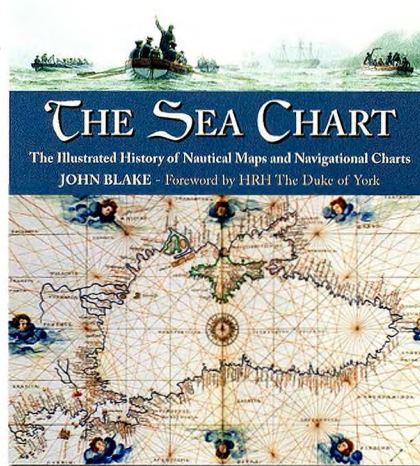


The Sea Chart

The Illustrated History of Nautical Maps and Navigational Charts

Foreword by HRH The Duke of York; By John Blake, published by Conway Maritime Press 2004, ISBN 0 85177 945 X, RRP: £30.00.

This is a handsome volume that will achieve the author's stated aim "to appeal to the interested public at large, rather than the academic ..." The staggering effort over time that humankind has put into the quest for safer and more accurate charts is poignantly captured on the dust jacket of the book in the author's use of Myers' painting which depicts Vancouver's final survey parties returning to the ships at Port Conclusion, Alaska, in a hard rain squall on 19th August, 1794. It is all there! The cost in manpower, effort and resources and the isolation endured to capture information about a relatively small area of the world is evoked in the image. No wonder we still know so relatively little about the oceans! The efforts of such legendary surveyors and chart makers are generally well chronicled: less well known and largely taken for granted by the general public is the immense effort and skill over hundreds of years by countless hydrographers and nautical cartographers that underpins much of the world's exploration, development and trade. Operating at sea remains sufficiently hazardous to this day without the mariner having to worry about the accuracy of his or her charts. HRH The Duke of York points out in his foreword that "we almost take for granted the safe and accurate transit of ships across the oceans of the world that today's navigational charts give us."



Any volume that illuminates this subject for the general public is therefore to be welcomed.

The Introduction is a broadly written essay on the 'sea chart'. The author writes in a style that is attractive to the general reader. He pays particular attention to the detail in his descriptions of the many reproductions contained in the book. The layout throughout is pleasing to the eye and the quality of reproduction is high. Images are sharp and 'clean' and the high standard is maintained throughout. The use of panels to expand on particular topics of interest is done rather well. The early coverage of such topics as wind roses, origins, portolans and navigational views are covered in just sufficient detail to whet the reader's

appetite to embark on the metaphorical voyage through time with this author that the book promises and largely delivers.

The first chapter deals with navigation. The significance of weather to early seafarers cannot be overstated for obvious reason. Empathy with the mariner is an important attribute for any nautical cartographer, and the navigator's requirements have always been reflected in the portrayal of charting information. Thus, we see such early examples as Sir Francis Drake's Pocket Tide Tables, 1548; views, sketches and diagrams; emphasis on shoaling; topographical detail and even (Hailey in 1700) magnetic variations. Graphic depiction alone was never going to be adequate, no matter how skilled the artisan, and so we see examples of the development of ancillary documentation such as the Sailing Directions, tables and almanacs. The early problem of determining longitude is well known, as is the issue of how to lay off a straight course bearing between two places on a chart, solved by Mercator and his eponymous Projection. These are covered in the first chapter. Geographic knowledge was power. The secrecy of earlier times has given way to the international sharing of geographic information that now exemplifies the ongoing quest for increasingly accurate charts and the consequent improvement of safety at sea.

The author then takes us on a fabulous charted voyage around key areas of the world. Commencing in the Mediterranean we can begin to appreciate the impact on the form of the chart that reproductive technology has had as individual works of art, beautifully presented, give way to the harder, mass produced reproductions of the modern chart, first influenced by engraving media such as copper that facilitated the pragmatic need for mass reproduction while facilitating the constant changes necessitated by revisions and reprints. See the Port Mudros chart depicted as an example.

We explore many regions of the world chosen by the author through the eyes of those many mapping folk who went before. Names like Cook and Flinders, of course, are to be expected in such a book, but the author surprises by including some of the lesser known but equally exquisite and astonishingly detailed examples as that of the 1750 Chart of the Gulf of Finland by Captain Nagaev. This

Russian captain contributed an astonishing 15 charts in the Baltic Sea. The influence of slavery on the sea cartography of Africa is considered. The beautifully detailed Jansson map of the Ottoman Empire (c. 1650) remains a visual delight. Examples of early Chinese charts show a particularly oriental approach to the depiction of nautical information and yet, many of the essential elements are all there: topographic detail, legends, routes, military information and fortifications. Gazing on the exquisite penmanship of Lewis Evans (1755) in the Map of the Middle British Colonies still gives intense pleasure to this writer who spent much of his formative professional career armed only with a crow quill nib. The presentation ends in quite melancholy vein with an image fragment of the survey track work carried out while Scott and his colleagues struggled on the Antarctic continent by his base ship, the steam yacht *Terra Nova*. Hydrographers never let a chance go by to collect information for the betterment of charting!

Throughout the book, the author also deals with many influences on charting. These include whaling, chart folio *The Atlantic Neptune*, Bligh and the *Bounty*, slavery, the Gulf Stream and the profound development of the world's hydrographic offices. The book generally achieves its aim to be an illustrated history of nautical maps and navigational charts. It will certainly appeal to its target audience who will be largely like myself, I suspect, an armchair mariner. They will enjoy the author's style and his historical but geographical slant on the development of what he calls sea charts. The author himself is no armchair mariner having served nearly twelve years as a sea-going officer in the Royal Navy plus five in the Reserve, with extensive service in ships across the world. His love of maritime history and the chart in it, both shine through in the volume, but like me in this review, I suspect he struggled with the issue of what to leave out as he put his work together.

This is a book that will appeal to those who enjoy browsing the works of those who contributed so much to the development of modern nautical cartography.

Reviewed by Ron Furness, chair, International Cartographic Association Commission on Marine Cartography, formerly Australian Hydrographic Office