Introduction

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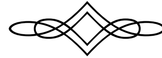

Agency and Archaeology of the French Maritime Empire was born following the Society for Historical Archaeology 2020 Conference in Boston, as most of the authors of this book contributed to a session focused on the lower classes of the French maritime empire in the Americas from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. While this panel did not pretend to encompass the entirety of the research involved in this topic, the resulting session framed French sailors, settlers, enslaved populations, and shipwrights as an extremely dynamic group that constantly negotiated their identities with both the center of power and their complex regional realities. This session was not about the story of kings, military leaders, and politicians but rather an exploration of the perspective of those who provided the fuel, both willingly and unwillingly, for the French maritime empire.

The chapters in this volume expand on efforts to archaeologically document and reflect on these populations throughout various regions that were once under the influence of France. This introduction will briefly review some of the core aspects of this work and explore the extent of the French maritime empire to provide a common ground for understanding agency within the archaeological record.

REVIEWING THE FRENCH MARITIME EMPIRE

The use of the term *empire* for French territories in the context of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries might surprise the reader who is familiar with the political regimes of France. Indeed, the concept of *empire* in France's

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history typically refers to the Napoleonic era of 1804 to 1815, when Napoleon Bonaparte ruled the country, followed forty years later by the Second French Empire under Napoleon III, from 1852 to 1871. For the goals of this volume, we wish to transcend national political definitions to encompass a broader definition of the concept of empire. Such concepts have received much attention in modern scholarship, from formal to informal. Formal definitions often require a certain number of typical features, including military conquest, exploitation, and an elite imperial class (Pomper 2005: 2). A formal definition of *empire* also implies a sovereign state with a strong hierarchy whose power elites shape the grand strategies of high-stakes social projects such as economic development, military strategies, colonial endeavors, etc. While the populations included in this volume did largely exist within the boundaries of a formal French political structure, focusing solely on a political definition of *empire* risks centering the agency of elite strategists and overlooking the agency of those removed from these central offices of political power (Pomper 2005: 11). In an alternative definition, Hardt and Negri, in their work *Empire*, conceptualize a view of empire that focuses on the workings of contemporary capitalism and the distribution of power along a network of connections without emphasizing traditional imperial institutions (Hardt and Negri 2001; Pomper 2005).

We utilize a view of empire that combines aspects of both definitions while centralizing the experience of the lower social, cultural, and economic classes. An essential cornerstone of this foundation is the recognition, put forward by Edward Said, that “the enterprise of empire depends upon the *idea* of *having an empire* (Said 1993: 11). This perspective recognizes the vast and complex webs of interconnectedness in which individuals find themselves. These webs comprised political, commercial, and social structures and would have been experienced differently by each individual within them. Different actors would reside within different networks and would not have access to the same set at all times and across all spaces. Shipwrights in mainland France would be experiencing, reacting to, and operating within different socioeconomic structures than, say, French pirates operating in the Caribbean or cod fishermen in North America.

The definition of *empire* lies, then, in the overlap of their experiences, their shared networks, and the degree to which they can reasonably expect to be connected. When applying this lens, the experience of empire can change depending upon one’s proximity to the center. The further from the center and the closer to the periphery an individual moves may weaken, or perhaps in some cases strengthen, the perception of empire, and may even introduce networks from other sociopolitical entities. Returning to our example, a mainland French shipwright will likely have a more defined view

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of the French empire than the French pirate operating on the periphery of French influence. An archaeological inquiry that focuses on the agency and experience of lower socioeconomic classes must utilize a nuanced definition of *empire*; politically and commercially based definitions run the risk of imposing a top-down view, assuming or suggesting a homogenous experience of social and political structures that did not, in fact, exist. Thus, for the following analyses, we have taken our definition of the French socioeconomic empire to refer to the complex network of cultural, political, and economic webs that caused individuals to share experiences.

On the Territory Considered in This Volume

France's contribution to the European colonial expansion started later than those of its European counterparts like Portugal, Spain, England, or the Dutch Republic, as many historians describe France as a terrestrial society (Bonnichon, Gény, and Nemo 2012; Braudel 2008; Meyer et al. 2016; Taillemite 2003). The scholars in this volume focus primarily on the period starting with the first effort at providing a presence in America and ending with the early nineteenth century as the empire created under the Ancien Régime melted away through the wars and treaties that disposed France of most of its possession (Bonnichon 2012: 60; Meyer et al. 2016: 313).

France's presence in the Americas was first motivated by access to resources and not by settlers (Meyer et al. 2016: 22). The interest in the North American regions was prompted by the availability of cod, mainly through Breton and Norman fishermen on Newfoundland shores at the end of the fifteenth century. A first failed attempt to install a settlement in 1543 by Jean François de La Rocque de Roberval following Jacques Cartier's expeditions of 1541 and 1542 discouraged the effort to colonize the region until the foundation of Port Royal in 1605 and Quebec City in 1608. Following the establishment of a presence in the North American Atlantic region and the inquiries in the Saint Lawrence River, endeavors in the Caribbean aimed to acquire local resources such as exotic wood and sugar. Commercial attempts were also made in Brazil during the first half of the sixteenth century to access exotic wood, among other resources (Vidal 2000). A fort was constructed in Guanabara Bay in 1555, only to be destroyed five years later by the Portuguese in 1560. A second failed attempt at colonization with evangelization purposes was made between 1612 and 1615. In addition to efforts in Brazil, others were made to establish a settlement in Florida between 1562 and 1568.

Instead of opting for colonial settlements, French authorities established their presence using mercantile policies. These policies highlight the impor-

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tance for the *métropole* of getting raw products from its colonies, transforming them, and selling them back to the colonies through exclusive companies. Everything was done to reinforce the fiscal power of the *métropole* (Meyer et al. 2016: 32). Companies were created to exploit resources and maintain a monopoly over commerce in exchange for bringing settlers and taking care of their needs. The companies, such as *Compagnie de Saint-Christophe* in 1626 (later renamed *Compagnie des Isles de l'Amérique* in 1635) or the *Compagnie des Cent Associés de la Nouvelle-France* in 1627, prompted a small movement of the population to the Caribbean islands and the Saint Lawrence valley with some success. The model was not lucrative and was quickly abandoned as soon as 1663 for the *Compagnie des Cent Associés.* Instead, a local governor and an intendant oversaw the colony trade and population in New France and the Caribbean.

In New France, further exploration to the west expanded the territory up to the Great Lakes and down to Louisiana in the second half of the seventeenth century. The territory owned by France was large, disconnected, and underpopulated by settlers (Gainot 2015: 38). The French American territory was made of two distinct regions: the Caribbean, with lucrative commerce based on enslavement, tobacco, and sugar cane, and New France, based on the fur trade, which had difficulties in attracting permanent settlers (Meyer et al. 2016: 33).

By the end of the seventeenth century and extending into the early eighteenth, triangular commerce routes linked Europe to the Caribbean and New France, encompassing the traffic of enslaved populations from Africa, sugar and tobacco from the Caribbean, and wood, fur, and other primary goods from New France. An early disruption to the territory followed the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, when Hudson Bay, Acadia, and Newfoundland became British possessions. The increasing presence of British settlers in the North American colonies created a growing hostility throughout the eighteenth century until its culmination in the Seven Years' War. The Treaty of Paris in 1763 limited French presence in North America to Saint-Pierre et Miquelon, as France lost the entirety of New France to Great Britain and Louisiana to Spain. In 1803, Spain sold the Louisiana Territory back to France before it was then sold to the United States.

Following France's major loss of territory in North America, commerce with the Caribbean intensified, focusing on the sugar and human trades. The colonial societies became increasingly diversified and witnessed the emergence of local identities and claims, leading to revolution and civil unrest (Gainot 2015: 115). These social movements resulted in the abolition of slavery in 1794 in the American colonies. This abolition was revoked eight years later, in 1802, and slavery was abolished in 1848 for good throughout the

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entire French empire, including Africa and the Indian Ocean. Throughout the nineteenth century, the empire's territory remained mostly the same except for two changes: the loss of Saint-Domingue (Haiti) in 1804 after years of conflicts, and the sale of Louisiana to the United States in 1803. Even after decolonization efforts in the twentieth century, part of the Caribbean territory and the island of Saint-Pierre et Miquelon remain a part of France as overseas territories.

Condensing the extent of the geographical reality of the French colonial empire into such a small space erases some of the subtlety of local histories and realities. Nevertheless, it provides a general overview of the main areas where the French population was located in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: New France, Louisiana, and the Caribbean.

On the Notion of Maritime

France has always had a complicated history with the sea, developing its navy much later than its European counterparts and relying more on its terrestrial strength. However, that is not to say that France had no maritime component to its colonial evolution. Most obviously, there could be no colonial expansion without ships and maritime trading routes across the oceans and waterways. But such maritime consideration goes beyond this fact. Until the introduction of airplanes, waterways were the connections between regions, providing the opportunity to displace populations, goods, and ideas across the globe. Waterways brought change, either in the form of development or destruction. People, goods, and ideas affected both the colonized and the colonizer in ways that were profound and not always intended (Augeron and DuPlessis 2010: 11). Moreover, waterways and associated shores were at the core of initial population settlements established at river mouths and inlets. These settlements created spaces where maritime activities and influence were central to processes of profound change.

In archaeology, maritime subjects have often been conceived of as relating to ships and seafaring communities (Muckelroy 1978). The framework developed by Christer Westerdahl in 1978 and published in English in 1992 took a step back from a shipwreck-centric perspective and instead encompassed the broader cultural landscape in a holistic approach (Westerdahl 1992). Maritime landscapes include the network of routes taken by ships as well as coastal structures such as ports and harbors that encompass the entire range of maritime economies, what Westerdahl called the *mariculture*. This mariculture typically has multiple layers of human activity concentrated on land and under water, such as shipwrecks, the remains of

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land-based structures, topography, place names, and even immaterial aspects such as the mental maps of coast-dwelling people. In this definition, *maritime* can be applied to any population, region, or activity that related to the *mariculture* either intentionally, such as sailors, pirates, or fisherman communities, or unintentionally, like the settlers who relied on maritime commercial exchanges to carry on their daily life.

An Emerging Definition of the French Maritime Empire

Taking the above information into account, the French maritime empire considered in this book is related to the French colonial empire developed in the Americas during the Ancien Régime. Each of these regions has its own cultural, economic, and geographic reality that impacted the development of their societies. Despite these different realities, it would be a mistake not to consider how they were also connected. These territories were connected not only through the metropole by existing under common institutions that dictated colonial development but also through commerce and population movements. Individuals in these territories had overlapping identities and networks, converging across and beyond their belonging to the French empire. Individuals were part of the same wide network with varying degrees of proximity to the center of the empire. They shared a common experience as they navigated this complex network of cultural, political, and economic webs of which they were part.

UNDERSTANDING AGENCY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

The inspiration of our session, and what later developed into this volume, was the desire for a deeper exploration into the experiences of the subjects of our research. While our research topics varied, with one of us focused on the shipwrights of metropolitan France and the other concentrated on peripheral sailors, captives, and pirates, we both felt that we had run into the same issue: a pervasive, shallow outlook of the actual power and impact of these social groups that analyzed them strictly in the ways upon which they were acted, and which rarely viewed them as actors themselves.

This view, we felt, left out half the picture; if we accept that culture and society are constructs of constant negotiation, a continual push-pull of change and continuity, then those at the bottom of the sociocultural ladder must have the same negotiating power as those at the top, albeit in different, and often subtle, ways.

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Action as a concept, also referred to as agency, entered archaeological theory in the early 1980s when behavioral archaeology came to be considered too narrowly constructed and an overly mechanistic treatment of past humans (Wobst 2000: 40). The notion of action did not seek a uniformitarian stimulus and response, and instead undertook to document informed choices of historical actors within their own context. While certain criticisms can be levied against agency theory, this perspective can still provide the opportunity to examine or reexamine data in which the normative structure of cultural history or the processual approach might have hindered or hidden social variation (Sassaman 2000: 153). Thanks to an agency and practice-based approach, it is possible to focus on aspects of everyday life within archaeological records in which social agents are seen as individuals with goals, intentions, and subjectivity. It also allows scholars to view them as actors of social structure negotiation, strategies, and relations (Silliman 2009: 191–92). In addition, it allows for the conceptualization of historical groups of people as heterogenous.

A few key terms are important to introduce before moving forward with a brief outline of the theoretical paradigm of agency. The first is *habitus*, defined by Bourdieu as the agent's embodiment of social structure (Bourdieu 1980: 89). Habitus is a system of schemes, perceptions and thoughts that are created through social conditions associated with one's social group. What is deemed appropriate to eat, how to eat it, how to speak, how to consume goods, which goods to consume, what is appropriate behavior, and what is considered to be good or bad are all examples of habitus. Because individuals are socialized in a similar environment, their answers to a stimulus can be similar but not strictly defined, since habitus changes within the life of one person. The capacity to change can in turn be limited by the habitus that could prevent an individual from even thinking about a solution outside theirs lifestyle. Habitus is a series of structures that predispose individuals to act or react in a certain way, since habitus generates and organizes what is the appropriate practices and behaviors.

The next, and closely related, term is *doxa*, the unquestioned and often unacknowledged shared backdrop of accepted realities in discourse and social interactions (Silliman 2009: 193). Doxa embodies the constant negotiation of the juxtaposition between heterodoxy, the deviation from accepted standards and beliefs, and orthodoxy, the accepted standards and beliefs. To sort out the nuances of social agency represented in the material record, it is vital for the archaeologist to first establish the doxic practices of the individuals and groups under study.

A component of agency theory is change agency, defined as the power and influence of actors to transform the conditions of their existence

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(Nentwich et al. 2015: 235). To explore change agency in a given group, it is first important to understand the ways in which the status quo is maintained, the role that individuals play in maintaining that status quo, and the forces for stability. An additional key concept for understanding change agency is the concept of legitimacy, referring to the power to resist being transgressed and having meaning transformed. Different scholars have provided different perspectives on the function of legitimacy within change agency, one that views legitimacy as embedded within the actor (Bourdieu 1977) and one that views it as fragile and situational (Butler 1997).

We must be careful not to limit agency to transcendence of doxa; historical actors still possess agency when not transcending doxa. Different groups of people with different habitus and doxa frequently overlap in complex social settings, which gives a great deal of depth to the ideas of habitus and doxa. This gives rise to situations in which, for example, the doxa of one group might count as resistance for another group.

At this juncture, it would be an oversight to not also discuss historical materialism and the impact of Marxism on contemporary archaeological theory. Given the focus of this volume on class and agency, it is important to review, albeit briefly due to the vast corpus of written work on the subject, the contributions of Marxist scholarship to class- and labor-based analyses. Karl Marx (1818–83) was one of the first social theorists to analyze societal change through the lens of class tension and conflict, and from this perspective he developed the critical theoretical approach of historical materialism. While he never concisely defined *historical materialism* in a single work, it can be broadly seen as the analytical approach that locates the process of cultural change within changing material components of life. In this view, it is material culture and the means of production that influence social structures, and not the other way around (Olssen 2004: 454–55). "The social structure and the State are continually evolving out of the life process of definite individuals, but of individuals, not as they may appear in their own other people's imagination, but as the *really* are; i.e., as they operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will. ... The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life" (Marx: 2010: 655). For Marx, social ideologies were directly tied to developments in material production and the interaction between material culture and individuals. In this way, life was "not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life" (Marx: 2010, 656). At a certain stage in a Marxist view of societal development, changes to production reach a tipping point and force social upheaval, which results in changes to the superstructure (Olssen 2004: 455).

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Historical materialism became a foundational piece of sociocultural analysis, and while it was later refined and adapted by postmodern theorists, it was not entirely discarded. Foucault utilized the concepts of practice, strategy, and relations of power set forth by Marx, yet he rejected the Marxist model of a determining economic base (Olssen 2004: 457). While Marxism was aimed at discovering cultural continuities and causal mechanisms, Foucault did not believe in one set of unifying factors but instead aimed at exploring rules of formation, which could differ in relation to relative importance of material factors in place and time. For Marx, economic change was the ultimate determinant for social change. "This was a linear and individualist conception of cause and effect between objects whose self-determined essences collide and interact with predictable consequences. For Foucault, such an approach not only implied a conception of change and causality which he found problematic, but with respect to Marxism specifically, it was associated by topographical and architectural metaphors, between deep/surface or base/superstructure which sat uncomfortably with his own preference for analysing the micropractices of lived experience" (Olssen 2004: 458–59). However, Foucault, relying heavily on structural linguistics, was still analyzing change from a structuralist approach and so had less focus on individual human change agency.

Marxist historical materialism also heavily influenced the field of archaeology, which is naturally connected to historical materialist viewpoints, as archaeologists regularly use associated material remains to denote cultural groups of people. Historical materialism naturally lends itself to the study of archaeology and can, in fact, often be seen to creep into works that are thought by the authoring scholars to be atheoretical. While many different groups of scholars debated, refined, reorganized, and struggled over the theoretical meaning of Marxist historical materialism, the field of archaeology largely, for a majority of the twentieth century, remained outside these debates. "This is not because archaeological anthropology has not been interpreted in ways commensurate with particular orthodoxies but because these interpretations and reinterpretations have been implicit and non-theorised" (Thomas 1982: 245). While a few early archaeologists, such as V. Gordon Childe, attempted to incorporate historical materialism into their research in concrete and intentional ways, this later received a great deal of criticism by scholars who turned to ecological approaches to find determinist and causal explanations for anthropological aspects of archaeology. In this approach, social factors were always "made secondary to the inexorable rationality of 'adaptations' and the teleology of the homeostatic system" (Thomas 1982: 249). With broader shifts toward processualism and the incorporation of postmodern theories into archaeology, this approach in turn began to receive criticism.

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The most important lesson for contemporary archaeologists from the history of the development of historical materialist theories is twofold: first, the recognition that a traditional empiricist epistemological interpretation of archaeological research is flawed as it fails to acknowledge the importance of theory in the creation of knowledge, and is devoid of any notion of ideology. Second, the attempted creation of aforementioned strictly empirical archaeological research, above that of low-level theory data collection, will often result in the accidental implementation of historical materialist conclusions without recognition of their theoretical flaws or blind spots.

By using an agency perspective on archaeological populations, we as archaeologists are confronted with the fact that historical individuals were active parts of their social fabric. They created and recreated the structures that influenced or impeded changes, sometimes in unpredictable ways (Sassaman 2000). Examining the lower socioeconomic classes of the French maritime empire through a lens of agency, the authors in this volume have contributed to enhancing our understanding of how their identities were diverse and complex, both from regional and global perspectives, and how they contributed to the expansion of the French maritime empire.

VOLUME OVERVIEW

The chapters in this volume provide an interpretation of various populations that contributed to the growth and maintenance of the French maritime empire. The objective of the book was not to provide an extensive review of all the scholarly work actually undertaken by archaeologists working on French colonies in the Americas but to present a diversity of ongoing research, each including a different perspective on the diversity and complexity of identities that fell under the umbrella of the French empire.

The first three chapters focus on three groups of individuals whose social identities and agency were defined by their belonging to specific trades in the margins of the centralized institutions: shipwrights, sailors (including pirates), and captives aboard slaving vessels. The variation between local and global perspectives is exemplified by Marijo Gauthier-Bérubé's analysis of shipbuilding construction techniques, which uses a corpus of known French shipwrecks of the late seventeenth century. Gauthier-Bérubé demonstrates that shipwrights were seasoned craftsmen whose agency played a role in the technical tensions between maintaining traditional techniques and developing engineering rules that were gradually reinforced within shipyards. The second chapter by Annaliese Dempsey addresses the experience of sailors and enslaved individuals during the Atlantic Golden Age of Piracy and

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Atlantic slave trade through the archaeological evidence of the infamous *Queen Anne's Revenge*. This chapter exemplifies how the process of becoming for both sailors and captives overlapped despite sharing different historical narratives. Among the population involved in maritime activities in France are individuals that acted at the fringes of society. Jean Soulat and Annaliese Dempsey provide perspective on the archaeology of piracy through the material culture that was recovered from both land and shipwreck sites.

But beyond shipwrights, sailors, and pirates, the development of social identities could be addressed from the perspective of sailors and fishermen. The second half of the book addresses the sailors and commercial networks involved in the cod trade in the Atlantic in New France, the Caribbean, and in Saint-Pierre et Miquelon. Gaëlle Dieulefet and Brad Loewen highlight a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ceramic assemblages on Canadian sites and their association with Saint-Malo fishermen who participated in the maritime economy that shaped their social identity. The role of fishermen communities as individuals that facilitated the economic expansion of the French empire is also discussed by Malory Champagne and Catherine Losier through a ceramic assemblage from Crève-Coeur, Martinique. Champagne and Losier show the complexity of the provisioning networks that fueled the development of local identities in the margin of formal nationalistic lines. Fishing activities are also highlighted by Cécile Sauvage, Éric Rieth, and Elise Nectoux in a chapter that reflects on the archaeological remains at Saint-Pierre et Miquelon. Their preliminary research shows the importance of gathering extensive data while keeping an open mind that allows the identification of similarities and variation between sites that encompass a larger maritime cultural landscape perspective.

The results presented in this volume address questions of agency and social identities through the archeological records of French populations between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The goal is not to provide a complete chronological overview of the lower socioeconomic classes of colonial France. This volume rather aims at exploring social embodiment by providing a different perspective than a national narrative that would focus on an individual's life trajectory or global socioeconomic trends. By bringing together different research, either completed or ongoing, we wish to highlight the richness of social interaction and identities of French communities.

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in French shipbuilding practices and shipwrights communities of practices and identities. She is currently conducting research in the Richelieu and Saint Lawrence Rivers.

Annaliese Dempsey focuses her archaeological research on the diverse agency and experiences of traditionally homogenized sociocultural groups. In the maritime sphere, her work has involved the analysis of sailing characteristics of Age of Sail vessels and the accompanying distribution of knowledge among sailors, utilizing technical reconstructions of vessels to explore the lived experiences of those on board and the integration of maritime archaeology and public outreach.

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