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Palimpsest Pirates: Modern Japan's Piracy of British Maritime Culture and Nautical Narrative

In 19th-century Britain, the fate of Carthage, which was in conflict with the Roman Empire, was often referred to as a cautionary tale for commercial empires. Similarly, in late 19th-century Japan, when powers struggled for dominance, the British navy, merchant marines, and nautical fiction were presented as models for ideal maritime states. As a result of accelerated modernization and expansionism from the 1920s onward, Japanese imperialism came into conflict with British imperialism. Furthermore, the promotion of maritime trade and security was heavily promoted as a way of undermining British supremacy in the East. In this Anglo-Japanese context, the vice-admiral G. A. Ballard emphasized in *The Influence of the Sea on the Political History of Japan* (1921) that Japan was historically not an isolated island nation but a maritime empire. The restructured discourse of history, which drew on the discourse of the yellow peril, exacerbated and popularized a discourse in Japan that stated that Britain had established its hegemony through piracy. It is hardly surprising that the Spanish Black Legend that circulated in Britain was adapted for this purpose. Similar to how Spanish conquest and plunder was exaggerated to justify British privateering, British piracy was used as propaganda in Japan. Ironically, Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883) was appropriated and adapted primarily as a popular nautical narrative. Another source of inspiration was British explorer John Davis, who was killed off Sumatra by his captive Japanese pirates in 1605, and the work of fiction Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), in which the namesake wandering sailor denounces British colonialism and describes his capture by Japanese pirates.