



THE BOOK OF PIRATES

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TASCHEN



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Truth or Vision? Piracy of the Past

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Frank Schoonover
Treasure Island, oil on canvas, 1920
 Long John Silver is here shown in traditional pirate attire, with his parrot Captain Flint on his left shoulder.

Captain Charles Johnson
Stede Bonnet, portrayed alongside the first known depiction of the Jolly Roger flag, from *The History and Lives of All The Most Notorious Pirates*, 1725

The hanging of Stede Bonnet, from *Historic de Zee-Rovers*, a Dutch edition of Johnson's *General History of the Pirates*, 1725



Defoe's writing about pirates, including *Robinson Crusoe*, was enabled by the sizable cache of contemporary source material that he had at his disposal, including but not limited to a number of captivity narratives. Book authors, newspapers editors and writers, ballad-ers, and playwrights on both sides of the Atlantic understandably paid close attention to these legendary rogues during piracy's Golden Age in the 1600s and 1700s, as pirates were both overtaking ships at sea and pillaging citizens along the coastlines of the countries they traversed. Long-range travel became hazardous, and international commerce was threatened, both in harbors and on the high seas. The hanging of Captain Kidd on the afternoon of May 23, 1701 at Execution Dock inspired an immediate outpouring of broadsides and sermons, together with *Captain Kid's Farewell to the Seas* (also known as *The Dying Words of Capt. Robert Kidd* or *The Ballad of Captain Kidd*). This 22-verse narrative, in its original extent, covering Kidd's career on the high seas and his subsequent imprisonment and execution, became the longest-lasting folk ballad in music (in its American version) about pirate life.

The publication in Dutch in 1678 of Alexandre O. Exquemelin's (c. 1645–1707) *De Americaensche Zee-Roovers* (*Buccanneers of America*, ill. pp. 12–14), soon afterwards translated into English, French, and Spanish, marked another of the milestones in early

pirate literature and history, for its claimed authenticity. Presented as the "autobiographical account" of a one-time indentured servant of the French West India Company who wound up in the pirate nest of Tortuga Island (off the coast of today's Haiti), and then joined Henry Morgan's buccaneers in raiding the Caribbean in the early 1670s after buying his own freedom, this book profoundly affected later literary treatments of piracy and anticipated Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. After Exquemelin determined to "enter into the wicked order of the Pirates or Robbers at Sea" he related many aspects of pirate culture and behavior, including the articles of agreement they bonded themselves to keep and their preference to set prisoners on land after capturing a ship, while keeping back only a few captives as servants. In contrast to the savagery pirates sometimes display, they could also be liberal comrades in the crunch. Were a pirate to lose his goods or money, others would bail him out. While on shore, sea rovers made certain to pay their tavern bills so as to avoid being sold into servitude themselves.

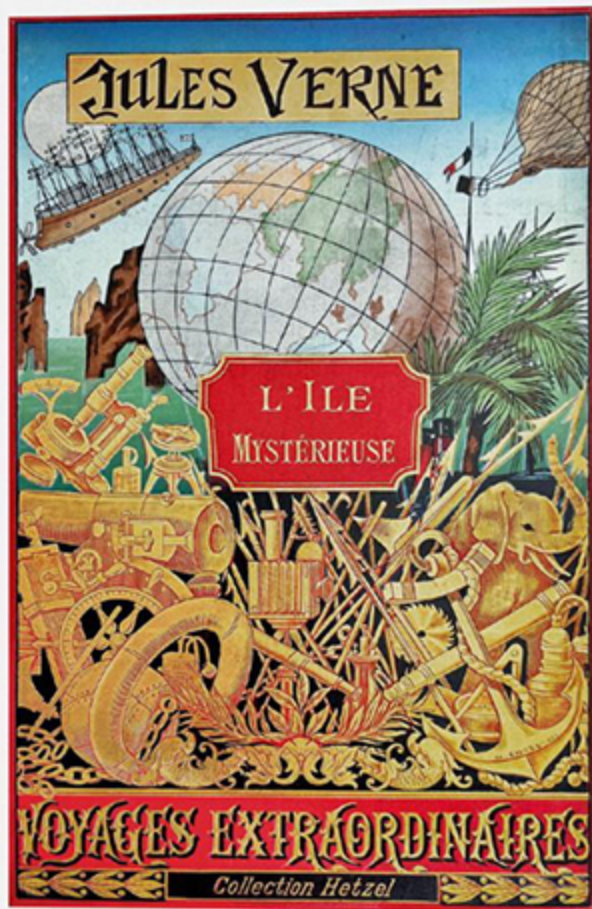
Democracy on the Seas

So, what should we believe of early pirate literature, and how do these stories square with what is known from history? To begin with, it is important to note that historical research bears out what Exquemelin high-

INTRODUCTION

Jules Férat
Cover illustration to the original, Hetzel
edition of *L'île Mystérieuse*, 1875

Jules Férat
"The black flag", cried Ayrton": the
castaways espy a pirate ship adorned
with the Jolly Roger from afar, in an
illustration from *L'île Mystérieuse*, 1875



Delaware coastline, Pyle worked to recreate an accurate depiction of these men within his writings. Yet, in the end, he is remembered more for his illustrations of buccaneers than his narratives about them.

Although several of the American illustrators who studied with him would remember Pyle reading his stories to them as they worked together in their shared studio, many of them never followed him into the world of fiction writing. Instead, they remembered Pyle's fascination with legendary tales of piracy and created their own illustrations that included dramatic scenes and detailed representations in various adaptations of the stories contained in this volume. Two students who studied closely with Pyle, Newell Convers Wyeth (1882–1945) and Frank Schoonover (1877–1972), remained in the Delaware area where piracy's hold had helped inspire their mentor's work. Perhaps the surroundings also sparked their creative output in the field of pirate illustration.

Much like Defoe's *Crusoe*, Pyle's pirate tales depended upon predictable elements found in early writings. In *Jack Ballister's Fortunes*, first published in 1895, while the plot is partly based on earlier accounts of Blackbeard, Pyle's conventional framing allows his reader to predict the story's ending, and he resorts to the common literary device of the orphan's tale to frame Jack's adventures. As an English youngster who

