Piracy and the production of knowledge in the travels of William Dampier, c.1679–1688

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Abstract

Despite its centrality to the production of knowledge in the early modern period, the ship remains a rather marginal site in the work of historians of science. Accounts of ‘floating universities’ and ‘laboratories at sea’ abound, but little is said of the countless other ships, and their crews, involved in the production of knowledge through maritime exploration and travel. The central concern of the paper is the life and work of William Dampier (1651–1715), a seventeenth-century mariner who sailed as a pirate and authored genre-defining and well received scientific travel narratives. The thesis presented here is that the ‘way of life’ encouraged among the crews of the pirate ships aboard which Dampier travelled rendered him well-placed to gather the ‘useful’ knowledge and experiences which made his scientific name. Understanding this juxtaposition requires a focus which moves beyond the materiality of the ship, and which ultimately brings into view some of the social and epistemic geographies which took shape in and beyond the ship.

I dined with Mr. Pepys, where was Captain Dampier, who had been a famous buccaneer had brought hither the painted Prince Job, and printed a relation of his very strange adventure, and his observations. He was now going abroad again by the King’s encouragement, who furnished a ship of 290 tons. He seemed a more modest man than one would imagine by the relation of the crew he had assorted with. He brought a map of his observations of the course of the winds in the South Seas, and assured us that the maps hitherto extant were all false as to the Pacific Sea, which he makes on the south of the line, that on the north end running by the coast of Peru being extremely tempestuous.1

With these words, marking the events of August 6th 1697 in his diary, John Evelyn (1620–1706) records a significant moment in the life of William Dampier (1651–1715), when the formerly ‘famous buccaneer’ regaled the guests at Samuel Pepys’ dinner table with ‘his very strange adventure, and his observations’, the substance of which had appeared in print as A New Voyage Round the World some seven months earlier.2 As the proposer of useful knowledge and a former sea-bandit, Dampier was something of a paradox even to his contemporaries, or as Evelyn puts it, ‘a more modest [in the sense of respectable] man than one would imagine by the relation of the crew he had assorted with.’ In this moment Dampier’s stock was as high as it would ever be, with a Royal commission in the offing, a widely read book in print, and, only shortly after his dinner with Pepys, a sitting with Thomas Murray, portraitist to royalty, at the expense of Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753) (see Fig. 1). Circulating among the chattering classes of London, Dampier the natural philosopher and author was, for the moment, seemingly a long way from Dampier the ‘buccaneer’, the violent raider of coastal towns and taker of ships. In Evelyn’s remarks we can read this uncertain subject, a man who is the trusted observer of patterns of winds and currents and at the same time marked by the fact that such respectability should come as a surprise given his past, given his somewhat regrettable associations.

Drawn to this intriguing mix of intellectual endeavour and piratical adventure, a rich literature has developed around Dampier: biographies abound, and historians and literary scholars have found...
in him much purchase for their work on piracy, exploration, travel narrative and natural history, among other things. On the scope of this literature little can be said here. Neill’s recent study of Dampier and his work within the broader context of the rise of global commerce and the role of travel literature therein, however, deserves particular attention. Neill’s thesis, put simply, is that the crafting of New Voyage marks an attempt by Dampier to (re)establish his Englishness, to make the transition from stateless outlaw to settled citizen. The publication, Neill suggests, should be read as a ‘narrative of reformation’ in which a ‘pirate savage’ becomes a ‘man of science’. The Dampier with whom readers of New Voyage became acquainted, the man of virtue in spite of his associations with vice, is a construction, and it is possible, Neill argues, to witness the unfolding of this construction and gaze upon another Dampier, to be


4 Neill, British Discovery Literature (note 3).

5 Neill, British Discovery Literature (note 3), 183.
found in an earlier draft of his journal (see Fig. 2). In the process of writing up his journal for publication, piratical acts made way for natural philosophy, New Voyage became a narrative of scientific discovery as well as adventure, with the former taking centre stage and the latter becoming auxiliary, retained but without the emphasis apparent, Neill argues, in the manuscript.

The thesis presented here seeks not to contend Neill’s analysis of Dampier’s designs on Englishness as such, but to offer a different reading of the situation which adds another layer to the narrative. This layer is spatially figured, involving an attention to the geographies obfuscated in the creation of New Voyage, to the places of his scientific practice. For while it holds that Dampier’s obfuscation of his piratical past represents an attempt to re-establish his citizenship, it is also true that it functioned as a means of establishing scientific credibility, trustworthiness and authority. This was an increasingly essential undertaking when formally presenting scientific knowledge towards the end of the seventeenth century, since, Shapin argues, being thought of as reliable was to demonstrate that you were ‘doing the proper thing in the proper setting’. Among the members of the ‘Republic of Letters’, Goldgar confirms, ‘behaviour preceded and underlay all their other activities’. While Dampier was certainly doing many of the proper things for a field-scientist in the age, his claims to have been doing these things in the proper settings were less secure, ultimately lacking what Shapin has termed ‘epistemological decorum’. Given the extent of his ‘tacit expertise’, to borrow Collins’ phrase, Dampier could present something of this decorum, if only the edges of his piratical past could be softened. By exploiting the ambiguities of imperial politics at sea, and through the craft of his pen, Dampier was able to obscure his piracies behind a veil of implied legitimacy and retrospective repentance, systematically disguising the role of one of the most significant places of his scientific practice, the pirate ship.

This paper represents an attempt to recover something of this relationship, to re-establish some of the connections that existed between piracy and science at the end of the eighteenth century, ultimately responding to Livingstone’s injunction to ‘put science in its place’. While the geographies underpinning the production, circulation and reception of scientific knowledge, which affects not only the practice of the scientist but the very nature of their work, have been mapped in a number of contexts, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the ship, despite its centrality in the history of science. The notable exception to this trend is Sorrenson’s insightful exposition of the ‘ship as a scientific instrument’ in the eighteenth century. Though useful in many ways, Sorrenson’s singular focus on ships fitted-out out for scientific expedition, so-called ‘floating universities’ like Nicolas Baudin’s Geographe et Naturaliste (1800) or James Cook’s Endeavour (1768–1771), neglects the vast range of other ships and other sailors involved in the production of knowledge. Considering the role of the pirate ship in the production of Dampier’s knowledge begins to address this lacuna. Through an attention to Dampier’s own writings as well as contemporary documents written by, for, and about his fellow seafarers, it will be argued that his scientific knowledge was inevitably and irrevocably bound in various ways to the ship-centred geography of its production. Rather than focusing on the ship as material instrument as such (though this function could never be ignored), the thesis advanced in this paper foregrounds two distinct but ultimately inseparable contentions regarding what could be conceived of as the more subtle geographies of the pirate ship. The first is that Dampier’s piratical existence endowed him with a certain geographic privilege, an almost unrivalled mobility across space, facilitating experience and encounter, the ‘bread and butter’ of the seven-centuries-field-scientist. The second contention centres on temporal liberty, a feature of many maritime employments — but acutely so among pirates — which enabled Dampier’s characteristic intrepid, observational practice. It is argued that the alternative social order of the late-seventeenth-century pirate ship, with its pioneering democratic processes and relative egalitarianism, endowed Dampier with the necessary freedoms of time and space to witness and record. Livingstone suggests that ‘there are questions of fundamental importance to be asked about all the spaces of scientific inquiry’. It is the purpose of this paper to establish and address some of these fundamental questions about the piratical foundations upon which Dampier’s scientific knowledge stood.

Piracy in the margins

At the age of eighteen, with desires of ‘seeing the World’, Dampier made his way from East Coker in Somerset to the docks at Weymouth where he found employment with a merchant, leaving in his wake the farming life which had endowed him with ‘a more than

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14 Sorrenson, The ship as a scientific instrument (note 13).
15 While Galvin has considered Dampier’s ‘life of piracy’ as being of significance to his scientific output through a geographical lens, his treatment is largely silent on the ship, focusing instead on the nature of his observations and their impact on ‘science’; see P.R. Galvin, Patterns of Pillage: a Geography of Caribbean-based Piracy in Spanish America, 1536–1718, New York, 1999.
16 Livingstone, Putting Science in its Place (note 11), 3 (original emphasis).
usual Knowledge [of nature] for one so young. By the time he was twenty-three his appetite for knowledge and experience had been indulged and emboldened by voyages across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans aboard trading vessels and around Western Europe in the service of the Royal Navy during the Third Dutch War (1672–1674), fostering within him an inclination for seafaring, if not for the rigid disciplinary structures commonly imposed in such employments. Perhaps in an effort to evade further naval service,
or by the prospect of adventure and profit, Dampier worked his passage to Jamaica aboard the "Content" in 1674, where he was bound for the Bybrook sugar plantation and life as a boiler.¹⁹ Reading Dampier's own account against records left by the Helyar estate — the plantation owners — Bennett argues that the now experienced mariner might have been rather forcefully nudged into undertaking the voyage, suggesting that he was "carefully shepherded to the "Content" by Helyar's London representatives ... who were taking no chances on losing sight of [him].²⁰ For this reason, undoubtedly among others, Dampier hastily absconded from his commitments of plantation life to pursue an altogether more libertarian existence among the logwood cutters based in the Bay of Campeche, Mexico. Among the men trading in this illicit industry Dampier would have found many sea-bandits, some of whom would have been the self-same individuals he met with five years later, when, in 1679, he began his voyage round the world in the company of so-called privateers.²¹

The faint tracks of this, Dampier's first complete circumnavigation, are visible on Herman Moll's expertly engraved 'Map of the World', included as a fold-out in New Voyage (see Fig. 3). This epic twelve-year journey began in late December 1679 in Negril bay, Jamaica, whence a monumental crossing and re-crossing of the Isthmus of Darien on foot was undertaken, followed by a voyage to Virginia, where Dampier resided for around thirteen months. In August 1683 he set sail from Accomac, Virginia, destined for the west coast of Africa, re-crossed the Atlantic, rounded Cape Horn and entered the Pacific Ocean early in 1684, cruising the South American coast, from Chile to Mexico, until March 1686 when, departing from Cape Corrientes, he crossed the 'Great South Sea', with a tack for Guam, where he landed two months later. From here Dampier went on to explore Indonesia and the northern coast of Australia, and after a short period as a willing maroon on the Nicobar Islands in May 1688, he spent the best part of the next two years voyaging around the Indian Ocean, weighing anchor in Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and China. In September 1691, Dampier arrived at the Downs with most of his carefully preserved papers and charts in hand; apparently glad to be 'home', in England.

From his setting off from Jamaica in 1679 to his being marooned on the Nicobar Islands in 1688, Dampier actively navigated the world's oceans aboard vessels which were routinely engaged in the plundering of other ships and the sacking of towns, villages and ports. The violent, acquisitive nature of these actions is not really in question, indeed the fulcrum of Dampier's identity — his social and scientific standing — rested not on these points as such but on the issue of their legitimacy. For good reason Dampier felt some angst over this issue of legitimacy, since '[T]he boundary between piracy and legalised violence at sea was, by the end of the seventeenth century, becoming an increasingly important one.'²² Presentation of self for returning marauders was important, capital indeed, and it is clear that Dampier, like many of his contemporaries at sea, 'gave considerable thought to strategies for preserving the pretence of legality' in relating the nature of their conduct to those in authority.²³ He was, in his own account of his actions, a privateer (a point to which we will return), but others among his contemporaries and ever since have used other terms for him, rendering him as 'buccaneer' or 'pirate' in their accounts. While each of these terms denotes the violent acquisition of persons or property at or by descent from the sea, they carried different, and significant, connotations for Dampier and his contemporaries, as they do for scholars now. While the boundaries between these different categories of marine predation were becoming more fixed by the end of the seventeenth century, they were still fluid enough for men like Dampier to move between them. Before considering the significance of this mobility for the production and reception of Dampier's knowledge, we must first consider what made maritime violence piracy rather than privateering at the end of the seventeenth century.

Defining piracy comprehensively and with universal acceptance has, Anderson highlights, eluded jurists, but a 'broad definition that emerges from historical writing is that of the essentially indiscriminate taking of property (or persons) with violence, on or by descent from the sea.'²⁴ In contrast, privateering, which differs none in violent means and avaricious ends, is the decidedly discriminate taking of property at sea or by decent from the sea, deriving legitimacy, and in effect its crucial difference from piracy, from the presence of 'competent authority.'²⁵ Benton argues that, toward the end of the seventeenth century, 'defining piracy became related to the question of legitimate sponsorship'; centring, in effect, on the extension of sovereignty of the seas to the ship and its crew in the form of a 'Letter of Marque'.²⁶ In essence these documents licensed the exercise of violence on declared enemies of the issuing sovereign by private enterprise, with shares of any prize going to the crown and stockholders, as well as to the crew of the ship.²⁷ Buccaneers, a group to which Dampier is often associated, were perfectly situated to exploit the ambiguities of this system, since they operated 'in those parts of the world that lay beyond the so-called 'lines of amity', the imaginary quadrant formed by the Tropic of Cancer and a prime meridian that bisected the Atlantic west of the Azores.'²⁸ The construction of such 'autonomous spheres' depended in part upon what Benton identifies as a 'creative interpretation' of the legal geography of the ocean and the documents, including the 'Letter of Marque', which ostensibly regulated maritime space.²⁹

Dampier, like many of his fellow marauders, was acutely aware of these 'imperfect geographies' and he certainly understood the

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¹⁹ Bennett, William Dampier: buccaneer and planter (note 3).
²⁰ Bennett, William Dampier: buccaneer and planter, 472 (note 3).
²¹ The links between the logwood trade and piracy during the latter half of the seventeenth century have been established by a number of historians; see J. Baer, Pirates of the British Isles (note 3), 52–54.
strategies available for negotiating the boundaries between legality and illegality, between privateering and piracy. He writes, with unusual candour:

It hath been usual for many years past for the Governor of P. Guavres to send blank Commissions to Sea by many of his Captains, with orders to dispose of them to whom they saw convenient. Those of Petit Guavres by this means making themselves the Sanctuary and Asylum of all People of desperate Fortunes, and increasing their own Wealth, and the Strength and Reputation of their Party thereby.

While Dampier goes on to distance himself from such practices, his discussion makes clear that others were more than happy to accept such commissions in an attempt to legitimise their actions, indeed they shared with their betters, a sense of the Atlantic “as a zone distinct from Europe — a region where even ‘law-abiding’ peoples (metropolitan as well as Creole) were free to engage in practices that were unacceptable in Europe”; it was, in short, an ‘a place of contested sovereignties, diminished legalities, and warring imperialisms’. Dampier’s actions in this liminal space were thus, in a sense, legitimated by their geography, by the fact that they took place where they did and, as was most often the case, at the expense of Spanish. They were however conducted without ‘legitimate sponsorship’ and thus de jure piratical, contravening the Treaty of Madrid (1670), an accord which granted English traders limited scope in the ‘New World’ on the condition that such piracies were suppressed by the English crown. Dampier, in his manuscript, professes naivety with respect to the imperial politics which, to use Scammell’s phrase, ‘theologically distinguished’ acts of piracy from acts of patriotic heroism.

If it is objected that the point of right was not so well studied in these adventures as it ought to have been I can only say that the Political rights alliances, and Engagements between Empires and states are too high for me to discuss. Benton’s argument about the ‘certain expertise’ prevalent among marauders like Dampier, manifests in a ‘shared knowledge’ of ‘defence arguments’ against charges of piracy, seems to undermine the naivety permeating this passage. Indeed, even those sympathetic to Dampier’s position could not explain away all of his activities with reference to ‘lines of amity’ and the ambiguities of commissions. For, while his predation of the Spanish in the western Atlantic and Pacific Ocean was in accordance with nascent imperial and simmering religious sentiments among England’s ruling class, if not her recent concordats with the Spanish crown, Dampier’s activities in November 1683, while anchored off the coast of ‘Guinea’, where he took part in the piracy of a Danish slaver trading with a ship of the Royal African Company, could not be legitimised on these grounds. The taking of this ship — which was later named The Bachelors Delight — could not have been covered by any commission, and must be understood as it would have been by his contemporaries, as an act of piracy. Unsurprisingly, Dampier neglects this event in his telling of his journey, but the Journal of William Ambrosia Cowley, a crew mate at the time, relates the story in detail. In a passage from his manuscript which refers not to this incident specifically, but to the routine of his employment from 1679 to 1688, Dampier writes that, “[I] must confess at that time I did think the trade Lawfull yet had never followed it but in hopes to make such discoveryes as might in time conduce to the benefit of my nation.”

On the encouragement of others, such candid references to potential guilt were removed from the published account of his travels and any remaining references to acts of predation were framed so as to soften their illegitimacy, rendering Dampier and his history more palatable to the many publics to whom his journal was bound to appeal. Perhaps when he was crafting this new story he had the

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31 Dampier, New Voyage (note 2), 192, original emphasis.
32 Gould, Lines of plunder or crucible of modernity? (note 28), 105.
35 Benton, A Search for Sovereignty (note 23), 113.
37 Dampier, The Adventures of William Dampier (note 6), 128.
words of Captain Swan — who was himself worried about his associations with piracy — in mind: ‘There is no Prince on Earth is able to wipe off the Stain of such Actions’.38

This process of reinvention has been the focus of much of the recent scholarship on Dampier, with questioning centring on the mechanisms which enabled his transformation from brigand to respected observer of facts. What made it possible for a man with Dampier’s past to obtain the respect of the Royal Society and the Admiralty? Two interconnected factors made this possible. Both involved concessions, one on the part of the scientific establishment and the other on the part of Dampier himself, the former relating to the public acceptance of knowledge from such a source and the latter to a reimagining of persona in the writing of a life. Of the first, it is clear that the scholarly acceptance of Dampier’s observations depended upon the continuing influence of Baconianism among Royal Society members and Lords of the Admiralty, for whom the testimony of the ‘geographically privileged’ was paramount to scientific, economic and political ambitions.39 As a pirate contributing to the body of knowledge, Dampier stands as the very embodiment of Baconian philosophy at its logical conclusion, fulfilling the promise of Novum Organum’s (1620) iconic frontispiece: that ‘many will travel and knowledge will be increased’.40 Such timelines could only be considered significant in tandem with Dampier’s ability to rework his past in the production of his published journal.41 With the help of an expert copy editor, the edges of his piratical past were softened, the extent of his criminal deeds written out to make way for valuable descriptions and observations on the natural and social conditions of far flung places.42 The full extent of this editing only becomes apparent when the published version of New Voyage is compared to an earlier incarnation of the text and the journals of some of his contemporaries. Where Neill interprets Dampier’s efforts in this regard as an attempt to rediscover his citizenship, this paper argues that such moves must also be understood in relation to his desire for scientific credibility, a cognate concern for sure, but one which deserves specific attention.

For some, like the explorer James Bruce (1730–1794), Dampier was indelibly tainted by his piratical associations, figured as a man driven more by avarice than any sense of duty to knowledge or understanding.43 And, while his reputation among some of his contemporaries was that of an ‘Old Pirating Dog’, others, coveting his knowledge and experience of the world beyond Europe, including many in high office, were impressed enough by his qualities to overlook such slurs.44 Prime among these admirers was a certain Sir Hans Sloane, the influential Secretary to the Royal Society, collector and traveller, who, perhaps owing to his own experiences of the Caribbean and knowledge all that went on in that ‘cauldron where the bad blood of Europe boiled at will’, found much in Dampier to recommend to others.45 From his association with Sloane, Dampier received a favourable reception at the Royal Society and a commission from the Admiralty. Sloane, while sympathetic to Dampier’s past, was not unaware of the requirement for a certain decorum in the presentation of knowledge to a scientific audience, and it is perhaps his influence which was brought to bear on the published version of Dampier’s journal. With the help of well connected people like Sloane, Dampier was able to veil his piratical past, to obscure his predations with details of the natural world. Thus means and ends were dissociated in the writing of New Voyage, piracy left in the shadows, literally left in the margins, with observation and description taking the light and the centre stage. Murray’s rendering captures such a division, showing Dampier at the height of his success, clutching in his hands an ornately bound copy of New Voyage which dominates the picture, stealing the foreground, with the gold trim of the book drawing the viewer’s gaze away from the man himself, who appears rather dull in decidedly lacklustre attire, seemingly slipping back into the shadows.46 What the viewer is offered is the journal, not Dampier himself, or at least not all of himself, not his colourful persona, not his adventurous past or daring-do methods of knowledge acquisition. No ships are shown in the background, no globe to be surveyed, no ink-well and pen, no compass, or cutlass, or anything which might suggest his activities in gathering the knowledge offered in the book at the centre of the piece. The portrait is one of subject and object, of man and knowledge, with a clear distinction being drawn between the two, mirroring that which characterises the book itself. In Dampier’s own words, New Voyage is the ‘mix relation of Places and Actions’, with the latter figured as little more than ‘concomitant circumstances’.47 In the manuscript version of this text, much of the detail of these actions, or at least the more piratical elements of them, are left in the margins, annotations in Dampier’s own hand which were deemed unsuitable for publication, perhaps figured as too much a distraction from the scientific worth of the text.48

As a serious contributor to knowledge, Dampier adds weight to Dayton’s assertion that science was, at the end of the seventeenth century, fuelled not simply by ‘the fickle patronage of kings and ministers’ but more routinely by the heady combination of ‘speculative chaos’, ‘Curiosity, moral certainty, greed, and patriotism’, all of which ‘fused into the restless enthusiasm of the volunteer’.49 It was in this context that Dampier’s contributions to knowledge were significant. His journal encompassed anthropology, botany, zoology,

38 Dampier, New Voyage (note 2), 364.
39 New Voyage received a favourable review in the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society and Dampier was also invited to the Society to address its members shortly after its publication; see VII. An Account of a BOOK. Philosophical Transactions (1683–1775), 1697, 426–433. For discussion of ‘geographic privilege’ see S. Shapin, The house of experiment in seventeenth century England, Isis 79 (1988) 373–404.
40 The frontispiece to Francis Bacon’s Novum Organum (1620) shows a ship leaving the Mediterranean through the Pillars of Hercules, striped of their Ne Plus Ultra insignia, and entering the Atlantic Ocean, passing by a ship on the return, presumably laden with knowledge as well as produce. At the bottom of the page reads a passage taken from the Book of Daniel (12:4), assuring the reader that ‘many will travel and knowledge will be increased’ — capturing the essence of Bacon’s new, more empirically engaged philosophy of science.
41 The nature of Dampier’s reinvention through the writing of his journal is more fully explored by Edwards, Neill and Mitchell — see Edwards, The Story of the Voyage (note 3); Neill, British Discovery Literature (note 3); and Mitchell, William Dampier’s unacceptable self.
42 Dampier’s editor was most likely his publisher James Knapton.
46 Mitchell, William Dampier’s unacceptable self (note 41).
47 Dampier, New Voyage, Preface (note 2).
48 See Fig. 2 for example of Dampier’s ‘marginalia’. These writings are said to be of Dampier’s hand, showing changes and alterations he wished the copy writer to make for the next, perhaps final, draft. The case for approaching texts in this way is made by R. Mayhew, Denaturalising print, historicizing text: historical geography and the history of the book, in: H. Lorimer et al. (Eds), Practising the Archive: Reflections on Method and Practice in Historical Geography, Historical Geography Research Series 40, 2007.
geography, oceanography, meteorology and navigation, ultimately pioneering what Withers has termed the ‘scientization of travel’.50 He wrote not just for ‘Learned Scholars’, but for his ‘Countrymen’ also, expressing himself in a style plain, concise and exceedingly clear. His descriptions were infused with details derived from corporeal encounter, obtained through the practice of patient extensive observation and embodied experience. They are often a tour of the terrain of the object, from its visual appearance to its olfactory presence:

The Ant-Bear is a four-footed Beast, as big as a pretty large Dog. It has rough black-brown Hair: It has short Legs; a long Nose and Little Eyes; a very little mouth, and a slender Tongue like an Earth-worm about five or six Inches long. This Creature feeds on Ants; therefore you always find them near an Ants Nest or Path. It takes Food thus: It lays its Nose down flat on the Ground, close by the path that the Ants travel in (whereof here are many in this Country), and then puts out his Tongue athwart the Path: the Ants passing forwards and backwards continually, when they come to the Tongue make a stop, and in two or three minutes it will be covered all over with Ants; which she perceiving draws in her Tongue, and then eats them; and after puts it out again to trapan more. They smell very strong of Ants, and taste much stronger: for I have eaten of them.51

This description of the South-American Ant-Bear (or Ant Eater), typical of the journal, is infused with knowledge derived from sensate encounter, an intrepid method based on embodied experience, of tastes and textures, of sights, sounds and smells, supporting Polanyi’s now famous insistence that ‘[O]ur body is the ultimate instrument of all our external knowledge.’52 Largely eschewing the sense of wonder which Greenblatt and Daston and Park have shown to be a feature of earlier accounts of the ‘New Worlds’ beyond Europe, Dampier’s writing focuses instead on the mundane, on the practical, on guidance for what might settle the stomach or what colour a particular fruit can be expected to go when ripe.53

Arguably his most significant contribution to science, Discourse of the Trade-Winds, Breezes; Storms, Seasons of the Year, Tides and Currents of the Torrid Zone throughout the World, comprised the third part of his Voyages and Descriptions, a supplementary volume to New Voyage published in 1699. This section stands out among Dampier’s eclectic oeuvre as the most sustained engagement with a significant scientific frontier of the age, one which also attracted the considerable attentions of Edmond Halley. Peterson, Stramma and Kortum highlight the fact that, while Dampier’s descriptions of the trade-winds in the Atlantic (see Fig. 4) were much like those first published by Halley in 1687, his map of the ‘Pacific Ocean has no counterpart in Halley’s work’, and, furthermore, actually represents a ‘large improvement in objectivity over those given by Kicheri (1664/5) and Happel (1685)’ (see Fig. 5).54 Furthermore, such was the impact of Dampier’s observations on the variation of the compass and the tides, winds and currents in the Indian Ocean, that Halley’s 1702 isogonic map was partly based on information derived from Dampier’s charts of the region.55 Though both travelled to acquire knowledge and made an art of careful note-taking, Halley was by far the more intellectually accomplished of the two, offering, Thrower argues, a more systematic, theoretically engaged account of the phenomena he related.56 Dampier was however, far more widely travelled and experienced. The legacy of Dampier’s work is highlighted by Alexander Von Humboldt, for whom Dampier was ‘the finest of all travel writers’, even suggesting that those who came after — the ‘great European scholars and travellers’ — had done little to add to his achievements.57 In the context of the ongoing epistemological debate which divided early nineteenth-century naturalists between the field and the study, these comments should be viewed in light of Humboldt’s commitment to exploratory field-science, a position he was forced to defend from Georges Cuvier’s attacks.58 This is, of course, not to say that Dampier’s work was not valued by Humboldt, but that it was valued for a particular reason, perhaps the same reason that led Charles Darwin include Dampier’s work in his Beagle library, regarding the writings as a ‘mine’ of information.59 This legacy is perhaps best summed up by Admiral James Burney, who writes that:

It is not easy to name another voyager or traveller who has given more useful information to the world; to whom the merchant and mariner are so much indebted; or who has communicated his information in a more unembarrassed and intelligible manner.60

The argument advanced in this paper is that this legacy was predicated in part on the geographical mobility and relative liberty enjoyed through the practice of piracy. Taking his place among seventeenth-century London’s intellectual circle depended upon his ability to present his past in a way which retained his geographic privilege but obscured the piratical foundations upon which it stood.61 The argument that follows concurs with Beaglehole when he writes that, for Dampier, the roving way of life pursued by buccaneers, provided ‘a convenient way of seeing the world’.62

50 Withers, Placing the Enlightenment (note 12), 94. Dampier’s role in pioneering Enlightenment ‘voyage literature’ as a genre is more fully explored in Edwards, The Story of the Voyage (note 3).
51 Dampier, Voyages and Descriptions (note 17), 301.
59 J. Burney, A Chronological History of the Voyages and Discoveries in the South Sea or Pacific Ocean, London, 1816, 486.
Mobility and geographic privilege

Capturing the spirit of the Enlightenment in a phrase is impossible, but Kant certainly comes close when he talks about Sapere aude, or ‘dare to know’.63 Addressing many of the questions raised in this climate of enquiry required the ship, a ‘technology’ which allowed field scientists to leave behind the ‘laboratories, libraries, studies, and scientific societies of metropolitan centers of empire’, thence to garner knowledge about the ‘globe — its shape, geography, and topography, its magnetic, meteorological and atmospheric properties, its oceans, winds, and tides […] its peoples, animals, plants, soils, rocks, waters, and airs’.64 Where the telescope and microscope served to amplify the visual range of the laboratory scientist — revealing ‘new worlds’ in miniature and ‘distant worlds’ in the night sky — the ship served to amplify the corporeal range of the field-scientist, conveying them across once impassable oceans and seas to locations where discoveries lay in wait. Thus, Sorrenson argues, the ship functioned as a ‘scientific instrument’ which made possible not only the transportation of the field-scientist from place to place but also, Latour argues, the ‘mobilisation of worlds’.65

While it is clear that ships were integral to satisfying this desire to observe, record and collect, Sorrenson argues for an attention to the kind of vessel ‘chosen for a particular voyage’, focusing particularly on ‘who had commissioned it, and what kind of scientific instruments and techniques made certain its navigation.’66 For the Royal Society toward the end of the seventeenth century, funding such ventures was difficult, indeed as Drayton has argued, ‘[H]igh science’ routinely depended ‘on the insight of lesser amateurs.’67 This reliance on ‘direct connections with mariners and colonists’ through ‘cultivated contacts on the waterfront, and on vessels bound for strange lands’ meant that the testimonies of ordinary mariners were often central to understandings of the nature of the world.68 Indeed, in one of the first issues of the Philosophical Transactions, printed in 1665, ‘sea-men bound for far voyages’ are actively called upon to study nature rather than books, and from the observations, made of the phenomena and Effects she presents, to compose such a History of Her, as may hereafter serve to build a solid and useful Philosophy upon [...] to keep an exact diary, delivering at their return a fair copy thereof to the Lord High Admiral of England, his Royal Highness the Duke of York, and another to the Trinity-house, to be perused by the R. Society.69

While the issuing of this call to journals among ordinary mariners demonstrates the continuing influence of Baconianism on scientific practice, the seamen whom the Royal Society had in mind

63 Cited in Withers, Placing the Enlightenment (note 12), 2.
64 Sorrenson, The ship as a scientific instrument (note 13), 221.
66 Sorrenson, The ship as a scientific instrument (note 13), 222.
67 Drayton, Knowledge and Empire (note 49), 237.
68 Drayton, Knowledge and Empire (note 49), 239.
would no doubt have been those in the burgeoning Officer class of the Navy and merchant fleet.\textsuperscript{70} Though not of the right stock to be considered equals among the Royal Society’s members, their relative transience — their geographic privilege — rendered their word valuable at this historical juncture. In principle, any mariner could have submitted their observations to the society, although in practice few would have had the necessary levels of literacy or the opportunity, such were the conditions of labour at sea, to undertake such a task, and one can confidently assume that the authors of this piece never intended nor expected this grace to be extended to those involved in piracy.

The extent to which such academies relied upon information provided by ‘amateurs’ and ‘volunteers’, to use Drayton’s terms, calls for an attention to the various non-scientific ships aboard which these agents lived and worked.\textsuperscript{71} Looking to these ships as sites of scientific knowledge production demands an approach which moves beyond the somewhat reductively materialist focus of Sorrenson, whose concerns centre on the design and application of the ship and its instrumentation. What \textit{New Voyage} and \textit{Voyages and Descriptions} demonstrate is that a ship-centred life of piracy left Dampier exceedingly well placed to respond to the Royal Society’s petition. Put simply, the argument advanced here is that the pirate vessels aboard which Dampier traversed the world’s oceans were arguably the most mobilising of ships, endowing him with a freedom of movement across space and between places; all of which had a profound impact upon his practice and the content of his science. In his prefatory remarks in \textit{New Voyage}, Dampier himself acknowledges the significance of this rambling existence to his method, writing that his ‘traverses’

make for the Readers advantage, how little so-ever for mine; since thereby I have been the better enabled to gratify his Curiosity; as one who rambles about a Country can give usually a better account of it, than a Carrier who jogs on to his inn, without ever going out of his Road.\textsuperscript{72}

This acknowledgment stops short of fully disclosing the geographies that underpinned this practice; that is, the spatialities of piracy which actually made this ‘rambling’ possible at all. Indeed, in the preceding sentence he strains to distance himself from ‘the Actions of the Company, among whom I made the greatest part of this Voyage’, insisting that he does not ‘take any pleasure in relating them’ to the reader.\textsuperscript{73} [F]or methods sake’, however, he is keen to retain his claim to have been there — his tacit expertise — so he must walk the line between playing up his first-hand account and revealing the true nature of that experience.\textsuperscript{74}

While the physical nature of the ship was no doubt important, facilitating movement across water, connecting Dampier with places and people otherwise separated, the main concern here is with the more subtle mobilising geographies of the ship. Attending to the socio-spatial aspects of the pirate ship facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the mobilising potential of such a site, which is ultimately achieved by foregrounding the ways in which the alternative social order famously enacted aboard such vessels rendered Dampier mobile beyond the confines of a single ship or route, connecting him with multiple possibilities making him more geographically privileged. One of the most obvious ways in which this freedom was manifest was in the so-called ‘Law of the Privateers’, a doctrine or code understood through social interaction and manifest

\textsuperscript{70} Shapin questions the Royal Society’s apparent openness to ‘ordinary’ men, highlighting the fact that it was very much a ‘gentlemanly club’ with ‘gentlemanly codes for the making of empirical knowledge’; see Shapin, \textit{Social History of Truth} (note 7), 122–123.

\textsuperscript{71} Drayton, \textit{Knowledge and Empire} (note 49), 237.

\textsuperscript{72} Dampier, \textit{New Voyage}, Preface A3 (note 2).

\textsuperscript{73} See note 72.

\textsuperscript{74} See note 72.
in text in the form of articles. The communitarian foundations of this social order, known to many at the time as the ‘Jamaica Discipline’, constituted a ‘rough, but effective, egalitarianism’, and are revealed when Dampier writes that his crewmates would always ‘eat together, having all sorts of provisions in common, because none should live better than others, or pay dearer for anything than it was worth.’ These ships were governed by ballot, with each crew member casting an equal vote, sometimes to determine the rules on ‘Temperance and Sobriety’ and at other times to establish an acceptable route and destination. One of the implications of this social order on the mobilising potential of the pirate ship is revealed in Dampier’s journal when he writes that ‘Privateers are not obliged to any ship, but free to go ashore where they please, or to go into any other ship that will entertain them, only paying for their provision.’

Pirates, unlike their counterparts in either the merchant service, who were all-too-often indentured servants, or the Navy, wherein many were press-ganged, were free to jump-ship or go ashore if they desired such a move. For Dampier, a man with a seemingly insatiable appetite for new encounters, this represented a golden opportunity, of which he took full advantage. Throughout his travels, Dampier exercised this right, changing his trajectory with the explicit aim of furthering his knowledge, as in the following example of his departure from the crew of Captain Davis in 1685:

> It was not from my dislike to my old Captain, but to get some knowledge of the Northern Parts of this Continent of Mexico: And I knew that Capt. Swan determined to coast it as far North as he thought convenient, and then pass over for the East Indies; which was a way very agreeable to my inclination.

On another occasion, Dampier, reflecting upon the ‘rambling’ nature of his journey, relates how he was happy to stay with the ship upon which he presently sailed, because he was ‘well enough satisfied, knowing that the farther we went, the more knowledge and experience I should get, which was the main Thing that I regarded.’ He was thus mobilised by the pirate ship, and better placed to practice as a field-scientist, with the democratic, but nevertheless violent, geographies of piracy acting as a means for the production of knowledge. As well as enjoying this ability to ‘jump-ship’, Dampier was served well by the fact that the pirate ship was able to navigate waters and visit places from which others were excluded. Pirates, by the very nature of their existence, were drawn to places that were literally off the map, places wherein they could scheme, hideout, re-group, careen their vessel and perhaps, if we are to indulge in the fantasy for a moment, divide up their spoils. In the dedication of New Voyage, which Dampier humbly addressed to Lord Montague, incumbent president of the Royal Society, he makes clear that the ‘Account of his Travels’ has merit because, among other things, ‘the Scene of them is not only Remote, but for the most part little frequented also’, adding ‘so there may be some things in them new even to you.’ As Earle points out, even by the late 1700s, around two-thirds of merchant sailors ‘never went far from home’ and those who did only ventured into the Pacific Ocean after 1775. By contrast, Dampier’s detailed knowledge of new and little frequented parts of the world reveals how well placed pirates where to serve the political, economic and scientific interests of the imperial European states at this time. In practice, by the ‘late seventeenth century ... the pursuit of knowledge, commerce and colonies, religious piety, and nascent patriotism were tightly bound together’, and Dampier’s experience of ‘New Worlds’ served these interests, especially where their focus coalesced — on the territories of the Spanish Empire. Gathering information about the natural and social worlds of Spanish America through legitimate scientific voyaging at the end of the seventeenth century was virtually impossible, and although wandering merchants would sometimes provide such information; those best placed to facilitate such knowledge were pirates. The terms of treaties with competing Imperialists restricted the mobility of law-abiding English traders and Naval vessels, so for academics, politicians and speculators alike, Dampier’s accounts of the landscapes of Australia, the social customs in Indonesia, or the flora and fauna of the Galapagos Islands, would have been fascinating, fuelling old debates and sparking some new ones.

Though often relating places which were terra incognita, such as the many hitherto uncharted islands of the Pacific he describes in New Voyage, what were most interesting to many of Dampier’s readers were his accounts of the plantations, the mining towns, and the wealthy ports and cities of the Americas. Famously, this geopolitically valuable knowledge was coveted by the Darien Company of Scotland (DCS), who, in 1699, launched of a fleet of ships from Leith with the aim of founding a Scottish empire in the Isthmus of Darien, thereby establishing control over the strategic and lucrative passage between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The venture quickly collapsed and along with it crumbled the Scottish economy, leading directly, some have argued, to the Union of the Crowns in 1707. The intelligence for this project was derived in part from the writings and testimony of Dampier and his friend and fellow pirate Lionel Wafer.

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75 Dampier, New Voyage (note 2), 68.
76 M. Rediker, Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age, London, 2004, 61. It should be noted that Rediker uses this phrase to characterise the ‘alternative’ social order associated with Atlantic piracy at the beginning of the eighteenth century, a couple of decades after Dampier’s era. Though the ‘set’ of pirates to which Rediker dedicates his study were perhaps more pronounced in their communitarian ideals, Dampier’s journals, and those of his contemporaries, reveal that this egalitarianism was also prevalent among pirates at the end of the seventeenth century. Among others, Earle highlights the prevalence of ‘democracy and egalitarianism’ among buccaneers of Dampier’s generation: see Earle, The Pirate Wars (note 28), 101–103.
77 Dampier, New Voyage (note 2), 12.
78 Dampier, New Voyage (note 2), 69. On one such occasion, early in 1681, Dampier relates how ‘consultations were held every day’, yet ‘it was 7 or 8 days before any resolution was taken’; see Dampier, New Voyage (note 2), 28.
79 Dampier, New Voyage (note 2), 31.
82 Dampier, New Voyage (note 2), 440.
83 Dampier, New Voyage (note 2), A2.
85 Drayton, Knowledge and Empire (note 49), 234.
87 Lionel Wafer consorted with Dampier at various stages during the period. In 1699 Wafer also successfully published an account of his travels under the title A New Voyage and Description of the Isthmus of America; see J.E. Elliot Joyce (Ed.), A New Voyage and Description of the Isthmus of America, Hakluyt Society, Oxford, 1934. A draft of this journal is part of the Sloane MSS 3236, which is also the holding for Dampier’s draft manuscript.
Although Wafer’s dealings with the DCS on this matter were more substantial, Dampier’s journal certainly provided weight to the DCS’s argument for settling the Isthmus, as a report published by the company in 1699 clearly shows.

The depth of experience and knowledge Dampier became renowned for was also coveted by the Council of Trade in England who, in 1698, wrote to Dampier requesting advice on navigation in the Indian Ocean. Ironically, the board was seeking this information for a proposed expedition to suppress piracy around the valuable trade routes of the Indian Ocean and Red Sea. Dampier replied to William Popple, a member of the Council’s board, thus:

The Council of Trade yesterday asked me. (1) How long a ship might be running from England to Madagascar at this time of year? I answered that to the best of my judgment it might be done in three months and a half. (2) How long a ship might be in passing from Madagascar to the Red Sea? I could not answer this without consulting my papers, and I now inform you that since, according to the best of my information, on the coast of Madagascar the winds are at N.E. and N.N.E. from the end of January to the end of May (which is right against them) the voyage could not be performed in less than two months. (3) How long a ship might be in passing from the Red Sea to Cape Comorin? This depends upon the setting in of the western monsoon. In the Red Sea this falls out in May, when you may pass in a month, but you cannot bridge that way earlier. Thus if a ship leave England in November, she may reach Madagascar by the middle of February and the Red Sea about the middle of April. She must then wait about a month for the monsoon and about the middle of June she will reach Cape Comorin, a week or two sooner or later according to the setting in of the monsoon.

The erudition apparent in his reply and the clarity of its delivery demonstrate the key qualities that made Dampier a valuable source of knowledge for the political, scientific and mercantile classes. The geographic privilege Dampier enjoyed as a result of his piratical exploits clearly contributed to this value. The pirate ship made it possible for Dampier to practice field-science, rendering him transient and potentially connected to almost anywhere from whence a body of ‘useful knowledge’ global in scope could be constructed. The pirate ship mobilised Dampier to observe and record, among other things, matters botanical in the rainforests of Central America, zoological at various Pacific Islands, anthropological in Australia and Southern Africa and meteorological across the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans; ultimately allowing him to produce knowledge derived from such diverse and often dangerous locations inaccessible to many other vessels and mariners. Such an undertaking inevitably required time as well as mobility, and it will be argued that the ship-centred life of piracy that endowed Dampier with the latter also provided the former condition also.

**Liberty and fraternity**

Dr. Samuel Johnson once remarked that ‘no man will be a sailor who has contrivance enough to get himself into a jail; for being in a ship is being in jail with the chance of being drowned … A man in jail has more room, better food, and commonly better company.’ Despite the haughty tone, Johnson’s comments do reveal something of the reality of life in the wooden world of the ship in the age of sail. Piercing cold, fierce heat, ferocious winds, cramped conditions, sleep deprivation, malnutrition and dehydration all took a toll on the often overworked and frequently mistreated body and mind of the sailor. Such were the conditions that populating these salt-water gaols often required coercion, with the infamous press-gangs stalking the streets of England’s port-towns to ensure the Navy had a constant supply of labour, and merchants, too, relying frequently upon the forced labour of so-called indentured servants, who, were, by virtue of the nature of the contracts that bound them, slaves by another name.

Though Dampier and the pirates with whom he sailed suffered many of these selfsame deprivations, they enjoyed certain privileges, enshrined in a shared code of practice which flattened the hierarchical structures of power common in the merchant and naval service, ensuring that the worst effects of what were often unavoidable hardships could be mitigated. They commonly laboured for a share of the company’s takings rather than a wage, received a fair allocation of food and drink, and enjoyed provision from the common purse upon injury. What ultimately underpinned this communitarian order was the crew’s ability to elect and depose those in positions of authority. Dampier himself notes that the positions of Captain and Quartermaster were always decided upon by the ‘consent of all the company.’ The men among whom he sailed at this time were often ‘so more wilful, and less under Command’ than other sailors, thus enjoying a degree of autonomy and liberty, which remained, Bromley writes, ‘for most inhabitants of the old world and the new … frustrated dreams, so far as they were dreams at all.’

As late as 1708, the Board of Trade in London lamented the fact that the ‘ill practices too frequently committed’ by West Indies ‘privateers’ could be prevented if only the captain enjoyed ‘the sole command … whereas, as we have been informed, every seaman on board a privateer having a vote, it is not in the captain’s power.’

For common seamen like Dampier the lure of this alternative social order must have been strong, although one must not lose sight of the fact that such a move was inevitably motivated at least in part by the prospect of quick and substantial material gain. In practice, the prospect of better working conditions and personal profit meant that pirate ships in the late seventeenth century often had little trouble attracting men from more legitimate employment to their ranks. This is not to say that all who sailed did so freely, to the contrary, men with skills in carpentry,
navigation or medicine were often held by a crew in want of such abilities and slave holding was not uncommon at all. Nevertheless, attracting sailors in numbers and maintaining harmony among them were essential for ensuring successful pillaging. Put simply, piratical success depended largely on the ability of one ship to intimidate another, which, in practice, required that the crew of the pirate ship substantially outnumber the crew of their prey. Rediker has argued that, in the decades after the turn of the seventeenth century, crews of pirate ships commonly outnumbered those in similar sized ships by a factor of five, indeed a Navy ship which required 15 to 18 hands, would if taken and refitted by pirates, have been manned by 80 or 90 men, each of whom, accordingly, had much less work to do. Though dealing with pirates operating in a significantly different context from Dampier, Rediker’s point can be read as indicative of a broader trend among such communities, to seek strength in numbers, ensuring that when the time came to board a ship, their prey would relent in the face of insurmountable opposition.

The practicalities of such large crews eating, sleeping and working in the confined space of the ship for extended periods would have had a number of consequences for living conditions. One can easily imagine the stale, cramped quarters below deck, the uncomfortable sleeping arrangements, which often involved finding a space on deck, and the relentless bustle of so many bodies living and working together within such a limited space. These conditions would not, it appears, have provided the ideal situation for knowledge production; indeed one could scarcely imagine more of a contrast to the scholarly libraries and orderly laboratories of London or Paris, or the floating universities inhabited by Cook or Baudin. New Voyage stands as testament to Dampier’s dedication to pursue intellectual ends in spite of such privations and hindrances, which, while important, should not obscure the fact that such ships provided Dampier with a means to these ends. It is suggested here that one of the privileges of a piratical life was a relative temporal liberty, which, given the right inclinations, could be spent in the pursuit of knowledge and experience.

For Dampier, the abundance of hands on deck and relatively loose trajectories of piratical voyages presented a clear opportunity to pursue knowledge and discovery, in way which was perhaps less likely for the ordinary mariner in either the Royal Navy or merchant fleet at this time. Earle points out that aboard merchantmen during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, officers were instructed to make sure that sailors were continually ‘at work upon something ... even if there is nothing to do’. This regime of discipline by work aboard merchant vessels was also an increasingly necessary function of shipboard life, given that, ‘over time fewer sailors were needed to work each hundred tons of English shipping’, an improvement in efficiency which Earle suggests ‘may of course have been achieved at the sailor’s expense by making them work harder’. Keen to dismiss the possibility that such gains were the result of a more effectual regime of labour exploitation, Earle suggests that the impact of increasingly large ships, technical advances, and safer seas during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, even suggesting that, if sailors were worked harder, ‘they did not complain much about this.’ Interestingly however, Earle goes on to note that ‘it does not take much imagination to appreciate that life aboard ship must have been very different as one of three than of a hundred. Workload, the work itself, and familiarity with ones mates were all totally different.’ In a statement which confirms the darkest register of Earle’s interpretation, Edward Barlow (1642–c.1738), an experienced sailor of both merchant and navy vessels, remarks in his own journal that:

Yea, I always knew that the worst of prentices did live a far better life than I did, for they had high days and other holy days to rest upon and take their pleasure; but all days were alike to us, and many times it fell out that we had more work on Sabbath day than we had on other days; and the hardships I endured made me think many times that I had better to have taken any other employment upon me than have come to sea; but I had always a mind to see strange countries and fashions, which made me bear these extremities with more patience.

Like Dampier, Barlow was man of ambition and curiosity, and while he indicates that his ‘mind to see strange countries and fashions’ was sated somewhat by his seafaring life aboard merchant and navy ships, his journal bears little comparison to Dampier’s with respect to the tone of its observations and descriptions. Of course, such dissimilarity could be attributed to their different dispositions, but one can infer from Barlow’s description of the organisation of shipboard life in the service of both the Navy and merchants, that extensive fieldwork and intensive study would have been very difficult for common seamen.

It follows, as Rediker and Earle both argue, that extra hands on deck would have reduced the workload expected of each individual mariner, freeing up, as a result, some time to pursue other ends, which, popular conception would have it, commonly involved varying combinations of drunkenness, debauchery and gaming. The range and depth of knowledge apparent in Dampier’s writings strongly suggest a practice underpinned by extensive periods of observation and consistent record keeping. Clearly, for Dampier, knowledge was an end worth investing time in, indeed his practice of enthusiastic encounter and patient note taking, the foundations of field-science, were in part underpinned by the relative temporal liberty endowed by living a pirate’s life. Even aboard the more formally administered privateering ships of the age, the crew enjoyed ‘a relatively light workload as result of their large crews, coupled with much less severe discipline than in the navy.’

96 Dampier’s famous ‘golden dreams’ of settling the secund land of the New World involved the exploitation of ‘1000 slaves’ — Dampier, New Voyage (note 2), 158–159; for a critical account of the relationship between piracy and slavery in the seventeenth century see Earle, The Pirate Wars (note 28), 101–102.
97 Rediker, Villains of All Nations (note 76), 58.
98 This point is also made by Starkey when he writes that ‘Piracy was essentially labor-intensive, with comparatively large crews required to over haul and overwhelm prizes.’ Starkey goes on to explain that that this over-manning of ships was common among pirates throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Caribbean, Atlantic and Mediterranean waters. D.J. Starkey, Pirates and Markets, in: Pennell (Ed.), Bundits or Sea, 116.
99 Dampier notes that it is ‘usual with seamen in those parts [the West-Indies] to sleep on the deck, especially for Privatere; among whom I made these observations’, Dampier, Voyages and Descriptions (note 17), 303.
100 Earle, Sailors (note 84), 74–75.
101 Earle, Sailors (note 84), 7.
102 See note 101.
103 Earle, Sailors (note 84), 8.
104 Cited in Gill, The Devil’s Mariner (note 3), 75.
105 Earle, Sailors (note 84), 196.
Consider with Lloyd the computations for manning the Royal Navy drawn up by Samuel Pepys in 1677, which dictate that a Sixth Rate ship of sixteen guns required sixty-five men to function, while a Fifth Rate with thirty guns would need a complement of one hundred and thirty men.106 A pamphlet circulated in 1690 suggests that achieving these complements proved challenging for the Navy and merchants alike, with its author declaring that, ‘[t]here are not enough seamen sufficient in England and the rest of their Majesties dominions to man the royal fleet and to drive the trade thereof.’107 Comparing Dampier’s situation with these general trends is illuminating as to the relative manning of pirate ships in the period. While cruising as part of a transnational armada of pirate ships in 1681, Dampier found himself aboard the ship of Captain Sharpe, having transferred there from another in the fleet that was itself ‘overmanned’.108 Sharpe’s modest vessel of twenty-five tons boasted only two guns, but was manned by a crew of forty men, substantially more than one would expect on a similar ship in the navy, even taking Pepys’ ambitious targets into account.109 Prior to the introduction of these targets, warships were routinely manned according to tonnage, with a ratio of one man to four tons being the standard, which would mean that Sharpe’s crew were capable of manning a ship of 180 tons, or to put it another way, they were themselves overmanned by a factor of six.110 With the numbers available for other ships aboard which Dampier sailed it is possible to bear witness to this same circumstance, like in 1683, when part of a 70 man crew aboard the 18 gun Revenge, though at times this would have been less acute. While rounding Cape Horn aboard the Bachelors Delight in 1684, Dampier was part of a crew of one hundred and fifty-six manning thirty-six guns, only matching the navy target of around four men to a gun, though it is entirely possible, given their purpose, that the ship was carrying more guns than a similar sized navy ship would have. Nonetheless, their predatory pursuits demanded that the crews of pirate ships be over and above what was actually required to allow the ship to function.

While it would be misleading to think of the life of the pirate as one of only ‘pleasure and ease’, Jean-Baptiste Labat (1663–1738), a Jesuit priest and historian who befriended and travelled with pirates in the West-Indies at the end of the seventeenth century, points out the extent to which leisure was valued among such men, suggesting that they often rigged their ships with a simple square-sail because of their ‘dislike of work’.111 While sailors aboard merchant vessels spent most of their time ashore engaged in the loading and unloading of materials, and those aboard Navy ships were kept busy by the duties of the service, pirates enjoyed a different social organisation of time, often only prompted ‘to go to sea’ by dwindling funds.112 The nature of Dampier’s work suggests that the free time he enjoyed as a result of such practices was routinely invested in intellectual endeavour, in observing and recording, in perusing papers and appropriated derroteros, and in discussing such things with his fellow brigands and those with whom he met traversing the same watery pathways. Although he has often been portrayed as an individualist, New Voyage suggests that the pirate ship connected Dampier with an extensive seafaring knowledge network, encompassing pirates, merchants, ordinary seamen and the native inhabitants of the ‘New World’.113 Dampier was part of what could be tentatively referred to as a literate and literary buccaneering fraternity. With no comparison before or since, the late seventeenth-century West-Indies was the scene of a flourishing of piratical writing, with Dampier’s being only the most famous. Others, most of whom knew Dampier well, found publishers and audiences for their journals, including Basil Ringrose, Lionel Wafer, Bartholomew Sharpe, William Ambrosia Cowley and John Cox.114 It is clear that Dampier valued the word of many of these men, especially Basil Ringrose, whom he deemed a ‘worthy consort’, and Lionel Wafer, with whom he shared common values and aspirations, and undoubtedly colluded with in the preparation of New Voyage.115 He also alludes to having met with ‘Captain Davis’, a companion from his buccaneering days, in London before the publication of his journal to discuss their former adventures together.116 Such consultations were however, also conducted aboard ship, indeed one of the most consistent and influential sources of information for Dampier was a certain John Canby. Canby, ‘much esteem’d as a very sensible Man’, and Dampier shared, Baer has argued, ‘several leisurely conversations over a substantial period of time’ during their voyages together.117 The ship can thus be understood as a social space, an instrument important not only in its materiality but in it social function, as a place of meeting and exchange, where ideas and experiences could be traded in the quiet hours between essential tasks.

As well as references to discussions with his fellow marauders, Dampier’s journal is replete with examples of intellectual engagements with other travellers and settlers in the New World and with the indigenous populations of those lands. Conducting something of a ‘buccaneer ethnography’, to borrow Neill’s phrase, Dampier used his free time to interview people with whom he met as to their knowledge of a place and its products.118 He was impressed by the

107 Cited in Lloyd, The British Seaman (note 106), 114.
108 Dampier, New Voyage (note 2), 30.
109 Gill, The Devil’s Mariner (note 3), 99.
110 Figures for men to tonnage ratio taken from Lloyd, The British Seaman (note 106), 80.
112 Earle, Sailors (note 84), 79–81; Dampier, New Voyage (note 2), 371.
114 Basil Ringrose produced two works of note, both stemming from the journey he shared with Dampier across the Isthmus of Darien. The first took the form of a ‘Waggoner’ (a sea atlas) which he is said to have copied from a ‘derrotero’ taken from the Rosario, a Spanish ship captured by the buccaneers off the coast of modern Ecuador on July 29th 1681. Ringrose’s original manuscript is held in the National Maritime Museum — see B. Ringrose, ‘The South Sea Waggoner Shewing the Making & Bearing of All the Coasts from California to the Straights of Le Maire Done from the Spanish Original by Basil Ringrose’, c.1682 P/32 — and a complete reproduction is also available: see D. Howe, N.J.W. Thrower (Eds), A Buccaneer’s Atlas: Basil Ringrose’s South Sea Waggoner, California, 1992. The second work, produced around 1683, is a ‘journal’ detailing his involvement with the buccaneers. The original is held in the British Library Manuscripts Collection — see B. Ringrose, 1680–81: Journal, c.1883, British Library Slone MS 3820. The content of this journal was also included in the second edition of A.O. Exquemelin’s Bucaniers of America: see A.O. Exquemelin, Bucaniers of America: the Second Volume, Containing the Dangerous Voyage and Bold Attempts of Captain Bartholomew Sharp and Others, London, 1865. For Wafer see note 86. Original drafts and writings by Sharpe, Cowley and Cox are held in the British Library Manuscripts Collection, see Sloane MSS 46a and 46b, Sloane MSS 54 and Sloane MSS 49 respectively. Edited versions the journals of Sharpe and Cowley were also published by Hack — see Capt. W. Hack, A Collection of Voyages, London, 1699.
115 Dampier, New Voyage (note 2), 60.
116 Dampier, New Voyage (note 2), 224.
117 Dampier, Voyages and Descriptions (note 17), 342. Baer, William Dampier at the crossroads (note 3), 116.
‘sagacity’ of the Mosquito Indians of Central America and learned much about the flora and fauna of that part of the world from travelling with those people.\(^{119}\) He also found fellow adventurers a useful source of information, as the following account of a discussion with a ‘Spanish Gentlemen’ reveals:

I met with a Spanish Gentlemen that had lived 30 years in the West Indies ... and from him I had these relations. He was a Very Intelligent Person, and pretended to be well acquainted in the Bay of Campeachey: therefore I examined him in many particulars concerning that Bay, which I was well acquainted with myself, living there 3 years. He gave very true and pertinent answers to all my demands, so that I could have no distrust of what he related.\(^{120}\)

Such encounters clearly provided Dampier with an invaluable sounding board for his experiences and observations, and often presented him new information. Though these connections were sometimes fleeting – a chance conversion or an interrogation of a captive – Dampier’s writings suggest the existence of a broader network of information gathering and exchange among pirates and other seamen at this time. Engaging with this network as a supplement to his everyday practice of observation required a substantial investment of time, which, it has been argued here, he was afforded by virtue of his piratical life. In an uncharacteristically candid passage, Dampier adds some texture to these notions of liberty, fraternity and knowledge which never made him rich but would foster a legacy of the Mosquito Indians of Central America and learned:

Exploring this tension in detail involved a focus on the ways in which the pirate ship provided Dampier with the geographical range and the freedom of time necessary to practice field-science. While the importance of the ship’s materiality has been noted, this paper has looked to some of the more subtle social and epistemic geographies which situate the pirate ship of the late seventeenth century within more expansive spatially-stretched networks of social relations. From the evidence drawn from various sources detailing Dampier’s life and work it is clear that the relatively democratic governance of these transient, floating societies in miniature conferred a mobility which extended far beyond the wooden confines of a single ship or the trace of a single voyage. It is also the case that such a network, with remarkably fair terms of entry and exit for the age, which were themselves spatially-stretched, afforded members fairer, less arduous labour conditions than they would have experienced in other maritime employment. The socio-spatial configuration of piracy at the close of the seventeenth century centred on the ship and it is apparent that the liberty and geographic privilege that came with a pirate’s life were invested by Dampier in the pursuit of knowledge. Relatively unfettered by the tyranny of masters at sea or stockholders on land and liberated, if only to an extent, from the oppressions of daily labour by the abundance of hands-on-deck, Dampier was well-placed aboard the pirate ship to pursue knowledge and experience at every turn of the rudder and sighting of land.

Conclusions

In his Table Talk and Omniana, Samuel Taylor Coleridge famously refers to William Dampier as ‘a rough sailor, but a man of exquisite mind.’\(^{122}\) In this typically pithy observation, Coleridge captures a dialectic which has come to define Dampier’s place in history. In the service of both the Brethren of the Coast and the Republic of Letters, Dampier sailed the world’s oceans, passionately gathering knowledge which never made him rich but would foster a legacy that no stash of doubloons or gold trinkets could ever have matched. As a pirate with apparently gentlemanly aspirations Dampier has consistently figured as one of history’s paradoxes, a man who embodied supposedly irreconcilable identities and ways of life. It has been demonstrated that approaching this juxtaposition from a geographical perspective allows for a more generous account of Dampier’s agency. Placing Dampier’s knowledge aboard the pirate ship opens up the possibility for understanding the ways in which he creatively exploited the liberties of space and time a life of piracy afforded. The implicit claim here is that making sense of the shared history that piracy and science undoubtedly have in the form of the life and work of Dampier requires an attention to the geographies that they also shared. What this focus reveals is that these sites subvert notions of the ship in scholarly discourses of both piracy and the history of science, demonstrating that a real tension exists between the trope of the violent, anti-establishment site of the pirate ship and the orderly and legitimate site of the scientific ship. Such essentialist notions are an ill-fit for an account of Dampier’s work which suggests that the pirate ship of the late seventeenth century was also well placed to be a ship of knowledge production as well as a site of violence and avarice.

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\(^{120}\) Dampier, New Voyage (note 2), 230.

\(^{121}\) Dampier, New Voyage (note 2), 381.

\(^{122}\) S.T. Coleridge, The Table Talk and Omniana of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, with a Note of Coleridge by Coventry Patmore, London, 1917, 168.