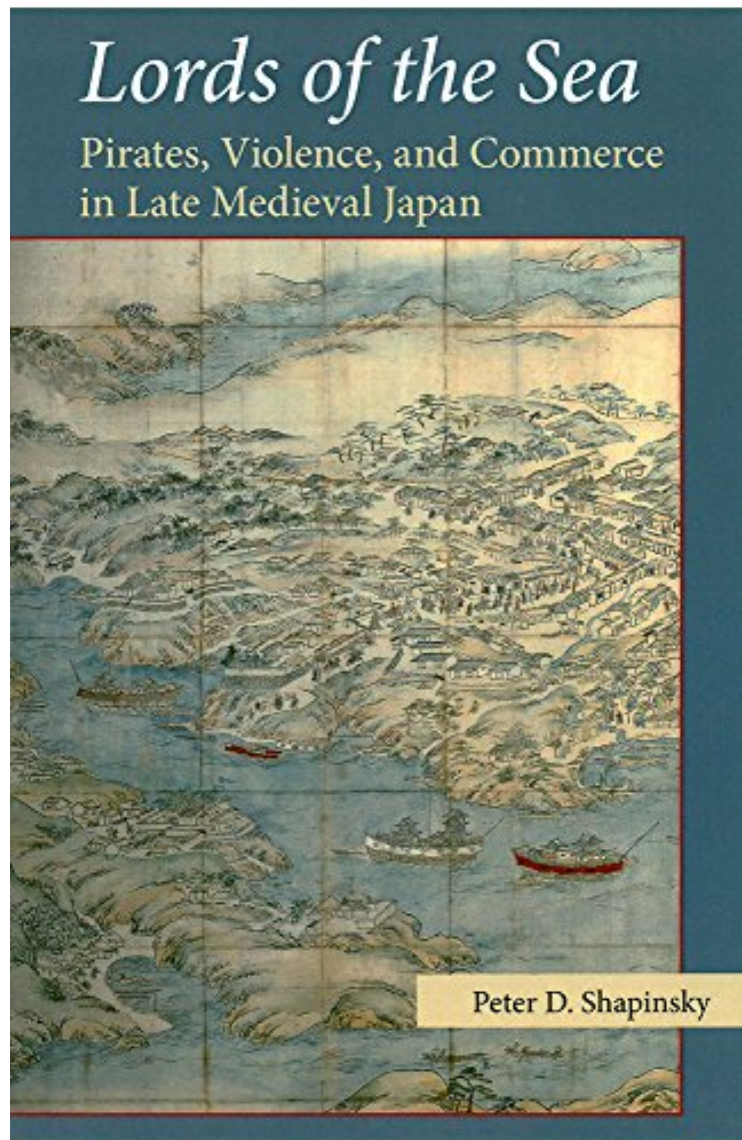


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Lords of the Sea: Pirates, Violence, and Commerce in Late Medieval Japan (Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies)

Peter D. Shapinsky

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Peter D. Shapinsky : Lords of the Sea: Pirates, Violence, and Commerce in Late Medieval Japan (Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Lords of the Sea: Pirates, Violence, and Commerce in Late Medieval Japan (Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent work - but not an easy read. By Timothy J. Logan For the student of Japanese history this tendentious read is well worth the effort which can be considerable. The long and detailed narrative of the evolution of the Wokou pirates is poorly covered in even the most detailed of Japanese historical monographs. Even the Cambridge History of Japan fails to cover the evolution and eventual demise of Japanese Pirate Lords adequately. This detailed analysis of Japanese Pirates from the Heian Period to the eventual demise of the Wokou in the Oda/Hideoshi/Tokugawa consolidation is of great value in illuminating this most interesting period. This is an excellent resource. 3 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A PC view of Japanese suigun

By Chou Kung The overruling idea of this book is that the history of the suigun (water warrior) groups in early Japan must be seen from a strictly PC perspective. Viewed thru the collegiate PC perspective, the author demands these groups be seen as lords. Such a title, of course, is what pirates in most places yearn for, so I'm sure they would be very happy reading this book. Although in fact a few suigun leaders were given titles (they were both politically and economically connected to major powerhouses), way too much historical arm twisting is required to sweepingly call the suigun lords. A lot of very interesting, and obviously well-researched, historical narrative is brought forth, but the result of this arm twisting is that the narrative is constantly broken up by the author's attempt to show that no matter how piratical the suigun may have been (and he uses the word "piratical" all the time), they are still lords in Shapinsky's eyes. For this reason, the excellent information the author has uncovered is varnished and tarnished by current PC terms and methods. Most current Japanese research views the suigun realistically as having four "faces"--the piratical, the mercenary, the navy-ish, and the merchant marine. It is unfortunate that the only full-scale review of the suigun in English does not plainly tell this very interesting story. The effects of the PC route the author steers is illustrated in his back-to-the-future translation of the Japanese warship atakebune as dreadnought, which refers to the early 20th century battleship class. The atakebune were fighting castles of the sea, whose innovations from many East Asian nautical sources are very telling (although not actually told in this book). By calling the atakebune "dreadnoughts," the author pushes the image of the suigun as equivalent to dreadnought commanders of the early 20th century. But that really skews a very important point. The origin of the word atakebune is not clear, and while there are many close historical parallels to the atakebune both in Asia and the West, the early 20th century dreadnought is not one of them. The dreadnought were known for speed, big guns, iron strength, and seaworthiness, and as a symbol of a well-ordered royal navy. Atakebune, on the other hand, while they had relatively large guns and many had iron-shield protection, were very slow and not particularly seaworthy. Their commanders included some great strategists, but they were basically mercenaries, and compare very poorly with the English navy of the early 1900s. On the other hand, if he had referred to the Dreadnought built in 1573 to the "race-built" design, he would have been somewhat closer to reality. However, that comparison would be less "accurate", as the atakebune were probably closer to Henry VIII's flagship, Henry Grace a Dieu. Although it is interesting that some of these navy vessels were also commanded by people who were once considered "pirates"... Similar to the distortion of naval tradition, the book would have been much more balanced if he had discussed merchant marine activities throughout the period (roughly 15th to 17th centuries)--and the subtitle of the book would suggest it would be a main theme. Unfortunately, the merchant side of the seafarers is not dealt with significantly. This is unfortunate, however, as a review of the merchant seaman of the era would have shown both a stark contrast between suigun merchants and other maritime merchants in some cases and how the suigun could switch hats and run legitimate businesses, though more in the Mafioso tradition of legitimate businesses hiding illegitimate ones. Putting the suigun in this broader historical context, would allow a much different history to emerge. It simply would have worked against the lord of the sea theory. In terms of lordship, it is no doubt true that the increase in violence during the 15th to 17th centuries meant that Japanese society devolved to the level of the mercenary suigun. For this reason, as other reviewers (e.g., Ethan Segal) have pointed out, as entitled groups, the suigun operated autonomously for only a few decades. Soon after the violence of the sengoku (warring states) period ended, whatever lordship some suigun may have gained quickly disappeared. The author himself seems to give up, as he calls one of the main families pirates at the end of the book (243). The majority of suigun simply did not have the capacity to pilot their way into the post-sengoku world, something that differentiates them from many similar piratical groups (i.e. groups doing violent sea acts outside the authority of governments, who were, of course, doing the same) in other parts of the world, such as the Zheng family in China and Francis Drake in England. For this reason, the suigun (in this case Kiku) did not have the power or skill necessary to make critical contributions to the subsequent Japanese invasion of Korea--an invasion that was lost by and large by the near complete destruction of the Japanese maritime force (while the land force was amazingly successful). In summary, this could have been a great book if the author had taken a less heavy handed approach to forcing his ideal on history. Most Japanese authors recognize the suigun had many faces, from pirate to highly capable maritime merchants. This flexible and pluralistic approach makes sense, and also makes for interesting history. 1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Shapinsky's penetrating insights into the history of Japan's pirate culture ... By Jim B. Shapinsky's penetrating insights into the history of Japan's pirate culture is a truly remarkable work. It is consistently readable, thoroughly sourced and a genuinely important contribution to the field of East Asian studies. I predict that in time it will be considered to be the landmark work in the field.

"Lords of the Sea revises our understanding of the epochal political, economic, and cultural transformations of Japan's late medieval period (1300-1600) by shifting the conventional land-based analytical framework to one centered on the perspectives of seafarers usually dismissed as 'pirates'"--Provided by publisher.