

Introduction

Writing World Oceanic Histories

*Sujit Sivasundaram, Alison Bashford
and David Armitage*

‘World Oceans Day’ was first proposed at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro; the United Nations General Assembly formalised it in 2008. It was proposed with a view to the ocean’s status as vital matter for humankind: ‘Our rainwater, drinking water, weather, climate, coastlines, much of our food, and even the oxygen in the air we breathe, are all ultimately provided and regulated by the sea.’ The oceanic past – indeed a shared oceanic heritage – was also foregrounded in a bid to make World Oceans Day meaningful: throughout history, the UN stated, oceans and seas have linked the peoples of the world through trade and transportation.¹ It is clear from this effort that oceans do all kinds of discursive work for the UN, offering ways to make the world appear to be one. Indeed, UN materials shift constantly and tellingly between the plural oceans of the world and the singular ‘world ocean’. On the one hand, for example, World Oceans Day aims to draw attention to how ‘the world’s oceans – their temperature, chemistry, currents and life – drive global systems that make the Earth habitable for humankind’.² On the other, the spin-off network Réseau Océan Mondial, based in Brussels, resolutely posits a single ocean, the world ocean. Its statutes define the key objective of a global network of oceanographers as working ‘towards achieving a healthy and productive world ocean and to encourage sustainable use of its resources’.³ Even more directly, a singular and shared ‘world ocean’ drives the Intergovernmental Oceanic Commission of the UN Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) under the slogan ‘One Planet, One Ocean’.⁴

¹ ‘Throughout history, oceans and seas have been vital conduits for trade and transportation’; World Oceans Day – Background, United Nations: www.un.org/en/events/oceansday/background.shtml (accessed 28 February 2017).

² World Oceans Day – Background, United Nations: www.un.org/en/events/oceansday/background.shtml (accessed 28 February 2017).

³ Constitution, Réseau Océan Mondial, 28 January 2006: www.worldoceannetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/WON-STATUT-2006-ENG.pdf (accessed 28 February 2017).

⁴ Intergovernmental Oceanic Commission, UNESCO, *One planet, one ocean* (Paris, 2017).

2 S. Sivasundaram, A. Bashford and D. Armitage

Oceanic Histories analyses both the plural oceans of the world and the singular world ocean while bringing both into dialogue, placing oceans and seas within world history and envisaging world history through oceanic and maritime regions. The chapters present assessments of historians' work on the Indian, Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, the Arctic and the Southern Oceans and some of the world's major seas: the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the Sea of Japan/Korea's East Sea, the Baltic, the Red Sea and the South China Sea. Other chapters might be imagined – for example on the Caribbean, the Java Sea, the North Sea or the Caspian Sea. However, as the first such collective survey by multiple authors, the book's aim is to be extensive more than comprehensive, wide-ranging rather than yet all-encompassing.

Most of the chapters in *Oceanic Histories* have a historiographical objective in the first instance. They seek to chart how the human and natural pasts of these oceans and seas have been framed, written, presented and disputed over time, where they stand now and what might be their prospects for the future. Some seas and oceans – notably, the Pacific, the Atlantic, the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean – have long, variegated and ramified historiographies; others, such as the Red Sea, the Black Sea and the Southern Ocean, have shorter traditions and therefore demand more historical treatment than historiographical reconstruction at this stage. Every chapter works on the leading edge of its field even if the timelines and terms of discussion differ from sea to sea, ocean to ocean. Yet in every case, we can see that historical scholarship on each oceanic topic was established and influential well before 'World Oceans Day' emerged as a subject of international interest barely a generation ago.

Taken together and read in sequence, the chapters in the volume chart how histories and geographies as modes of knowledge became linked to the sea and its relation with land over the *longue durée*. The move early this century to promote a supposed 'new thalassology' often assumed the primacy of Mediterranean models for oceanic history with frequent reference to Fernand Braudel's work as germinal;⁵ more recently, the runaway institutional success of Atlantic history in the early 2000s, spearheaded by Harvard historian Bernard Bailyn, added another influential avatar.⁶ However, one running theme of this volume is to critique

⁵ For consideration and critique, see W. V. Harris, ed., *Rethinking the Mediterranean* (Oxford, 2005); Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, 'The Mediterranean and "the new thalassology"', *American Historical Review*, 111 (2006): 722–40; Molly Greene, 'The Mediterranean Sea', below.

⁶ David Armitage, 'The Atlantic Ocean', below.

and recontextualise this genealogy, by showing how thinkers, narrators and historians have written of the sea beyond the Mediterranean – and, by extension, the Atlantic – over long periods before the rise of US- and Europe-based scholarship on seas. Many of our authors place the historiography of the *Annales* and the Atlantic, of Braudel and Bailyn, within a totally different intellectual ecology often with origins well before the twentieth century. Some also show how inhibiting these prevalent trends have been for generating historiographies for other tracts of water, for instance the Arctic or the Red Sea.⁷ And the longer genealogies of, say, the Pacific and Indian Oceans presented here question the claim that they derived, or should draw inspiration, from the Atlantic or Mediterranean, and argue forcefully that they ‘should be considered as original model[s] for the historicising of oceans’ in their own right.⁸

This recalibration of influence, and resurrection of alternative inspirations, should have effects not only for the specific oceanic histories treated here but also for the future of Mediterranean and Atlantic histories themselves. With these revisions in mind, the authors recognise and take full account of the fact that the accelerated writing of oceanic histories over the 1990s and 2000s paralleled and often intersected with that same environmental and global sensibility that gave rise to such a thing as an ‘Earth summit’ and a ‘World Oceans Day’ in the first place. In this regard, the book provides the most comprehensive, comparative and critical mapping now available of the distinct timelines and growth patterns in the historiography of oceanic history.⁹ Given the misunderstanding of the origins of ocean histories, it also considers what can be drawn from reading across these separated literatures now.

Oceanic Histories aims, through its various chapters, to answer the question: what is the historical and historiographical relation between world histories, the world’s oceans and the world ocean? (This will also be the informing concern of the monographic series, ‘Cambridge Oceanic Histories’, that this volume inaugurates.) Oceanic historians, especially those rooted in a tradition of maritime scholarship, often claim a particular stake in a world history configured geographically and

⁷ Sverker Sörlin, ‘The Arctic Ocean’, and Jonathan Miran, ‘The Red Sea’, below; also Alexis Wick, *The Red Sea: In search of lost space* (Oakland, CA, 2016).

⁸ Sujit Sivasundaram, ‘The Indian Ocean’, and Alison Bashford, ‘The Pacific Ocean’ (quoted), below.

⁹ For an earlier, less comprehensive, effort see Peter N. Miller, ed., *The sea: Thalassography and historiography* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2013), and for contemporaneous enterprises attempting a *longue durée* sweep, see now Michael North, *Zwischen Hafen und Horizont: Weltgeschichte der Meere* (Munich, 2016), and Christian Buchet, gen. ed., *La mer dans l’histoire/The sea in history*, 4 vols. (Paris and Woodbridge, 2017).

4 S. Sivasundaram, A. Bashford and D. Armitage

economically: that is, in the historical geo-economics of a globe increasingly connected by large waterways and the exchange and commerce they facilitated. This is an approach to oceanic histories in which, broadly speaking, globalisation took place in a maritime world connected forcefully, but certainly not solely, through the European maritime empires and coastal polities in commercial relation with each other, and with regional maritime traders, labourers and navigators in different parts of the world.¹⁰

While paying attention to the role of European maritime empires as drivers and conduits of world history, *Oceanic Histories* also foregrounds another tradition of world history-writing that concentrates attention on extra-European worlds on their own terms.¹¹ For example, our authors examine the Middle Kingdom-centred Nanyang, the maritime Malay world, the seafaring traders between Arabia and India and the complex of colonial and Indigenous whalers and sealers in the Southern Ocean.¹² In both of these traditions of world history, some scholarship is squarely maritime while other parts are more oceanic. We suggest below some of the differences as well as the synergies between these proximate and overlapping approaches.

Many recent historians of oceans and seas identify their work within a tradition of transnational history-writing. This is unsurprising, because none of the oceans and seas align with any one polity and the move to their histories represents an ‘escape’ from the prevailing ‘terracentrism’ of traditional history-writing.¹³ But is ‘transnational’ the best indicator of the substance and method of oceanic histories? Perhaps not – not least

¹⁰ For example, Philip de Souza, *Seafaring and civilization: Maritime perspectives on world history* (London, 2001); Daniel Finamore, ed., *Maritime history as world history* (Gainesville, FL, 2004); David Cannadine, ed., *Empire, the sea and global history: Britain's maritime world, c. 1760–c. 1840* (Basingstoke, 2007); Maria Fusaro and Amélia Polónia, eds., *Maritime history as global history* (St John's, Newfoundland, 2010); Lincoln Paine, *The sea and civilization: A maritime history of the world* (New York, 2013); Ingo Heidbrink, Lewis R. Fischer, Jari Ojala, Fei Sheng, Stig Tenold and Malcolm Tull, ‘Forum: Closing the “blue hole”: Maritime history as a core element of historical research’, *International Journal of Maritime History*, 29 (2017): 325–66.

¹¹ For example, K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An economic history from the rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1985); Wang Gungwu and Ng Chin-keong, eds., *Maritime China in transition, 1750–1850* (Wiesbaden, 2004); Markus P. M. Vink, ‘Indian Ocean studies and the “new thalassology”’, *Journal of Global History*, 2 (2007): 41–62. Also note Engsang Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley, CA, 2006).

¹² Eric Tagliacozzo, ‘The South China Sea’, Sivasundaram, ‘The Indian Ocean’, Jonathan Miran, ‘The Red Sea’, and Alessandro Antonello, ‘The Southern Ocean’, below.

¹³ Rila Mukherjee, ‘Escape from terracentrism: Writing a water history’, *Indian Historical Review*, 41 (2014): 87–101; see also Isabel Hofmeyr, ‘The complicating sea: The Indian Ocean as method’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 32 (2012): 584–90.

because, at the heart of the ‘transnational’, we always find the nation.¹⁴ In many ways it is more useful, or at least as useful, to consider how oceanic histories have been *trans-local* studies.¹⁵ Littoral societies often shared more in common with similar formations across seas and oceans than they did with their own nearby hinterlands.¹⁶ Coastal entrepôts operated in a global geography of connection, not with nations or the capitals of other polities, but primarily, even exclusively, with other local port towns. Many of these were the key urban sites for a converging world history over the long modern period: for instance, Guangzhou, Valparaiso, Cape Town, Manila, Florence or Singapore. These ports hold the *trans-local* history that constituted world history. Yet at the same time, several authors below highlight how sea-facing cosmopolitans were disowned by their others, necessitating the need for historians to place ports and entrepôts in a broader oceanic context. Ports encompass many divergent histories: for instance, of labourers who travelled through them; of commodities that were transshipped at the site of the port; of technicians, journalists and activists who set up stall in port cities; and of the imperial photographers who roamed across ports to visualise maritime travel and urban development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁷

Oceanic histories are also perhaps better conceptualised as area or regional (and inter-area and inter-regional) studies, notwithstanding the Cold War scholarly and political connotations of this approach. This is often what is meant by the ‘world’ or ‘worlds’ often attributed to oceans: ‘the Indian Ocean world’, or ‘the Pacific world’ or ‘the Atlantic world’, as strategic arenas defined by ideas of political community or even of civilisation. In this respect, it is important to recall that conceptions of an ‘Atlantic world’ and a ‘Pacific world’ were products of strategic thinking during the Second World War and diplomatic plans for

¹⁴ C. A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol and Patricia Seed, ‘AHR conversation: On transnational history’, *American Historical Review*, 111 (2006): 1441–64.

¹⁵ Matt Matsuda, *Pacific worlds: A history of seas, peoples, and cultures* (Cambridge, 2012), is an exemplary use of the ‘trans-local’ within oceanic history.

¹⁶ Michael N. Pearson, ‘Littoral society: The concept and the problems’, *Journal of World History*, 17 (2006): 353–74.

¹⁷ Arndt Graf and Chua Beng Huat, eds., *Port cities in Asia and Europe* (London, 2009); Haneda Masashi, ed., *Asian port cities, 1600–1800: Local and foreign cultural interactions* (Singapore, 2009); Brad Beaven, Karl Bell and Robert James, eds., *Port towns and urban cultures: International histories of the waterfront, c. 1700–2000* (Basingstoke, 2016); Nile Green, ‘Maritime worlds and global history: Comparing the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean through Barcelona and Bombay’, *History Compass* 11, 7 (July 2013): 513–23; and C. A. Bayly and Leila Tarazi Fawaz, eds., *Modernity and culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, 1890–1920* (New York, 2002).

reconstruction after it.¹⁸ More recently, political and economic concerns have generated parallel designators, such as the ‘Indo-Pacific’, or given new geopolitical heft to the Baltic and Black Sea as regions of international collaboration.¹⁹ While the nomination of such ‘worlds’ and areas suggests an underlying bias towards integration, their pluralisation, as a multiplicity of such worlds, reflects division, even competition, among and within them.

The ideological history of oceans and seas is most evident in the continuous geopolitical and epistemological battles over their naming. These can reflect the reactions of outsiders to, say, a South Sea deemed to be relatively calm or ‘pacific’ or a Black Sea perceived as either threatening (*Axeinos*) or welcoming (*Euxinos*).²⁰ It can also be an attempt to insert cultural presence: note the debate about renaming the Indian Ocean as the ‘Afrasian’ Sea.²¹ Sometimes the names of bodies of water explicitly signal sovereignty, if controversially so: the Sea of Japan/Korea’s East Sea or the South China Sea, for instance.²² Sometimes, they do so by inference, flagging an orientation and therefore a presumed centre, as in the Nanyang or the Southern Ocean – south, that is, from imperial China’s standpoint – the East Sea (east seen from Korea) or the Southern Ocean, north of Antarctica but south of Australia. One history of the naming of the Atlantic Ocean signals a Mediterranean perspective of, and upon, the world; the ocean beyond the pillars of Hercules that enclosed all land, as Atlas supported the heavens. But the Atlantic had a simultaneously diminished and larger function in *longue-durée* world history: from this standpoint, it shifted over the centuries from being the ocean that enclosed all land to the ocean that separated an ‘old world’ from a ‘new

¹⁸ For example, in Arnold Ræstad, *Europe and the Atlantic world*, ed. Winthrop W. Case (Princeton, NJ, 1941), and Fairfield Osborn, ed., *The Pacific world* (Washington, DC, 1945).

¹⁹ Rory Medcalf, ‘The Indo-Pacific: What’s in a name?’, *The American Interest*, 9, 2 (November–December 2013): 60–65.

²⁰ O. H. K. Spate, ‘“South Sea” to “Pacific Ocean”: A note on nomenclature’, *Journal of Pacific History*, 12 (1977): 205–11; Mark Peterson, ‘Naming the Pacific’, *Common-place*, 5, 2 (January 2005): www.common-place-archives.org/vol-05/no-02/peterson/index.shtml (accessed 28 February 2017); François de Blois, ‘The name of the Black Sea’, in Maria Macuch, Mauro Maggi and Werner Sundermann, eds., *Iranian Languages and Texts from Iran and Turan* (Wiesbaden, 2007), pp. 1–8; Bashford, ‘The Pacific Ocean’, and Stella Ghervas, ‘The Black Sea’, below.

²¹ See for instance, Michael N. Pearson, *Port cities and intruders: The Swahili coast, India, and Portugal in the early modern era* (Baltimore, MD, 1998) and Michael N. Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (London, 2013), p. 14.

²² As well as Tagliacozzo, ‘The South China Sea’, and Alexis Dudden, ‘The Sea of Japan/Korea’s East Sea’, below, see Si Jin Oh, ‘An identity aspect to the “wars” of maps in East Asia: Focusing on the East Sea/Sea of Japan name debate’, *Korea Observer*, 48 (2017): 57–83.

world'. Similarly, the Mediterranean gradually moved from being the centre of the world within the Greco-Roman ecumene to simply one sea among many, with no presumed priority or predominance, flowing into the world ocean itself. And of course it was not the 'Mediterranean' to Arabic and Muslim observers until the term entered Arabic in the nineteenth century by way of European languages.²³

There is also a curious history in which regional nomination has shifted between watery and territorial spaces, part of the 'terraqueous history' of the globe.²⁴ For example, 'Australia' became the name for the continent (in part due to its maritime circumnavigation between 1801 and 1803), yet in some early charts it is the ocean to its east that is labelled 'Greater Australia' or sometimes 'Australasia'.²⁵ This great archipelago of Pacific islands came to be named for the water surrounding them – 'Oceania', now the formal UN regional nomenclature.²⁶ To take another example, the *Mare Aethiopicum* of Antiquity was still in use as 'the Ethiopic Ocean' on nineteenth-century world maps. Over time it became the South Atlantic and then subsumed by the late nineteenth century into a holistic Atlantic, stretching almost from pole to pole.²⁷ But modern 'Ethiopia' shifted to the horn of Africa, far closer to the Indian Ocean than the Atlantic: it is, ironically, land-locked. In counterpoint, it is curious to note how our planet is named Earth when 70 per cent of its surface is Ocean. In this regard, it may be exceptional among the known planets, but it is not alone within the solar system and beyond in having oceans, even if these extra-terrestrial 'water worlds' – on Mars or on Saturn's moons, for instance – remain for the moment beyond the reach of historians.²⁸

Though divided by oceans and seas, the chapters here indicate clearly the fluid movement between them in the context of the world ocean and how their histories and material forms are entangled. In this way, the history of the Indian Ocean connects with the history of the Red Sea, the

²³ Greene, 'The Mediterranean Sea', below.

²⁴ Alison Bashford, 'Terraqueous histories', *The Historical Journal*, 60 (2017): 253–72; see also Hester Blum, 'Terraqueous planet: The case for oceanic studies', in Amy J. Elias and Christian Moraru, eds., *The planetary turn: Relationality and geoaesthetics in the twenty-first century* (Evanston, IL, 2015), pp. 25–36.

²⁵ National Library of Australia, *Mapping our world: Terra incognita to Australia* (Canberra, 2013).

²⁶ Bronwen Douglas, 'Terra Australis to Oceania: Racial geography in the "fifth part of the world"', *Journal of Pacific History*, 45 (2010): 179–210.

²⁷ Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, 'The Ethiopic Ocean – History and historiography, 1600–1975', *Portuguese Literary & Cultural Studies*, 27 (2015): 1–79.

²⁸ Jan Zalasiewicz and Mark Williams, *Ocean worlds: The story of seas on Earth and other planets* (Oxford, 2014), ch. 9, 'Oceans of the solar system'.

8 S. Sivasundaram, A. Bashford and D. Armitage

history of the Red Sea to the history of the Mediterranean, the history of the Mediterranean becomes the history of the Atlantic, the Atlantic of the Pacific, the Pacific of the Southern Ocean, and so forth. Strangely, though, the two oceans most physically distant from one another – the Arctic Ocean and the Southern Ocean – are closely combined, institutionally and historiographically, under ‘polar history’ and ‘polar studies’, as in the *Journal of Polar Studies*, for example, or at the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge; accordingly, we have linked them here.²⁹

As maritime historians have shown, it was circumnavigators and merchant mariners, whalers and navies in peace and war, who directly experienced the world ocean: the waters of the eastern and western, northern and southern hemispheres. And as environmental historians discuss, the world ocean also belonged to the mammals and fishes who swam, fed and migrated beneath it.³⁰ As a research enterprise for hydrographers, the ‘world ocean’ has been essential to oceanography since the 1960s.³¹ It has also become a highly politicised entity, linked both to an environmentalist global ecology and to the global history of capitalism. The world ocean, some argue, was the natural entity that facilitated the world system of commercial globalisation.³² And the world history of that globalisation depended on diverse human ingenuity and capacity to pass over the sea and to live upon it.

The Naval and the Oceanic

The challenge of making the sea a home has been a perennial human quest. Its persistence comes from how the ocean is seen to teem with life but is still unfit for our species. To venture onto the ocean has long been seen as somehow unnatural, with shipwreck and drowning the fitting rewards for hubris in contravening our terrestrial destiny.³³ Humans can swim, but only just. Swimming itself has a cross-cultural history including how European explorers of the sixteenth century such as Francis Drake attempted to frighten off Pacific islander swimmers who attacked

²⁹ Sörlin, ‘The Arctic Ocean’, and Antonello, ‘The Southern Ocean’, below.

³⁰ Ryan Tucker Jones, ‘Running into whales: The history of the north Pacific from below the waves’, *American Historical Review*, 118 (2013): 349–77.

³¹ Richard Carrington, *A biography of the sea: The story of the world ocean, its animal and plant populations, and its influence on human history* (New York, 1960); William A. Anikouchine and Richard W. Sternberg, *The world ocean: An introduction to oceanography* (London, 1981).

³² For example, Peter Jacques, *Globalization and the world ocean* (Oxford, 2006).

³³ Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with spectator: Paradigm of a metaphor for existence*, trans. Steven Rendall (Cambridge, MA, 1997).

them.³⁴ In much of the West, from the fall of Rome to the nineteenth century, there was an active prejudice against swimming. The quest to be with the sea means that those who cross the vast swathes of the world ocean have been cast as heroes. The challenge now combines with the prediction of a watery human future. As one set of authors notes, conceiving the sea in this way has been gendered: ‘Could the ocean then, be thought of as a source of all things, a kind of maternal sublime?’³⁵

If such is the tension in human engagements with the sea, the ship has served as a vehicle for experiments in habitation: how to live on board ship; how to create, distil or transform social and cultural norms in such spaces; how to govern and legislate on a ship over prisoners, sailors or ‘natives’; how to control a ship so that it transfers materials, ideas, nature and people across locales; and, how to proclaim and dramatise a culture from the deck and ‘across the beach’ to a newfound land or indeed to go to war with other nations on the water. It is as if the ship becomes a floating piece of land, practically, socially and often legally.³⁶ As the ship is given a name and biography, also a launch and decommissioning, along with flags, papers and nationality, it becomes akin to a person on the sea. On the casting of ships as alive, tales of Indigenous people who mistook European ships as birds or islands are many; they reveal as much about Euro-American projections and self-mythology as about indigenous cosmologies. When placed together with the difficulties of being at home with the sea, and the Foucauldian labelling of ships as classic ‘heterotopias’, it is unsurprising that epic moments of shipping have been commemorated with grandeur as alleged turning points in the human past.³⁷

Take for instance, the over-confident ship-shaped memorial to Portuguese early modern ‘discoveries’, the Padrão dos Descobrimentos, at one of the most westward points of Europe, on the River Tagus as it flows into the Atlantic in Lisbon. The memorial originated in 1940 from an exhibition of the Portuguese World held to celebrate the birth of the Portuguese nation in 1140, a celebration which chimed with the country’s authoritarian Estado Novo.³⁸ It was built in permanent form in 1960 to coincide with the death anniversary of Henry the Navigator. Set

³⁴ Nicholas Orme, *Early British swimming, 55 BC–AD 1719* (Exeter, 1983), p. 49.

³⁵ David Lambert, Luciana Martins and Miles Ogborn, eds. ‘Currents, visions and voyages: Historical geographies of the sea’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 32 (2006): 484.

³⁶ Lauren Benton, *A search for sovereignty: Law and geography in European empires, 1400–1800* (Cambridge, 2010).

³⁷ Michel Foucault, ‘Of other spaces’, *Diacritics*, 16 (1986): 27.

³⁸ Ellen W. Sapega, ‘Image and counter-image: The place of Salazarist images of national identity in contemporary Portuguese visual culture’, *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 39, 2 (Winter 2002): 48–50.

10 S. Sivasundaram, A. Bashford and D. Armitage

in rose-tinted stone and cement and shaped like a Portuguese caravel, it depicts men, following Henry the Navigator who is at the prow, reaching in fervent pose for the sea. The monument itself is firmly rooted on the shore, and yet it stretches from the land to the water. If this ship takes its meaning from its physical setting as such a bridge, then a similar reading is open for another ship-shaped monument to epic ‘discovery’, the so-called ‘Singing Ship’ monument in Emu Park in Queensland, Australia, which marked the Cook bicentenary in 1970. Here the element that plays a role is the wind: the ship is designed to ‘sing’ as the wind blows through it.³⁹ If successful navigation is about rising above the elements and taming them so as to live at sea and to cross the sea, it is curious that ship monuments like these are still environmental signs.

Indeed, such monuments serve as evidence of the multiply conflicted roles played by ships. For ship memorials are also found which are tokens not of achievement but of death on a vast scale. One example is the National Famine Monument or ‘Coffin Ship’ in Murrisk, County Mayo, Ireland.⁴⁰ A bronze sculpture with skeleton bodies in the riggings, it commemorates those who left Ireland for the New World. It was built by the Irish government for the 150th anniversary of the Great Famine. In popular telling, sharks followed the ‘coffin ships’ for the number of dead who were thrown overboard.⁴¹ Memorials to the Middle Passage also point to the ship as a bearer of memories of enslavement, violence, dehumanisation and death. One instance of this is the slave ship which is a part of the African American Monument in the South Carolina State House. If such is the memory of ships, this volume asks: how should historians return to the ship from the perspective of the world ocean?

To begin such an enterprise, it is important to contend with the variegated dimensions of human engagement with ships. Ships have served as experimental sites for life at sea as much as spaces of death, and watery tombs beneath the waves continue to fascinate the public as well as archaeologists. Modernity could quite literally be shipped as much as shipwrecked.⁴² Ships are, as revealed even by their monuments, environmental projects. They are also legal personalities and even cast as figures, as is evident from the elaborate figureheads kept in many maritime

³⁹ Ros Bandt, ‘Taming the wind: Aeolian sound practices in Australasia’, *Organised Sound*, 8 (2003): 198–99.

⁴⁰ Emily Mark-Fitzgerald, *Commemorating the Irish famine: Memory and the monument* (Liverpool, 2013).

⁴¹ Marcus Rediker, ‘History from below the water line: Sharks and the Atlantic slave trade’, *Atlantic Studies*, 5 (2008): 285–97.

⁴² Steve Mentz, *Shipwreck modernity: Ecologies of globalization, 1550–1719* (Minneapolis, MN, 2015).