

# MARITIME AND PORT HISTORY: A REVIEW

---

 *Jaime Rodrigues*<sup>1,2</sup>

 *Flávio Gonçalves dos Santos*<sup>3,4</sup>

**M**aritime and Port History, the subjects that have been proposed for this *Almanack* dossier, are classics and yet insufficiently tapped into. The perspectives opened by this collection of articles indicate a long path to be followed to deepen such topics and their various possible approaches.

Strictly speaking, ports would be modern sites for the movement of people and commodities, equipped with more sophisticated machines than the average wharf. However, considering that people and commodities were already in movement before a contemporary capitalist-based definition surfaced, we became used to calling docking sites for ships of different sizes and provenances “ports”. Urban, cultural and economic specificities were developed around ports, which led to port cities having then and now characteristics that almost always arise from their condition as a communication link to their *hinterlands*, to nearby places, or even to long distance routes that connected them to the whole world.

Crafts, professional cultures, forms of organization, intense traffic, diverse landscape, languages and ethnicities in coexistence: these are factors that bring the histories of ports and port cities closer to-

---

1 Universidade Federal de São Paulo. Guarulhos – São Paulo – Brazil.

2 Jaime Rodrigues teaches is a professor at UNIFESP and holds a PhD in History from UNICAMP.

3 Universidade Estadual de Santa Cruz (UESC). Ilhéus – Bahia – Brazil.

4 Flávio Gonçalves dos Santos is a professor at UESC and holds a PhD in History from Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF).

gether. A similar phenomenon can be observed aboard: ships are also social places of diversity and movement, although the isolation and constant attempts of enforcing discipline at sea have brought historians to see the life of those boarded as akin to what is witnessed in prison and factory environments.

Consequently, the dialogue between Port History and Maritime History is stimulating. If Port History is bound to the land, economy and society, Maritime History functions as its mirror. Although crewmen spend a reasonable part of their existences aboard, they do not inhabit the sea. Their arrival on land to fulfill their destinies and duties always happened in ports and had an impact on the local community: the ships brought along commodities, introduced epidemics, demanded refueling, carried written and oral information, transported passengers and could be used as a means to evade justice and also to smuggle goods, military incursions and resistance.

By “men”, we refer not only to mankind but also to the male gender. Maritime and port labors were quintessentially male, although women were not completely removed from ship environments. Nonetheless, their integration was almost always as passengers or as family members to those on board, living a life of waiting. Thus, Port History and Maritime History also comprise analyses in which gender is a relevant factor, waiting for historians to take them up.

If Port History dialogues more keenly with national histories, Maritime History may be removed from such perspective. In fact, some authors have proposed the surpassing of imperial and national histories in the studies of Atlantic History – and we may also extend their concerns to oceans, seas and other water streams. Oceans are both geographic spaces and a category at the same time. They share these and other characteristics with the national States: both have clear boundaries and participating individuals build political alliances with each other and in relation to the institutional powers.

When suggesting such idea, David Armitage points out mutant boundaries and “imperfect conjunctions between political alliances and geographic limits” in States. Oceans are works of nature, but the use of such spaces is historical and we can dwell on them as we

would on any other object. Armitage also indicates a chronology for the Atlantic History, from Colombo to the Age of Revolutions. Given their own space and time, Maritime History may well transcend the strict (and at times narrow) approach of national States; thus, not being bottled up as a palatable take on maritime empires. In accordance with Armitage, Bernard Bailyn points out that a history of the peoples of the/at sea cannot be transposed as the sum of the histories of the people who inhabit(ed) these State's shores. The author argues that if we want to move beyond the imperial and national character, it must be emphasized that, although not a sum, this approach also cannot simply cast aside the history of the peoples of Europe, Africa and America, as it so commonly happens.

Several approaches may arise from the conjunction between Port History and Maritime History, including an integrated perspective. In the following dossier, the articles and their authors compose an inventory in progress, which deserves broadening and strengthening from the area.

The following articles in the dossier are situated in the temporal arc that ranges from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All articles refer to the Mid and South Atlantic – spaces that, in the scope of an Atlantic historiography, have had much less emphasis. Brazilian, Argentinian and Spanish historians, brought together in the endeavor proposed by the organizers, speak, read and write well in Portuguese and Spanish. The sources produced in these languages are our strength to intervene in a debate that has clearly privileged the Anglophone and Francophone North Atlantic, which has been taken as parameter for more comprehensive studies.

All summaries are to some extent a little arbitrary, and in this presentation this may as well occur. We have observed, among other arrangement possibilities, three approaches exemplified by the articles in the dossier. The first one, focused on historiography and Port and Maritime History sources, is depicted in Cezar Honorato and Jaime Rodrigues' papers. The former bestows upon us his wide experience by weaving an assessment regarding the historiography of ports and port cities, with an emphasis on the emblematic case of

Rio de Janeiro, while not neglecting the production on other sites in Brazil.

In addition to pointing out the general outlines through which port historiography has been developed for decades, Honorato has a comprehensive command of the studies and more active and relevant cores of historiographic production regarding to the port theme. His command of the subject derives from his extensive faculty experience and from coordinating, along with Miguel Suarez Bosa, the project “Puertos y Ciudades del Mundo Atlántico” at Universidad de Las Palmas, in which researchers from across the globe take part.

Jaime Rodrigues, for his part, focuses on the potential of registry records as sources for Maritime History in view of Social History and of the ordinary men who were also the builders of the empire. In addition to providing a glimpse of the circulation of the free inhabitants and the poor between the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the sources facilitate studies on the positions and roles on board; period of experience and age range of the people embarked; the eventual possibilities of professional development; the relation between the types of ships, maritime routes and the size of the crews; and the variety of places of origin, social standing and professional training of the seamen and officers.

The second approach in the articles of this dossier refers to the studies of port cases. Alejandro González Morales and Antonio Ramón Ojeda work with a larger area – the so-called Macaronesia, composed of the Atlantic archipelagos integrated to the territory of their former metropolis, namely: Azores, Madeira and Canary Islands. Its insular condition was key to the existence of many ports and connections made by vessels of various kinds in its ports. Nature as a constraint is the starting point for the study that the authors present to us about the port development in these archipelagos, here considered from a comparative perspective.

Thiago Mantuano’s object of research are demography and society in the port region of Rio de Janeiro. His view on the city in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is assembled by the port boroughs, their dynamics and their urban evolution. Focused on meager areas of high population

density, the author contextualizes them in the region, in Brazil and in the world through the port in Rio and its movement. The wealth that flowed there when the city was the capital of the Empire did not stop the port region in Rio from being, at the time, an area scarred by its high concentration of acute poverty.

However, not only large volumes configure the mainstay of ports. Flávio Gonçalves dos Santos has dedicated, over the last years, to the study of Ilhéus, in Bahia, and the impact that its port had on the city life. The author handles themes such as social composition and professional occupations being transformed due to port activities. All pieces of evidence interest the historian, and Santos makes a clear point when dealing effortlessly with serial sources and fiction literature to compose a demographic approach which does not neglect a society undergoing a transformation process.

Laila Brichta crosses the Atlantic to focus on a colonial space still little studied among us: the 19<sup>th</sup> century Moçâmedes. The region gained relevance among other Portuguese domains due to its commercial activities with other African ports and, thus making the area viable for the Portuguese metropolis. Unlike what the colonization plans foresaw at first, fishing and its by products' commerce are bound to be the foundation for the increased relevance of this region to the South of Angola.

Lastly, the dossier presents an inescapable perspective: the construction of Atlantic circuitries through the movement of people, surveillance, repression and ideas that, had they followed a different path, would have never spread so widely between late the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Three papers have been dedicated to this study. Martin Alborno and Diego Antonio Galeano share the authorship of a take on the anarchists in full motion across the South Atlantic, especially in the route that connected Rio de Janeiro to Montevideo and Buenos Aires. Police officers, diplomats and other agents of repression of anarchism in South America make it clear that national boundaries are, at times, limits that historians come up with for their own comfort. In the face of international strategies for the control of spa-

tial movements, anarchists were able to deploy their own strategies of protection and escape by sea and through ports in the continent.

Álvaro Pereira do Nascimento rehashes the history of João Cândido as an emblematic character of maritime life in a moment of deep transformations. The effort is not merely biographic, but one of understanding Cândido as a thread leading to an analysis of the technological impact on the new reality in which the Spanish Armada kept recruiting a large contingent of black men and former slaves from the then newly-extinct slavery in Brazil. Complexion, technology, labor relations and ideological disputes in the new regime are matters which singularly handled by Nascimento, in a manner rarely seen in approaches other than his own regarding Social History.

The dossier wraps up with Rodrigo Faustini Bonciani's article, which examines a short story by Brazilian writer Machado de Assis and a novel by American writer James Weldon Johnson, exponent of the Harlem Renaissance. Both literati come from slavery-based societies and lived during their post-abolitionist periods, expressing through literature the repercussions of the African diaspora in race relations in Brazil and in the United States. Bonciani focuses on the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to interpret different existing approaches to the study of the black Atlantic.

Much more is left to say. The dossier makes a point of stating that the subject is broad and can still be widened. Different approaches that seldom converse among themselves are brought to light in this issue of *Almanack*. Different possibilities of studies are highlighted considering different periods and perspectives. Economic History, Social History and Cultural Studies take center stage. All of that is still too little, but it does not make us lose heart: ports and seas are seductive siren songs and will remain as such for generations of scholars to come.

## ***Bibliography***

LINEBAUGH, Peter. "Todas as montanhas atlânticas estremeceram". *Revista Brasileira de História*, 6: 7-46, sept.1983.

Received in: 11/01/2018 - Approved in: 11/05/2018