The Sea and International Relations

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Introduction: staring at the sea

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'What would we do without the oceans? Carry the boats?' This joke from coastal Norway is not only telling about the extent to which maritime life for many people is an inherent part of everyday life, but can also be read as a biting commentary about how the academic discipline of International Relations (IR) has to a large degree been content with carrying the boats, pretending as if the oceans were not there, as if their existence did not matter to our analyses of international relations and as if the boats made perfect sense on dry land.

For an academic discipline which boasts of dealing with the global, it is peculiar that IR has stubbornly, repeatedly and obsessively limited its gaze to a little less than thirty per cent of the globe – the landed part. Save a few exceptions, in region-specific and topic-specific parts of the discipline, IR has been a pathological 'landlubber discipline': either refusing to deal with the sea or treating it as land. This is an unfortunate state of affairs. With sea-level rise, depletion of fish-stocks, plastic pollution and piracy making the news repeatedly and constantly, it is obvious that the sea matters in international relations. It should also matter to the discipline studying these relations. In related disciplines (see e.g. Paine, 2013 for History) burgeoning literatures have recast the importance of the sea for understanding not only the past, but also key parts of our current predicament. Time has come for IR to catch up; to launch our boats into the sea. This would benefit the discipline, but it would also make contributions to a better understanding of the sea. With its diverse approaches to conflict, cooperation, and

political co-existence, IR has obvious insights to bring to the study of the sea.

By addressing the sea, IR could stress the *political dimension* of maritime orders often taken for granted. We stress this political dimension in particular as an antidote to the long-standing depoliticising tradition of seeing the sea as a global commons. While this approach has provided interesting insights and important ways of thinking about policy, it has served to elide how the notion of the sea as commons has rested on naval hegemony, and an active forgetting of the endemic oceanic violence of the centuries before the nineteenth century.

This volume breaks with the trend of oceanic amnesia in IR, with the goal of kickstarting a theoretical, conceptual and empirical conversation about the sea and International Relations. The authors address the sea head on through understanding what implications it holds for our analyses of global issues and international relations. They do so by focusing on key dimensions through which the sea has played a key role for global politics, categorised under three headings: (1) taming or mastering the sea (2) traversing the water and (3) controlling maritime resources (see further discussion of these dimensions, or tropes, below). On the one hand we seek to expand the horizons of IR by incorporating the sea, on the other hand we suggest what IR brings to the sea. Specifically, we believe that IR provides what one could call an *amphibious* approach. Rather than exchanging land with sea, we focus on the interplay between sea and land, and insist on the political character of the social space of the sea.

The aim of this volume is thus twofold; to bring the sea more explicitly into IR and to take IR to the sea. In this introduction we set the stage, discussing how and why IR has engaged (or not) with the sea, exploring what other disciplines can offer IR when staring at the sea and suggesting some possibilities for fruitful engagement. We first set the scene by discussing why the sea has been missing from IR and the challenges facing us when trying to theorise the sea. Then we engage with the developing literature in other disciplines from the last two decades, illustrating why an IR-take makes sense, and where there is room to expand on the existing IR-literature. The third section puts the focus on politics, circulation and control, before the last section lays out how the different chapters engage with these overarching topics.

Landfilling the globe, flattening the waves

Before engaging with other disciplines, it makes sense to explore why the sea has been marginalised in IR. Our argument is not that the sea has never been addressed in IR, but rather that the attempts made at bringing the sea into the discipline have tended to remain on the margins; on the shores, so to speak. As a result, in spite of these efforts which we will discuss in more details below, the sea has remained outside of the mainstream of the discipline, and few have paid attention to it when theorising international relations.

One reason for the lack of attention paid to oceans could simply be that they are harder to control physically, and that it is hard to theorise about political interaction if there is no permanent control over any stable place in which to interact. We find this way of thinking historically deficient. Until the age of steam, long-distance travel at sea relied on wind and currents, and most shipping could be found along well-known 'lanes' at sea. Early overseas empires did stake claims to these lanes, as some sort of extension of their landed power (Benton, 2011). Until the final third of the nineteenth century and the emergence of steam shipping, it could thus make some sense to claim that some state(s) controlled the sea, while other states might attempt to circumvent or undermine that control. Perhaps, then, the rise of steamships was the key part of the great transformation of the nineteenth century which created the world of IR (Buzan and Lawson, 2015)? In the sense that a world without controllable shipping lanes is a world where IR can be thought without much concern for the sea? Steam power allowed IR to forget the sea as space, and to count it simply as time.

To the extent that territoriality is a key building block of IR, the steam-powered move away from controllable sea lanes is one plausible reason why IR has shied away from the sea. This explanation is, however, not sufficient. We would argue that the failure of IR to engage with the sea also stems from the relatively ahistorical roots of the discipline. To us, the lack of intellectual engagement with the sea in IR seems obviously related to how the discipline emerged and has developed in a period of naturalised oceanic hegemony. In the centuries before the nineteenth, the sea figured prominently in much thinking about states, empires and the relations between them.

Hugo Grotius' writings are a case in point, based as they were to a large extent on how the emerging Dutch empire could and should relate to other polities at sea. During two centuries of established naval hegemony, the sea could be taken for granted in much theorising about the globe.

The difference between IR and International Law (IL) is instructive in this respect. IL indeed traces its roots back to the thinkers of Grotius' time, to topics not necessarily tied to territoriality and to questions concerning how to handle the lack of overarching authority at sea. Several of the key topics in the development of IL, such as freedom of navigation, distinctions between piracy and privateering and the rights of neutral shipping were directly tied to the sea, and even under the condition of naval hegemony, IL has continued to focus on the developing regulation of the ocean. This may indeed help us understand why the sea seems to be a more intrinsic part of IL than IR, as witnessed by the discussion in Chapter 7.

When IR emerged gradually from around 1900, questions of overseas empire were central, but more in the guise of imperial administration than with any relation to the sea. On the other hand, the emerging geopolitics of the same period had a strong focus on the ocean (see Ashworth, 2011 on Mackinder), a focus which remained until at least mid-century (Rosenboim, 2017), but more so in the subfield of strategic studies than in IR more generally. More often than not, if mentioned at all, the sea was simply there, as a space to traverse, or a place for resource-extraction. Of course, there are no rules without partial exception, which holds true in this case too. In their world-systems approach to sea power, Modelski and Thompson (1998: 5) emphasised that 'the modern world system is, characteristically and importantly, an oceanic system. … The advent of the modern world system was at the same time also the onset of use and control of the seas on a global scale, hence the opening of an entirely new age of sea power'. Even so, the sea in this account remains a constant, a medium upon and beneath which, and from which, sea power can be projected.

The general forgetting of the historical importance of the oceans was perpetuated by the strong Central-European roots of much post-World War II IR theorising. If the experiences of continental Europe shaped IR theorising, it is hardly surprising that the oceans became

a secondary concern. Yet, this omission is deeply problematic. Any historically grounded theorisation of IR which does not include consideration of oceans must be somewhat deficient. Oceanic travel was what connected the word into one global system, and from the rise of the Iberian empires to the fall of the British empire, all of the aspiring hegemons have relied on the capacity to deliver goods from overseas possessions to the imperial centre.

It is obviously possible to theorise international relations without acknowledging the sea. Most theories of IR are theories of what happens when landed entities engage with one another, completely ignoring the maritime domain. The sea is still more often than not merely an adjunct, a conveyor-belt or an obstacle to be overcome in the interaction between landed units. In what can be read as a *coda* to the geopolitical thinkers of the early twentieth century, John J. Mearsheimer (2001) for instance did refer prominently to the 'stopping power of water', and made much of the notion of the 'offshore balancer.' Yet, while it plays a key role in the theory, the role of water remains almost magical.[1]

The 'landedness' of the sea is prevalent in many studies of naval and sea power. As Geoffrey Till has shown, studies of sea power have remained largely within the trail of Mahan's famous dictum about the relative economy of naval power and its tremendous benefits in terms of global power projection: '[c]ontrol of the sea by maritime commerce and naval supremacy means predominant influence in the world [and] is the chief among the merely material elements in the power and prosperity of nations' (cited in Till, 2018: 1). The importance of the sea is of course central to any treatment of sea power, as Till makes clear, not the least because of key attributes of the sea. It is (1) a resource in and of itself, (2) a medium of transportation and exchange, (3) a medium of spreading information and the spread of ideas, and (4) can be understood as dominium (Till, 2018: 17). Beyond the 'transformative' power of the sea in that it has allowed less powerful states such as the UK dominion on a global scale, the sea is not taken as a starting point for theorising concepts of phenomena beyond the shore. The sea, then, remains largely an extension of land, and sea power is limited to being a corollary of land-based military power and a space which must be traversed in order for states to project their power beyond their narrow shores. The work of Andrew Lambert on sea power states

follows those lines. To Lambert, the sea represented an opportunity for smaller states to develop inclusive, dynamic, outward-looking and progressive polities and cultures with the sea as their chief commercial and diplomatic resource (2018). All told, a considerable number of studies of maritime warfare and navies have been undertaken within the discipline. But where one could have expected these to highlight how maritime security was different from traditional (grounded) security, these have seen the maritime domain as an unquestioned extension of the terrestrial one.

As the examples above illustrate, it is not as if the sea has had no place in IR. There are specialised literatures on e.g. maritime security, fisheries regimes, the law of the sea, sea power, climate change and the sea, ocean governance and naval strategy. Likewise, there are regional literatures about specific parts of the ocean considering these and other topics. To return to the theme from the introduction, these literatures still come close to boat-carrying. They recognise the sea as an important organising feature of human life, but it is still just there, as space, time or resource. It does not matter in and of itself, it is not theorised or even part of any theoretical framework. We accept that oceans are notoriously hard to theorise as a constituent part of international relations, but that should not stop us from trying.

IR has not been alone in finding the ocean hard to think with. Until fairly recently, the sea has been elusive to most social scientists, and therefore also largely absent from their works. As Steinberg (2014: xv) noted, 'Since the sea is a space that cannot be located and that cannot be purely experienced, thalassography – sea-writing – presents a challenge [and] [i]t is no wonder that the social science literature on the sea as a holistic space of interspecies intersubjectivity is exceptionally sparse.' Steinberg's point here echoes the long-standing difficulty in grasping the specificities of the sea, as Mahan noted more than a century ago: 'Historians generally have been unfamiliar with the conditions of the sea, having as to it neither special interest nor special knowledge; and the profound determining influence of maritime strength upon great issues has consequently been overlooked (Mahan, 1890 [2018]:1).

Furthermore, the academic disciplines which have taken it upon themselves to master the study of space have been defined as 'earth writing' (geography) (Barnes and Duncan, 1992: 1), and have

remained true to their etymological roots (Steinberg, 1999a, Peters, 2010; Anderson and Peters, 2014: 3). The maritime has tended to be relegated to either 'the backdrop to the stage on which the real action is seen to take place – that is, the land – or they are portrayed simply as the means of connection between activities taking place at coasts and in their interiors' (Mack, 2011: 19).

The ways in which the sea has figured in the modern imagination has done little to make its role more prominent in theorising the globe. At the most basic level, the sea is different from land. The sea is the other in the traditional binary which separates land and sea (Westerdahl, 2005: 13). As a consequence of this, 'The ocean can then be categorized as a space of nature to be fetishized, a space of alterity to be romanticized, or even a space beyond society to be forgotten. In each of these formulations, the ocean is classified as an object, a space of difference with a distinguishing ontological unity, the "other" in a land-ocean binary' (Steinberg, 2014: xiii). The consequences of this were pointed out decades ago, scholars 'bound by a European terrestrial bias, have accepted as *natural* the dominance of the land in understanding human interactions and relationships with environments' (Jackson, 1995: 87–8; emphasis original). This spatial othering has also been coupled with a material othering: 'This "naturalized" position of the oceans as marginal to the land, is, moreover, enforced through the liquid materiality of water. The sea's physical constitution renders it as intrinsically "other"; it is a fluid world rather than a solid one. Our normative experiences of the world centre on engagements on solid ground; rather than in liquid sea' (Anderson and Peters, 2014: 5).

The relative difficulty of accessing the sea has rendered it marginal and often addressed obliquely: 'in many ways the ocean seems to be a space more suitable for the literary essay or poem that reproduces difference even as it interrogates its foundations, for the policy analysis or military strategy that analyzes one particular ocean use while ignoring others, or for the philosophical tome that reduces the sea to a metaphor for flux and flow while ignoring the actual mobilities that are experienced by those who traverse or gaze upon its surface' (Steinberg, 2014: xv). Broadly speaking, as noted above, we could speak of three tropes which cover the way the sea has been dealt with in the Western tradition: (a) the sea as a space

to be *tamed*, (b) the sea as a space to be *traversed*, and (c) the sea as a space to be *controlled*. The most prominent view of the sea, according to Mack has been the first one, namely that of 'a quintessential wilderness, a void without community other than that temporarily established on boats crewed by those with the shared experience of being tossed about on its surface' (Mack, 2011: 17). This dovetails with the view of oceans as obstacles which needed to be tamed and mastered in order to establish domination over vast distances (Anderson and Peters, 2014: 1; Law, 1986; Ogborn, 2002). Added to this first trope of indomitable wilderness is the sea as a 'non-developable space' or an 'empty transportation surface, beyond the space of social relations' (Steinberg, 2001: 113). According to this largely mercantilist trope, then, the sea is a mere surface to be traversed; an empty space of circulation. Here, oceans and seas are mere 'spatial fillers to be traversed for the capital gain of those on land' (Anderson and Peters, 2014: 1; Steinberg, 2001), the 'vast void' between states (Steinberg, 2001: 113). Finally, one could add a third trope; one in which the sea is no different from land, simply an extension of it. Dovetailing with security studies or maritime security, the sea is yet another space – if not territory – which must be secured and controlled. At any rate, whichever trope the sea has been imagined through, it has not figured prominently in either one of them in its own right. Agency is located outside of the domain of the sea, and the sea is only there to be passively (albeit with some resistance) acted upon.

As Langewiesche has pointed out, 'Since we live on land, and are usually beyond the sight of the sea, it is easy to forget that our world is an ocean world' (2004: 3). One could further hypothesise that along with technological developments in shipbuilding and fisheries, fewer people experience the sea firsthand today as opposed to earlier centuries. The sea has gone from a space that had to be reckoned with in the daily activities of many people to a space of leisure. A number of tourists in the course of their leisure encounter the sea, yet these encounters of the sea are of a completely different character than the experience of earlier centuries. It is perhaps not surprising then, that the social sciences have until recently been characterised by a certain 'seablindness' (Bueger and Edmunds, 2017). We now turn to how the situation has changed.

Thinking about the sea

The sea has made an obvious return over the last decades, in the news and in academe: '[r]ediscovered as a crucial space of globalization … oceans have swung insistently into view in recent years. And slowly but surely, scholarly attention has followed' (Wigen, 2014: 1). The scientific attention has come in a variety of forms, often interdisciplinary, grouped under headings such as 'blue cultural studies'/ 'blue humanities' (Mentz, 2009; Gillis, 2013) or 'critical ocean studies' (DeLoughrey, 2017; 2019). Under these umbrella-terms, a wide range of topics and approaches can be found. Some use a maritime focus to reinterpret the past and present, while others suggest that engaging with the sea could (and even should) lead to a thoroughgoing rethinking of basic ontologies, epistemologies and ethics (Winkiel, 2019). These are important literatures, and both we and the other authors in this volume engage with them. Among other things, these literatures urge us to rethink the Eurocentric and gendered nature of many of the traditional approaches to the sea. Put bluntly, there are many other ways of approaching the oceans than the Western, masculine one. We deal with this explicitly in Chapter 3. However, for the purpose of bringing general IR and the sea closer together, we believe that the explorations must start closer to 'home', in neighbouring disciplines and how they can combine with IR.

Different landed disciplines face different kinds of questions when moving to sea. Geographers have suggested a focus on 'the sea as a holistic space of interspecies intersubjectivity … characterized by the co-construction of maritime subjects – from sailors and swimmers to reefs and water molecules' (Steinberg, 2014: xv).[2] The corollary of this focus is the move we note above, from geography to 'thalassography'. From our perspective, this take is both too wide and too narrow. Too wide, in that we are not trying to understand the sea *as such* to the depth (pun intended) of the geographers. Too narrow in the sense that we are not writing the International Relations *of the Sea* but giving perspectives on how the sea matters *to* International Relations. Our vantage-point from International Relations also implies that we are not concerning ourselves with all inter-polity relations of, on and about the sea, but restrict our exploration to the last 600 years or so. Here we follow a diverse set

of thinkers stressing how the age of exploration and mercantilism implied a spatial reconfiguration of land, sea and globe (Schmitt, [1942] 2015; Modelski and Thompson, 1998; Steinberg, 2001). In that sense, although we disagree with both the politics and the conclusion drawn by Schmitt ([1942] 2015),³ we concur with the overarching notion that International Relations need to consider Land *and* Sea.

Much like geography and IR, most macro-historical accounts of political transformation have been 'landed' (Steinberg, 2001; see also the accounts in de Carvalho, Costa López and Leira, 2021) to the point where few theoretical statements take the sea into account, and sea power figures either as land power, its extension, or, as operating along the same logic (see Tilly, 1992: 94; see the critique in de Carvalho and Leira, 2021). For the most part, the sea is ignored or obliterated as a transport leg, or a neutral conduit for European expansion (Blakemore, 2013); counted as time rather than analysed as space (Blakemore, 2013). Yet, due to a lack of landed infrastructure, sea lanes were central to both trade and warfare throughout the early modern period (Subrahmanyam, 1996), and amphibious power – such as privateering – came to be crucial in securing control over these spaces (Trim and Fissell, 2006). One early take on this can be found in the work of Jan Glete. While most of his writings concentrated on navies and naval history, Glete also linked the issue of warfare at sea to the formation of states in Europe, forcefully demonstrating in a Tillian fashion the extent to which wars made states; just not the wars Tilly had covered. On the contrary, Glete shows the extent to which arming a navy required so much more long-term investment and bureaucratic expertise than landed warfare, that if war was a decisive factor in the making of states, it was naval warfare rather than traditional landed battles which provided the main impetus behind such a large scale political transformation (see, e.g. Glete, 2000). Glete was at the forefront of what has become a more sustained turn towards the oceans in global history.

In a recent opening statement, summarising two decades of oceanic history, Sivasundaram, Bashford and Armitage (2018) celebrate the diversity in how historians have dealt with the naval, the maritime and the ocean, and put special emphasis on ecology, space and time. These topics are covered in the ensuing pages as well, and from an International Relations point of view, we will add an

emphasis on the political quality of the sea. While the sea can at one and the same time have both material and cultural dimensions (as demonstrated in the chapters of this volume; see also Sivasundaram, Bashford and Armitage, 2018: 16) as long as human interaction with the ocean involves more than one polity, there will be a political dimension to the sea. As noted earlier, only by bringing this political dimension to the fore can we begin to comprehend the extent to which the order at sea we take for granted today rests on centuries of challenges to hegemonic rule, culminating in the Anglo-American order that has been in place for close to a century and a half.

We should stress that seeing the ocean as political does not simply imply that the ocean is a space where politics is played out, it implies seeing the ocean as something with no inherent meaning, as something which is politically contested as such. Thus, our view of the ocean as inherently political implies that we are primarily concerned with the social construction of the ocean (Steinberg, 2001), and how different disciplines and approaches have contributed to shape the ocean. Furthermore, an insistence on the political quality of the sea does not imply state-centrism. One of the important contributions of the new wave of ocean studies discussed above, has been to de-privilege the state in analyses of the sea. This is not to say that states can be ignored, but to reiterate that they are only one of many potential actors in out study of the sea.

We could summarise, with Wigen, that historians have tended to emphasise the sea as 'a highway for intercontinental exchange', social scientists have approached the sea as 'an arena for conflict' and humanists have preferred to 'probe the contours of the oceanic imaginary in film and fiction, map and metaphor' (Wigen, 2014: 1). IR, with its methodological plurality and ontological richness, we believe, opens up for weaving many of these aspects together. Furthermore, as much of the work on the sea has tended to focus on specific spaces enclosed by specific seas or on definite spaces connected by individual oceans – what Wigen calls 'a burgeoning but fragmented body of work, framed within individual basins' (Wigen, 2014: 2) – IR holds the promise of a more general understanding of the sea in human experience and a more global take on its importance.

Rethinking the (IR) world with the sea

As we have laboured above, the sea has been conspicuously absent from theorising in IR. This lack of theorising has been bemoaned recently, with scholars pointing out for instance that '[w]here discussion has taken place, it has largely been secondary or subsidiary to studies on specific issues such as piracy, counter-piracy or illegal fishing, or to wider debates on sea power or the law of the sea. Only rarely has maritime security capacity-building been addressed on its own terms' (Bueger et al., 2019: 2). As the same authors acknowledge, addressing the sea in IR needs to incorporate land: 'Maritime security is not simply about the sea. The challenges it presents are closely interlinked with issues of development and security on land, in terms of both cause and effect' (Bueger et al., 2019: 3).

Thus, while oceans are distinctive spaces (Steinberg, 2001; Shilliam, 2015), to IR it is first and foremost the extent to which these spaces interact with other spaces and how the space of the sea contributes to shape that interaction and constitute both actors and power in specific ways which is the topic of the present volume. Rather than a wholesale adoption of the sea into IR and consequent obliteration of land, we believe that the most promising ground for the discipline lies in *combining* the work pioneered by Steinberg and Peters (2015) on the ocean 'as a dynamic environment of flows and continual recomposition where, because there is no static background, "place" can be understood only in the context of mobility' with perspectives emphasising the amphibious or liminal nature of social phenomena (see, e.g., Trim and Fissel, 2006; Klein and Mackenthun, 2004). To this, we would add the political quality of the oceans, leaving us with a set of approaches which combine sea, land and politics.

Recent contributions in IR showcase some of the promise of such combinations. Andrew Phillips and Jason Sharman's take on heterogeneity in the Indian Ocean (2015), or Jeppe Mulich's (2015) work on the coastal or maritime 'space between empires' incorporate, as Alejandro Colás has argued, 'the diversity or plurality of polities and territorialities fostered in large measure by the particularities of the sea, into our explanations of international relations' (2019). Likewise, Luis Lobo-Guerrero has dealt with how the sea structures global governance (2011; 2012; Lobo-Guerrero and Stobbe, 2016).

Charlotte Epstein too, has shown how maritime discourses offer a platform to rethink our (terrestrial) conceptual arsenal (2008). More historically, Alejandro Colás (2016; 2019; Campling and Colás, 2018; Colás and Mabee, 2010) has sought to bring the sea into analyses of the development of capitalism. Finally, our own work has sought to explore duality through liminal institution of privateering and amphibious nature and practice of privateers (Leira and de Carvalho, 2011). Yet while these contributions have all approached the sea and dealt with 'blue IR' to a larger extent than others, none of them put the sea squarely at the centre of their study, and as such they all fall short of giving a comprehensive view of the challenges the sea represents for research in IR.

As alluded to above, we need to tread cautiously when emphasising the distinctness of the sea. Indeed, where some scholars have called for a 'blue turn' in IR we wish to caution here against such an enthusiasm. Not only because we tend to think that the whole business of turns has gone overboard in IR, and that it has been reduced to a marketing device rather than an accurate description of the state of disciplinary developments, but also because, following Peters and Steinberg (2019), such a take overlooks the extent to which theorising from the sea offers new perspectives on the friction between sea and land and uncovers the amphibious nature of many social phenomena.

We believe that rather than to adopt a 'wet ontology' wholesale or even rethinking IR from the sea, we believe the true promise of bringing the sea lies in rethinking IR *with the sea*.[4] While we need to break with the traditional assumption that sea power is a corollary of landed political power, we cannot discard their relation altogether. Nor can we accept the distinction made by students of naval power only. Instead, we need to focus on how they interact, for instance through 'maritime contact zones' (Klein and Mackenthun, 2004). For however important the sea is, be it for transportation, extraction or strategic purposes, we must keep in mind that sea and land are not separate spaces but intertwined; seapower cannot do without a basis on land.

While there is a burgeoning scholarly literature on the sea, we agree with Kären Wigen that there is still a need for a better conceptual apparatus for making sense of the sea. As such, we too

hope that the chapters gathered here help provide 'tools for refining the still crude categories through which scholars are attempting to apprehend seascapes, maritime histories, littoral cultures, and transoceanic exchanges' (Wigen, 2014: 12). In the case of IR, this conceptual rethinking concerns largely how we have conceptualised of time and space. With regards to the former, at its most basic, we need to rethink the way we conceive of the projection of power in light of the obstacles represented by the sea at different times. As to the latter, we need to review the extent to which we have taken ocean spaces as natural delimitators of space.

As 'spatial fillers', 'voids', or even 'the space between empires' (see the discussion above), the sea has tended to represent a vacuum between shores and acted as an invisible delimitator of space. For, as landmass is the primary object drawn by mapmakers, we have tended to ignore the extent to which the sea contributes to regional spatialities, to carving out masses of land and pushing them together. Yet the sea means different things to different people. For some, today, it is primarily a site of recreation – or even the primary site of recreation – while for others it may be an obstacle, a conduit, or a space for resource extraction. In a similar vein, the sea has not only worked to close regions off from one another, but also brought shores together. The Mediterranean is of course a case in point, but so is also the Baltic sea, while the English Channel has worked mainly to distance Great Britain from Europe. The spatial function of the sea therefore cannot be taken for granted but needs instead to be the object of our analyses.

In a similar vein, technological advances in seafaring proved key to the American Civil War, just as they did during the world wars. The importance of mastering the sea, then, has changed over time and cannot figure as a constant in our analyses. With the Cold War, for instance, it was argued that developments in intercontinental missile technology again made the sea rather irrelevant as one no longer had to master it in order to deliver a strike against any city on the globe. Yet again, this is a slight exaggeration as submarines still use the sea as hiding ground. All this goes to show that we cannot assume that the sea will play a passive role in our analyses. The sea needs to figure centrally in IR. But as we have emphasised above, bringing the sea in requires more than to study the sea. Studying the sea in isolation will not help us integrating the sea.

Rather, we have to think IR *with* the sea. In so doing, we need to understand how the different tropes which capture different ways in which the sea has been treated also cover different and often contradictory representations of the sea. We will illustrate this by way of a few examples. In so doing, we showcase what we mean by *thinking with the sea* and indicate why we have chosen the ensuing chapters for inclusion in the volume.

Taming or mastering the sea

The first trope is that of the sea as an untameable force, which works to contain human life to the shores. For a long period of time human offshore activity within and around certain seas was blooming, while the oceans represented vast and infinite space which could not be surmounted. Surmounting them requires both technical knowledge and know-how, but also a broad process of rethinking the significance of high seas. Perhaps the most basic intervention the authors of this book make in IR is that fact that mastery of the sea cannot be taken for granted, and that to master the sea requires a lot of resources. As Jan Glete has shown, state-sponsored seaborne military activity required much more resources than mounting terrestrial campaigns. In the modern era, this investment may be less onerous on states, yet that does not mean that the means invested in mastering the seas has become a marginal or insignificant. Maritime defence, even under the current hegemonic order we have regulating commerce and transportation over high sea lanes, requires vast resources and coordination.

Which brings us over to the relation between mastery of the sea and political domination. Through mastering sea lanes, one can control trade routes. A global mastery of sea lanes thus enables a broad control over global trade. As a case in point, the hegemonic role the British took from the second third of the nineteenth century would have been unthinkable without their mastery of the sea. The same could be said for the United States, which came to take over the role of global hegemon from World War II onwards. A global reach over the sea and firm control of central trade routes were also central in allowing the US to play the role they have played in the postwar world.

Thus, while the sea is something that is in the way, an obstacle to be surmounted or tamed, its mastery is also intrinsically connected

to global dominance. Being a precondition for the establishment of empires beyond European landmass, the mastery of the sea is connected to power projection far beyond the immediate power of the vessels sent out. Investigating how global power is connected to the mastery of the sea, and how different forms of mastering the sea have engendered different understandings of power, rule and spatiality are key issues IR must address in order to understand the extent to which conceptions of order and relations between polities have developed in conjunction with changing technologies for mastering the sea. As long as the sea is an obstacle, the focus will be inland and towards regional politics, while the mastery of the sea – by turning the sea into a connecting space – turns the focus way from regionalisation and towards inter-regional interconnectedness. Mirroring this, we can hypothesise that our understanding of the sea works in a similar way on our theories of global ordering. Seeing the sea as a natural delimiter will guide us to see landmasses as ontologically given and make us prone to take those regions for granted – at the expense of connections across the sea which may in fact be stronger.

Traversing the waters

Most attempts to theorise IR on any macro scale today rest on an inability to conceive of a world without free circulation of goods. And this free circulation rests squarely on the sea. For the last two centuries, people and goods have been able to move at sea with fairly high certainty of not being molested. Never fully tested, this state of affairs has rested on British and American hegemony at sea, and potential rivals at least in principle adhering to common rules.

Once the obstacle of the sea has been mastered it represents a set of new challenges. It is also worth noting that not all seas have represented such a major challenge. In fact, certain sea lanes have been conduits of transportation and trade throughout history, shaping economic and political ties. As noted above, the Mediterranean comes to mind, as does the Caspian sea. The second trope of the sea as a conduit to be travelled, then brings out different effects of the sea, a sea that first and foremost connects. Such a view puts less emphasis on borders and what Mearsheimer, as discussed above, has called the 'stopping power of water' (2001) than on ties and connections. Focusing on the sea as a conduit or circulation

of material goods, ideas and people, then, shifts the focus somewhat away from warfare onto trade, and away from states and onto greater political conglomerates such as empires and smaller network nodes such as ports.

Yet this way of approaching the sea tends to transform space to time. The sea is reduced to the time needed to traverse it. As the sea doesn't seem to represent a challenge, it is not focused upon either, and seems to gain importance more as a function of what travels on it than in and of itself. Even so, this trope has become increasingly important as the '[c]onnecting function of oceans has come to supercede their earlier distancing functions' (Wigen, 2014: 15), and therefore all the more pressing to focus on for IR.

Controlling maritime resources

The final trope the sea has been understood through is that as a repository for resources, resources whose extraction rests upon controlling parts of the sea. Fisheries and offshore oil drilling are obvious examples of how the sea appears, but the sea as a resource is not limited to that. Maritime states with long shores have more of a say in global sea matters. Long shores are also more 'territorial' than the high seas, as they fall within the exclusive control of maritime states. As such, the sea can convey authority to states. The artificial islands China is building in the South China Sea are a case in point, both in terms of how the sea and maritime resources can be controlled through processes such as territorialisation, akin to those processes taking place on land, but also in terms of how a state actively seeks the authority seashores convey upon states by actively building these shores.

The sea as a resource, then, draws our gaze to maritime contact zones, zones where sea and land meet. Just as control of the sea requires some relation to landed polities, extracting resources from the sea hinges upon one's claims of ownership or right to use the sea. While this places ports and other liminal spaces at the center of the analysis, it also draws in the framework within which these claims and rights are nested. International Law, especially the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), is crucial in framing these claims and central to making sense of how the sea has been harvested in the past as well as today.

The question of maritime resources is of course also closely related to the extent to which these resources are available and

how this has changed over time. The challenges posed by climate change are crucial in these terms, as for instance rising sea levels. Changes in the conditions of possibility of extracting resources and the changing nature of the sea/authority relation should be the focus of studies in IR, but are also ways in which a focus on the sea can contribute to IR more broadly. The interplay between land and sea has also become more important within the sphere of defence, where since the Battle of Midway (1942) and air power eclipsing traditional sea power, it has been obvious that shipping lanes could not be controlled solely by surface ships, but by an interplay between land, air and sea forces. A focus on the sea from the perspective of resources, then, also showcases the extent to which trade and violence are intertwined. In addressing maritime resources, IR scholars should focus on the extent to which the sea is changing (from fluidity to territorialisation?), and to what extent changes in global governance and the effects of climate change contribute to these changes.

Conclusion

The chapters of the book all address the sea through the tropes discussed above, making the case for why the sea ought to be more central to IR, and the implications of doing so beyond the subject matter at hand. Our goal has not been to cover the topic encyclopaedically, but to present agenda-setting and exemplary research. The chapters of this volume are nevertheless united by being theoretically informed and concerned with the historical developments of international relations and the sea; they explore how thinking historically and theoretically about international relations and the sea help open up the discipline.

Immediately succeeding this introduction, Alejandro Colás in Chapter 1 makes the case for understanding sea *and* land through their linkages, through 'terraqueous' relations and linkages. Following that, Maria Mälksoo draws our attention in Chapter 2 to the extent to which the sea is intertwined in the constructive of collective identities. In Chapter 3, Halvard Leira and Benjamin de Carvalho explore two dimensions of the sea which – even in studies of the sea – are largely marginalised, in spite of the extent to which they structure our understanding of it: gender and race.

Chapters 4 by Mark Shirk and Chapter 5 by Benjamin de Carvalho and Halvard Leira moves on from such broader theoretical engagements and delve into the historical importance of the sea in the constitution of our current global order. Both chapters focus on key developments in the politics of the sea which came to structure the make-up of the world beyond European shores. Dealing with seaborne or amphibious violence, both chapters remind us of the extent to which our current order rests on specific articulations of politics and law intertwined with maritime practices.

Dealing more explicitly with the present, in Chapter 6, Andonea Dickson analyses current practices around migration in the Mediterranean. In doing so, she addresses the sea as a geography, showing how through a multitude of contacts and entanglements, the sea and seafaring become central vantage points in defining political orders. In Chapter 7, Jessica Simonds continues to focus on the more practical side of traversing the sea, focusing on risks at sea, how they are perceived and how they are addressed in the context of the Indian Ocean. Focusing on the interplay between maps, navigational technologies and security, she addresses how threats to maritime transit become conceptualised as threats to landed political structures. Filippa Braarud continues this investigation of the relationship between the sea and modes of mastering it in Chapter 8, focusing on the deep seabed as common heritage of mankind. Her focus, drawing International Law explicitly into the argument, is on whether such protection withstand changes in technologies of extraction, and if these changes influence the extent to which the common heritage of mankind designation gives rise to *erga omnes* obligations. In Chapter 9, Kerry Goettlich emphasises the need for new ways of analysing the connections between humans and the environment. In attempting to take the environment seriously, Goettlich interrogates the extent to which the sea understood as the 'natural' world has played a crucial role in influencing core IR theories and categories.

In the conclusion of the volume, Xavier Guillaume and Julia Costa López draw up the implications of these interventions, emphasising the need to conceptualise the sea not as yet another space in which international politics takes place, but in terms of its many relationships with land, picking up the concept of terraqueous relations launched by Colás in the first substantial chapter of the book.

Together, these chapters seek to show the way in how IR could address the sea, and would be better off in doing so, as it would allow the discipline to recover the spatiality and politics of the sea. As Jordan Branch has shown, medieval mapmakers had no measure other than time to measure distance, as distance was measured in travel days. In medieval maps, space was measured in time. In a similar vein, we have argued here, the spatiality of the sea has been lost in IR, as space at sea has collapsed into time. In this focus on time, IR seems much like medieval cartography (Branch 2014), where the key items were places (often towns) and the time it took to pass from one of these to another, without much consideration to what happened between the 'places'. The spatiality of the sea has thus been overlooked, relegated to other disciplines, or assumed to be a corollary of land. This is striking, especially, perhaps, when it comes to liberal theories focusing on interaction and trade, since the vast majority of transport is seaborne. But in most liberal theories, oceans (if they appear at all) are simply reduced to time – the time it takes to cross them. Perhaps equally striking given the importance of mastering the sea as a precondition for global projections of power and the sea as a means to project landed power, the geographic imaginary of IR, formed by geopolitics, has centered around notions of heartland, rimland, etc. In fact, whatever IR has studied, it has been on land and not at sea.

Yet as we have argued here, the sea is a space, but also what creates spaces. As such, IR cannot remain blind to the sea and needs to think of the world with the sea rather than ignoring it. As the sea has determined where humans have settled, it has been largely responsible for our current human geography. Yet we still lack the most basic tools with which to grasp the sea. To quote (and paraphrase) Wigen, 'Most current categories of social analysis were initially developed to understand land-based societies. How those categories need to be transformed by perspectives from the sea – and how far they can be stretched, bent, and reworked to accommodate ocean-centered realities – is perhaps the most important unresolved agenda [ahead of us]' (2014: 17) This is the challenge this book seeks to address: start to think IR with the sea, and see where it takes us. The time has come to stop carrying the boats and to explore where the boats can carry us.

Notes

1　It also remains unclear whether the stopping power is related to medium or distance; but regardless, it is related to time – the time necessary to mobilise on an 'island', and the time necessary to cross to such an island.

2　It is impossible to overstate the importance of the work of Philip Steinberg for the growth of oceanic literatures over the last two decades. His seminal work on the social construction of the oceans (Steinberg, 2001) was published in an IR series, but had a much deeper impact in geography and adjacent disciplines. This volume could be read as a much belated IR follow-up to Steinberg's pathbreaking work.

3　While we find Schmitt's politics abhorrent, his panoramic vision of land and sea remains an important inspiration and a corrective to much 'landed' analysis. We nevertheless find his final conclusion unconvincing. Schmitt (2015 [1942]: 93) argues that: 'Today's transportation and communications technology has made the sea into a space in the contemporary sense of the word. […] if this is so, then the division of sea and land, upon which the link between sea domination and world domination allowed itself to be erected, falls away. The basis of British sea appropriation falls away, and, with it, what had up until now been the *nomos* of the earth.' On the contrary, we see a US continuation of British sea appropriation, and a continued division between sea and land, based on a continued perception that the sea is fundamentally different from land.

4　The notion of 'thinking with the sea' can be traced back at least to Rachel Carson's writing in the 1950s, and resonates with Lévi-Strauss' notion of 'being good to think with'. How the sea is 'good to think with' is obvious for example in the many references to 'flows', 'streams' and 'waves' in analyses of current affairs. We have obviously been unable to avoid them in this chapter as well. 'Thinking with the sea' has also been used as a grounding for 'wet ontology' (Steinberg and Peters, 2015). Our ambition here is, as noted, somewhat less ambitious.

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