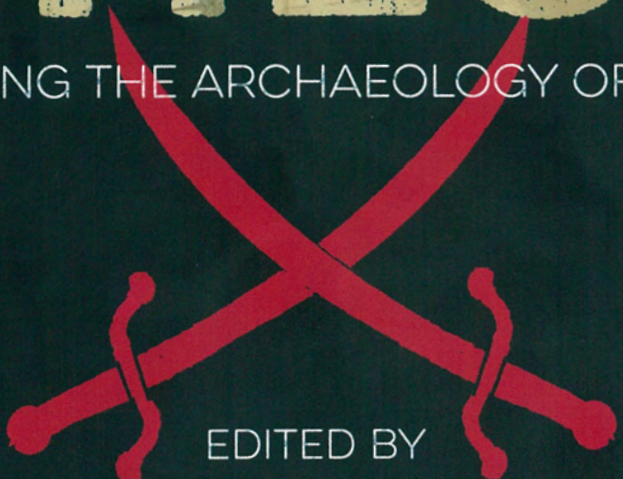
DEAD MAN'S CHEST

EXPLORING THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF PIRACY



EDITED BY

RUSSELL K. SKOWRONEK AND CHARLES R. EWEN

DEAD MAN'S CHEST

UNIVERSITY PRESS OF FLORIDA

Florida A&M University, Tallahassee
Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton
Florida Gulf Coast University, Ft. Myers
Florida International University, Miami
Florida State University, Tallahassee
New College of Florida, Sarasota
University of Central Florida, Orlando
University of Florida, Gainesville
University of North Florida, Jacksonville
University of South Florida, Tampa
University of West Florida, Pensacola

DEAD MAN'S CHEST

Exploring the Archaeology of Piracy

Edited by Russell K. Skowronek
and Charles R. Ewen

UNIVERSITY PRESS OF FLORIDA

Gainesville/Tallahassee/Tampa/Boca Raton
Pensacola/Orlando/Miami/Jacksonville/Ft. Myers/Sarasota

Contents

TRANSATLANTIC PIRACY

6

Casting Piracy a Line

An Examination of the Influence of Piracy in the Archaeological Record of Two New England Fishing Settlements

Megan Rhodes Victor

The mere mention of colonial New England fishermen and sailors conjures up raunchy, salt-soaked scenes of taverns, with ale and coins scattered across creaking, sticky wooden tables. Such taverns are frequently inseparable from the stereotypes of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century fishing towns. Historically, there is solid evidence for this association. The centrality of these institutions on the social landscape of the English colonial world makes them ideal locations in which do what archaeology does best: search for the material remains of human behavior. Within the evocative, alcohol-laced environment of the tavern, an early modern period patron could find the ideal atmosphere for sociability and commensal politics (defined as the sharing of food and drink in a structured way so as to facilitate social negotiation). A keen-eyed archaeologist can find the remains of these negotiations, including agreements both legal and illicit.

Through a comparative study, this chapter examines the material remnants of such negotiations of social and economic capital at two sites to highlight the presence—or absence—of illicit trade and piracy in the archaeological record. The fishing station of Pemaquid, Maine, resembled many contemporary English colonial fishing plantations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while the fishermen of Smuttynose Island, in the Isles of Shoals on the Maine/New Hampshire border, ran a fishing station consisting of a loosely organized confederation of fishing masters. These expert fishermen combined their knowledge with a new innovative fish-drying technique, dunning, to create a lucrative business enterprise. Further, unlike Pemaquid, the

Shoals were a well-known haven to smugglers and pirates, including Thomas Larrimore and John Quelch. The archaeological assemblages from the taverns and domestic areas at the two sites reveal the presence (and absence) of piratical patrons.

Historical Background

Now the site of present-day Bristol, Pemaquid was one of the earliest fishing villages in Maine, established in the 1620s (Figure 6.1). While it is difficult to ascertain an exact date of founding, a permanent settlement likely was present by 1629, with enterprising fishermen exploring the area for as much as a decade earlier (Camp 1975; Hackelton 1869; Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry 2013). As a fishing plantation, Pemaquid endured a series of land conflicts and uprisings, each of which damaged its economic prosperity and its population density. The fishing station weathered at least four major uprisings: King William's War (1688–1697), Queen Anne's War (1702–1713), Lovewell's War (1722–1725), and the French and Indian War (1754–1763) (Camp 1975; Coolidge and Mansfield 1859; Hackelton 1869; Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry 2013).

Organizationally, Pemaquid was very similar to other seventeenth-century fishing plantations, such as Maine's Richmond Island, near Cape Elizabeth, and Newfoundland's St. John's on the English Shore (Camp 1975; Harrington 1992; Pope 2004). The fishermen at Pemaquid labored as residents of a fishing plantation, defined as a "waterfront premises from which the fishery was conducted" (Pope 2004:1). They worked under a local agent who regulated nearly all aspects of their daily lives, standing in for the (usually absentee) "planter," who owned the land on which the community stood and the fishing boats. The planter for Pemaquid and other such English fishing plantations generally held high social and economic status, while the fishermen themselves operated under the perpetual threat of job loss due to the planter's financial hardships or whims (Hamilton et al. 2009; Harrington 1992; Pope 2004). Finally, Pemaquid—like many mainland fishing plantations—was organized and funded as an entrepreneurial enterprise. Within the broader framework of Atlantic world trade systems, it was one of many fishing plantations that were part of a trade network consisting of "two steady streams" of economic flow "and one trickle" (Pope 2004:91). Pemaquid and other stations supplied Europe, especially southern Europe and the Mediterranean, with dried codfish; European centers, in turn, exported both fruit and wine to English and Dutch ports on the North Atlantic. These are the "steady streams" about which Pope writes. Finally, Dutch and English ports then sent goods back to

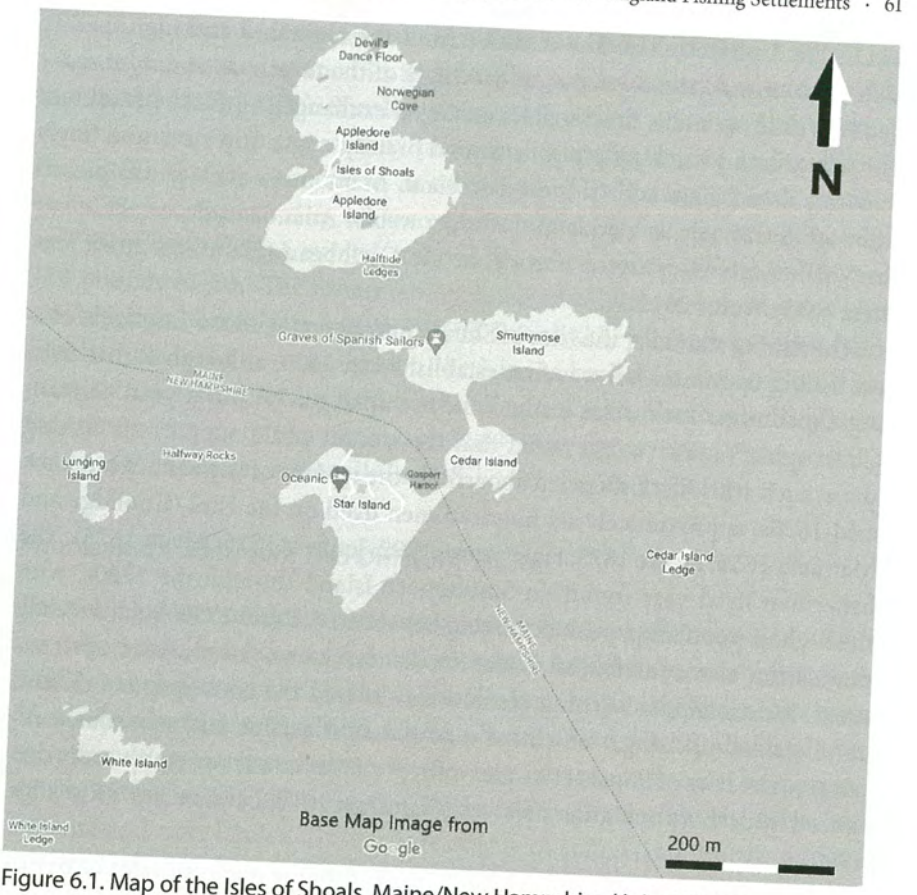


Figure 6.1. Map of the Isles of Shoals, Maine/New Hampshire, United States.

fishing plantations like Pemaquid, in a "trickle" of much smaller proportions than the fish exported.

This unequal flow of goods made it difficult for the fishermen at Pemaquid to acquire large amounts of wealth, despite fishing the rich waters off Pemaquid Beach (Pope 2004). The activities and strict social organization of fishing plantations like Pemaquid generated a unique settlement pattern: the fishermen lived in a large communal building known as the Great House. This structure was the center for domestic activities in the community and also sheltered the fishermen from the elements while they carried out other tasks, such as net mending.

The Isles of Shoals consist of nine craggy islands, located approximately 10 miles off the coast of the present-day Maine and New Hampshire border. Located in a deepwater harbor, the Isles were well situated for the enterprising Shoalers to establish a tavern, which catered to travelers, fishermen, mer-

chants, and pirates alike. The distance from the mainland and high-quality fish were strong incentives to stop overnight at the tavern on Smuttynose Island. Within its walls, the Shoalers arranged exchanges of marine resources for tobacco and smoking pipes, wine and brandy, sugar and rum, and finely blown colored glass and Chinese porcelain. Many more such goods passed through the Shoals, as a node in the larger web of Atlantic trade, on their way to North America, western Europe, or the Caribbean (Hamilton 2010; Jenness 1875; Victor 2019).

The fishing station at the Isles of Shoals, another one of New England's oldest fishing communities, was first established in 1623, although earlier fishing expeditions took place around the archipelago. Within a year, Captain Christopher Levett (1628) noted that the station could support six fishing ships, each with fifty fishermen aboard. By the middle of the next decade, the mid-1630s, approximately six hundred men lived on the Isles (Coolidge and Manfield 1859; Drake 1875; Harrington 1992; Jenness 1875; Levett 1628). The fishermen lived year-round on Smuttynose Island through the 1780s, with the highest population peak occurring between 1710 and 1750. Such a steady population also contributed to the Shoals' unique socioeconomic environment. Most mainland fishing plantations suffered the consequences of land conflicts and uprisings, which led to population decline and subsequent recovery. The Isles of Shoals (10 miles away from the coast) were physically distanced from this population pressure (Hamilton 2010; Lawson 2007; Rutledge 1997).

The Shoalers' most potent resource came from the plentiful schools of fish that lived around the archipelago. Regularly weighing approximately two hundred pounds (which far exceeds today's six- to ten-pound specimens), codfish (*Gadus morhua*) dominated the Shoals' economy. The master fishermen at the Shoals used a new technique, known as dunning, to dry the fish they caught in such abundance; dunning dried each fish with less salt and rendered each one thinner than other processes, which allowed more fish into each wooden barrel shipped out from the Shoals. The reduction in salt not only reduced costs for the fishermen but also made the final product far more palatable. Once soaked and boiled, as was the practice with saltfish, Shoals fish retained much more of its inherent plumpness, giving it a fresher taste. This taste was so appreciated that Isles of Shoals cod was soon seen as the best available, resulting in Caribbean and European merchants using the product as something of a standard against which they could measure other salted cod and set prices (Hamilton 2010; Jenness 1875; Lawson 2007; Rutledge 1997).

The Shoalers also owed their success to their social organization. Rather than operating as a fishing plantation, the fishermen at the Isles of Shoals

worked together as teams of fishing masters to build capital and were consequently distanced economically from the pattern of streams and trickles mentioned by Pope. The Shoalers were not "planted" colonists but, instead, could compete with the wealthy planters due to the volume and quality of the saltfish that they produced. At the height of the fishing station's productivity, they were exporting 3,000 to 4,000 quintals of fish per year (Coolidge and Mansfield 1859). A quintal, it should be noted, contains between 100 and 112 pounds of fish. The fishermen operated with "almost unrestrained civil and religious liberty" (Jenness 1875:107). Initially, they lived in privately held, lightly built wooden structures on the Isles as bachelors. Eventually, a few more substantial structures came to the Shoals, along with wives and children for some of the men (Hamilton et al. 2009; Harrington 1992; Jenness 1875). Many of the Shoalers eventually retired, wealthy, to the mainland.

Pirates and Fishermen: Two Different Stories

The fishing communities at Pemaquid and at the Isles of Shoals had widely varying views of piracy and colonial authority, no doubt influenced by their different socioeconomic structures. The Shoalers frequently were at the heart of colonial complaints for disrespecting officers of English colonial law, often even assaulting them, and generally showing "utter indifference" to their authority (Jenness 1875: 124; see also Drake 1875). In contrast, the fishermen at Pemaquid were known to comply readily with colonial authorities and cooperated to settle the constant land disputes over the bountiful fishing waters off of Pemaquid Beach. They also viewed English colonial authorities as a source of protection from the violent uprisings that they suffered. At least two forts were erected by such authorities to aid in these efforts, including Fort William Henry, which was likely the first stone fortification in New England (Coolidge and Mansfield 1859; Hackelton 1869; Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry 2013).

Given this background, it is unsurprising that the inhabitants of the two settlements harbored very different views on piracy. Just as they were the victim of many land conflicts and uprising, the fishermen at Pemaquid were also attacked by the pirate Dixey (or Dixie) Bull (Dow 1969; Hackelton 1869). The first fort constructed at Pemaquid, known as Abraham Shurte's Fort, was erected in 1630 as a wooden palisade. Unfortunately, it "proved an insufficient defense against the marauding acts of the noted pirate, Dixie Bull," who attacked the settlement in 1632 and burned the fort to the ground (Hackelton 1869: 22; see also Cartland 1914). Bull fled with £500 in goods from Pemaquid, but the fishermen were far from piratical sympathizers. As his crew was

weighing anchor, one of the men from Pemaquid successfully shot and killed Bull's second in command. Reportedly, an angry crowd gathered in Bull's wake as the ship left Pemaquid's shore (Cartland 1914; Dow 1969; Hackelton 1869).

In contrast, the Isles of Shoals had a reputation for being inhabited by a "motley, shifting community of fishermen . . . sailors, smugglers, and picaroons," all of whom chose to make the Shoals "their rendezvous and their home" (Jenness 1875:123). In fact, these fishermen were as "unconcerned with ideology or national borders as the fish they caught" (Smith 2006: 27). They would often "escape into the open sea" to "elude" officers of the law (Jenness 1875: 119-123). As such, pirates found a welcome home among the Shoalers. Jenness (1875:122) bemoans that "the islanders were generally indulgent, and sometimes friendly and serviceable in their intercourse with the numerous pirate ships which visited their harbor."

Dow (1969: 31) recounts multiple instances of piracy at the Shoals. In 1691 Governor Simon Bradstreet of the Massachusetts Bay Colony commissioned Captain Christopher Goffe to sail the *Swan* between Cape Cod and Cape Ann as well as "off the Isles of Shoals for the safeguard of the coast." Later that same year, Captain Thomas Griffin and Captain George Dew (also known as George Hout or George d'Hout), initially commissioned as privateers, captured Captain Thomas Wilkinson's ship and claimed that they believed it was a French vessel. Rather than relinquish their wrongfully stolen goods, the two men slipped from privateering to piracy and avoided Boston altogether. Instead, they "carried their prize into the Isles of Shoals" first, before heading into Portsmouth and upriver, "where part of the cargo was disposed of without trial or adjudication" (Dow 1969: 31). These were not the only pirates to seek shelter at the Shoals. Thomas Larrimore, pirate captain of the *Larrimore Galley* and part of pirate John Quelch's crew, traveled to the Isles of Shoals to gain men and provisions (Beal 2007; Dow 1969). Beal (2007: 134) notes that "this was not a surprising destination" because "since the early seventeenth century the Isles had been a favorite waypoint for people looking to disappear." Larrimore was confirmed to have returned to the Shoals, laden with Portuguese gold, after Quelch and his crew were pursued by Major Stephen Sewall (Beal 2007; Dow 1969).

Archaeology at the Two Sites

Unlike other early New England fishing stations, the site of Pemaquid underwent thorough excavations. Camp (1975) excavated there for ten years, with the goal of refining the station's chronology and identifying the places of

manufacture of the artifacts found. The project yielded extensive information on the metals recovered, particularly those pertaining to fishing equipment and ships. The crew also recovered a large amount of pipe fragments, glass, and ceramics, which Camp (1975:78) focuses on in detail as "datable artifacts." Drawing on these data recovered, Camp (1975:79) concludes that the site's strata dated to a "range from the early 1600s through the period of the American Revolution." This period of occupation is almost the same as for the Isles of Shoals, which makes the archaeological comparison a sound one. Analysis of the artifacts allowed Camp (1975:79) to deduce that the inhabitants of Pemaquid were indeed "for the most part fishermen," as is fitting for a fishing plantation. In total, during the ten years of excavation, she uncovered the foundations of fourteen buildings, which included a tavern and a domestic activity area. The ceramics from these two areas are the main focus on this analysis.

The data from the Isles of Shoals come from three years of excavations on Smuttynose Island (2009 through 2011), under the direction of Nathan Hamilton. Excavating in three phases, the project first confirmed the presence of an intact site on the island dating to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, then identified activity areas, including a fish-processing area, a domestic area, and a tavern (Figure 6.2), and finally conducted small-scale data recovery (Victor 2019). The tavern-related activity area lay on Smuttynose Island's western shore, likely once constructed of brick with lead window casements and a nonlocal stone floor. The domestic architecture, as alluded to earlier, was archaeologically ephemeral. The fishermen's small wooden homes left little architecturally in the archaeological record. This was a problem exacerbated by the island's rocky soil, which made identifying postholes difficult. The fish-processing area was identified by the hundreds of fish remains (especially articulated cod vertebrae) recovered there, as the wooden racks and other equipment would also have left little trace archaeologically. The soil in this area was thick with fish oil, even centuries later.

Comparing the Data

The analysis done for this chapter drew on the ceramic assemblages from Pemaquid and Smuttynose Island in the Isles of Shoals. The ceramics were organized by ware type and comparative contemporary value (DAACS 2004; FLMNH 1995–2010; Stelle 2001; St. Mary's University Archaeology Lab 2010). Excavations by Camp (1975) yielded 15,215 sherds in total, of which nearly 5,000 ($n = 4{,}967$) sherds came from the fishing plantation's tavern, believed to be John Earthy's Tavern. The excavations at Smuttynose Island yield-

Figure 6.2. Ceramics from 2009 excavations at the Isles of Shoals, showcasing the variety of ware types present at the site. (Photo by author)

ed 11,004 sherds, of which almost 5,000 (n = 4,761) came from the tavern assemblage, which makes the size of the two tavern assemblages very similar. Coarse earthenwares composed the vast majority of the Pemaquid tavern's ceramic assemblage. Of these, 2,403 sherds were lead-glazed red earthenware vessel sherds, 241 sherds came from North Devon gravel-tempered vessels (of which 18 sherds were vessels decorated with an incised sgraffito pattern), and 3 sherds were identified as North Italian sgraffito-decorated slipware. Additionally, 22 sherds were classed as European slipwares and 55 sherds as Iberian storage jars. Staffordshire slipwares were also present, consisting of 212 sherds. Finally, 26 sherds of Buckley and a single sherd of Border Ware were identified in the assemblage. Camp (1975) also notes the presence of 11 sherds of unidentified coarse earthenware.

The tavern from Smuttynose Island yielded 2,413 sherds of coarse, lead-glazed red earthenware. North Devon wares were also prevalent in a rather

high proportion, including the smooth (n = 954) and gravel-tempered (n = 125) varieties, as well as sherds with an incised sgraffito pattern (n = 33). A minimum of 54 North Devon vessels were recovered, of which 8 contained this decoration. Iberian storage and small olive jars (n = 4 sherds, representing at least 3 vessels), New England slip-trailed redwares (n = 31, representing at least 2 vessels), and 7 sherds of North Italian sgraffito-incised marbled slipware from a single vessel were also recovered. Additionally, European polychrome slipwares were represented by 2 sherds. Staffordshire slipwares were also present, consisting of 60 sherds (from at least 5 vessels). Finally, 24 sherds (representing at least 3 vessels) of Border Ware were recovered from the tavern assemblage.

Less represented at both taverns were refined, white-bodied earthenwares. No refined earthenwares were recovered from the Pemaquid tavern. The contemporary tavern assemblage on Smuttynose Island contained Jackfield (n = 2 sherds from the same vessel), Jackfield-type (n = 38 from at least 4 vessels), creamware (n = 304 from at least 18 vessels), plain pearlware (n = 509 from at least 23 vessels), painted pearlware (n = 160 from at least 22 vessels) and Whieldon Ware (n = 9 from at least 2 vessels).

Tin-glazed earthenwares were the second most common ceramics. The Pemaquid tavern yielded a total of 403 sherds, representing vessels from England, the Netherlands, and Spain. The tavern at Smuttynose Island had a total of 534 sherds of tin-glazed earthenwares, representing at least 34 vessels from Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, and England.

Stonewares compose almost all of the remainder of the assemblages at both taverns. Just under a third (31 percent) of the assemblage from Pemaquid consists of stonewares. Many of these stonewares were Rhenish, including Westerwald and Bartmann-style Frechen. A notable 641 sherds from the assemblage were English Staffordshire white salt-glazed stonewares, of which 16 sherds were decorated with a scratch blue design. These ware types were also present at the Smuttynose Island tavern. Westerwald (n = 8) and Bartmann Frechen (n = 5) vessels were recovered. It is noteworthy that several sherds of the more expensive all-white Westerwald (a prestige good) were found at Smuttynose. Additionally, 46 vessels of English Staffordshire white salt-glazed stoneware were represented, of which 5 were decorated with a scratch blue pattern. Some stoneware types not present in the Pemaquid assemblage were found at Smuttynose Island, including Nottingham and Fulham.

Finally, a total of 35 sherds of porcelain came from Pemaquid's tavern, all of which were Chinese. Smuttynose Island's tavern assemblage contained 4 tea-ware vessels (n = 16 sherds), which were Chinese and English in origin.

The domestic assemblages for the two sites look quite different from one

another, marking the main contrast in the two sites' assemblages. Most expensive ceramics are found in the tavern assemblage at Smuttynose Island. At Pemaquid, however, a fair number of finer wares were found in the domestic spaces as well, although they clustered in one or two domestic locations rather than being evenly spread, which speaks to a wealth inequality within the domestic spaces. A total of 4,693 ceramic sherds came from the dwelling spaces excavated at Pemaquid, compared with 6,243 sherds recovered from the domestic spaces at Smuttynose Island. Of these, coarse red earthenwares still represent the largest proportion of the domestic ceramics (n = 3,003): their volume is almost double the volume of the redwares from Smuttynose Island's domestic spaces (n = 1,601 from 41 vessels). The domestic assemblage from Pemaquid contains a total of 591 sherds of tin-glazed earthenware, as opposed to only 63 sherds at Smuttynose Island. In all, 253 Staffordshire slipwares were recovered from the domestic spaces at Pemaquid as well, while only 37 such sherds were found at Smuttynose Island. The only refined white-bodied earthenwares at the site come from the domestic assemblage, although they are present in much smaller numbers than at Smuttynose Island.

Finer stonewares, such as Westerwald and English Staffordshire scratch blue white salt-glazed stoneware, are present in larger abundance at Pemaquid, with 528 sherds. Smuttynose Island's domestic spaces have only 182 such sherds. Finally, the most expensive ceramic of the period, porcelain, was found in higher proportions in Pemaquid's domestic assemblage (n = 29) than at Smuttynose Island (n = 4).

Remnants of Piracy in Sherds? The Data Discussed

The datasets from the two sites reveal somewhat similar tavern assemblages but very different domestic ones, although Pemaquid, as a whole, was a far less wealthy settlement. The artifacts recovered speak to the definitive presence of taverns at both sites: assemblages filled with vessels related to alcohol consumption as well as the preparation, serving, and consumption of food. The tavern at Smuttynose Island yielded a far wider variety of ceramic types and places of manufacture. It contained wares not found at Pemaquid's tavern, such as Portuguese tin-glazed earthenwares, white Westerwald sherds, Jackfield and Jackfield-type ceramics, Nottingham stoneware, and refined white-bodied earthenwares. This wide variety of ceramics stands as a testament to the myriad trading routes and contacts associated with the independent fishing station at the Shoals; it also helps show their distance from the trade patterns discussed by Pope (2004) as typical for fishing plantations.

More of the comparatively expensive wares, such as tin-glazed earthenwares and porcelains, were found in the domestic spaces of Pemaquid than were recovered from Smuttynose Island's domestic area. These were not found at every domestic building, however, but were clustered at only a few such structures. While less valuable overall, the ceramics found at Smuttynose Island were rather evenly distributed. This showcases the hierarchical structure of the traditional fishing plantation organization at Pemaquid and the more balanced organization at the Isles of Shoals.

The ceramic assemblage of the domestic area speaks to household quotidian activities and features a correspondingly utilitarian array of ceramics. The vessels in the tavern indicate large-scale eating and drinking, which is expected at the alcohol-related establishment. Notably, though, the great wealth of the Shoals is also seen in the tavern. The Shoalers were fishing masters who, based on the archaeology, chose to invest their wealth in the tavern rather than in their homes. The more particular wares—like the white Westerwald and the Chinese porcelain—may very well have been a product of the traders, sailors, and pirates who came through the tavern in the course of their affairs, enticed by what was offered therein: good food, fine alcohol, and a sympathetic attitude, away from governmental regulations and—at times—pursuit.

"Does an excellent job in taking a global approach to studying piracy through the archaeological lens and succeeds in shining even more light on one of the most romanticized activities throughout human history."—**Frederick H. Hanselmann**, author of *Captain Kidd's Lost Ship: The Wreck of the "Quedagh Merchant"*

"*Dead Man's Chest* refines the signature of pirates in the artifactual record and pushes the known boundaries of where we may find outlaw settlements but also includes updates on the more well-known pirate assemblages that have left previous readers eager for more."—**Charles Bendig**, University of West Florida

"Should be on the bookshelf of every maritime and historical archaeologist."
—**Chuck Meide**, St. Augustine Lighthouse Archaeological Maritime Program

FEATURING DISCUSSIONS OF newly discovered evidence from South America, England, New England, Haiti, the Virgin Islands, the Caribbean Sea, and the Indian Ocean, *Dead Man's Chest* presents diverse approaches to better understanding piracy through archaeological investigations, landscape studies, material culture analyses, and documentary and cartographic evidence.

The case studies in this volume include medieval and postmedieval piracy in the Bristol Channel, illicit trade in seventeenth-century fishing stations in Maine, and the guerrilla tactics of nineteenth-century privateers and coastal bandits off the Gulf of Mexico Coast. Contributors reveal the story of a Dutch privateer who saved a ship from a storm only to take control of it, partnerships between pirates and Indigenous inhabitants along the Miskito coast, and new findings on the *Speaker*—one of the first pirate ships to be archaeologically investigated—in Madagascar.

As well as covering shipwrecks and other topics traditionally associated with piracy, several chapters look at pirate facilities on land and cultural interactions with nearby communities as reflected through archival documentation. As a whole, the volume highlights various ways to identify piracy and smuggling in the archaeological record, while encouraging readers to question what they think they know about pirates.

Russell K. Skowronek is professor of anthropology and history at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. **Charles R. Ewen** is professor of anthropology at East Carolina University. Together they coedited *X Marks the Spot: The Archaeology of Piracy* and *Pieces of Eight: More Archaeology of Piracy.*

Front: Coins from the *Speaker*, courtesy of the National History Museum in Mahébourg, Mauritius.

UNIVERSITY PRESS OF FLORIDA
http://upress.ufl.edu

ISBN 978-0-8130-6974-6 $45.00