Early American Ships' Logs as Theological Texts: Divining the Sacred amidst the Mundane (and Maritime)

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When the *George* slipped out of the New London harbor in June of 1755, like any good shipmaster, Aaron Bull knew exactly where he was headed – Barbados… and heaven. While the former's sun-kissed beaches are oft equated with the latter's peaceful bliss, Bull kept the two destinations distinct. Nevertheless, a single document, a ship's logbook, kept track of each unique journey and their narrative threads interwove in its pages. Bull began his recitation with a header typical for a trip of this sort. "A Journal of our Intended Voyage In the Sloop George My Self Master…Bound to the Island of Barbados the Lord of Heaven Earth & Sea preserve and land us Safe to our Desired port, Amen." Weather delays caused him to repeat the auspicious-sounding beginning on the next three days, demonstrating the types of setbacks faced in reaching both desired ports. It was a sign of things to come.

Once the ship managed to leave sight of the coast, the voyage seemed pleasant enough. One week at sea and Bull could report, "fine Easy Weather for our Horses the Good Providence of God Seems att present to Smile on us." But the tide turned. Just three days later, the rough seas tumbled horses, ruined hay, and shattered Bull's initial confidence in divine providence. After marking the ship's position, he wondered "Wheather the Good providence of God does Not Block all My Intentions for Sins?" But two days later the situation changed again with "Very Good Weather for our Horses and Comfortable for man." Despite the alteration, Bull's doubts remained. Good progress towards Barbados, the master found "makes me Careless of Seeking God which proves My sinfulness By Nature." As the ship meandered its way south, Bull tossed between joy and dismay, confidence and doubt. Such waves formed the vicissitudes of the voyage and of life. Soon it became apparent to Bull that he was lost, literally and spiritually. "I think My Quadrants when Nigh the Sun is To Far from itt and when at a Distance from the Sun it is To High," he noted after he almost ran aground on the island of Bermuda. That same day he also wondered "What God Hath In Store for me Whether Mercy or Judgments." Where was he headed? Eventually, after weeks of wandering, the *George* finally reached safe harbor, in

Antigua, not Barbados. Whether Bull finally reached his other, heavenly destination, the logbook does not chronicle.[1]

Strictly defined, logbooks record the measurable particulars of a ship's direction, rate of progress (measured by the use of an apparatus called a "log," hence the name logbook), and position, if discernable.[2] During the voyage, the logbook tracked a vessel's course across a featureless landscape allowing the ship's master to determine the time and heading needed to reach port safely. Prospective masters and younger mariners sometimes kept informal logbooks termed sea-journals, which mimicked the format of the official ship's log. A broader definition of logbook includes these accounts since they shared the requisite elements marking speed, distance, course, wind, weather, and remarkable daily events. After the voyage, the logbook could serve a multitude of purposes. In the case of legal disputes, logbooks served as evidence recording the physical circumstances that shaped decision-making upon the sea. For younger masters, it proved they had the requisite skills to manage a vessel successfully. For more specialized voyages, the logbook served as a key business tool marking the best seasons and places for commerce to take place whether it be pepper markets or whaling grounds. The logbook epitomized the Baconian scientific ideal of gathering observable data that could later be categorized and systematized. In addition to the raw facts, eighteenth-century logbooks typically included a space for "Remarks" or "Remarkable Occurrences." Entries in this section of the logbook might note the weather ("fine Gale at SW"), health of the crew ("one of the people fell over board but happyly got in again with out receiving any Damage"), or the employments of the day ("infixing and over hauling our Rigging").[3] This section also allowed for personal

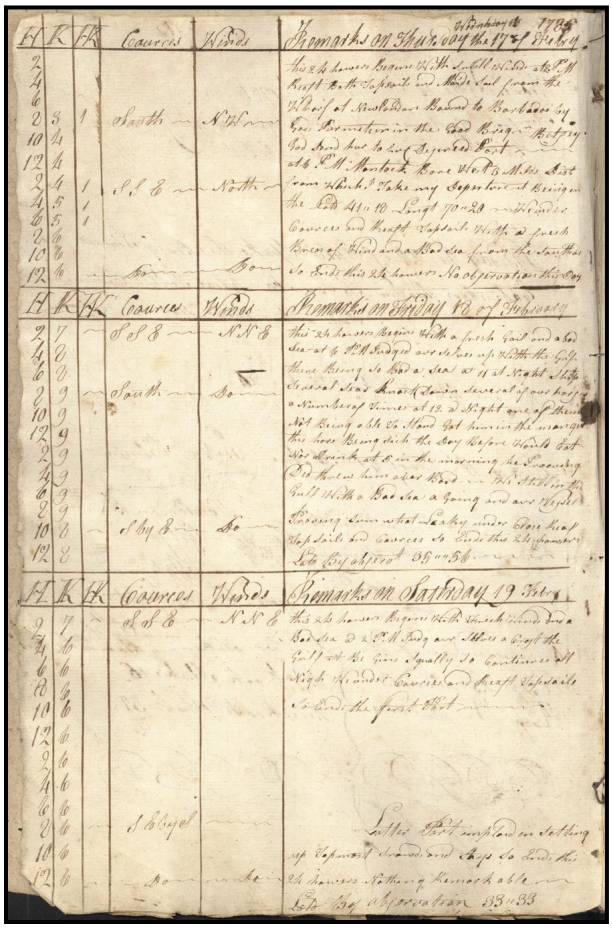

Figure 1 Page from the Logbook of the Betsey, 1785, John Palmer Papers (Coll. 53), G.W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport.

commentary by the log-keeper. While later standardized logbooks minimized the space available for individual reflection, the hand-ruled books of the eighteenth century left room for God to enter the mariner's space.

God entered this nautical space not just in terms of religious practice and biographical experience, but also in terms of organized conceptions and webs of belief, which might be labeled, "theology." Theology is often associated with formal beliefs or structures articulated by theologians - clergy, philosophers, or academics - dedicated to the presentation of conceptions of a deity. Scholars such as Brooks Holifield and Mark Noll have recently described the extensive influence of these theologians who dominated American print culture prior to the Civil War. In this context, Holifield provides a helpful definition of theology as a "discipline that combined biblical interpretation with one or another form of background theory."[4] This definition of theology emphasizes its role as a field of academic inquiry and structuring element for Christian praxis. This classification seemingly limits the realm of theology to formal articulations articulated in recognized textual genres – books, articles, sermons, or tracts. While utilizing the same set of "acknowledged theological elites" who pursued "a self-consciously professional study of theology," Noll concentrates his description on the social settings of these ideas and their contributions to larger constructions of national thought.[5] Non-elites imbibed the theological offerings of America's religious leaders through aural and print culture, and thus they establish not just an elite discourse, but also a preeminently public one.

Historians of "popular religion" – particularly in regard to the Christianity of Western Europe – tend to discount this top-down approach, instead emphasizing the alternate, populist constructions of belief that defied orthodox theological pronouncements.[6] In this sense, popular religion is often equated with anti-clericalism, oral culture, and a class of beliefs and practices termed magic or superstition. In an American context, historian Peter Williams argued that popular religion consisted of three elements: it is "(1) found outside formal church structures, (2) transmitted outside the established channels of religious instruction and communication employed by these structures, and (3) preoccupied with concrete manifestations of the supernatural in the midst of the secular world."[7] In terms of colonial America, David Hall provides a useful, but more complex scheme that emphasizes the conjunctions between the laity and clergy, rather than competition. New England's highly literate, mainly homogeneous populace built upon common beliefs which they had brought with them from England and

integrated these traditions with the ideas they heard from the pulpits to form an interpretive framework with which to understand daily life. Thus popular religion was "a dialectic of resistance and cooperation" in which common New Englanders followed the clergy, but only as far as the citizenry wanted to go.[8] The clergy informed theology, but did not have a monopoly on belief. Popular conceptions of theology emerged from wonder books, almanacs, court cases, and people's journals.

Can logbooks be similarly viewed as theological texts? Logbooks often served as incidental, rather than purposeful accounts of religious belief. When the personality of the keeper infiltrated descriptions of these more mundane tasks, the accounts could become explicitly theological. Yet even the basic form of ship's account revealed aspects of a larger worldview that acknowledged the existence of the supernatural. Trust that the observable particulars of a ship at sea provided a reliable and transferable source of information displayed faith in an ordered universe. However, logbooks also recognized the unpredictability and mysteriousness of the unfathomable oceanic depths. The world of the knowable clashed with a world of wonders. The juxtaposition of these two elements - certainty and doubt - formed the core theological dilemma with which the most basic of ship's logs wrestled. In tracing the prosaic and portentous elements of the sea voyage, these nautical texts left room for personal reflection. Many a mariner entered that theological space.

Everyday documents such as ship's logbooks are important for understanding early American religion because they provide insight into common beliefs of laymen. These nautical texts provide a glimpse of the theological vernacular of mariners as opposed to the elevated literary view of God conveyed in formal theological writings. The circumstances of the sea voyage, particularly the experience of danger and death, brought latent religious beliefs to the surface giving insight into the worldviews of the average person. The appearance of theological reflection on the part of seamen further complicates the typical understanding of the religious aspects of maritime cultures.[9] Then and now, sailors bore the stigma of being irreligious and immoral.[10] That some of these foul-mouthed profligates entertained notions about God would have surprised some contemporary observers such as George Whitfield, who once pondered whether sailors could pull a rope without committing some blasphemy. Nevertheless, even though mariners often criticized and mocked institutional forms of religion and its clerical representatives, they did not abandon theology and its questions regarding the role of God within

human affairs. Structurally and personally, logbooks provide insights into the religious worlds of the least churched.

The Prosaic

The look and feel of a logbook often shaped its contents. From large professionally bound folios, trimmed in Moroccan leather, embossed with the ship's name to folded quarto pages, hand-sewn, and wrapped in sail-cloth, these volumes displayed a wide array of physical appearances. This material range among logbooks varied according to the purpose of the voyage, the status of the log's recorder, and the availability of materials at a given time. Having the knowledge and skills required to maintain a logbook itself demonstrated the major shipboard social divide between officers and crew. Maritime historian Marcus Rediker calls attention to the stark divide between a ship's officers and common sailors, even terming the latter a proto-proletariat which struggled to control the terms and wages of their labor.[11] Literacy and mathematical knowledge contributed heavily to this division serving as requisite skills necessary to maintaining a logbook and thus safely navigate a ship. New England mariner Benjamin Bangs described paying 5£ to spend twelve days learning navigation from Mr. Selew.[12] The investment paid off, for he moved from manning small local fishing craft to owning transatlantic trading vessels. The ability to write empowered a few common sailors to cross from foc'sle to quarterdeck. On a 1797 voyage to Asia, Eleazar Elderkin was promoted to second mate of the *Eliza*, although the greenest of the crew for whom this was his first deep sea voyage, because "Not one of the crew had Navigation or Education Sufficient to take it."[13] His new duties caused him to neglect his personal journal, "being Oblig'd to keep that of the Ship." His case demonstrates the education and social position represented by keeping a log.

The logbook itself signified a certain status, but other physical aspects of the text spoke of keeper and voyage alike. Generally speaking, logs of coastal voyages and trading excursions to the Caribbean – often folded pages sewed together with sail cloth – displayed little formality and ostentation, seldom consulted by anyone other than their keeper. In contrast, the official logs of long distance trading voyages and military forays exhibited more self-importance with the increased likelihood that they would be consulted during legal proceedings. The East India Society of Salem even provided standard journal books to captains trading in that region with the understanding that upon completion of the voyage a copy would remain in the possession of the

Society to be consulted by others. These more expensive and formal books indicated the public purpose they served, which limited the personal and reflective contents of their pages.[14] Thus, the less formal a book appeared the more personal the contents enclosed within.

Sometimes log keepers humbly acknowledged the poor physical manifestation of their sea accounts. Connecticut mariner John Palmer self-deprecatingly labeled his log of a revolutionary war voyage by linking the meager quality of writer and text. "Bad ink & Bad Pen Bad Paper & Bad hand I myself John Palmer."[15] The keeper of the Pearl's log in 1771 apologized for his youth as well as his handwriting. "Robert Dunn is my Name & for to write ye may think Shame; for although I be a young Lad, my write is but verry Bad."[16] In some cases logbook writers reflected on their own deviations from official purpose. When the captain caught the young daydreaming clerk of the *Count D'Estange* doodling love poems in the official log of their voyage to Boston, he scribbled a reply. "Je vous prie Monsr Don, dont Write any more in this Logbook without You are desired by Capt Palmer or his Mate."[17] The informality of the medium in these more routine voyages left room for such a casual exchange between captain and clerk.

This same casualness allowed for theological reflections as well. The Harvard trained sailor and future attorney general of Massachusetts, Robert Treat Paine folded pages and sewed them together to document his rather routine voyages from Boston to Portugal and Spain. Most entries maintained very business-like accounts of the voyage. On occasions, his homemade logbooks allowed him to unfold his innermost thoughts as to a confessor. During one January voyage in 1754, he recorded several days "full of Scenes of Sorrow & Dejection." which accompanied a sudden Atlantic winter squall that shredded his masts, sails, and rigging. Exasperated and in the "most shattered circumstances", he surrendered to "ye Mercy of the Wind & Seas, but hoping in the Mercy of a good Providence to land us safe on some shore." When the sloop finally limped into Plymouth harbor the innermost relief of its beleaguered master once again spilled onto the pages.

> Wednesday, Jan. 30, 1754. ...Thus by ye peculiar Goodness of Providence we are once more in Harbour, having been from the Bay of Cadiz fifty six days & 23 days beating on ye Coast in the most miserable Condition imaginable, being utterly deprived of all Means on wch to build ye hopes of a safe arrival.

An orderly, but homespun account of a fairly typical business venture gave expression to personal feelings of respite and gratitude.[18]

The most mundane of maritime ventures, the briefer accounts of coasting and fishing voyages made such religious appeals starker. Usually ill-prepared for extended misfortunes, these logs often expressed a greater sense of relief when their ships obtained safe harbor. The terse account of Benjamin Bangs demonstrates this sense of respite as his vessel raced a storm into port. "We run in over Matamkin bar at 9 clock morning and came up the River to anchor at 11cl. The wind is southerly and stormy Rain Thank god we have got in."[19] However, these more informal accounts not only noted dangers averted, but took cognizance of the beauties God offered. "We have had a fine pleasant passage Down and blessed be god for his goodness to us," noted the mate of a fishing schooner.[20] The casualness of these logbooks' production left space for a personal discourse that more formal logkeepers might deem inappropriate.

By the opening decade of the nineteenth century, economic and technological forces increased the use of standard, pre-printed logbooks. Designed specifically to record the technical information of the voyage, these ready-made volumes limited the type and degree of information sailors could note. As one publisher advertised, their seaman's journal contained the "easy and correct METHOD of keeping the Daily Reckoning of a *Ship,* during the course of her voyage." With the "COLUMNS and SPACES properly ruled and divided," these standardized logbooks left space for the recording of every "necessary OBSERVATION."[21] The fill-in-the-blanks approach of such books left no space on the pages for the unscientific reflections, poems, or sketches that sailors included when they ruled and divided their own pages. For example, in his handwritten logbooks, Palmer typically began his account with the phrase “By God’s Permission” and typically included numerous poems and reflections in the midst of his formal accounts. For his 1785 voyage in the ship *ReadyMoney*, however, he used a preprinted logbook that included the formula “Ship _____ from _____ towards_____.”[22] This volume did not leave space for God at the beginning of a voyage, nor did it contain poems or other extended reflections. Although standardized for mariners, these professional books left no room for traditional maritime calls upon providence or the divine. The form limited the functions that the logbook could serve further diminishing room for personal or theological ruminations.

Using God to Navigate Doubt

Despite their formal scientific task of recording the knowable physical world to increase commercial efficiency, writers of logbooks also acknowledged the existence of an unseen world, or at least an element beyond human control or understanding. In biblical imagery, the sea signified chaos and mystery. This disarray contrasted with the image of an all-powerful God who controlled this tumult as water cupped in the palm of a hand. Although the growth in scale and sophistication of the maritime trades since the sixteenth century had tempered much of the fear and mystery of the ocean, there still remained the element of unpredictability. In their ordinary accounts, sailors recorded extraordinary phenomena for which they could offer no explanation. The logkeeper of the sloop *Prudence* described an apparition in the Caribbean sky that modern observers might label a UFO.

> About 10 Minutes after Sun Set saw a very remarkable thing in the NE the first appearance of it was like the shooting of a Star w^{t} a long continued Stream of fire from it this continued in a straight line & of a fiery colour the space of one minute ten chang'd to a purple its form then alter'd to that of a Snake w. a tale at ye upper end having a motion like a pendat at a Vessels masthead then chang'd to a light blue & alter'd its form nearly resembling a W this continued in sight 15 minutes & keeps its places w^{t}out moveing in ye air.[23]

While no threat materialized from this glowing object, the same log marked deadly contagious diseases among the livestock, severe shipboard equipment failures, and unpredictable bouts of weather at inopportune times. Thomas Rice revealed how death crept into his thoughts when embarking on a voyage when he penned "its my wish when I'm dead not a Tear should Be shed" at the bottom of the first page of the schooner *Molly*'s log.[24] Mentally and spiritually, mariners had to account for these doubts in their daily lives at sea in order to function in their pressure-filled lives.

Mariners ritualized their response to the uncertainties of the sea with a formulaic call upon the divine at the beginning of voyages. At the beginning of each voyage, the log-keeper established the points of departure and destination. In order to give a degree of certainty to the otherwise unpredictable voyage, masters often provided the positional coordinates for each port along with the anticipated route.[25] Despite these geographical certainties, masters commonly

appended the caveat “by God’s permission” to the typical formula. For example, one log commenced with “A Journal of a Voyage by Gods permission from Portsmouth in North Carolina to Charlestown in South Carolina.”[26] A sample of 50 eighteenth-century logbooks from the collections of Mystic Seaport yielded 30 that appended some type of religious caveat to the typical introductory formula. The exact nature of this cliché entreating the divine varied from general forces of “Fate” and “Providence” to more specific expressions of trust in the Christian God. These phrases reflected the degree of ambiguity involved in each passage, as well as a desire to avoid tempting fate by presuming success. They also expressed hope that the voyage would “prosper” those aboard ship. Uncertainty and the existence of uncontrollable forces tempered the scientific confidence reflected by the geographical observations and mathematical calculations of logbooks.

Sometimes these inscriptions at the beginning of logbooks assumed the outward character of prayer. Typically, mariners uttered brief prayers, such as John Palmer's request that "God Send her to her Desired Port."[27] Some made the prayers in these pre-voyage inscriptions explicit by the addition of an "Amen." Some extended the plea for protection explicitly to include the well being of the crew. "So God Send the Good Sloop and all Hir Crue to Hir desired Port in Safety Amen."[28] Others appealed only for individual protection, as when Aaron Bull asserted his trust in "the God that made me I Know will preserve me from all Evil & Harm for His Mercies Saik."[29] Not all such introductory prayers focused on the benefits that God's permission granted, but some turned to praise. God demonstrated his glory through the protection of people. Sailors used these religious inscriptions at the beginning of their logbooks to put a divine stamp of certainty upon a voyage in which nothing seemed certain.

Slave ship logs in particular expressed heightened insecurity and thus greater need for divine aid. Few logbooks expressed residual doubts about the morality of the slave trade, but their opening stanzas often explicitly linked the name of God with the nature of their enterprise. For example, the British slave captain John Newton began his logbook with the statement "Journal of voyage intended (by God's permission) in the Duke of Argyle, snow, John Newton, Master, from Liverpool to the Windward Coast of Africa, etc; commenced the 11th August 1750.”[30] The logbook of the Rhode Island slave captain Nathanael Briggs openly prayed at the beginning of his account, "the Good Ship Cald the Cleopatra Nathl Briggs Master and Bound for the Coast of Africa So God Send the Ship to her desired port with safety Amen."[31] Roman

Catholic slavers widened these formulaic appeals to include the Virgin Mary or one of the saints associated with the maritime trades. The Latin phrase "De Majorem Dei Glorium Virginis q Maria" (To the greater glory of God and the Virgin Mary) boldly began Robert Durand's journal of the slave ship *Diligent*.[32] These supplications indicate confidence on the part of Christian mariners that God supported their endeavors in the taking and transporting of slaves across the Atlantic.

These same calls upon the divine also indicate lingering doubts on the part of some conscientious mariners. In multiple slave logbooks, further references to the divine accompanied the successful conclusion of a slaving voyage, as when Samuel Gamble added the ascription of praise "Soli Deo Gloria" to his log account of a slave voyage.[33] Such attributions brought comfort and a sense of security to a deadly and morally ambiguous enterprise. These expressions of praise at the end of their log accounts set slave ships apart from most voyages. Typically, when the hazards of the voyage ended and the haziness of one's immediate fate dissipated, fewer mariners took the time to return thanksgiving for the blessings that they previously requested. One Rhode Island purser noted this tendency when he remarked "very few Godly Enough to Return God thanks for their deliverance."[34] Part of this lack of ritual thankfulness derived from the way most logbooks ended with the sighting of land. The busyness of entering a port brought narratives to a close without a formal conclusion. Once the dangers of the sea had passed, most mariners no longer felt the strong need for divine guidance. That a few slave ship captains continued to make divine appeals indicates that for them a degree of uncertainty remained until their potentially dangerous cargo safely set foot ashore.

Some counted their shipboard blessings on a daily basis. While less frequent than specific appeals to providential protection at the beginning of the voyage, some ship accounts included a religious addendum to the normal formula for daily remarks, “This 24 hours.”[35] The unidentified log keeper of the sloop *Polly* sometimes appended the comment “So Ends this 24 hours With a fair Breeze of Wind & All hands Well on Board With the Blessing of God.” The record of the *Nonpareil* made this refrain specifically Christian.

> Latter part Less wind & Less Sea warm water & Smoak a plenty
>
> At 12 Mnd Suppose to Enter the Gulph.
>
> Blessed be God for past favours & May his Blessing attend us through Life for Christ Sake Amen

This seeking of lifelong blessing amidst the daily routine of the ship reflected both the happiness and unease experienced aboard ship. Each day could bring beauty, difficulty, or a combination of both.

The simple act of putting into port occasioned an unburdening of the pent-up anxieties and precautions necessary when a voyage's fate was yet uncertain. Sometimes mariners added the word "amen" to the conclusion of their account, as if the voyage itself represented a completed prayer.[36] Rhode Island mariner William Almy verbalized the giddiness of rationing ceased and relief released. "Gave the people as much water as they can drink which gave them great Joy and myself not displeased at it, this Reckoning is Up, thank god."[37] A whaler recently returned from a voyage where he witnessed crewmen losing appendages found it fitting to attach a formal prayer to the conclusion of his log account.

> O Most merciful Father who of thy gracious Goodness hast crowned our Labours with success, we give the Humble & hearty thanks for this thy special Bounty, Beseeching the to continue thy Lovingkindness unto us, that we may enjoy the fruits of our Labour, to thy Glory and our Comfort through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.[38]

Such explicit devotional reflections upon completing a voyage are rare, especially when compared to the much more common prayers attending embarkation. Logbooks possessed no formulaic counterpart to the usual beginning statements. Most accounts simply left off once the ship sounded its intended port or moved into a description of the frenzied business of unloading. The lack of a typical closing phrase makes theological reflections stand out even more, indicating the degree to which the uncertainties of a voyage pushed a few mariners to look for signs of a deeper, more certain reality.

Personal

On certain occasions, ship's logs could become explicit theological texts, although these religious expressions could assume widely different forms. Two examples demonstrate the range that these personal idioms could assume. The first form represented intense introspection. When Aaron Bull's ship wandered off course on its way to Barbados in 1755, the master examined

himself for spiritual deficiencies rather than question his mathematical skills. "Whether it is our fortune to Gitt to Barbados or not What Divine providence Hath before me I cant tell, I Have Really Reason to fear Judgments."[39] As the voyage became more protracted, extensive quotations from hymns and detailed spiritual disciplines overshadowed Bull's earlier concern about the care and feeding of the horses. By the time Bull stumbled upon the island of Antigua, his spiritual position in relationship to God mattered just as much as his physical location. In his case, the ship's log served as a type of conversion narrative. Material cares gave rise to a more intense experience of reality in which individual causality played a role in the unfolding of the divine economy.

For Rhode Islander George Munro, the logbook occasioned not deep theological apprehensions, but daily expressions of thanksgiving and mercies received. The mate often ended his daily entries with some variation of the mantra "So ends this Day and the Lord be with us." In addition to marking the maritime flow of time with each passing 24 hours, Munro tracked a different calendar that paid attention to Sabbaths and Good Fridays. Every day became sacred in his accounting and furnished reasons for thankfulness. "So Ends this Day of our Lord in Helth & thankfull I am for it." While taking note of daily nautical trials (such as a drunken unfit cook) and dangers (witnessing a Danish sailor drown), Munro also resides in a separate time and space where the "God almity" chooses to oversee a frail, wooden schooner.[40]

In addition to daily reflections and thanksgivings that could be squeezed into even the most formal and task-oriented of logs, hand-ruled logbooks gave more space for poetical and hymnic expressions of longing. Often noted for their love of "shanties" to accompany the more tedious and taxing shipboard duties, sailors also turned to religious forms of music to give voice to inner hungers.[41] While primarily an aural tradition, early American mariners sometimes practiced their rhythmic craft in their logbooks. Perhaps drafted for future public performance or recording a past recital, the blank pages of a log offered a space where personal desires could be attached to poetical forms. As communal acts, these shanties often represented an assertion of outward masculinity by lauding the manly pursuits of women, war, and wine. Verses penned in logbooks, however, downplayed these themes of conquest and often spoke of God and women as objects of unrequited longing.

A song collected in the logbooks of John Palmer exemplifies this exchange of fleeting lusts for more certain desires.

See the vain Lace of Mortals move
Like Shadows over the Plain
They Laze and Strive Desire and Love
But all the noise is vain....
Now I forbid my Carnal hope
My fond Desires I Recall
& give my mortal interest up
and make my god my all[42]

The shipboard context helps make sense of these verses, especially when contrasted with other songs in the Palmer logbooks that express typical male bravado. In times of difficulty and uncertainty, sailors sang about those triumphal exploits where they had control. Yet amidst those same difficulties, they also expressed hope in an unseen power that could control the tempests of the deep.

The existential difficulty came when nautical circumstances muddied these heavenly certainties. As the log of the Sloop *Nancy* asked

Dear Lord where is thy shining face
Is there a Cloud between
Dear Lord i pray take it away
and let thy face be seen[43]

Theological beliefs most often rose to the surface when some outward turbulence troubled the calm voyage of life. For John Ellery, his expression of divine trust came in response to the drowning of a young man and the theological problem of bodily resurrection. Meditating on Genesis 46:3-4 – "fear not to go Down into the Deep for I will assuredly Bring the up again" – Ellery asserted

Look what you are when in the Ocean Drowned
The very Same at Judgment you'll be found
I would not Care where my vile Body Lies
were I assured it Should with Comfort Rise[44]

In a situation where friends and family would not have the closure of a bodily burial, this theological commitment provided tremendous reassurance to sailors that, in the end, everything would be all right.

Given the reputation of seamen for irreligion and immoral conduct, it might seem strange that such poetic expressions of faith would appear in a technical document. One mariner even used poetry to note the contrast between beliefs and behavior.

i know i have neglected
that which i ought to due
Seams strange how i expected
jesus would mercy shew[45]

Sailors admitted that the sea hardened them and exposed them to offensive habits, but they refused to believe themselves worse than other men. On December 6, 1798, in the logbook of the Two Brothers, Simeon Griswold dispensed with the usual recording of ship's course and position in order to describe the transformative nature of the sea. The sailor "will soon give up all thought and Care and take ti Drinking Swearing and Horeang Gameing and all Such thangs that are Bad untill He Becomes Such a Sot that Every Body Hates the Sight of Him." Despite these feelings of vitiation, Griswold pondered the hypocrisy of those with greater access to the means of grace. Yes, sailors possessed their vices, but were they greater in number or kind than those on shore? Were sailors any worse than the church-going merchant who sells a barrel of beef and swears "it is Best that is killed," but "at the Same time it is all Legs and Heads?"[46] Sailors had their faults, but so did other men.

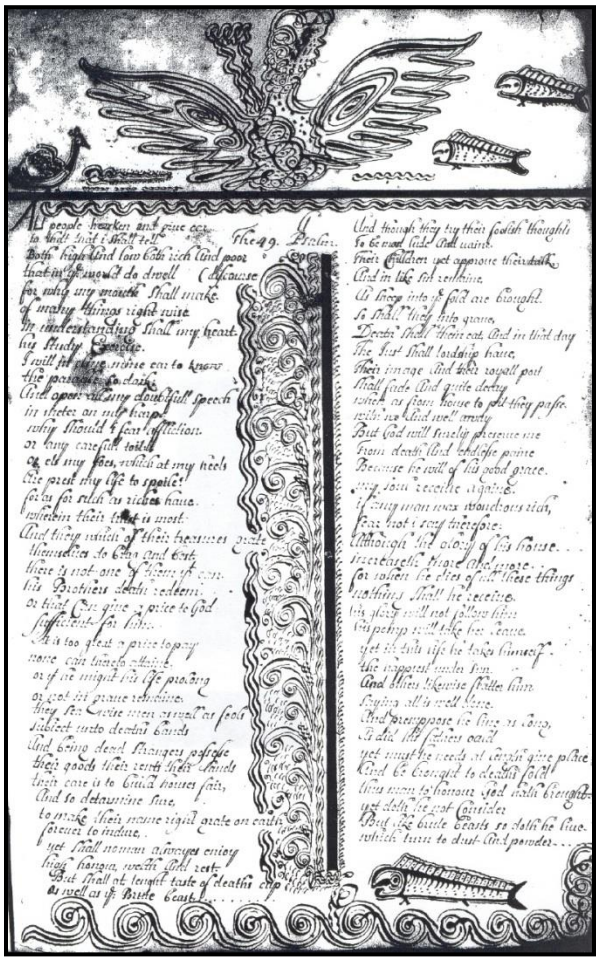

Figure 2 Samuel Russell Pen Sketch, Psalm 49, 1706, Elbridge Gerry Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

Observers, then and now, assessed the religion of sailors based on their actions or oral traditions alone. As Rediker summarized, "Seamen believed in omens and apparitions, but they did not believe many of the teachings of the Church of England, or any other church for that matter."[47] Logbooks, however, often described biblical

knowledge circulating aboard ship, at least on one side of the mast. Some ship journals abounded with scriptural quotation and specific poetic reflection on religious tenets. Samuel Russell wrote out entire Psalms and illustrated them with stylized waves and sea creatures.[48] [See Figure 2] Thomas Nicolson marked the spiritual significance of Christmas day 1767 by penning a lengthy poem that included the verses "great are thy Mercys Lord to Man / for which thy Name I'll praise / thro Distant Realms thy Power known."[49] A similar short verse expressed Owen Arnold's desire for Christian spiritual renewal.

Great god i have Come to the a new
Tho i am a wicked one
To plead thy merits in and through
Thy Dear beloved Son
Great god i have[50]

This mariner's theology contained an explicit story of sin, Christ, and redemption that reflected the very "prayer book" theology that mariners were thought to shun. These additions tucked away in logbooks reveal glimpses of more complicated religious beliefs among mariners.

Conclusion

As sources, eighteenth-century American logbooks primarily recorded the routine life of sailing vessels plying Atlantic waterways, but they also can provide a snapshot both of individual belief and broader worldviews of seagoing cultures. Lacking religious institutions, the marking of time shifted on board ship. An undifferentiated succession of days marked by location, miles sailed, wind direction, and a host of other daily routines replaced a calendar revolving around sacred days. Yet, unlike ledgers of other commercial operations, they were not just about business, especially in this era when the informal format created space for "remarkable" occurrences. Religion thus appeared in logbooks at predictable times, but outside the traditional Sabbath day. The beginnings of voyages, sustained contrary weather patterns, and death predictably occasioned religious reflections. At these and similar moments aspects of the sacred entered the maritime record leaving traces of belief systems that did not conform to societal expectations on land, but neither did they negate them.

As texts, logbooks reveal more than first glance might suggest. Reading logbooks as religious manuscripts opens pathways to view these documents with other interpretive lenses. The descriptions of work and play signify the hyper-masculinity of mostly-male shipboard societies that celebrated idealized versions of distant women through song and verse. Representing a distinct social position, logbooks show how labor relations aboard ship operated onboard ship in cooperative rather than conflicting patterns. In an era where production was moving from agrarian to industrial markings of time, logbooks show how time could be structured differently. As cultural historians strive to recover the material and mental past, logbooks demonstrate that the most prosaic of documents reflect the cultures that produce them.

The description of the eighteenth-century American ship's logbook might also apply equally to eighteenth-century religion. Logbooks possessed a rigid order, but were flexible enough to deviate from accepted practices. They coupled a belief in a scientifically ordered universe with the understanding that mysteries remained. Logbooks documented the labors of men while also acknowledging that providence determined the uncontrollable aspects of their lives. Like early American meeting houses, logbooks recorded shipboard societies that apportioned physical space by social standing, but ultimately included everyone in the same boat. Logbooks reveal human struggles over deep theological issues such as providence and salvation. Jack tars might not have possessed the profundity and seriousness of learned scholars of religion or men of the cloth, but they still pondered the existence and operations of God and that makes them theologians of a sort.

Endnotes

[1] 5 June 1755 – 19 July 1755, Aaron Bull, Diary of a Voyage, (1755) Connecticut Historical Society (CHS).
[2] "A ship's Logbook, as opposed to a journal or diary, was the official record of a voyage. While a journal could be kept by any crew member, the Logbook was most often kept by the mate, or first officer. It was the official record of the ship's voyage." Douglas L. Stein, *American Maritime Documents, 1776-1860* (Mystic, CT: Mystic Seaport Museum, 1992), 15, 89-90. Entries for "Log" and Logbook," The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a logbook as "A book in which the particulars of a ship's voyage (including her rate of progress as indicated by the log) are entered daily from the log-board."
[3] Examples drawn from Thomas Nicolson Navigation and Logbooks, 1769-1779, Massachusetts Historical Society.
[4] Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought in America from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 3.
[5] Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 17-18.
[6] For example, Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* translated by John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).
[7] Peter W. Williams, *Popular Religion in America: Symbolic Change and the Modernization Process in Historical Perspective*, Revised edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), xi.
[8] David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Knopf Press, 1989), 12.
[9] Christopher Magra has recently made a similar argument that sailors "worldviews paradoxically combined competing and disparate elements" based on his close reading for eighteenth-century memoirs left by Anglo-American seamen. Christopher Magra, "Faith at Sea: Exploring Maritime Religiosity in the Eighteenth Century" *International Journal of Maritime History*, XIX, No. 1 (June 2007), 87-106.
[10] Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 173-180.
[11] Rediker, 288-298. Greg Dening argues that the lack of a clear social divide between officers and crew contributed to the mutiny aboard the *Bounty*. Greg Dening, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language: Passion, Power, and Theatre on the Bounty* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
[12] 13 April 1743, Benjamin Bangs Diary, 1742-1769, MHS.
[13] 22 April 1797, Eleazar Elderkin, *Journal of Voyage on ship Eliza 1796-1798*, CHS. Previously on this voyage, Elderkin noted experiencing the ritual shaving and oath taking marking first time sailors who had never crossed "the Celebrated Equinoctial line."
[14] The British Public Records Office advises researchers that logbooks contain few personal details and little information regarding cultural and social life aboard ships.
[15] Sloop *Revenge* (Privateer) abstract log, July-Sept. 1777 and journal Feb-June 1778, John Palmer Papers (Coll. 53), G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[16] First page, Logbooks of the *Pearl*, *Robert*, *Brothers*, and *Manimia* (Log 686), G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[17] Sloop *Count D'Estange* journal, kept by John Palmer for a coastwise and West Indies trading voyage, 1783-1784, John Palmer Papers (Coll. 53), G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[18] 3 January 1754 to 30 January 1754, Journal of a Voyage from Cadiz toward Boston in Sloop *Hannah* Robert Treat Paine Papers (1731-1814), MHS.
[19] 15 February 1747, Benjamin Bangs Diary, 1742-1769, MHS.
[20] 29 April 1772, George Stevens Logbook, 1768-1774, MHS.
[21] Log of the *Nonpareil* (Log 2), G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[22] Log of the Ship *ReadyMoney*, John Palmer Papers (Coll. 53) G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[23] 31 July 1743, Logbook of Sloop *Prudence* (Log 692), G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[24] Journal of the Schooner *Molly* (Log 830) G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[25] For example, the following inscription appears before a voyage in the log of the sloop *Nancy*.

> A Journal of Passage intended With ye Permission of God in the Sloop Nancy Thomas Greene Master at Preasent Bound from Antegua in the Lattd of 17:25 North Longtd in 60:35 West to Blockisland in the Lattd of 41:7 North Longt in 69:50 West Friday March ye 26 Day at 10 Clock this fore Noone Wighed Our

Ancor in the Harbor of St Johns and Went to Sea With a fresh Breeze of Wind at East So God Bless us and Send us A Good Passage in Safety to Our dessierd Port Amen.
26 March 1756, Logbook of Sloop *Nancy* (Log 693), G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[26] Logbook of the *Lively* (Log 829), G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[27] 1 November 1793, Sloop *Count D'Estange* journal, John Palmer Papers (Coll. 53), G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[28] 23 June 1754, Logbook of Sloop *Nancy* (Log 693), G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[29] 16 June 1755, Aaron Bull, Diary of a Voyage, CHS.
[30] Bernard Martin and Mark Spurrell, *The Journal of a Slave Trader (John Newton) 1750-1754* (London: The Epworth Press, 1962), 3.
[31] 4 July 1770, Nathanael Briggs Logbooks, Rhode Island Historical Society.
[32] Robert Harms, *The Diligent: A Voyage Through the Worlds of the Slave Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), xi.
[33] Bruce L. Mouser, ed. *A Slaving Voyage to Africa and Jamaica: The Log of the Sandown, 1793-1794* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002). See also John Newton, *The Journal of a Slave Trader*, ed. Bernard Martin and Mark Spurrell (London: Epworth Press, 1962), 62.
[34] 6 September 1748, *Revenge* (Sloop) Papers, 1741-1801, MHS.
[35] An entry from the logbook of the *Neptune* captures what remarks for a day typically look like.
"Remarks on Thursday 27 January [1803]
These 24 hours begins and ends with fine pleasant weather & fresh breeses. Such is the weather that a person can enjoy life who is fond of being on board a vessel at Sea."
Logbook of the *Neptune* (Log 186) G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[36] 8 April 1798, Log of the *Nonpareil* (Log 2), G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[37] 6 October 1779, William Almy Journal, 1776-1780, Rhode Island Historical Society.
[38] 17 June 1796, Journal of the Ship *Henrietta*, 1787-1795, Scoresby Family Papers (Coll. 55, Vol. 43) G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[39] Aaron Bull, Diary of a Voyage, 1755, CHS.
[40] George Munro, Journals of *Polly* (Schooner) 1795 and *General Greene* (Sloop) 1795-1797, Rhode Island Historical Society.
[41] "Shanty" or "Chantery." Derived from the French word "chanter" meaning "to sing", this term refers to the distinct musical practices of sailors whether songs specifically crafted for labor. Roy Palmer, "Shanty [chanty, chantey]," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (New York: Grove, 2001).
[42] Undated song, John Palmer Papers (Coll. 53, Box 1 Folder 5), G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[43] 14 July 1754, Logbook of Sloop *Nancy* (Log 693), G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[44] 14 December 1737, Logbooks of the Neptune and Elizabeth, (Log 180), G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[45] End pages, Logbook of Sloop *Nancy* (Log 693), G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[46] 6 December 1768, Logbook and Journal of the Brig Two Brothers by Simeon Griswold, 1768-1770, (Log 320) G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.
[47] Rediker, *Between the Devil and Deep Blue Sea*, 166.
[48] Samuel Russell Navigation Notebooks 1706, 1710, Elbridge Gerry Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.
[49] 25 December 1767, Nicolson Navigation Book 1766-68, Massachusetts Historical Society.
[50] Logbook of Sloop *Nancy* (Log 693), G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.