
Global History and Maritime History¹

Patrick Manning

The World in Maritime Perspective: Images and Metaphors

In the course of their lives interacting with the sea, our ancestors put recurring energy into representing the waters they sailed and the watercraft they built. In paintings, sculptures, petroglyphs, photographs and models, many generations have created representations of the maritime side of human existence. The paintings and sketches in this vast repository remind the viewer of the oceanic expanse, drawing our eyes to great distances – to the horizon at least as much as to the foreground. The grand scope of the world lies before us – and, for the observant, the curvature of the horizon appears as well. Yet while a viewer might tend to look to the horizon when the sea is calm, the rise of tempests turns attention to the foreground. In this closer view, we cannot fail to feel the overwhelming force of nature compared with the limited energies of humanity – watercraft can be tossed like woodchips, and the shore can be inundated or washed away. The potential force of the waters becomes clear not only in the open seas and in great lakes but also along the rivers, where one must stand in awe of the power of floods. The concentration of resources in ships and ports means that disasters, natural and man-made, can be extremely costly.

Mankind focuses its collective gaze alternately toward the land and seas. Humanity arose on dry land, yet our existence has depended at every stage on the waters – on rivers, lakes and oceans. Throughout our existence, humans have relied on saltwater and on inland waterways – for food, for other resources, for travel and transportation. What other species relies with such an interesting balance on both the land and the waters? Certain birds and mammals live at the boundary of land and water, but the gulls and bears focus on the terrestrial side, while the pelicans and the otters concentrate on the maritime side. Only the humans exploit and combine the full range of land and sea. In the accumulation and interplay of voyages, maritime life brings encounter, exchange, diplomacy and trust, but also warfare, slaughter and domination.

¹An earlier version of this essay was presented as a keynote address on “Maritime History as Global History” at the Sixth International Congress of Maritime History in Ghent, Belgium, in July 2012.

Maritime life creates and reproduces social relations. Maritime work requires a complex division of labour which breeds cooperation and solidarity among shipmates. Yet such labour also brings its own sort of hierarchy – stereotypically in the role of the ship captain. Hierarchical power, a version of the division of labour, has its advantages in the decision making required for sailing and cargo handling, though it often leads to abuse and arbitrary brutality. In addition, life at sea generates a need for technology and innovation: new ideas for the vessel and its means of propulsion, but also for fishing and hauling. Repeatedly, in age after age, maritime life has led to innovation and investment, then to development of both skill and capital and eventually to the creation of large-scale maritime enterprises. The added time of travel by sea provided a long time-frame for decisions about production and trade.

Men and women have experienced maritime life from various vantage points: from the sea itself, from rivers and lakes, and from the beach and the dock looking out on waterways both large and small. From the vantage point of the sea, the estuaries, rivers, lakes and streams are tentacles reaching steadily into the terrestrial surface. Looking from the beach and the port, one looks out at the sea and experiences the dynamic of vessels departing and arriving. Each port has its contact with other port towns – encountering unfamiliar people in distant ports, sending settlers out to colonies and maintaining relations of dominance over other regions. On the other hand, people in ports can turn their backs on the sea and visit adjoining lands, initiating relations with the hinterland, as in the exchange of fish for grain. Through the linkage of these elements, the seas and vessels knit the shores into trade networks, communities and empires. Portages, canals and harbours complete the geography of maritime life.

My tour through these images, literal and figurative, is to facilitate a comparison of global history and maritime history, sketching out the trajectories of each. Both fields of historical study reflect a complex past and an intricate discourse about it as they interact with each other – or perhaps avoid each other. The fields of global history and maritime history have paralleled each other for decades without as much contact between them as one might expect. To show how they can miss one another I offer a personal example. In the spring of 2000 the Peabody-Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, led by Donald Marshall and Peter Stanford, held a conference on World History and Maritime History, which resulted in the 2004 volume edited by Daniel Finamore, entitled *Maritime History as World History*.² Shortly after the Salem meeting, in June 2000, I directed the ninth annual conference of the World History Association in nearby Boston. Perhaps some were aware of the pairing of the conferences, but I was not among them until the past year. As a further

²Daniel Finamore (ed.), *Maritime History as World History* (Gainesville, FL, 2004).

irony, imagining myself to be thinking in maritime terms, I sought in 2000 to arrange a day trip by sea from Boston to Salem as a world-historical excursion but found that the ferry service linking the two ports had been discontinued just that year.

Let me extend my initial, explicit images of the seas and the littoral by turning to figurative metaphors of maritime history and of global history more generally. I ask that we imagine maritime history as a *vessel*, containing a discourse on the past, passing through successive waters and carrying successive cargoes, from naval warfare and commercial expeditions to national histories and then to addressing social history.³ I propose also to extend the metaphor so that the vessel incorporates the dock, the port town, the rivers and lakes and the hinterland. The dynamic is then one of the voyage, not only from port to port but from early times to the present. Viewed in this fashion, maritime history is a long voyage which has carried valuable and productive cargoes from one era to the next.

What metaphor, then, is one to offer for global history? I propose that we imagine world history as a populated sphere in orbit. The metaphor of the orbiting sphere is also a vessel, “spaceship earth.” This sphere, as for the previous vessel, also contains a discourse intended to represent the past of humanity as a whole. One can see, however, that the vessel of maritime history is much more constructed by humankind and perhaps more directed by human choice than is the entire global sphere. We can see the world’s population as a neighbourhood – a heterogeneous, shifting collection of interests, conflicts and occasional solidarity.⁴

The contrasting time frames of maritime and global history can be drawn out of these metaphors. Global history begins with the sphere itself, constructed mysteriously but existing long before the rise of its human population. The vessel of maritime history had to be constructed – by ancient predecessors to Noah, but clearly in a time frame more compressed than that of global history. In between these two metaphoric levels of historical experience, we may briefly consider the terrestrial world. Perhaps we can treat it as a great, flat plain, with its remains of trudging footsteps, permanent houses and fields to tend, punctuated by occasional mountain ranges and river valleys. I propose to leave aside this terrestrial world while we alternate between historical views of the maritime world and the world as a whole.

³For the oral presentation of this paper, I even picked out and displayed the image of a specific vessel – a modest fishing craft named *Direction*, bobbing across the waves.

⁴Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “On World Historians in the Sixteenth Century,” *Representations*, XCI, No. 1 (2005), 26-57, portrayed the world of 1600 as seen by four cosmopolitan individuals at different points on this sphere.

What types of internal detail can we hope to locate for these metaphoric histories of maritime and global experience? In each case, one must consider various levels of aggregation and disaggregation and an associated set of systems. If the vessel is divided into decks, holds, propulsion systems and crew members, the global sphere can be divided into geosphere, hydrosphere and atmosphere, with particular attention to the increasingly dominant human role in the biosphere. If macro-history is the story of the voyage of the vessel or the orbit of the entire orbiting sphere, that history takes place at each of these levels through the functioning or malfunctioning of many overlapping mechanical, biological and social systems. Yet by phrasing our investigation in terms of disaggregation and systems, in no time at all we have just gone from simple metaphors for maritime and global history to systemic interactions of immense complexity. We are mere mortal historians seeking to interpret this complexity, and we must select our emphases because we cannot do it all. What topics and dynamics of change shall we select to advance our interpretation of history? This is the metaphoric framework for the comparison to follow: balancing the maritime vessel and the orbiting sphere as ways of looking at global patterns, scholarly organization, global conceptualization and research agendas.

Global Patterns: Interaction and Hierarchy

In this section I offer some ways to simplify the complexity of large-scale history by focusing on specific patterns that seem characteristic of human behaviour in general. For instance, my own research includes the devotion of much energy to the study of migration – movements from one community to another – as a recurring characteristic in human behaviour.⁵ In the species-level pattern of migration, young adults commonly move, voluntarily or not, to a community where the language and culture are different from their home, having to learn language and customs, and then learning or perhaps contributing new ideas as they live and work in their community of settlement, back at home or

⁵In addition to migration, some other patterns can be fit to the time frame of *Homo sapiens* – the past 100,000 to 200,000 years – and may thus be general to our species: (1) representation – including syntactical language, music, dance, visual art and poetry; and (2) religion and the spiritual – religion has many, varying forms and varying degrees of involvement, but spiritualism occurs generally among humans and nowhere else. Some characteristics have been in place either too long or have developed too recently to be considered generic to *Homo sapiens*: the use and control of fire goes back a half-million years to *Homo erectus*, well before our own species; literacy goes back only 5000 years; and we have had electric power for less than two centuries. On migration, see Patrick Manning, *Migration in World History* (London, 2004; 2nd ed., London, 2012); on fire, see Johan Goudsblom, *Fire and Civilization* (London, 1992).

in some other community. Here I emphasize patterns that are basic yet somewhat more complex than migration in that they involve not just a basic impulse to move but interaction and hierarchy among contending social forces. Among the basic human social and historical dynamics are those that involve long-term alternation between distinctive emphases. I offer three recurring, long-term dynamics of alternation within human history.

First, in gender relations there has been a long-term interplay in male and female roles, with periodic shifts – thus, the rise of agriculture brought shifts in the division of labour, commonly with men clearing the land and women tending the plants. In comparison with other species, humans have a remarkable variability and fluctuation in gender roles. In various societies and times, there have been different degrees and types of gender hierarchy and division of labour.⁶ This has not been a linear evolution but a range of fluctuations and changes in social and cultural fashion and economic organization. It presents a fascinating puzzle.

Second, the interplay of maritime and terrestrial life is another long-term, species-level pattern that is unique to our species and gives a distinctive character to all human life.⁷ Here is the argument for this long-term interplay in additional detail. Table 1 gives a schematic statement of technological alternation in human history, sometimes advancing maritime life and sometimes advancing the terrestrial. If the emergence of modern, syntactic language enabled the spread of human communities within Africa, the development of rafts and reed boats made possible the expansion of humankind along the consistent ecology of the Indian Ocean coast some 70,000 years ago. Thereafter, populations expanded in the tropics of India, Southeast Asia and (still relying on watercraft) the western Pacific. From 40,000 years ago, humans moved north into the distinctive ecology of temperate Eurasia. Arguably, however, the development of boats of skin stretched across wood frames – watertight, dry and light – made it possible to colonize the temperate lands along their coastlines and along the cold and fast-running rivers. The last Ice Age, especially from 25,000 to 15,000 years ago, and the warming period after it brought technical advance on land through pottery, domestication of animals and agriculture. Then in the following period, from 4000 to 2000 years ago, maritime advance took place throughout the Old World, as sailing craft brought expanded trade and settlement to remaining island territories. After the fall of Rome and Han,

⁶Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Gender in History: Global Perspectives* (Oxford, 2001; 2nd ed., Oxford, 2011); and Pamela Scully and Diana Paton eds.), *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World* (Durham, NC, 2005).

⁷Marcus Rediker, “Against Terracentrism: The Sea and History,” unpublished paper presented at a conference on “Hydrarchy: Power and Resistance at Sea,” Gasworks/University College London, 18 September 2010 (video available online at: <http://www.marcusrediker.com/Lectures/lectures.htm>).

oceanic journeys were surpassed for centuries by terrestrial trade and travel: the great expanse of the Mongol Empire symbolizes this period. Yet even the Mongols built a great navy to complete their conquest of the Song. And in the era from 1400 onward, maritime transport led to the restructuring of human society. In a remarkable competition unfolding in the mid-nineteenth century, both railroads and steamships became widespread at once. Arguably, however, the global impact of steamships initially was more profound, and only in the twentieth century did transportation on land equalize the maritime advance.

Table 1
Long-term Technological Balance of Maritime and Terrestrial Life⁸

Time (years ago and/or CE)	Maritime Advances	Terrestrial Advances
90,000 years ago (ya)		Language
70,000 ya	Settlement of Indian Ocean coast; Reeds, rafts	
50,000 ya		Settlement of mainland India, Southeast Asia, Australia
40,000 ya	Skin boats: temperate Eurasia; maybe to Americas	
25,000-10,000 ya		Production – ceramics, houses, agriculture, domestic animals
8000-3000 ya		Pack animals, horses
4000-3000 ya [200-1000 BCE]	Sails: Mediterranean, Indian Ocean, Western Pacific	
2000 ya [1 CE]	Open-water navigation	
2500-1000 ya (500 BCE-1000 CE)		Overland commerce
500 ya (1500 CE)	Global sailing	
170 ya (1840 CE)		Railroads
160 ya (1850 CE)	Steamships	
100 ya (1910 CE)		Motor vehicles
60 ya (1950 CE)		Air travel
40 ya (1970 CE)	Containers	

To restate this general point, I argue that there have been periodic shifts in the centrality and development of maritime and terrestrial life, with no evident trend over the very long term.⁹ Both sides of this equation remain central to human existence.

⁸For a survey textbook of world history by a maritime historian who provides detail on many of these alternations, see Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *The World: A History* (Upper Saddle River, NJ, 2007).

⁹Similarly, what proportion of the human diet has come from the waters and what proportion from land?

What, then, is to be the future of the maritime world? The sea is now upon us, encroaching on the land. We can build the dikes higher, but not necessarily dependably enough.¹⁰ But the rise in the seas is not yet enough to limit the voluntarism of humans: we now visit every corner and every level of the seas, and we develop new knowledge of the seas – the winds, currents, tides, temperatures, storms. Expanding knowledge has only recently decoded the ultimate and long-term story of the seas – the pattern of plate tectonics and continental drift during the last three billion years. With amazing rapidity, that long-term story has been filled in with great detail. For the immediate future, we can see that the maritime workforce continues to decline and that aircraft handle more and more of the task of transporting humans and goods. Yet ferries carry many passengers, ships and containers carry the great majority of interregional commerce and industrial fishing is expanding at water's edge. So the balance of land and sea remains of interest.

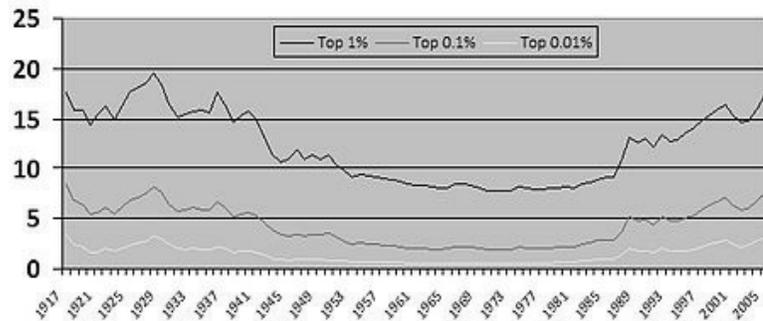


Figure 1: Proportion of US National Income Received by Top Portions of the Population, 1917-2005

Source: Emmanuel Saez and Thomas Pikety, "Income Inequality in the United States, 1913-1998," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, CXVIII, No. 1 (2003), 1-13; figures and tables updated to 2010 in Excel format at <http://elsa.berkeley.edu/~saez/>.

Here is a third dynamic of alternation in human history, one that I believe is most important to learn about and little understood though much discussed – changing levels of hierarchy and inequality in human society. My argument is that the current social situation calls for analysis to document and explain the changes in hierarchy and our human society at multiple levels. Here is a convenient, if unrepresentative, illustration of the problem. Figure 1,

¹⁰The seas, already at historically high levels, are poised to rise at an accelerating rate from fifty centimetres to one metre in the next century; even more of the works of humanity are to be inundated or washed away by the seas.

based on the experience of the United States from 1917 to 2007, shows how the income of the top one percent of population ranged from roughly eight percent of the total in the 1970s to nearly twenty percent (in 1929 and after 2005) in a great cycle of eighty years. This cycle in income distribution is interesting in itself, but it has further implications.

Just as over time we find that sometimes maritime society gets the upper hand and sometimes the terrestrial maintains leadership, so also does it seem that within shorter time frames common people sometimes manage to organize themselves so as to move toward the equalization of their relations with the rich, and sometimes they lose ground *vis-à-vis* the wealthy. For instance, trade union movements gained steadily in strength from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, and weakened from the 1960s to the present. Note also that feminism – a major claim by women for the reallocation of influence and even wealth – launched itself most successfully at the minimum point in social inequality in the 1960s.

My understanding of world history and its interconnections leads me to believe that such fluctuations in relative inequality are not new to human history – they have been traced far back, though unevenly – for example, to European peasant rebellions of the fourteenth century.¹¹ One may hypothesize that such patterns have been global though surely not neatly synchronous. The wave of Atlantic piracy in the early eighteenth century must fit into such a pattern, as well as the extension of rights to sailors in the height of the nineteenth-century move to emancipation. But the crisis-level fluctuations of inequality in the present day call upon us to assemble these snapshots of earlier struggles over inequality into a more coherent picture of past variations in social inequality.

In describing these three dynamics of historical alternation or fluctuation, I want to emphasize the contrast between the historical dynamics of *fluctuation* and the dynamics of *unidirectional* change. Biological evolution is unidirectional – one cannot go back, just as one cannot go back in time. Other big changes in society tend to be presented as similarly unidirectional – the rise in human population, advances in technology, capital accumulation and even the overall notion of globalization. In fact, some of these changes may be less unidirectional and irreversible than is often assumed, but that is a different point. My goal is to draw attention to changes in human society that are definitely fluctuations. The three chosen for discussion here – patterns of gender relations, the balance of human reliance on land and sea and the shifts in social

¹¹Explorations of such cycles over periods of several centuries include Andre Gunder Frank, *World Accumulation, 1492–1789* (New York, 1978); Alfred Kleinknecht, Ernest Mandel and Immanuel Wallerstein (eds.), *New Findings in Long-wave Research* (New York, 1992); and Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas D. Hall, *Rise and Demise: Comparing World-Systems* (Boulder, CO, 1997).

inequality – are clear patterns of fluctuation, though at different rates of change. To keep these fluctuations in mind, it may be helpful to think of the periodic shifts of fashion in dress, music and architecture.

For both the cycles and the unidirectional transformations in history, the maritime sector of human society arguably stands out as the sector which has been especially sensitive to transmitting interactions and shifts in the balance of social power within human society. As a result, it may be that changes in maritime life have been a leading edge in social change generally.¹² For this reason, it might be especially beneficial to encourage more studies of maritime wage rates, reforms, rebellions, regulations and effects of technical change because such studies provide the possibility of articulating and dating cycles of relative influence among social strata and nuances to those cycles.

Scholarly Organization: Maritime History and Global History

Maritime history and global history each gained their current form of organization within the past two generations. The parallels, contrasts and links in the organizational structures and personnel in the two fields combine with the interconnected subject matter and analysis of each to show why both fields have thrived in recent years. The discourses on maritime history and global history have now become focused especially on professional historical analysis. The informal and amateur versions of both, central to the early days, have been encompassed within a professionalized discipline, though they have not lost their general audiences.¹³

The writing of maritime history goes far back in time, accompanied by the representation and celebration of maritime life in literature and visual art. In the last five centuries there have been substantial audiences, especially in Europe, for works on the history of exploration and of naval warfare. With time, the strengthening of nation-states absorbed maritime history into the national framework, especially among successful and aspiring maritime powers: maritime history became a leading element of national prestige. The rise of an international, professional study of maritime history came relatively late. The International Commission for Maritime History (ICMH) was formed in 1960: it was admitted to the UNESCO-affiliated International Committee of Histori-

¹²For an earlier argument that change in maritime life was a leading edge of social change generally, see Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge, 1987).

¹³The non-professional historians in maritime history are most commonly practitioners in maritime life; the non-professional historians in global history are more commonly specialists in another academic field who have taken up a world-historical view of their subject.

cal Sciences (CISH) in 1960 as an organization with national affiliates and has since met in association with the quinquennial CISH meetings; it was preceded by the International Commission for the History of Great Discoveries. Members are nine north Atlantic countries plus Australia; associate membership is held by two organizations: the International Maritime Economic History Association (IMEHA) and the Association of the History of the Northern Seas.¹⁴ The IMEHA was formed in the late 1980s as an affiliate of the International Economic History Association – also an affiliate of CISH which formed in 1960 under the leadership of Fernand Braudel and Michael Postan. The IEHA meets every three years for a conference at which the IMEHA organizes sessions, and the IMEHA holds independent conferences every four years.¹⁵

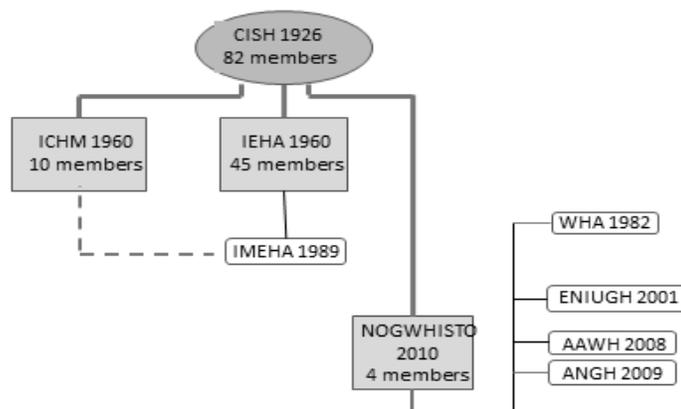


Figure 2: Maritime and Global Historical Organizations

Source: Courtesy of the author.

These organizations linked the national schools of maritime history that had existed for a long time. Within this professional framework for maritime history, the general statements of Frank Broeze laid the groundwork for the professional study of maritime history.¹⁶ But not all the developments took

¹⁴ICMH website: <http://intcommarhist.wordpress.com/>.

¹⁵IMEHA website: <http://www.mun.ca/mhp/imeha.htm>.

¹⁶Frank Broeze, "From the Periphery to the Mainstream: The Challenge of Australia's Maritime History," *The Great Circle*, XI, No. 1 (1989), 1-13; Broeze (ed.), *Maritime History at the Crossroads: A Critical Review of Recent Historiography* (St.

place within these formal, professional boundaries. Several independent and topical conferences have been important to the development of maritime history. In addition, museum displays are significant for the preservation and communication of maritime history: Antwerp's Museum Aan de Stroom (MAS) is one of many fine maritime museums.¹⁷

The writing of global history goes as far back as maritime history, though it focused more on great compendia than on recounting specific episodes, starting with the work of Herodotus in Greece and Sima Qian in China. Studies of empires and civilizations maintained a slim but significant audience among literate elites around the world. But global history (or world history, or universal history) went virtually underground with the rise of nationalism and national history.¹⁸ Only in the era of decolonization did this field revive; it then expanded as never before. The World History Association was formed in 1982 in the United States; its annual meetings began in 1992. ENIUGH, the European organization, formed in 2001 and first met in 2005. Now we have a UNESCO-affiliated organization, The Network of Global and World History Organizations (NOGWHISTO), formed in 2008 and affiliated in 2010, with affiliates on five continents (rather than nations) and with international congresses in one or more regions every year.¹⁹ (Global history thus gained UNESCO affiliation half a century later than ICMH.) Scholarship in world and global history remained restricted to senior researchers until the 1990s, and well after 2000 most historians rejected the possibility that graduate study

John's, 1995); and Broeze, *The Globalisation of the Oceans: Containerisation from the 1950s to the Present* (St. John's, 2002).

¹⁷This museum (www.mas.be/) was the site of plenary sessions of the Sixth International Congress of Maritime History at which the initial version of this article was presented.

¹⁸What is the difference between global history and world history? I quite agree with Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Global Perspectives on Global History: Theories and Approaches in a Connected World* (New York, 2011), who has sought to show that the variations among localized versions of global and world history are greater than any overall difference between the two. In fact, I prefer to call myself a "world historian" out of long habit but have adopted the term "global" for this presentation out of deference to the dominant terminology in English-language discourse in Europe. See Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past* (New York, 2003). For other analyses of global historiography, see Jerry H. Bentley, *Shapes of World History in Twentieth-Century Scholarship* (Washington, DC, 1996); and Marnie Hughes-Warrington (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in World Histories* (New York, 2005).

¹⁹Patrick Manning (ed.), *Global Practice in World History: Advances Worldwide* (Princeton, 2006); and Chloé Maurel and Pascal Ory, *Histoire de l'Unesco: Les trente premières années, 1945-1974* (Paris, 2010).

could address history at so broad a level. The evolution has been slow, but we now have a significant cohort of junior scholars in North America, Europe, Asia and elsewhere. Journals in world history, first launched in 1990, are now being joined by global historical journals with regional and topical sub-specializations.²⁰ In this interdisciplinary age, global history has come into contact with Global Studies. While global history has little presence in museums, it has a large and expanding influence in public education.

Table 2
Maritime and World History Sub-fields

Maritime History Sub-fields (according to the proportion of publications as identified by Polónia)	World History Sub-fields (emerging though less developed than fields in maritime history)
technology, vessels, labour, merchants and firms, ports, fisheries, war and diplomacy	empires, economic, migration, environmental, religion, science, gender

In sum, both fields gained a professional dimension in the late twentieth century. The pre-existing literature in each field became influenced increasingly by the analytical concerns of professional historians. Maritime history retains a North Atlantic and national basis for its organization; it will surely expand to Asian littorals. Global history expanded later but more broadly and is increasingly organized on a continental basis, with teaching becoming increasingly important on every continent.

Global Conceptualization in Maritime Historiography

With this institutional review in mind, let us turn to reviews of maritime history by scholars in the field. There have been many reviews of maritime history, Atlantic history and oceanic history. Here I draw on scholars who have put a lot of thought into maritime history, development of its professional study and its relationship with global history as published in the issue of *Research in Maritime History* devoted to this comparison. Amélia Polónia's 2010 essay provides an admirable tour through the literature reviews and edited col-

²⁰Principal journals in global history include *Journal of World History*, *Journal of Global History*, *Comparativ*, *Itinerario* and *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. World history encyclopedias and compendia now appear, though of varying quality: William L. Langer, *Encyclopedia of World History* (Boston, 1940; 5th ed., Boston, 1972); William H. McNeill, *et al.* (eds.), *Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History* (6 vols., Great Barrington, MA, 2005; 2nd ed., Great Barrington, MA, 2011); and *Gale Encyclopedia of World History: War* (2 vols., Detroit, 2008).

lections linking maritime and global history. In it she categorizes maritime articles, conference papers and datasets by topic and time frame. She documents the increasing breadth of maritime studies and asks “whether maritime history is at a crossroads leading to a kind of total history which encompasses all domains of knowledge.”²¹ She seeks to tease out differences in definitions of maritime, global and world history, but concludes that the present is “a time when the goal should be to cross frontiers of knowledge, a trend which implies both more global and more interdisciplinary studies.”²² Her approach is at once practical and visionary.

Maria Fusaro, in the essay concluding the same volume, applauds the flowering of maritime history but argues that the field is undergoing “growing pains” from the pursuit of analytical clarity.²³ She seeks ways to frame human interactions with the sea so that maritime history focuses on issues and topics relevant on a global scale. She is cautious about trying to set new boundaries for the field – she quotes global historians Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann to the effect that global historiography can be conceived instead as a basin in which various research perspectives come together rather than a bounded field.²⁴ Fusaro notes Gelina Harlaftis’ optimistic claim that maritime history provides “a methodology for linking the local, the regional, the national, the international, [and] the global.” For Fusaro, maritime history has not yet achieved the status of a methodology: it is an umbrella under which various approaches co-exist, leaving unresolved the need for analytical clarity.²⁵ To resolve this concern, Fusaro recommends following the path of economic history and focusing on early modern processes of economic globalization. To this end, she makes a distinction between global history and world history – identifying an economic orientation for global history and a social

²¹Amélia Polónia, “Maritime History: A Gateway to Global History?” in Maria Fusaro and Amélia Polónia (eds.), *Maritime History as Global History* (St. John’s, 2010), 6.

²²*Ibid.*, 16.

²³Maria Fusaro, “Maritime History as Global History? The Methodological Challenges and a Future Research Agenda,” in Fusaro and Polónia (eds.), *Maritime History as Global History*.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 269; and Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann, “Global History and the Spatial Turn: From the Impact of Area Studies to the Study of Critical Junctures of Globalization,” *Journal of Global History*, V, No. 1 (2010), 161.

²⁵Fusaro, “Maritime History,” 268-269; and Gelina Harlaftis, “Maritime History or History of *Thalista*,” in Gelina Harlaftis, *et al.* (eds.), *The New Ways of History* (London, 2010), 220.

and cultural orientation for world history. (I can see this distinction but feel it is overshadowed by the continuing predominance of political history on both sides of the global/world equation.) Fusaro completes her argument by reaffirming the contention of Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez that the opening of the Manila galleon trade in 1571 marked the birth of globalization: “a water birth!”²⁶

In the same volume Regina Grafe offers a nearly opposite resolution of these growing pains, focusing on the philosophy of social change.²⁷ Grafe argues that the technological and economic approaches to maritime history, while distinct, both assume an inherent human tendency towards reducing barriers. As a result, the direction of history is established – progress in technological advance or economic expansion – so that debate is limited to evaluating the path or rate of change. Social history, in contrast, adds human agency (conflicting social objectives) and therefore contingency and more interesting paths of change. Grafe documents her view through examples focused on Basque towns and Spanish monarchy. Grafe’s bold call for more attention to social history and her critique of economic history is muted, however, in her chapter in Richard Unger’s edited volume on shipping and growth. In a volume that focuses in remarkable detail on tracing growth in European shipping, she defends Spain against charges of maritime decline.²⁸

Suggestions on Topics in Maritime History

Global History raises the possibility that scholars can assess the overall human condition over time – the nature and effect of growth, transformation, cooperation, conflict, disaster and innovation. Of all the historical themes encompassed by global history, on which should we concentrate? Past work has emphasized the competition among imperial, national, ethnic and religious groups. More recently, historians and other scholars have focused on growth and technological change in human society. At the same time, in the past half century we have learned much of social history – the life and work of ordinary people. Even more recently, the combination of natural science and history has

²⁶Fusaro, “Maritime History,” 282; and Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, “Globalization began in 1571,” in Barry K. Gills and William R. Thompson (eds.), *Globalization and Global History* (London, 2006), 235.

²⁷Regina Grafe, “Turning Maritime History into Global History: Some Conclusions from the Impact of Globalization in Early Modern Spain,” in Fusaro and Polónia (eds.), *Maritime History as Global History*, 249-266.

²⁸Regina Grafe, “The Strange Tale of the Decline of Spanish Shipping,” in Richard W. Unger (ed.), *Shipping and Economic Growth, 1350-1850* (Leiden, 2011), 81-116.

made it possible to learn about environmental transformation and degradation. Here I offer some suggestions for themes in maritime history that come out of the considerations I have offered. Each of these suggestions addresses in some degree the issue of links among levels of hierarchy or aggregation in the processes of maritime history.

Technology

Studies of maritime technology, as Regina Grafe argued, risk appearing as teleological studies of inevitable progress, celebrating the cultural heroes who move technology ahead along the predetermined path.²⁹ In addition, however, the study of maritime technology goes beyond the celebration of great inventors to provide a textured view of maritime life. Technology includes the long struggle over navigational techniques and the ultimate resolution of the problem of longitude; once the problem was solved, it still required great expertise among navigators to implement the new technology. At the same time, the complex rigging of sailing vessels arose not from individual inventors but through incremental improvements from sailors on the job. The complexity and interaction of technologies, and the question of who benefited either through a change in workload or some other reward, links technology closely to issues of social history and hierarchy.³⁰ The maritime world is one of the best arenas to study technology at every level of complexity and social organization.

Empires

Maritime historians should review the relationship of their field of study to empire. Maria Fusaro expresses concern that maritime historiography, in tracing the course of European empires, has become complicit with the imperial project, privileging that perspective over those of others caught up in empire.³¹ The concern is well placed, but not only for maritime history. In the era of decolonization, scholars in social and cultural anthropology encountered and acknowledged that their complicity in the colonial project had caused them to minimize and distort the perspectives of the colonized. The result was a fierce and relatively effective self-critique. Maritime historians should acquaint themselves with these anthropological debates and seek to emphasize studies linking

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰Isaac Land, *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor, 1750-1850* (New York, 2009).

³¹Fusaro, "Maritime History," 275-278.

the twentieth century with earlier times to gain a wider perspective on empires.³²

Property

From the earliest days of hunting grounds and fisheries, there have been attempts by groups to gain control over lands and waters. Custom, law and military power have been the devices for limiting access to land and water, and to contesting notions of a broadly shared commons. Joshua Smith has used the term “enclosure” to refer to this process not on land but on the seas. Enclosure has definitely gone slower for the sea than for the land.³³ So while the sea brings a certain sort of order and perhaps hierarchy to guarantee the effectiveness of navigation and trade, that same sea remains a relatively lawless space, one in which pirates have been able to survive more successfully than on land. There is surely benefit to be gained from combining a study of land and sea in considering enclosure and law of the sea, for instance, as we face new international conflicts on the laws to govern the North and South Poles.³⁴

Oceanic Basin History

I propose expanded attention to a very broad level of interpretation: synthetic histories at the level of ocean basins. Oceanic history is a version of maritime history inviting comparison and linkage of the great seas and ocean basins. The recent publication of Matt Matsuda’s *Pacific Worlds* provides us with a concise but comprehensive view of the huge expanse of the Pacific.³⁵ It centres on the

³²Adam Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society: Transformations of an Illusion* (London, 1988). In addition, maritime historians might benefit from comparative reading on the history of terrestrial empires, to verify and perhaps contest the widely received notion that maritime empires are inherently distinctive. Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, 2010).

³³Joshua Smith made this observation in delivering the Nakagawa Lecture at the IMEHA conference in Ghent on 3 July 2012; his revised essay will be published in the December 2013 issue of the *IJMH*. See also Philip E. Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (Cambridge, 2001). In addition, I am grateful to Steven Pitt for discussion on this issue.

³⁴Tom Griffith, *Slicing the Silence: Voyaging to Antarctica* (Cambridge, MA, 2007).

³⁵Matt K. Matsuda, *Pacific Worlds: A History of Seas, Peoples, and Cultures* (New York, 2012).

region from maritime Southeast Asia through Polynesia but shows the links and parallels in processes for the whole Pacific Rim, especially in the past 500 years. We can now read and compare major syntheses on each of the oceans: Matsuda on the Pacific; Michael Pearson, Sugata Bose and K.N. Chaudhuri on the Indian Ocean; and a larger collection of more specific volumes on the Atlantic.³⁶ One can suggest the preparation of Atlantic syntheses that are sufficiently comprehensive to be compared directly with these. Through this broad reading, it is now possible to raise questions about the pace at which the various oceanic communities developed, the development and exchange of maritime technology and the relative volume of shipping in the various ocean basins. Surely the Atlantic was the last to develop large-scale shipping; just as surely the North Atlantic became the densest area of shipping, but it is not entirely clear when the North Atlantic gained its pre-eminence.

The Mediterranean synthesis of Fernand Braudel is of course central to studies of maritime history.³⁷ His emphasis on multiple perspectives set a standard for historical study, but the standard was rarely met. His closest followers – Chaunu, Magalhaes-Godinho, Mauro and Tenenti – focused on maritime empires, but less on other dimensions of the maritime past.³⁸ K.N. Chaudhuri, working on the Indian Ocean, came closer than his predecessors to the range of Braudel's analysis.³⁹ Bernard Bailyn in North America took up an approach centred on the Atlantic littoral and hinterland. His sort of Atlantic history tended to be nation-based, focusing more on the nation than on the ocean.⁴⁰

³⁶Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2006); Milo Kearny, *The Indian Ocean in World History* (New York, 2004); Michael Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (New York, 2010); Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, MA, 2005); J.H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (New Haven, 2006); and Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan (eds.), *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal* (Oxford, 2009).

³⁷Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (trans. Sian Reynolds; 2 vols., Berkeley, 1995).

³⁸Huguette and Pierre Chaunu, *Séville et l'Atlantique, 1504-1650* (9 vols., 1955-1960); Vitorino Magalhaes-Godinho, *L'économie de l'empire portugais – XVème-XVIème siècles* (Paris, 1969); Alberto Tenenti, *Naufrages, corsaires et assurances maritimes à Venise, 1592-1609* (Paris, 1959); and Frédéric Mauro, *Le Portugal et l'Atlantique au XVIIè siècle (1570-1670)* (Paris, 1960).

³⁹K.N. Chaudhuri, *Asia before Europe: Economy and Civilisation of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1990).

⁴⁰Bailyn, *Atlantic History*.

I want also to recall another major synthetic author, Jacques Pirenne, the Egyptologist son of the famed medieval historian, Henri Pirenne. Jacques Pirenne wrote *Les Grands Courants de l'Histoire universelle*, a title with a clear maritime echo. The intended four volumes became seven, published from 1945 to 1956.⁴¹ (The first two volumes were translated into English and titled, rather less imaginatively, *The Tides of History*.)⁴² Pirenne focused on states and empires worldwide, emphasizing an alternation in dominance of land-based, authoritarian states and maritime states with individualistic, commercially focused policies. His narrative shows that the recurring efforts to dominate the world, in politics or ideology, ultimately met defeat. By the seventeenth century, as Pirenne saw it, the world had become dominated by maritime states of western Europe. From that point his analysis shifted to the context of liberalism – free-market economic liberalism – as contrasted with conservatism. Pirenne brought this interactive analysis up to 1956, but he systematically viewed “societies” at the macro level, with little attention to multiple levels or to interactions among levels. Nevertheless, his attention to global interactions and to the interplay of maritime and terrestrial pre-eminence advanced a forceful thesis on long-term historical patterns.

African Diaspora and Maritime History

On a much more specific but still entirely global level, the people of Africa, both on the continent and in diaspora, have played a substantial role in maritime history. They have tended, however, to be neglected in historical studies. This is one more example of hierarchy in history and in historical interpretation. Paul Gilroy's 1993 *The Black Atlantic* can be seen as an important exception.⁴³ The content of the book was hardly maritime, although it did consider interactions around the North Atlantic littoral, showing how post-emancipation black cultural figures brought substantial changes to dominant anglophone culture. It is worth posing with more insistence the question of where Africa and the African diaspora fit into the Atlantic world – what their experience does to address questions of hierarchy and inequality? The remarkable autobiography of Olaudah Equiano can be seen as an epic of eighteenth-century Atlantic life,

⁴¹Henri Pirenne, *Les Grands Courants de l'histoire universelle* (7 vols., Neuchâtel, 1945-1956).

⁴²Jacques Pirenne, *The Tides of History* (trans. Lovett Edwards; 2 vols., London, 1962). Cf. William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (Chicago, 1963); and Will and Ariel Durant, *The Story of Civilization* (10 vols., New York, 1939-1975).

⁴³Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, 1993).

revealing the patterns and conflicts of life at sea and on land from a distinctive viewpoint.⁴⁴ Marcus Rediker has made two signal contributions in this regard: *The Slave Ship* relies on the vessel, and extends its view to the littoral. His new history of the Amistad rebellion, which takes place at once on a vessel and on the littoral of North America and West Africa, ranges all the way up and down the social scale.⁴⁵ In addition, my own survey of *The African Diaspora* suggests in several ways that black people have been not just marginal participants but have been at the core of many of the transitions of the modern world, notably through maritime connections.⁴⁶

Globalization and Modernity

Scholars somehow contrive these days to compress almost all the topics just noted into the interpretive categories of globalization and modernity. While the meanings overlap substantially, it is useful to distinguish *globalization* – the expansion of global interaction – from *modernity* – the nature of recent social transformation. While the term “modernity” in its various forms has been used for several centuries to discuss overall social change (notably focusing on changes provoked by elite agency, especially within national units), the term globalization entered usage in the late twentieth century, focusing on contemporary global interaction and social change. In this sense, globalization is seen as the centralization of capital (with its attendant subordination of labour) but also as the interplay of individuals. In addition, the accelerating changes in the physical environment, as they are provoked by human activity, become a global factor regardless of conscious human agency. With time, however, analysts began to identify earlier episodes of globalization so that the terms “globalization” and “modernity” came to overlap increasingly.

In sum, I offer a caution or critique against overreliance on the notions of globalization and modernity as keys for historical analysis. The terms refer appropriately to the symptoms of rapid and interactive social and historical change, but they confound the many processes and the specific interactions underlying those symptoms. That is, the studies of modernity and globalization centre on overall change in society, generally from elite perspectives, without

⁴⁴Oludah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Oludah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (ed. Werner Sollors; New York, 2001).

⁴⁵Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (Boston, 2006); and Rediker, *The Amistad Rebellion: An Atlantic Odyssey of Slavery and Freedom* (New York, 2012).

⁴⁶Patrick Manning, *The African Diaspora: A History through Culture* (New York, 2009).

much attention to interactions among the various processes of society or the various levels of social organization. Instead, the suggestions offered previously, sometimes more specific and sometimes more comprehensive, provide ways of breaking down the big problems of globalization and modernity. I believe that these approaches may lead to more productive historical analysis.

Crucial Turning Points: Periodization

What were the crucial turning points in global history and maritime history? How fundamental was each turning point? The year 1500 – meaning 1492 and 1498 – is widely accepted as a great turning point in both global and maritime history and is described in terms of Iberian commercial and imperial expansion. Was the change at this moment so great that the previous times need to be seen as completely different so that they should be studied as entirely unrelated topics? One may ask similar questions about the beginning of round-the-world commerce in 1571, the late seventeenth-century expansion of northern European shipping, the industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth century and economic and cultural globalization of the late twentieth century.

Global history emphasizes continuities, as in locating instances of commerce and capital accumulation far back in time. Yet global historians emphasize periodization as well. Economic historians are now focusing on the nineteenth-century Great Divergence rather than on the seventeenth-century crystallization of the capitalist world system.⁴⁷ Debates on an earlier turning point, the transition from feudalism to capitalism (debates which flourished in the mid- and late-twentieth century) addressed longer-term comparisons across a great divide but focused more on terrestrial than maritime history.⁴⁸

Historians everywhere need to get better at periodization – at comparing and balancing continuities and changes and at showing how old practices are expanded and repurposed. The large-scale Atlantic slave trade, for instance, was an innovation of the early modern era, yet it built on practices of the Mediterranean world. There will be no authorized, all-purpose periodization of human history but rather a range of overlapping periodizations constructed to serve contending interpretive purposes. There is certainly room for productive collaboration encompassing maritime and global historians in developing an improved periodization, especially for the modern world, but also

⁴⁷Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, 2000); and Robert C. Allen, *Global Economic History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2011).

⁴⁸Paul M. Sweezy, et al. (eds.), *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (London, 1976); and Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System, Vol. 1: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, 1974; reprint, Berkeley, 2011).

for times before 1500. As we identify turning points with the rise of the Iberians, the rise of northern European commerce, the establishment of British hegemony and the development of steam power and containers, we need to ask whether they are irreversible or not, and whether they are centred in particular regions or globally interactive.

It is my hope that study will expand on maritime history in the centuries before 1500. This work will require new methods, different types of documents and decades of study. Yet one can imagine the emergence of a fully-drawn picture of a network of maritime commerce over perhaps two millennia from 500 BCE to 1500 CE, stretching from the Mediterranean, Black Sea and the Baltic, to the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea, the Southwest Pacific and East Asia. Then one could compare this picture of maritime systems with that for the world after 1500 and decide, based on the evidence, whether the change at 1500 is best seen as a dramatic transformation or as a shift of relative power within a situation of substantial continuity.⁴⁹ This is no time to pre-judge the answer, but even the dramatic expansion of the European periphery in 1500 can be portrayed as a sequel to earlier expansions of Southeast Asian and East Asian peripheries.

Conclusion

A comparison of global history and maritime history enables one to raise, if not to resolve, some very big historical questions. Is it the case that human agency is more apparent and even more influential in maritime history than in global history overall? While sailors and merchants have been subject to the vicissitudes of nature on their voyages, they just as clearly have made decisions for good or ill. The orbiting sphere of global history is arguably influenced by too many factors to be directed consciously. Or one may ask whether, as I have sought to argue here, maritime life has facilitated communication sufficiently that it can be considered to have been a leading edge of social contact and change? On the other hand, rather than seek out contrasts of maritime and global history, it might be more useful to seek out the interactions and mutual benefits of the two ways of looking at the past.

What can maritime history contribute to global history? Maritime historians can correct the under-representation of maritime life in global history simply by continuing with the narrative and analysis in maritime history. Second, the various levels of social activity seem to be more clearly distinguished in maritime history than on the land. Where historians of terrestrial affairs have tended to dichotomize society between the individual and a grand collec-

⁴⁹Nancy K. Sandars, *The Sea Peoples: Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean, 1250-1150 B.C.* (London, 1978; rev. ed., London, 1985); and Stefan Brink with Neil S. Price (eds.), *The Viking World* (London, 2011).

tivity, maritime historians find it easier to discuss the significance of activity at multiple levels. Jacques Pirenne, in his contrast of maritime and terrestrial empires, saw in the former a greater opening to the agency of individuals, but the only individuals he found of interest were those who went on to great personal accomplishment; he considered the clash of great philosophies but not the contrasting perspectives of groups at various levels of society. Third, maritime historians can contribute the data they are collecting to the construction of global datasets. Thus, the newly available Sound Toll records could be made available to either of the international data-collection groups, CLIO-INFRA (based in Amsterdam) or CHIA (based in Pittsburgh).⁵⁰

What can global history contribute to maritime history? The frameworks and techniques of global history, if applied more systematically within maritime history, can lead to new advances. First, such global synthesis as that just completed for the Pacific can make sense of maritime history at a more comprehensive level. Second, maritime historians can apply systems-thinking to the study of transport, labour and technology; further, the analysis of social systems may be especially useful. The point of formalizing systems-thinking is that it helps to locate all relevant factors and consider all possible interactions. Third, maritime historians will benefit from more attention to social history and to linkages of social organization with other dimensions of maritime life.

⁵⁰Sound Toll Registers online: <http://www.soundtoll.nl/>; CLIO-INFRA: <http://www.clio-infra.eu/>; and CHIA: <http://chia.pitt.edu>.