British Journal for Military History

Volume 11, Issue 2, August 2025

Review of *Making Men in the Age of Sail: Masculinity, Memoir, and the British Merchant Seafarer, 1860-1914* by Graeme J Milne

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ISSN: 2057-0422

Date of Publication: 26 August 2025

Citation: Sam Clark, 'Review of *Making Men in the Age of Sail: Masculinity, Memoir, and the British Merchant Seafarer, 1860-1914* by Graeme J Milne', *British Journal for Military History*, 11.2 (2025), pp. 133-135.

www.bjmh.org.uk

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interested in War Studies from a wide perspective. Indeed, to put it briefly, the book reflects on the kind of efforts that in warfare go 'wasted' from a strategic point of view, and the efforts to sustain war. Reflecting on these aspects is always useful to remember the degree of uncertainty in the decisions that define a certain strategy of certain historical actors, and that these choices are taken in a dynamic sequence, not following a certain plan: the Mansfeld regiment went to Italy too late to take part in the war, but disbanded too early for the following war in Italy (just one year after the collapse). From another perspective, reflecting on how the reality of military transformations is not linear, but full of different possibilities engaged, the investment of efforts that sometimes go wasted, and the coexistence of contrasting mechanisms, is always central. To look at how these processes developed in the first half of the seventeenth century offers food for thought for military historians of any period.

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DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v11i2.1894

Graeme J. Milne. *Making Men in the Age of Sail: Masculinity, Memoir, and the British Merchant Seafarer, 1860-1914*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2024. 270 pp. ISBN: 978-0228021308 (paperback). Price £31

In this most interesting and informative book Graeme Milne examines the society and culture of sailors on British merchant sailing ships during the late nineteenth and very early twentieth centuries. Although merchant sailing ships were being replaced by steamships during this period, they were still significant in number until after the Great War. They were publicly portrayed in a large body of literature, especially in fictional literature that tended to romanticise seafaring. Milne's major sources are not fictional, however. He has used forty-one memoirs published from 1883 to 1971 by former seamen, most of whom had come to enjoy middle-class status. Milne tells his readers how these memoir writers sought to represent merchant seafarers in this period, but he also uses the memoirs to provide his readers with a wealth of information about merchant sailing, while recognizing the biases of these authors.

As indicated in his title, a major interest of both Milne and his memoir writers is in masculinity. Milne observes that during the nineteenth century traditional gender roles were challenged ideologically and by changes in the nature of work, but that gender divisions of labour hardly declined and that masculinity continued to be celebrated in

British culture. Sailing provided a relatively extreme case of both the gender division of labour and the celebration of masculinity. Ironically, the exclusion of women from ship work meant that men sometimes had to perform such tasks as sewing that would normally be carried out by women. For the most part, however, the sailor's job was perceived as highly masculine. Indeed for sailors a unique masculinity was recognized that required exceptional strength, endurance, skill, and courage.

Yet Milne joins with writers who reject the notion that there is one monolithic masculinity. At the risk of oversimplification we can say the memoirs give us two opposite masculinities: firstly, sailors were, in varying degrees, rough, crude, violent, and even degenerate; and secondly, they were practical and responsible in their work and in private life. Milne points out that many sailors were married, with families whom they supported; or they aspired to eventually taking on marriage as a manly responsibility.

In addition to masculinity, the other major concern of this book is with status and status competition. Milne analyses formal status structures on the ships, the ranking of sailors from Ordinary Seamen to Officers and Captains. In addition, among new recruits higher status was enjoyed by those who were destined to become officers. These 'apprentices' as they were called were increasingly drawn from the middle class and were more educated than other sailors.

This formal status structure was confounded by an informal structure that accorded higher status to sailors who were more experienced and knowledgeable, and more skilled and risk-taking. The co-presence of these formal and informal hierarchies sometimes resulted in more knowledgeable sailors having to take orders from less experienced officers, in the backbiting of more educated sailors, and even in the humiliation and marginalisation of apprentices, especially those who came from wealthy families. Yet the co-presence of the two status hierarchies could also lead to voluntary status reversals in teaching as well as beneficial friendships and mentorships between sailors of different formal status. Complicating matters further was the informal status hierarchy that was based on nationality and race. Racial prejudices were ingrained in British society and were by no means absent on sailing ships, but they were restrained by the dependence of sailors on one another, by the skill and knowledge of many non-British sailors, and by friendships formed between sailors of different nationality or race. As other research has shown, crews on sailing ships were anomalous in British society and its empire as a result of their necessarily more cosmopolitan composition.

Another tension in the sailing-ship culture can be found in the opposition between individualism and corporatism. Most of a sailor's self-esteem lay in his individual status and abilities. It is also true that sailors worked for a considerable time on their own;

indeed, seafarers were not supposed to talk with one another while on watch, except to answer questions from their officers. On the other hand, they did interact a great deal with one another; most crew members recognised their mutual dependence on one another; they thought that the faithful performance of duty was an indicator of manliness; and they were highly aware of the need for discipline on sailing ships. Citing Irving Goffman, Milne plays with the idea that these sailing ships were 'total institutions': most of a seafarer's life was spent interacting with other sailors on ships; their entire day was regulated by the imperatives of their work; according to memoir writers sailors assumed a somewhat different language on board ship; and they were reportedly reluctant to tell their yarns on shore. Yet in important respects Milne's sailing ships were different from the strict definition of 'total institutions'. There was frequent turnover in personal relations; sailors had significant connections with people on shore; and they were interested in the way the public perceived them.

Milne's book reveals certain similarities between his merchant sailors and those on sailing ships in the Royal Navy. Both were a symbol of Britishness even though they were drawn from only certain districts in the British Isles. Both occupations were risky. Both were a symbol of manhood, positively, but also negatively; they had similar reputations for sexual immorality, especially in foreign ports. Yet there were also significant differences between Royal Navy and Merchant Navy seafarers. Royal Navy sailors were obviously under more government control. Merchant sailors could even abandon or switch ships in British or foreign ports. And the Royal Navy was a symbol of Britishness and was used by government officials for political and cultural purposes.

Although Milne's memoir writers were certainly willing to acknowledge negative traits of merchant sailors, what is perhaps remarkable is that for the most part their portraits of these sailors do not seem to have been negatively shaped by their own middle-class status. Rather, especially after 1920, they generally sought to provide a patriotic memorialisation of seafarers on merchant sailing ships and to portray them positively in the imagery of British rule of the seas and imperial domination. In some ways, however, the story of sailing ships only contributed to the decline of this imagery. Eventually many people saw their disappearance as symptomatic of the overall decline in British standing in the world.

Making Men in the Age of Sail is highly recommended, not only to those who have an interest in maritime history, but also to anyone just looking for a good read.

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DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v11i2.1895