

REVIEWS

Maritime History Volume 1: The Age of Discovery, John Hattendorf (ed.).
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THE VOLUME IS THE PRODUCT of a Summer Institute held at the John Carter Brown Library, Providence, Rhode Island, in 1992. The editor obtained for it, and for the subsequent volume under review, the services of an outstanding group of contributors, each pre-eminent in the individual sections for which he took responsibility. The remarkable thing is how each of them has hit a nearly uniform level of presentation so as to make the volume read almost as if it were the work of a single author. The end result is that it forms what is probably the best introduction we have had so far to the earliest phase of extra-European maritime expansion. A list of the contributors will demonstrate their academic standing — Richard Unger, Charles Verlinden, George Winius, Felipe Fernández Armesto, William D. and Carla Rahn Phillips, and A.N. Ryan.

In chapter three Richard Unger traces the development of the ship in western Europe in the later middle ages. He points out that hull form had been standardised but that sail plans remained flexible. So far as sails were concerned the two or three masted vessels were carrying a lateen at the stern and, possibly, a small foresail as well. Such vessels were suitable for long as well as short voyages. One important point which he makes is that for a four month voyage on a long journey no less than

500 kilograms of food and water per crewman had to be carried, which for a 50-ton vessel amounted to 10,000 kgs. which would apply to the *Matthew*, assuming she had a crew of twenty.

A.N. Ryan considers the misty evidence we have about the pre-Cabotian ventures of Bristol seamen and concludes that the many attempts made between 1480 and 1496 may well have located land across the Atlantic. Indeed, evidence from the Basque country may indicate that they were known to have made such a discovery before 1476, though it also indicates that they were unable to find the island of Brasil in subsequent attempts. John Day states that they had made such a discovery before Cabot arrived, but does not indicate that they were able to find it again. This may well point to Cabot's crucial advantage in being experienced in latitude sailing as providing them with a means to return to their landfall across the Atlantic. Ryan rightly raises a query about whether Bristol was able, after the pioneer catches of cod in 1502 and 1504, to continue the fishery in the face of much stronger Portuguese, and later French and Spanish competition, as we have no further evidence until the 1530s.

No one who is interested in what Europeans did at sea, outside their traditional and long established routes, and which were to lay the foundations for overseas empires, can fail to gain authoritative information and understanding from this volume so far as maritime issues and actions are concerned. Professor Hattendorf is to be congratulated on the achievement of his team of historians, so that the volume is a good augury for the quality and range of its successors.