although the Vikings were not the first of Europe's Dark Age sea raiders, they were arguably the most successful. For over two centuries they terrorized northern Europe, then returned to conquer, and to rule. Although not strictly pirates, they did rely on their ships for speed, mobility and surprise – all hallmarks of the sea raider.

Most Vikings began as small-scale raiders, using one or two ships, but by the end of the era they operated in large fleets, capable of landing substantial armies. The Anglo-Saxon cleric Alcuin dated the coming of the Vikings to the morning of 8 June AD 793. That day a Viking band descended upon the monastic island of

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry for AD 793 recorded that on 8 June 'Heathen men came and miserably destroyed God's church on Lindisfarne, with plunder and slaughter.' The attack on Lindisfarne marked the start of a devastating series of Viking raids on the British Isles. (Photo by Werner Forman/Universal Images Group/Getty Images)

Lindisfarne, off the north-east coast of England, and put the monks to the sword. It then pillaged the monastery and set it on fire. Even in an age when murder was commonplace, this seemed an unprecedented atrocity. A chronicler described the raid as 'an attack on both the body and soul of Christian England'. Alcuin went further, claiming that 'never before had such a terror appeared in Britain as we now have suffered from a pagan race'.

The attack on Lindisfarne was only the beginning. Just a year later, in 794, an Irish monk recorded 'the devastation of all the islands of Britain by the gentiles' as Viking attacks were launched along Britain's eastern seaboard. Over the following years the monastery of Iona off Scotland's western coast was plundered, as were several others.

By 798 the Vikings were raiding the northern coast of Ireland, using their winter camp in Orkney as a base. Raids were launched increasingly further afield, until by the start of the 9th century it seemed as if no coastal community was safe. The monks who bore the brunt of these likened the fury of the Norsemen to the apocalypse. The Book of Jeremiah produced a suitably appropriate quote: 'Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land'. To these monks, the arrival of the Vikings presaged the end of the world. Although this day of judgement never came, the Viking raids would continue.

By the 820s a new breed of Norse overlord was appearing, willing to offer British coastal communities their protection in return for money. The era of the Viking raiders was starting to give way to a new phase of conquest, in which Britain became the battleground of warlords rather than a destination for plunderers. However, the raids would continue in Ireland for another decade. In 820 a cleric wrote in the *Annals of Ulster* that 'The sea spewed forth floods of foreigners into Erin, so that no haven, no landing place, no stronghold, no fort and no castle might be found, but it was submerged by waves of Vikings and pirates'. Even settlements that had been considered far enough from the coast to be safe from attack now fell prey to the Norsemen.

During the late 830s the Viking leader Turgeis followed up these attacks by seizing control of Ulster. Then the Vikings captured Dublin, and established a new power base.

For the most part the Vikings who raided the shores of Celtic Scotland and Ireland were Norsemen – from Norway. The raiders who devastated much of Anglo-Saxon England during the late 8th and early 9th centuries were Danish. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry for 835 declared that 'In this year the heathen devastated Sheppey' – an island on the Thames Estuary. From that point on the

A large Viking force landing on the coast of Anglo-Saxon England. While this illustration accompanied a 12th-century English manuscript chronicling St Edmund the Martyr, the scene it depicts still captures the general menacing appearance of Viking raiding parties of the 9th century.

A Viking longship filled with heavily armed warriors, as depicted in an illustration from a 12th-century Frankish manuscript, the *Life of St Aubin*. The warriors of a real Viking raiding party would have been less uniformly dressed and equipped, and would probably have had a less disciplined appearance.

Chronicle reported that each year the raids became larger and more numerous. During the 850s the Vikings established themselves in Kent on the islands of Thanet and Sheppey, which provided secure bases for expansion. This heralded a change of emphasis from raiding to conquest.

The Anglo-Saxons and the Celts were not the only peoples to suffer from Viking attacks. 'In the year of our Lord 845, the vast army of the Northmen breached the frontier of the Christians.' This was how a friar in the monastery of St Germain-des-Prés near Paris recorded the arrival of a large Viking force at the very gates of Paris. Actually the first Viking raiders had arrived in the Frankish kingdom 25 years earlier when they raided the Frisian (Dutch) coastline and probed the defences of the river Seine. In 841 the Vikings plundered Rouen, then extorted *danegeld* (protection money) from the locals. This was followed by the great attack on Paris in 845, when the sack of the city was only prevented by the payment of a horde of silver. Within six years the Vikings had established a permanent settlement on the lower Seine, which duly became Normandy, the land of the Norsemen.

In Europe the Viking raids lasted little more than half a century, a period that ended because there was little left to plunder, and because the Vikings had developed a taste for conquest. Whether these raiders can be dubbed pirates is open to question, although contemporaries viewed the term as virtually interchangeable with Viking. In effect the activities of individual Viking bands had become subsumed into a larger movement, influenced in turn by the development of a national Scandinavian identity. Although the Viking age would continue into the mid-11th century, by the middle of the 9th century the days of the sea raider were over.

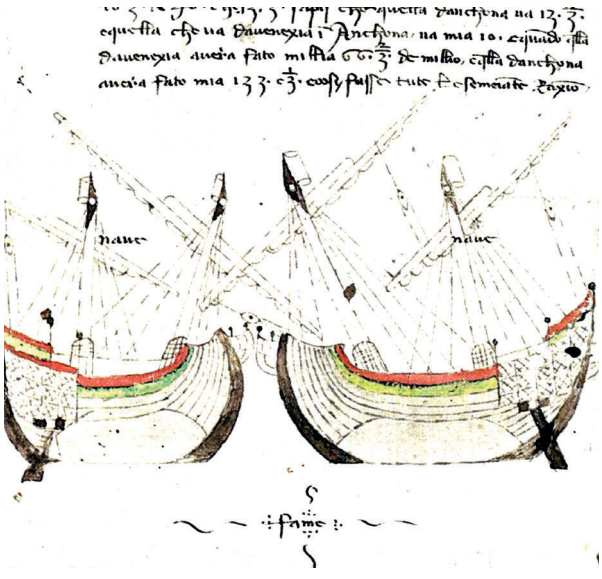
PREYING ON THE HANSE

While the ascendancy of the Viking sea raider might have ended, the era of the Scandinavian sea trader would continue, forming part of a greater mercantile empire that would transform the economy of Europe. By the 12th century a new series of major ports had developed along the Baltic and North Sea coasts – Hamburg, Lübeck, Bremen, Stettin, Danzig and Rostock being the most prominent.

In 1241, Lübeck and Hamburg joined forces to form the Hanseatic League, a merchant guild that supervised maritime trade in the region, and provided some protection against pirates. Other ports soon joined the League, until by 1300 the Hanse had become a major power in the Baltic and North Seas. The League dominated north European trade, which in turn reduced the power of individual states in the region. The Danes in particular were staunch opponents of the League, and they waged a low-key war against this mercantile monopoly that lasted well into the 14th century. This conflict also attracted those who sought to claim their own share of this Hanseatic wealth.

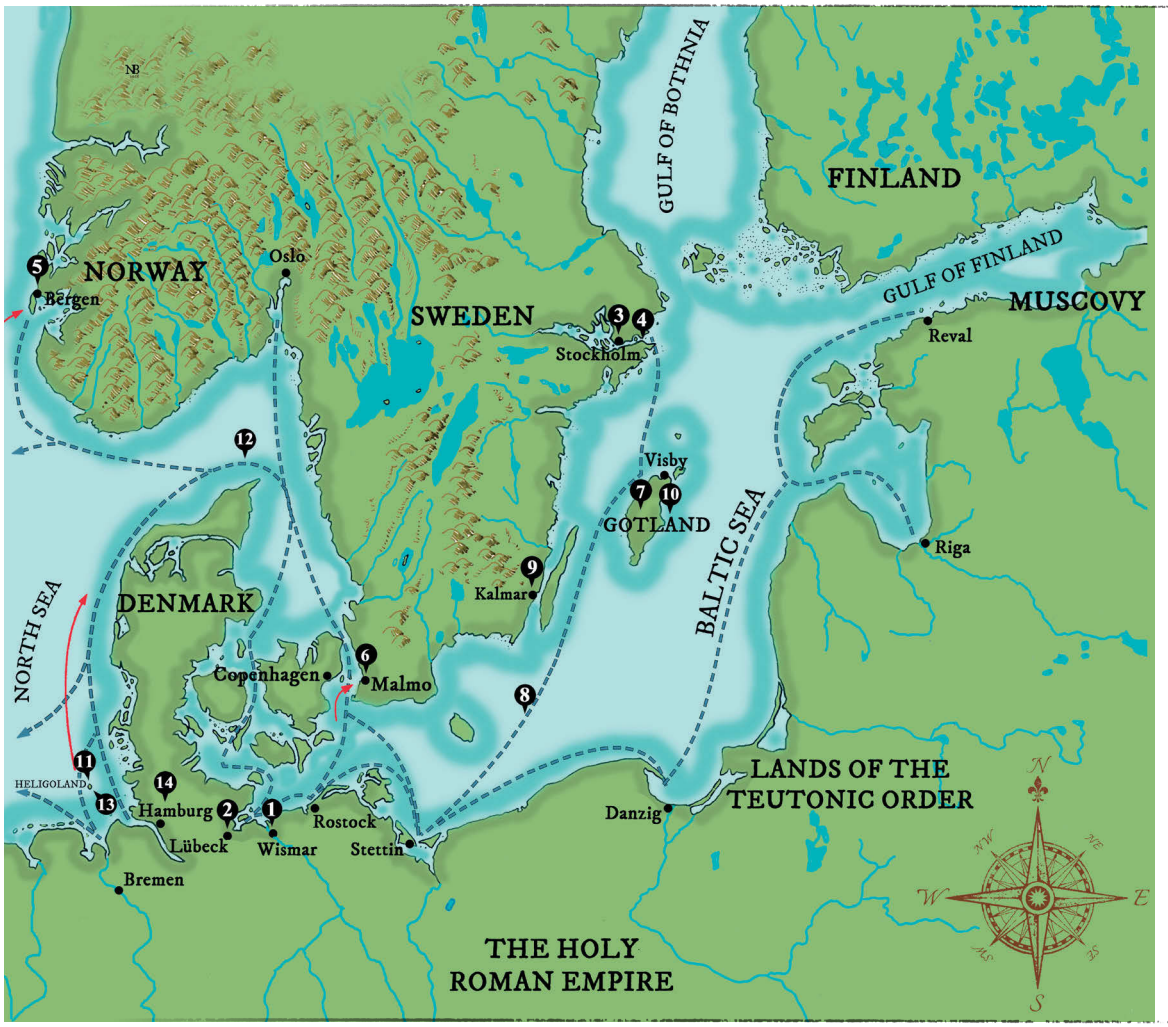
One such group was the confederation known as the Cinque Ports on England's south-east coast. The organization was formed in the early 14th century to protect local English shipping from pirates and to encourage trade. However, while the Hanseatic League remained a legitimate trading organization, its English equivalent also operated as an extortion racket, a semi-legal piratical organization that safeguarded its own shipping and those of its 'clients', but attacked shipping that had not paid for 'protection'.

In the Baltic, a group of German mercenaries and pirates formed their own brotherhood. Known as the *Vitalienbrüder*, or 'Victual Brothers', a name coined after running supplies into a beleaguered Stockholm in 1392, they then spent a decade fighting an undeclared war against both the Danes and the Hanseatic port of Lübeck. In 1393 the brothers sacked the Hanse ports of Bergen in Norway and Malmö in Sweden. The following year they seized Visby on the Baltic island of Gotland, and the island became their major base. This, however, coincided with a political union that united Sweden, Denmark and Norway under the Danish crown, and meant the brothers now had a powerful enemy.



Although these merchant ships are depicted in a 14th-century Venetian manuscript, they actually show much older vessels, of the kind used by Italian traders operating in the Aegean, Adriatic and eastern Mediterranean from the 12th century on.

KLAUS STÖRTEBEKER AND THE VICTUAL BROTHERS



Still, the brothers continued their attacks on Danish and Hanseatic ships, until in 1398 Denmark leased Gotland to the Teutonic Knights. This powerful military brotherhood duly invaded Gotland and drove the pirates from the island. Then the survivors of the brotherhood established new bases on the Ems estuary on the modern German–Dutch border, and on the North Sea island of Heligoland. This new brotherhood called itself the Likedeelers, which meant sharing things in equal measure.

Their most famous pirate leader was Klaus 'Störtebeker'. It is probable that his given name was Nikolaus Storzenbecher, and that he was born in Wismar

KEY

---- Trade routes ← Pirate raids

1. Around 1360: Klaus Störtebeker is born in Wismar.
2. 1367: The Hanseatic League declares war on Denmark, the dominant power in the Baltic. The Danes suffer several defeats, and in 1370 they sue for peace. The Hanse are now the region's major power.
3. 1389: The Danish Queen Margaret invades Sweden and besieges Stockholm.
4. 1392: The Victual Brothers – a pirate organisation – side with the Swedes against the Danes and relieve Stockholm. The pirates are also aided by the Hanseatic League.
5. 1393: The Victual Brothers raid the Hanseatic port of Bergen, and the League declares war on the pirates.
6. Early 1394: The Victual Brothers sack Malmö, and go on to raid dozens of smaller ports in Sweden and further afield.
7. Late 1394: The Victual Brothers seize the island of Gotland, and Visby becomes their main pirate base.
8. By the winter of 1394/95, maritime trade in the Baltic is at a standstill thanks to pirate attacks on the sea lanes. Both the Hanseatic League and the Danes suffer from this.
9. 1397: The Kalmar Union is founded, as Denmark, Sweden and Norway are united under the rule of Queen Margaret.
10. 1398: The Kalmar Union hires the Teutonic Knights to deal with the pirate threat. The Knights invade Gotland, Visby is captured, and the surviving Victual Brothers flee the island.
11. 1399: What remains of the pirate brotherhood re-establishes itself on the island of Heligoland.
12. 1400: Störtebeker becomes the head of the pirate brotherhood, which now calls itself the Likedeelers. They prey on Hanseatic and Danish ships alike.
13. 1401: A Hanseatic fleet attacks the Likedeelers, and in a sea battle fought off Heligoland the pirates are crushed and Störtebeker and the other survivors are taken prisoner.
14. 1401: Störtebeker and his men are executed in the Hanseatic port of Hamburg.

around 1360. Störtebeker was one of the brotherhood who escaped from Gotland, and he rose to command the Likedeelers. His pirate flagship was allegedly called the *Seetiger* (*Sea Tiger*), and was the largest ship in the pirate fleet. Heligoland was ideally placed for attacks on shipping sailing in and out of Hamburg, which by then was a thriving Hanseatic port. This made the Likedeelers a serious threat.

Störtebeker finally met his match in 1401, when the Hanse sent a fleet led by Simon of Utrecht to capture the island. The two forces met off Heligoland, and after a long-running battle the *Seetiger* was captured, as were Störtebeker and 71 of his men. They were taken to Hamburg to face trial, and that October Störtebeker was condemned to death. Even then he struck a deal. Pardons would be granted to all of the crewmen whom he could walk past after his head was cut off. As the legend goes, he staggered past 11 of his shipmates before he was tripped

by the executioner. The heads of the pirates were stuck on spikes along the banks of the river Elbe. Today Klaus Störtebeker is something of a German hero, a cross between Robin Hood and Sir Francis Drake.

THE PIRATE KNIGHTS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

In the early 5th century AD, when the Western Roman Empire collapsed in the face of barbarian invasion, the Eastern Empire somehow managed to weather the storm. In fact, as the Byzantine Empire it survived as a political entity for another millennium. The Byzantine Empire was effectively founded in AD 330 when the emperor Constantine established a new capital in Byzantium, which he renamed Constantinople. The city soon became a major commercial centre which thrived on its maritime trade. Byzantine warships patrolled these sea lanes, protecting the empire from seaborne attack and keeping pirates at bay.

This all started to unravel during the late 11th century. First came a catastrophic military defeat at the hands of the Turks at the battle of Manzikert (1071), which led to the loss of much of Asia Minor. Then the Crusaders appeared, who regarded the Greek Orthodox Byzantines as almost as much of a religious enemy as the Muslims. In the aftermath of Manzikert the Byzantine navy had been neglected, and so in 1189 the Byzantine emperor Isaac II signed a naval treaty with the Venetians. This policy backfired spectacularly, as in 1204 these Italians stormed and sacked Constantinople. What remained of the Byzantine navy was destroyed, and while the tattered remnants of the empire survived, its ability to control the seas did not. So from 1204 onwards the waters of the eastern Mediterranean were once again a haven for pirates.

This new infestation took root amid the patchwork of petty states where a new breed of Latin overlord saw piracy as a useful source of revenue. Seizing this opportunity, Italian adventurers took to piracy in large numbers. They established themselves in remote bases, well away from Venetian patrols or from Byzantine authority. Crete was a favourite haunt of theirs, as was Monemvasia in southern Greece. This harbour, known as the 'Rock', was a medieval fortress built on a rocky outcrop, joined to the mainland by a small causeway. This near-impregnable base became a major pirate haven during the 13th century, as did the nearby Mani peninsula to the west.

Other busy pirate havens were found in the Dalmatian Islands of the central Adriatic – now part of Croatia's picturesque Dalmatian coast. The region was then known as Maria, and it had been infested by pirates before the establishment

of Byzantine control. Now, like the Peloponnese, Maria provided pirates with a secure base astride the rich Venetian sea lanes.

Their most successful pirate leader was Margaritone of Brindisi (1149–97), an Italian knight who began his maritime career as a pirate. He then became a privateer working for the Norman rulers of Sicily, who rewarded him with high office. In 1185 he seized control of the Dalmatian Islands from the Byzantines, and turned them into a major privateering base. His end finally came while assisting the Sicilians by helping to defend Naples. In 1194 he was captured when the city fell to the Holy Roman Empire, and he died in a German prison. Still, the Dalmatian Islands remained a pirate base for another decade, until the archipelago was attacked and captured by the Venetian fleet in 1204. During the century that followed local pirates established new havens on Corfu, Zante and Cephalonia, and these islands remained active pirate bases until the late 14th century.

The real pirate heyday in Greek waters came in the later 13th century. The emperor Michael III recaptured Constantinople from the Italians, but he lacked the resources to rebuild the navy. Instead he hired pirates as privateers, and under the Byzantine banner they preyed on Italian ships throughout the eastern Mediterranean. The irony was that most of these pirates were Italians, from Venice or Genoa. One of these Byzantine privateers, Giovanni de lo Cavo, seized Rhodes from the Genoese in 1278, and became overlord of the island, ruling in the name of the Byzantine emperor. Rhodes remained a thriving pirate haven until 1306, when the Knights Hospitaller conquered the island.

By that time the rest of the region had been subjugated by the Turks, the Byzantines or the Italians. The growing naval power of the Ottoman Empire and the regional dominance of the Venetians and the Knights Hospitaller meant that lawlessness was curbed and maritime trade encouraged. After the capture of Rhodes, only remaining pirate refuge on the Greek coast of the Aegean was Athens. From 1311 on, pirates flourished under the protection of Duke Manfred of Athens, a Catalan mercenary who hired his services to Latin and Byzantine rulers alike. His so-called 'Catalan pirates' remained a scourge in the region until the Turkish conquest of Athens in 1458.

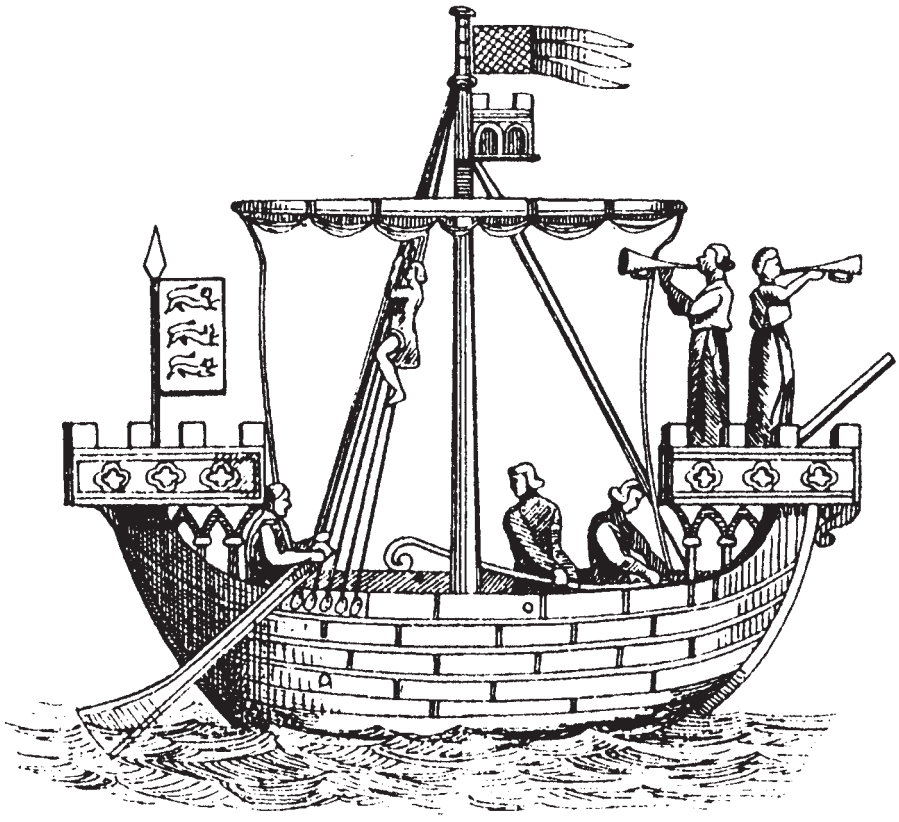
By the late 14th century the centre of piratical activity in the Mediterranean had moved west to the Mediterranean coast of North Africa. At a time when the merchants of northern Europe were re-establishing long-abandoned

This 14th-century seal depicts a cog, the round-hulled and commodious little ship that was used as both merchant vessel and warship during this period. This example shows a rudimentary quarterdeck and forecastle.

maritime trading routes, the Mediterranean was being divided into a religious battleground, where piracy and naval power would be combined to deadly effect.

PIRACY AROUND THE BRITISH ISLES

One of the characteristics of the feudal system was that the central power of the crown was limited. This made it difficult to maintain a state navy powerful enough to root out pirate dens. Therefore, in British waters, piracy thrived wherever it could, particularly in the English Channel and the Irish Sea. In the Channel Islands pirates even became semi-feudal lords themselves, benefiting from the dynastic struggle between England and France. By the early 13th century piracy had become such a serious problem in the English Channel that only the best-protected ships were guaranteed a safe passage. One of the most notable of these pirates was Eustace the Monk, also known as the Black Monk,



In this depiction of a late 14th-century cog from an English seal, the forecastle and sterncastle structures are more integrated into the hull of the ship, providing a better platform for fighting.