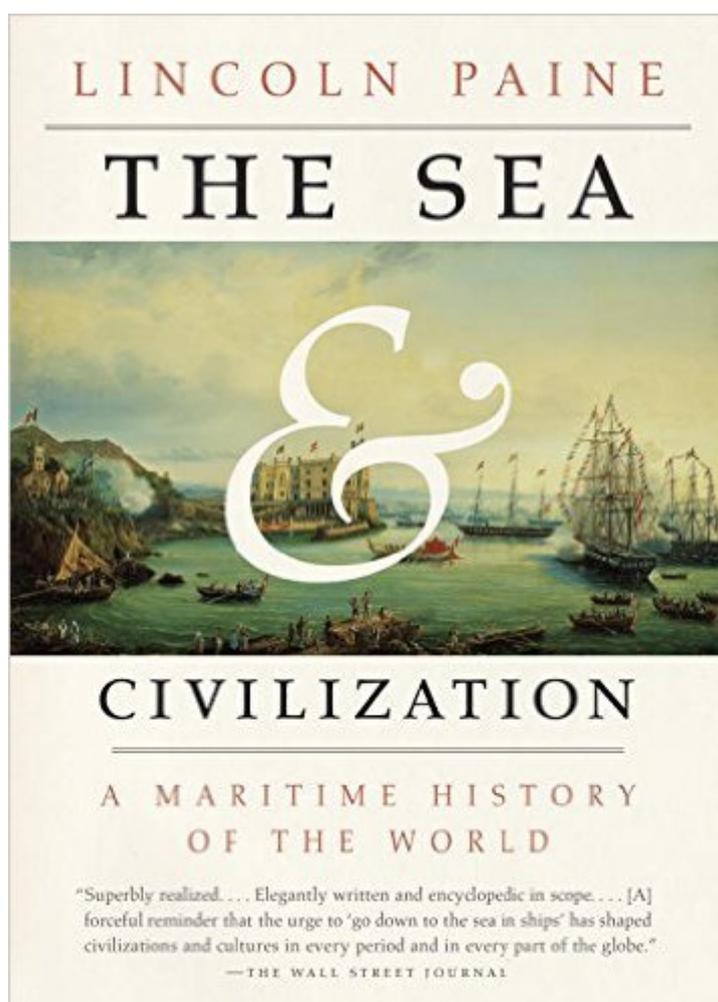


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The Sea And Civilization: A Maritime History Of The World



Synopsis

A monumental retelling of world history through the lens of the seaâ€”revealing in breathtaking depth how people first came into contact with one another by ocean and river, lake and stream, and how goods, languages, religions, and entire cultures spread across and along the worldâ€™s waterways, bringing together civilizations and defining what makes us most human.Â€ The Sea and Civilization is a mesmerizing, rhapsodic narrative of maritime enterprise, from the origins of long-distance migration to the great seafaring cultures of antiquity; from Song Dynasty human-powered paddle-boats to aircraft carriers and container ships. Lincoln Paine takes the reader on an intellectual adventure casting the world in a new light, in which the sea reigns supreme. Above all, Paine makes clear how the rise and fall of civilizations can be linked to the sea. An accomplishment of both great sweep and illuminating detail,Â€ The Sea and CivilizationÂ€ is a stunning work of history.

Book Information

Paperback: 800 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (October 27, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1101970359

ISBN-13: 978-1101970355

Product Dimensions: 6.6 x 1.6 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 starsÂ€ Â€ See all reviewsÂ€ (79 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

Certain topics yield essays that wander along the interests of the author, within the scope of the topic. A history of the Sea and Civilization is basically a survey course, and a large plum tree ripe with fruit for the picking. Regardless of the number of pages, the author is central in what he chooses to write about, and what stays by the shore and never sets sail. This is a good book. It is well written, a compelling read. The review of the history of the sea is a review of men who go down to the sea in ships. The battles, and the explorers, are here. In some ways, this book re-creates some of Daniel Boorstin's book, the explorers, and in some ways it touches on the course of human history. The author uses the design of boats, and the ways of navigation, as an entry point for talking

about peoples and water. At some points, the focus seems to be on small boating -- canoes, reed mats... and even when we move to Egypt and boats on the Nile, the scope is more boating than it is oceans and power. I did like the way the ocean currents explain strategies of exploration, and the archaeology of the expansion of peoples. The book opens up into discussions of trade routes, and the projection of might and empire through control of oceans. One thing I love about this book: the author is aware of, and often shows, every single rock carving, pot, or wall image of an ancient ship ever known to man. He is an encyclopedia of the archaeology of ships. He is learned, and an omnivore. I had recently read "The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean" by David Abulafia, and enjoyed the length and breadth of that work, while feeling that it grew tired in the telling.

Most world histories are centered on the movements of armies, the building of cities, the taming of the land. The sea is at best an incidental part of all that. A few noteworthy events may stick in the reader's mind--the battles of Midway, Trafalgar and the loss of the Spanish Armada--but most of the course of history is land-based. Lincoln Paine changes the vantage point. Traffic on seas, lakes and rivers has equally as much to do with the spread of human civilization. This densely-packed volume begins roughly in the Old Kingdom of Egypt and brings us all the way to the present day. I was about a hundred pages in when it dawned on me that this is really a textbook--whatever the author's intentions might be. It's a compendium of dates, kings and ship architectures. It wants to be read with a notepad on the side and a highlighter in hand; discussions to follow. The style tends toward the dry: it's impossible to do a quick read-through and then circle back for detail. Comparisons with a truly great naval writer (Samuel Eliot Morison) are not favorable in that regard. I would love to see a reduced version of this book with a more general audience in mind. As fascinating as this material is, it's really hard to stay with it. Reading and absorbing is a commitment of many weeks. So let's consider this as a textbook. As such it's excellent. I can't imagine any serious naval officer not spending a semester with it. It could still benefit from a greater sense of concurrency, since many of the activities happen simultaneously. For example, the last centuries of Ptolemaic Egypt are concurrent with the expansion of river traffic in China. Both economies grew from navigable rivers. I'd love to have seen comparison and contrast.

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