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Port City Planning
after the Seventeenth Century

The Problem

Only in the seventeenth century did Europeans ever really try to tie the development of commercial and military sea power to an urban context. Of course, not everyone involved with sea power saw a need for port city planning. Mention has already been made of English disregard for Continental planning practices; even the Royal Navy’s arsenal ports were temporary stations at a time when Continental navies operated increasingly from permanently established urban bases. Perhaps a better example is the disdain for any city planning schemes that characterized the relations between the merchants of Saint-Malo and Marseille and the administrative officers of Louis XIV’s government. Operating vast, responsive, and rapidly growing commercial operations, these merchants thought that royal projects for enlarging and beautifying their old and overcrowded cities would diminish the value of their property and increase their tax burden. They would have been content to see their cities prosper with little regard for spatial order; but their protests could not block the will of the king to see executed what were, in fact, some of the most important extensions of seventeenth-century cities. In France, in the Netherlands, and in Scandinavia, governments concerned with the rhythms of commercial traffic and aware of the changing fortunes of war and power thought that port city planning could serve as a matrix for sea power, and hoped that, through it, the cultural, social, economic, and political problems associated with the exercise and extension of sea power might be mitigated.

But in the eighteenth century the relevance of port city planning no longer appeared obvious and compelling, except to a minority who pursued it for its capacity to heighten the monumental and sublime for aesthetic effect. Thanks to their efforts, large-scale planning returned to the cocoon of speculative and largely impractical imagination from which it has not re-emerged. As
a result, those who dealt with the space of port cities on a problem-solving basis increasingly relied upon the limited talents, spatial vocabulary, and vision of the surveyor who developed port and city as separate, autonomous entities. Europeans substituted political studies, the fine arts, and literature for port city planning when describing the maritime world and the problems associated with commercial and military sea power.

The decline in importance of port city planning should not be interpreted as meaning that culture and society have evolved a more comprehensive and coherent understanding of the sea. On the contrary; the two societies that shared the same space in Louis XIV's new port cities—one familiar with the exercise of power but not with its extension onto the seas, the other a part of the maritime world but unfamiliar with the workings of the state—are still two separate groups with two different perspectives on the sea. To be sure, the record of seventeenth-century port city planning was not one of complete success. But it was sufficiently varied, important, and ambitious to make us want to know, first, why Europeans and Americans in the eighteenth century and after have found port city planning of little importance to their metropolitan and colonial port cities and to their exploitation of sea power, and second, what the consequences of this development have been for the maritime civilization of the West. This story is the real sequel to Brest, Lorient, Rochefort, and Sète as creations of Louis XIV's France. Perhaps the best starting point is the sudden and nearly simultaneous growth of two port cities, St. Petersburg and Liverpool—cities located at opposite ends of the north European world, but both built very much in a seventeenth-century frame of reference.

St. Petersburg

St. Petersburg, founded in 1703, was the last great city planned and established during an unprecedented era of port city development. Peter the Great's ambition was to change Russia and its place in world affairs by importing European commercial, cultural, and political practices through an urban base built on a European, not a Russian, model. As a result, Peter, his successors, and their planners and administrators referred to and were guided by seventeenth-century developments in the Netherlands, France, and Scandinavia. Excellent studies of eighteenth-century St. Petersburg already exist, but their authors have slighted the century-long, continent-wide perspective that gives St. Petersburg its place in this story of maritime urban culture.

For many years the Swedes had been developing forts, cities, and bases along the Russian littoral of the Baltic, which they controlled. Their activities and the seventeenth-century wars between Sweden and Russia had called Peter's attention to the possibility of a prosperous city on the Neva. In fact, several Swedish projects had been proposed for sites that were similar in topographic configuration to St. Petersburg. While it is impossible to know whether the Russians were familiar with any of these projects, it is likely that they became aware of Swedish precedents from former Swedish engineers or from individuals who had worked with the Swedes, from documents cap-
tured, stolen, purchased, or copied, and from direct observation of the sites themselves. Moreover, the search for the ideally effective form and the manipulation of waterscape in the city, both characteristics of late-seventeenth-century Swedish planning, probably appealed to the Russians for the same reasons it appealed to the Swedes. The hope that coherent design, symmetry, and perspective might insulate a city against the corrosive effects of changing political and economic fortunes seems to have motivated both Russians and Swedes.

Before looking at some plans for St. Petersburg, it is appropriate to examine some Swedish documents for eastern Baltic locations. For example, plans of and projects for Riga, Nyen, and Narva indicate the variety of solutions to problems of growth and defense considered by the Swedes. For Riga the question was whether or not an extension to the city should be enclosed by a single defense perimeter. But Riga was located on one side of a river, which simplified the problem. Nyen and Narva extended along both sides of a river, and Nyen in particular included a piece of land between two branches of a river—a configuration very close to St. Petersburg’s. Swedish planners were undecided whether to impose one scheme on all the land, unifying the city through its topographic form, or whether to compose the city out of distinct elements, each subject to its own historical pattern of development and perhaps related to the others by function or by being enclosed within the same defense works. Implicit in the disagreements among designers were issues of cost, time, and strategic import, but there were differences of vision as well: some of the plans for Nyen reflect concern for how the city would appear to its residents or to travelers arriving by ship. Of course it may only be coincidental that these same issues would dominate disagreement over plans for St. Petersburg in the eighteenth century; even so, it is worthwhile to note that in the second half of the seventeenth century in the same part of the world Swedish planners had already tackled these issues without resolving them.

Peter had traveled to western Europe in 1697, and had visited, among other places, the English naval yard at Deptford and the Zaanstreek district in Holland. He returned to Russia convinced that, with planning, Western conditions and circumstances favorable to the rapid and efficient exploitation of the sea might be replicated in Russia. The succession of plans produced into the nineteenth century shows that Peter and his successors remained committed to this conviction. But the plans also reveal the great paradox of eighteenth-century St. Petersburg: the city developed largely without planning, not only because the government could not control effectively the huge number of people who came there to live, but also because the planners themselves—and their royal patrons—were unable to select a plan they wanted to impose in the first place (to which must be added the difficulty in building on water-logged soil). As the city grew, therefore, each successive plan had to take into account the ever-increasing amount of land that had been put to use without planning.

Between 1700 and 1725, 200 new manufacturing establishments were opened on the banks of the Neva. In 1709 the Russian admiralty employed
900 persons; the next year it added 4,720 more to the payroll; in 1712 another 2,000 were hired. Those figures dropped in peacetime, but even so, some 5,000 individuals probably remained employed by the admiralty. And they produced several hundred ships in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. In 1725 the population approximated 30,000, and by 1750, 95,000. The rhythm of commercial traffic recorded the city's growth, too: 52 vessels called in 1718, 75 in 1720, 114 in 1722, 270 in 1724, and an average of 450 in 1725 and 1726. Apparently, few people reflected on the value of planning because the city was growing well without it. Instead, those responsible for St. Petersburg, no doubt believing that planning could translate the city's activities into a permanent structure and that without such a structure disorder and instability might jeopardize the entire enterprise, preferred to consider plans that emphasized the symbolic and aesthetic qualities of monumental space, and did not search for a pattern of ordered, organic growth that was related to how the city had developed. A sense of the ideal, more than anything else, characterized the plans produced for the city. Whatever Peter may have learned or thought about practical city planning did not survive so far away from the provocative example of the Netherlands; other influences, from France and Scandinavia, proved stronger.

Peter the Great had hoped to create a very un-Russian, well-built modern city with densely spaced brick houses, large gardens, and straight streets. He urged that the river, canals, and channels be incorporated into the general plan, required all buildings to conform to the general plan, suggested that each social group be settled in a separate district, and anticipated committing the management of the city to the care of the commercial and industrial leaders. Peter wanted visiting sailors and merchants to spread the word of St. Petersburg's beauty and industry throughout Europe, but the actual Amsterdam-on-the-Neva, which grew before a satisfactory plan was selected, was a busy and crowded place with little apparent spatial order. Growth by the 1720s suggested that the city was developing in several different, unrelated areas: on the tip of Vasilevski Island, on the left bank of the Neva along both the waterfront and a road leading inland, further downstream along a channel, and on the right bank of the Neva, behind the fort. The site, however, offered many possibilities to anyone with the vision to see them and with the conviction that the city could grow to match them. One plan, circa 1720, showed how the island in the Neva might have been laid out with canals, a dense grid pattern, and a park, and would have abandoned the rest of the city to grow along the lines it had been setting; the island was not integrated into a larger scheme for the city. The Frenchman Leblond, however, had envisioned a way to do that. (He introduced a sense of visual perspective that captured the Russian imagination and led the Russians to call on other Frenchmen in the future.) In 1717 he completed a plan for the city (figure 6.1) that made provision for upstream industrial works, an adjacent suburb, a more ordered growth on the Neva's right bank behind the fort, and the visual and functional unification of Vasilevski Island with at least the left bank of the city. But Leblond did not allow other parts of the city to be related to each other, and his plan isolated the palace from the waterfront.
Leblond’s was not the first plan for the city, and others followed his, but his revealed many of the problems others had to face, too: spatial distribution of activities and residences, provision for growth, and concern for the functional and architectonic interrelationship of the parts. Complicating the whole city planning process was the island of Kronstadt at the mouth of the Neva, which protected not only St. Petersburg (from a Baltic-borne invasion) but also large ships that would have difficulty reaching the city (goods were transferred to smaller craft). Plans for Kronstadt are interesting in themselves (figure 6.2). St. Petersburg was a prime candidate for regional planning and development. But of all of Peter’s ideas for St. Petersburg, only his prescription for the spatial separation of social groups and industrial activities was consistently implemented; the other ideas were downgraded or modified to better emphasize the city’s increasingly aristocratic character.

Iurri Egorov has analyzed these plans (parts of which were translated into reality) and has described the aesthetic and political context in which they were discussed. There is little point in going over the same material here, except to comment by way of conclusion that the difficulties involved in determining which parts of the city (exchange or palace) should be emphasized architectonically and the arguments over whether to isolate a part of the city from or integrate it with the waterfront led to important discussions of political and social significance. From the beginning St. Petersburg had been destined to deliver the wealth of maritime commerce and the power its profits could buy into the hands of the Russian rulers. Like the planners of Copenhagen and Stockholm a century earlier, those who contributed to the planning of eighteenth-century St. Petersburg and wrestled with spatial problems of organization and perspective sought ways to combine the city’s functions as courtly capital and commercial entrepôt. In all three cities an expansive aristocracy erected residences in a decorative and grandiose style close to the embankments, canals, and harbor activity belonging to the business world. The cityscape of St. Petersburg is a priceless visual record of how land empires harnessed the open horizons of long-distance commerce to their ascendance.

Liverpool

Liverpool, Defoe wrote, was “one of the wonders of Britain.” But Defoe’s impressions corresponded to a vision of port cities that few Englishmen of the seventeenth or eighteenth century shared. In Defoe’s day, Liverpool was resolutely given over to Atlantic commerce. That this happened at all has excited the curiosity of historians, because until the end of the seventeenth century Liverpool was a minor port that handled traffic with Ireland. The Navigation Acts of the 1660s curbed the trade with Ireland, and when the wars with France imposed a handicap on Britain’s eastern and Channel ports, Liverpool merchants seized an opportunity to exploit the shortest and safest route across the Atlantic offered by their city. But Liverpool could not easily handle the ships of the Atlantic trade. Coastal and Irish shipping were handled by small vessels; the law proscribed ships larger than 37 tons from the Irish trade.
Atlantic vessels could weigh 200 or 250 tons, but given the twenty- to thirty-foot tidal range of the Mersey River, it was ordinarily difficult to anchor such ships alongside the city. Two common practices were beaching the vessel or taking it into a tidal pool, and neither was particularly safe or easy. Liverpool was, therefore, unequipped for the Atlantic trade, and it was only natural for the city's merchants to propose that a wet dock, a dock facility whose waters were protected from the tide by a lock, be built. The decision to make such a facility was made in 1708; Parliament voted the enabling legislation in 1709; the dock was completed in 1720 (at a cost of £15,000, one-third more than originally estimated); and in 1721 a new customs house was erected along one side of the dock.

Defoe wrote about Liverpool in a *Tour Through England and Wales*, contrasting it favorably with Bristol. According to Defoe, Bristol's merchants were both suspicious of competitors and set in their ways, and their city was overcrowded, lacking in amenities, and locked into a medieval pattern—a reflection of its merchants' mentalities. Liverpool's great new dock and growing commerce would surely enable that city to exceed Bristol's wealth and size, predicted Defoe. Excited by that prospect, Defoe wrote about Liverpool's "exceedingly well built houses" and "straight, clean and spacious" streets. But when Defoe attributed to Liverpool an appearance as splendid as its enterprise, he used poetic license and distorted reality; he was sensitive to city space, and expressed this feeling as if there existed a sublime correspondence between image and reality. Liverpool was just as firmly set into a medieval urban structure, new dock notwithstanding, as Bristol. The merchants Defoe admired lacked his sense of urban beauty. Not until the nineteenth century would they add cultural institutions to their city, and when they did, they placed them far from the port (Liverpool merchants apparently did not believe that a great port called into being a great port city).

The ships that sailed from Liverpool "were among the finest works of man, exquisitely shaped for the seaman's purpose and infinitely more beautiful than any building the town had or would ever build." Most of eighteenth-century Liverpool was built of wood; its streets were sometimes enlarged, but were rarely paved; fires led to constant rebuilding; and the dock basin had to be dredged as sewage and mud flowed into it from the streets. But the merchants preferred to rebuild and clean up rather than reorder the city's space. The only distinguished eighteenth-century additions to the city were schools, churches, almshouses, and hospitals, and these were merely inserted into its fabric. Neither rapid growth nor inconvenience and expense encouraged those responsible for the city to think about it in a new way. The commerce of eighteenth-century Liverpool may have differed radically from what it had been in the seventeenth century, but the city did not. The impact of traffic and population growth had not affected the city's topography except to multiply the number of warehouses, mansions, and tenements. Business remained concentrated in the area immediately adjacent to the port.

Why had no plan to order Liverpool's growth been introduced during the eighteenth century? In the Middle Ages, Englishmen had used planning to establish new towns and to enlarge old ones. Because opportunities to create
new towns diminished and because city planning usually represented an increase in the power of civil authorities, after the fifteenth century Englishmen had reduced planning schemes to speculative ventures launched by the crown, important landholders, and capitalists. Even so, such seventeenth-century schemes as those to develop areas of London (Bloomsbury, Covent Garden, etc.) were beyond the reach or vision of Liverpool's merchants. Although they were in business to make money, they were not yet ready to transfer their profits into land and stone. Typically, speculative land development projects were launched by more established, more moneyed men than merchants engaged in the Atlantic trade for the first time. The City Corporation acquired a lease over land on which the central area and future dock district of Liverpool could be developed as late as 1777, and then it manipulated that lease for profit during the city's second century of growth.

Private property and social order became so closely linked in England that government interference with the former was thought to disrupt the latter. How different this was from the situation on the Continent! The careful observer should not be deceived by the Queen's Palace and Hospital at Greenwich (Jones, 1619–1635 and Wren, 1696–1699), by the great squares of Stuart and Georgian London, by Georgian Bath, or by the New Town of Edinburgh into thinking that the English had ever accepted the Continental spirit: they may have enriched architecture with these and other masterpieces, but architecture cannot be confused with city planning. The great English architectural compositions were not designed to encourage other urban developments, as Continental compositions had often been designed to do since the Renaissance. They were self-sufficient parts that enhanced the rest of a city by the contrast they provoked in it. There was no effort to see the whole as more than the sum of its parts, or any attempt to see in the handling of urban space an opportunity for social or political change. In England debates over change had been detached from the problems of city growth: even though city growth often provoked social and political tensions (as in seventeenth-century London), limits to or a reordering of growth patterns were not among the solutions seriously considered. Liverpool's story in the early eighteenth century can be explained in English terms alone, but that should not blind us to its importance: both Liverpool's unplanned growth and development and planning for St. Petersburg reflected opinions about the contribution city planning could make to maritime expansion.

Maritime Culture in the Age of Enlightenment: The Context for Planning

Both Liverpool merchants and St. Petersburg princes thought of maritime expansion in terms of city space. They arrived at radically different judgments about the relationship of the one to the other while agreeing that the relationship was critical. For this reason both cities belong to a seventeenth-century, and not a distinctively eighteenth-century, frame of reference. What happened in these two cities on the eastern and western frontiers of Europe
was literally peripheral to developments in the center, where changes in the Anglo-French maritime world brought on the decline in port city planning. The new eighteenth-century approach called for a decorative, ordered waterfront as a richly evocative by-product of commercial growth and military glory. Planners in London and Bordeaux, for example, no longer thought of the appearance or form of the port city as a critical factor in commercial or military sea power. Their judgment represented a decisive break with seventeenth-century port city planning. That story, which cannot be understood only in terms of the internal history of planning, becomes clear when presented in terms of the role left for planning in the broader maritime culture. For this reason, a study of eighteenth-century maritime culture in England and France precedes here a discussion of planning for London and Bordeaux.

When port city planning emerged in western Europe early in the seventeenth century, existing social, economic, cultural, and political values could neither promote nor sustain an understanding of new patterns of maritime exploitation without modification. Port city planning helped at least one small yet critical group of western Europeans adapt to a new maritime age, but relatively few people contributed to the arguments that port city planning stimulated. Conditioned by the old monolithic view of the sea as a hostile place, contemporaries largely ignored the cultural distance separating their society from the sea and failed to notice that that distance had begun to diminish. They became more conscious of maritime affairs when accumulated knowledge three generations deep began to sweep through French and English culture, riding the high tide of the Enlightenment, replete with its own optimistic outlook on nature and experience. In the eighteenth century conflicts and ambiguities in Western man’s understanding of maritime affairs became visible to a much wider circle of Europeans. As changes took place in European arts and letters, some writers and painters did new things with the sea—things that had not been attempted as often or perhaps as well before; they loosened old traditions and gradually elaborated new settings for the sea in a world of man’s works and ideas. Once political and economic theory, creative fiction-writing, and art began to absorb port city planning’s role as a mediator between society and seafaring, the spatial aspect of port cities no longer seemed relevant to the success of maritime enterprise. Having lost their preeminence in Europe’s maritime culture, planners tried to articulate in their own medium a spatial analog to the more innovative, exciting, and provocative attempts to understand the maritime world that others were undertaking: projects for city space became rhetorical, academic exercises in monumentality and impracticality. Engineers inherited the planners’ earlier claims to practicality, and they alone became responsible for the urban settings for building, outfitting, and coordinating the movements of large fleets of ships.

**Literature**

English and French writers began to reevaluate their ideas of the place of the sea in literature, which they had inherited from the Renaissance at least a
century after their nations’ adventurers and merchants had undertaken the permanent and systematic exploitation of the sea for the first time. Richard Hakluyt had written accounts of voyages in the 1580s so that the English public might know of and be excited about the new nautical age, but in 1724 Defoe could still complain that discovery voyages, commercial trade, and naval encounters were visible in books only “superficially and by halves; [that] the storms and difficulties at sea or on shore have nowhere a full relation; and [that nautical accounts] are generally filled up with directions for sailors coming that way.”

Tedious logs made dull books, but they are precious evidence of what marked the seventeenth century from previous periods of English and French maritime growth because, like markings on a trail, they indicated that the path of a few pioneers would be repeated routinely. But clearly that was not what men of literary imagination wanted to find in the new nautical age. Seventeenth-century writers used the picturesque or factual evidence of travelers’ books to make the sea more real when they bound it into a framework of religious and philosophical ideas. They used the sea as a symbol, and were interested in details about it only to give their expressions the resonance of versimilitude. They saw the seas with the fear of Noah and the conscience of Jonah, the memory of Ulysses and the spirituality of Jesus and his disciples. “Dread Neptune’s wild unsocial sea” (Frenneau’s phrase) was no place for man to stray; its waters would undermine any established community. Writers exploited the sea as a symbol at the expense of the real maritime world around them.

Defoe did not object to the conventional literary use of the sea; rather, he hoped to find in fiction a way to make the new nautical age more interesting to readers. Even though Defoe was a London-based merchant-adventurer who exercised a practical view of affairs, he still asserted the primacy of the imagination over the perceptual environment: he still wanted to submit the sea to his own view of it, which clearly derived from his authority as a writer, and not from his involvement in maritime commerce. Defoe was as yet unready to describe the tasks of seafaring and the accomplishments of seafarers as an important part of a story. His *A New Voyage Round the World* is picaresque, not picturesque; it is disappointing because each storm and each adventure seems identical to all the others, even if it is not. Defoe did not write the first great modern sea story, but his desire to do so is more important than the results he published. His dissatisfaction with existing literary realism pointed to problems that would control literary and artistic production for the next century. How could writers or painters without an intimate knowledge of the sea make a portrait of the sea interesting and plausible? To what ends could a more realistic perception of the sea be directed? Would such a perception help a man better understand himself and his world?

Writers, hesitant to study or describe the sea or to include in their works conditions of life introduced by the new nautical age, continued to apply inherited notions about the sea. Even the central Enlightenment concepts of nature and experience encouraged them to view the sea as a soulless and desolate space, for the sea itself could not yet be included in a concept of nature that made nature rational and open to knowledge through experience. The science of oceanography did not exist at a time when thinking
persons were busy organizing, classifying, and conceptualizing the biological, physical, and geological aspects of nature. The point about science is important, because writers replaced the traditional religious view of mountains as ugly and irregular signs of sin for a sublime appreciation of their beauty when Newtonian science and geology made possible an understanding of mountains as part of God’s plan. Perhaps the older, traditional, view of the sea as a primeval, original force moved by God since the birth of the world could survive in the Newtonian age, whereas the equally traditional view of mountains as unnatural signs of the fall from grace could not. Joseph Addison was one of the first to grasp that the beauties of mountains and seas were similar, but few writers found it as easy to write about the maritime world as to write about mountains. The natural landscape of eighteenth-century literature was largely terrestrial, whether composed of gardens, of grand vistas, or of precipices.

Two who tried a more documentary approach to the sea were William Falconer and Tobias Smollett. In 1762 Falconer published a long poem, “The Shipwreck,” which was popular in its day on both sides of the Atlantic. In it Falconer explored the diction and vocabulary of seafarers (perhaps brought into popular literature for the first time), but he blended it with his own view of the sea as an alien and hostile place: only the seaman’s skill and experience could turn the sea to some good use. Falconer’s work marked an advance on traditional literary convention, but it still reflected the older judgment that, fundamentally, the sea was alien to man. Such a perspective would encourage those without knowledge of the sea to remain ignorant, and to leave mastery of the sea to seafarers. Smollett’s mid-century novels also portrayed the sea as wild and primitive, beyond understanding or praise; their interest for us lies in Smollett’s attempt to describe life in the Royal Navy. Both Smollett and Falconer conveyed an appreciation for the seaman’s professionalism, but neither could indicate what stake the land-based reader had in what took place at sea. Perhaps because the underdeveloped scientific study of the sea made the sea appear unapproachable and alien, even writers like Smollett and Falconer could not celebrate the maritime world.

Falconer and Smollett were unable to dissolve the established literary formulae regarding the sea; their ventures seemed difficult and tentative. Although the volume of poetic and fictional maritime writings began to increase during the second half of the eighteenth century, most of their creators were unsuccessful at establishing literary reflections of the maritime world that were unbounded by traditional philosophical and religious frameworks. Seafaring was more accurately described, and the sea itself was looked at more closely, but by people with their feet firmly on the ground, who still found the sea on the horizon of man’s thoughts. Writers were not yet looking at the land from the sea, nor, really, at the sea itself, but at least their attempts to fit more of the maritime world into literature raised questions about the appropriateness and versimilitude of the older literary conventions, and so helped readers and writers alike become more open to the maritime world. At least this is the tentative conclusion that can be made on the basis of analyses by Stein and Philbrick. But these two researchers have barely skimmed the surface, as they
admit. There is much more to be learned about the reasons for the increasing number of literary materials referring to the sea and the meanings they conveyed to their readers.

Writers handled sea materials with ease and ambition at the end of the eighteenth and during the first half of the nineteenth centuries, when a greater understanding of the sea and an intensified search for its relevance to man were channeled into literary expression. The tensions between man and the sea, between society and the maritime world it exploited—tensions that had been a part of the maritime culture ever since the end of the sixteenth century—could be seen in a tremendous literary effort to relate the inner self to the outer world, and to base concepts of identity and existence on perceptions of the environment that were epistemologically and psychologically grounded in the humanism of individual sensibility. The comments that follow do not do justice to either the beauty and strength of numerous stories and poems or the rich body of critical interpretation surrounding them; they are presented in order to document the fact that literature could at last claim for itself an outstanding role in the interpretation of the maritime world.

Poets (Byron in “Childe Harold,” Coleridge in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”) explored the freedom and solitude of those on the sea as good things of themselves. In contrast to a trivial life on shore, time spent at sea could bring on an awareness of eternity, of the unknown, and of one’s own destiny. The qualities of being at sea that had encouraged earlier writers only to refer to the sea as a place for the fear of God encouraged these poets to use the sea as a setting for the most profound and revealing experiences of life, but this was still the literary use of the sea for its philosophical values. Novelists, especially in America (Cooper, and, later, Melville), who had an intimate knowledge of seafaring and had a vision of its role in civilization also portrayed the sea as a place where men fought for self-realization and, often, for life itself. Such literary uses of the sea could still reinforce the impression that the sea, and life at sea, were fundamentally divorced from society, which was wholly a terrestrial enterprise: perhaps this explains why eighteenth-century writers stepped back from the shoreline, while romantic authors went on board ship.

There was, however, a tendency among some writers (including Dana, and sometimes Cooper) to demonstrate the contrary, that the effect of sailing on the seaman was like that of farming and hunting on those who worked the land and walked the forests, and that the sea and seafaring were interesting precisely as they revealed parallels to the lives of all men. To be sure, many early-nineteenth-century American writers saw the sea as their country’s true frontier, and celebrated America’s independence and growth through a fascination with the ocean; the development of maritime novels in the United States was certainly more rapid, intensive, and far-reaching than it was in England or France. Whatever the reason, writers informed their readers about the maritime world in such a way that for the first time the land seemed to support the sea, instead of the other way around. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to magnify the differences between the romantics, who described the sea for metaphysical and aesthetic reasons, and the realists, who described the
maritime world in order to make it concrete and approachable. Both groups enlarged the place of the sea in Western literature far beyond what it had ever been before. They may have disagreed about why man should use the sea or pay attention to it; but that disagreement was not new to their day, as the history of seventeenth-century port city planning makes clear. What was new was the fact that that disagreement had become a major issue in the literary world.

For reasons that have not been explained, the great literary interest in the sea did not survive the American Civil War or the Crimean War, even though both wars demonstrated the importance of sea power as much as the engagements of the Napoleonic era had. Writing of the sea since the mid-nineteenth century calls to mind the novels of Joseph Conrad and Jules Verne and poems by Arnold, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Valéry, but interest in these writers has had little to do with their uses of the sea. The sea had earlier been a central theme in writing, not peripheral to an understanding of individual and society, but central to it; but then the sea gradually lost that role. In the last century such a theme has attracted neither critics nor audience: Melville has become popular only since the 1920s and the publication of Lewis Mumford’s biography, and Cooper’s sea novels were neglected altogether until Philbrick’s study appeared in 1961. Perhaps now that transoceanic travel has moved into the air few writers will care to ask their readers to become familiar with the richly divergent meanings of seafaring for man. The Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Aeneid, three primal classics of Western literature, are likely to remain the great maritime texts.

**Political and Economic Theories**

In the early eighteenth century a few writers of fiction saw what the potential for literature might be if the inherited literary nautical conventions were dissolved, but an imaginative mastery over the sea and a vision of the problems associated with contact with the sea came slowly. A “sea change” finally did occur in literature, as we have seen. Nevertheless, new perceptions of the sea and of seafaring did not eliminate stereotypes. Instead, two approaches to the sea unfolded at the same time, one new, the other old. Economic theorists paid attention to the sea long before fictional writers did, yet their knowledge of the sea and their ability to resolve the problems associated with its exploitation were no greater. Why?

The answer, whether for the few seventeenth-century economic writers or the many eighteenth-century ones, is that the nature of the maritime world eluded those who did not belong to it. Writers did not find it hard to realize that the commercial networks of port cities and the traffic carried between them created particular economic and political interests for those involved; contrasts between the maritime and agrarian worlds were easily made. But economic and political theorists made the mistake of trying to assimilate or integrate one world into the other, because they never really discovered that the two worlds were hardly related at all: each writer tried to describe the entire economic system, and somehow failed to comprehend how his view of
the whole was distorted by his misunderstanding of how the parts differed. Whereas travelers’ books made the topography, society, and economy of, for example, rural France or commercial Holland familiar to outsiders, such books tended to create the impression that every country’s rural and commercial economies had more in common with each other than either might have with its homologue elsewhere. Thus, Frenchmen discussed French agriculture, and not as it related to English or Dutch commerce.

In the seventeenth century, states had not been masters of the fiscal unity of their territory, and so models of economic interchange and development had not seemed practical. But once that formative period of state-building ended—at around the turn of the eighteenth century—the failure to perceive the autonomy of maritime and agrarian worlds had greater consequences. Debates and controversy about economic and political reforms only heightened the public sense that the issues at stake were real, and that rational comprehension of the issues was possible. The obvious differences between economic models based on the maritime world and models based on the agrarian one only made partisans feel more certain that one of the models was right and the other wrong. Such convictions led many thinking eighteenth-century Europeans to believe that in economic and political studies they had an instrument with which they could gain leverage against the material, natural world. Those who described the maritime world wanted their descriptions to help modify the context in which merchants and smugglers, customs officers and tax ministers, naval officers, suppliers, and administrators operated. But often the habits and activities of seafaring did not conform to their new roles, and the theorists did not bother to explain why this was so.

It is not possible to know whether port city planning became less important because economic and political studies appeared to describe the relations between the land and the sea in terms of taxation and politics, but it is worthwhile to suggest that the very emphasis such writers gave to fiscal and political programs minimized the contributions to economic growth that planned port cities would make. Of course this does not do justice to the richness and originality of writers ranging from Jean Bodin to Adam Smith. Nevertheless, as in the case of literature, I can suggest, though not affirm, what a new reading of economic and political texts demonstrates: I can call attention to the impact such texts may have had on the cultural context for port city planning.

Those most suspicious of the maritime world (Bodin, Montchrétien, Cantillon, the Physiocrats) certainly would have thought that the added investment port city planning called for might exacerbate the harmful influence such cities had on agricultural production and national policy—if they gave the subject any thought at all. Others more favorably disposed to maritime commerce, Englishmen like Mun, Child, Temple, Petty, and Smith, and Continentals such as Laffemas, Boisguilbert, and Galiani, thought that the natural tendency of such commerce to expand was most likely to be influenced by state fiscal policies; mercantilists and free traders alike would have agreed that port city planning absorbed resources and energies best invested in industry.
and commerce directly. That port city planning offered ways to emphasize or deemphasize the maritime world mattered little to writers more concerned with the circulation of money, the operations of the market place, and the influence of government policy on trade and production. They were not in a position to notice that the exploitation of the sea and the cultivation of the land had separate spatial settings, because they did not see in the differences in appearance between the great port cities and the trading centers of the agrarian hinterland the suggestion that each represented a separate social and economic sphere not paying much attention to the other.²³

Not until the end of the nineteenth century did English and French writers begin to emphasize how little the rural hinterland and the ocean seaboard had in common, politically, socially, or economically. In France geographers made decisive and rapid progress toward understanding mentalités, traditions, values, and lifestyles in terms of social and physical environments. From Vidal de la Blanche to Jean Brunhes, Maximilien Sorre, Lucien Febvre, and Fernand Braudel, French scholars have given human geography an analytical framework and historical depth.²⁴ Their works have endowed discrete patterns of life with structure, meaning, and visibility, which is what should concern the social sciences. The French approach, with its emphasis on a theoretical, generalized, and synthetic scaffolding for articulating the specific, variant identities of differing societies, provides researchers with points of reference within and outside their own fields.

In contrast is Anglo-American scholarship on the maritime world in the past century, which has emphasized historical studies. When historical maritime studies take as a point of reference other, land, events occurring simultaneously with an event at sea, the result often obscures how the exploitation of commercial and military sea power involves fundamental questions of economic structures and geographic settings: the distinct features of the maritime world do not become important enough to notice except insofar as they are linked to the context in which the events being analyzed took place. Much more is known about the formation of high naval policy now than in 1890, when A. T. Mahan wrote The Influence of Sea Power upon History, a work that had an astonishing impact on the Western world.²⁵ But Mahan’s effort to associate the fitness of a national culture or political system for sea power with the evolution of tactics and strategy has not had a sequel. There are dozens of books on leading statesmen and naval officers and important battles, but they all tend to make the navy easier to understand in its organizational and technological dimensions;²⁶ by inference alone are unique aspects of the maritime world to be understood as part of a social, cultural, and physical environment. Only a few authors, Arthur J. Marder and Samuel Eliot Morison most prominently, have written of sea power with some passionate sense of what it represents in civilization.²⁷

Yet the French approach does not hold all the advantages. As the best Anglo-American historical writings (and the seventeenth-century evidence in this book) demonstrate, there is a political and intellectual context in which maritime affairs are best understood and manipulated. There is a tendency in the holistic French social geographers’ approach to insulate the coastal “men-
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tality” against rapid change and to make it appear more autonomous and self-sustaining than it might be. Surely the French and Anglo-American styles of scholarship can complement each other.

Studies of commercial seaborne empires, even more than studies of military sea power, have highlighted the political, social, and economic values carried by those who engage in maritime affairs as well as the impact of their successes and failures on the land-locked society at home. There are also some pioneering works which suggest that a holistic, integrated approach to the seacoast may be valued more in the years to come. Mahan wrote an analysis of naval warfare in civilization in order that his work might have programmatic, prospective value. Few writers since have had such ambition, but now there is reason to anticipate greater demand for conceptual studies of the maritime world. After three quarters of a century of land wars and empires and conquest of the near and far reaches of space, the oceans are becoming the central arena of the 1975 to 2000 period. The importance of navies has only increased since World War Two, whether measured by the strength of the Soviet fleets or by the American resort to blockades of Cuba and Hanoi; in law and in science the oceans are, for the first time, the principal unexplored topic. What this means for the study of society and human achievement remains to be seen.

**Painting**

Should it be so surprising that the seventeenth-century maritime world developed without making much of an impact on French and English arts and letters? The discovery of new continents and voyages of adventure had their place in European culture, but the practical use of the sea did not represent the culmination of a long-nourished project or the final realization of a cherished dream. Writers, painters, and political theorists in France and England were preoccupied with other problems, and so were largely unconcerned about what was happening on Europe’s maritime frontier. And they kept their distance from the sea of commercial routes and naval engagements until those had long lost their novelty. When literature and the study of society finally made room for the experiences and achievements of the new maritime age, they integrated that age into existing cultural patterns without trying to understand it in its own terms. Painting reacted toward the sea in much the same way. The immediacy and color of paintings make them—and their subjects—seem much more accessible than books. But painters came no closer than writers to resolving the choice between creating new forms of thought and symbols for seafaring or refining and updating older ones.

Although the Dutch enthusiastically stimulated marine painting throughout the seventeenth century, the English and French never really cared for the genre or understood why the Dutch liked it so much. Some Frenchmen, such as Pierre Puget, approximated a marine style on their own, especially in drawings of boats, but that aspect of their work went unrewarded and unnoticed. The Van de Veldes lived in England after 1672, painting the naval encounters of England’s fleets, but their work had only minimal influ-
ence on painting there for quite a while, and was appreciated chiefly for its documentary value. Instead, most artists and their patrons preferred works of art that referred to the sea in symbols (the shell) or in caricature (mythological figures). The works of Claude Gelee were popular in France and England for this reason. Claude’s idealized architectural settings by the sea and his natural coastline subjects encouraged viewing the sea according to already determined cultural lines; the sea was included in a composition for the effect it made, for what the painter could do with it, and not for its own sake or interest. The decision of whether or not to paint water, ships, and seashore was an artistic one; these subjects were portrayed to heighten the contrast between the familiar and the exotic, perhaps, or to idealize the sea. For whatever the reasons, Claude, and others who used the sea in the same way, kept the sea firmly fixed in a typology of nature. There was no hint in their works of the new nautical age around them.

This changed somewhat at the turn of the eighteenth century. No one knows why the change in England and France toward a more realistic view of the sea occurred then rather than earlier or later. Painters such as Samuel Scott and the younger Van de Velde in England started out with a new approach to the seashore itself, as if they still had difficulty in leaving the shore for the open sea. Instead of painting an imaginary setting of buildings, rocks, and people in front of a sea that receded evenly toward a golden horizon, they showed a strong interest in seaports as they actually were; they found artistic value in the play of light on the sights of a port; they made the real seem ideal and immediate when they gave artistic dignity to scenes everyone had lived with but had not yet taken seriously as subjects for painting. These artists painted what they saw, freezing a moment in the life of a port city onto canvas. Their paintings, however, never achieved the renown of Canaletto’s paintings of the Thames from Somerset House Terrace and Joseph Vernet’s unprecedented and unsurpassed sweeping survey of French ports, both executed at mid-eighteenth century. Canaletto and Vernet did not always try to paint an actual scene; instead, they sometimes rearranged what could be noticed on the waterfront for greater variety and interest, placing people, boats, and objects where they wished within the fixed architectural frame. The architectural background was reproduced with fidelity so that the activities represented in the foreground might appear realistic, but this search for effect only heightened the sense of disappointment that cityscapes did not in fact look like pictures of them. Their work implied a criticism of port cities as they actually appeared, as if the changing scenes of life in such places were unintelligible and lacking in beauty until the painter restructured them. From this it was a short step to the design and construction of waterfront ensembles that would transform any quayside into a setting worthy of a picture.

Perhaps the pursuit of the sublime was more difficult in such a familiar and busy place as a port city waterfront than on a remote peninsula or on a mountain road. Efforts to endow the activities of a port city with meaning in visual terms enlarged the artist’s subject matter from what it had been in the seventeenth century, but it also called attention to the maritime world for its
aesthetic potential rather than for its inherent qualities. This is an important point. Until the nineteenth century true marine painting—ships and the sea—remained the concern only of those officers, merchants, and administrators already possessing a practical knowledge of the sea. Two painters sailed with Cook in 1768 to record his voyage and its discoveries, something no one (except Prince Maurice of Nassau, when he went to Brazil in 1637) had thought to do in previous centuries. If Turner had not grown up near London’s docks, it is unlikely that he would have turned to marine subjects so early in life. In 1803 Constable spent a month on a merchant ship and made 130 sketches of ships and weather conditions, but his experience was still extraordinary. By and large the English and French public ready to acquire and appreciate paintings of ships at sea and of their ports of call was as small as the number of artists capable of executing such works. Canaletto and Vernet were successful precisely because they understood that realism alone would not satisfy the aesthetic temper of the age.

Any mention of painting’s subsequent uses of the seas must be brief; the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in England and France await their interpreters. Roger B. Stein has shown how a nation’s maritime culture can be interpreted from three hundred years of art. His Seascapes and the American Imagination is not just a catalogue of paintings, for Stein was able to relate the technical aspects of composition and execution of successive themes and styles to changing demands for knowledge of the sea. Similar studies must be carried out for England and France as well. Such studies would perhaps threaten the heroic, isolated position of an artist like Turner, but they would immeasurably enrich our knowledge of painting and its place in an economy of knowledge. Such studies would concentrate on paintings that are currently noticed for their subject matter of ships, seas, men, and battles, and not for their painterly qualities. And such studies would renew the connections between travel and the sea.

In the eighteenth century paintings of the outdoors were often made as souvenirs for tourists on the grand tour. In the late nineteenth century new patterns of resort travel opened the Breton, Norman, and Mediterranean coasts of France to those who lived far away from them. Painting was never the same (as evidenced by works by Cézanne, Monet, Matisse, Boudin, Marquet, Dufy, etc.). How the painters got to the sea has been considered a minor and inconsequential part of the story of modern art. In fact, in cultural terms, France was largely detached from the Mediterranean during most of the nineteenth century. Only since the 1880s has the Mediterranean extended its influence over more aspects of French life—food, fashion, leisure, and politics and economics, too—than at any other time since the sixteenth century. Today Cézanne’s view of Marseille from L’Estaque still looks true-to-life, but so much has changed as a result of half a century of urbanization along the coast from the Spanish to the Italian border that it is not easy to reconstruct what life along the French Mediterranean was like before 1914. When the stories of the creation of resort complexes facing the sea in Languedoc, the new industrial center at Fos, and the Côte d’Azur from Cannes to Menton, as
well as the story of the fate of the hinterland from the Pyrenees to the Alps are
told, the first chapter should belong to the imaginations of painters and
tourists.

Decorative Planning in London and Bordeaux

This conceptual framework for understanding the erosion of seventeenth­
century port city planning—which had as its function the production of an
urban framework suitable for the exploitation of the sea—raises more ques­
tions about maritime culture than it answers. Even so, this demonstration of
the enlarged capacity of artistic expression for comprehending and describing
the maritime world is important to the thesis that the altered cultural climate
in which planning operated had more to do with changes in port city planning
than the internal evolution of planning and building styles did.

In the seventeenth century the problems of port city growth had been
among the most demanding faced by city planners anywhere in the European
world, and solutions to those problems must be ranked among the most crea­
tive and advanced urban projects of that century. Artist-planners had not
tried to conform to or reflect the aesthetic trends of the day, but rather had
adopted, rejected, or created styles according to their appropriateness in a
given situation, a judgment based on practical considerations of city change
and function. Not so in the eighteenth century. Those charged with fostering
maritime commerce and naval power then concerned themselves but little
with the spatial character and growth patterns of port cities. Planning for port
cities derived its formal vocabulary from styles already established in more
courty or rural settings, such as Nancy and Bath. The limited place of port
city planning in the history of eighteenth-century architecture and urbanism
is a measure of the extent to which Europeans were linking maritime affairs to
painting, literature, and political and economic studies. As the problems of sea
power and maritime affairs were understood in the eighteenth century, port
city planning did not appear to have anything practical to contribute. The
erosion of port city planning was not brought about by changes within the
architectural world, but by changes without.

Eighteenth-century elites might have followed the example of Liverpool
merchants and strenuously avoided any further involvement with port city
planning. Instead, they embraced planning for its decorative value alone, and
claimed front-row seats in the theater of the waterfront. They fixed upon the
very features of the waterfront that made it a working space—light, room,
access to water, and concentration of buildings and activities—and tried to
orchestrate them into an aesthetic enhancement of the cityscape. The sights,
sounds, and spaces associated with maritime affairs were to echo the rhythms
of seafaring for the pleasure of those who knew enough to recognize their
importance. London and Bordeaux, discussed here, are two cities where such
activity occurred.

The thrust toward waterside spatial design for purely decorative ends
had been present in the seventeenth century. Scandinavian city designs were
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often monumental and impractical, but they were not purely decorative, for they were supposed to have an influence on patterns of port city growth. Truly monumental design for aesthetic and decorative purposes only had been limited to the great rural palaces of the rich and powerful. The châteaux at Chantilly and Versailles were set off by moats, canals, and water fountains; Isola Bella of Count Carlo Borromeo and the Villa d’Este in Italy, and Greenwich, Westbury Court, and Chatsworth in England are other seventeenth-century examples. There were also the fanciful and imaginary waterside palaces of Sweden’s Erik Dahlberg (published in his Suecia Antiqua et Hodierna), complete with pleasure-boating, the view of water from the land and of land from the water, and the play of light by day and night. Such willful and playful ordering of nature was supposed to enhance the status of those who lived and played in such settings; it was supposed to satisfy their sense of their own worth. In the eighteenth century this sort of design was proposed for vast areas of great port cities.

London

One of the first to want to apply this pastoral dream to a city was John Evelyn. His plan for restoring burnt-out London “to far greater Beauty Commodiousness and Magnificence”35 was flawed by this contradiction: what enhanced the visual aspect of the city often was achieved at the expense of practicality. Thus Evelyn wanted warehouses, if placed along the Thames, to be located beneath beautiful houses on the embankment, but preferred that the warehouses be moved altogether to the south side of the Thames so that the north embankment (“of the noblest aspect”) could be given over entirely and uncompromisingly to “palaces.” The “deformed” structures lining London Bridge would have to go; they detracted from the bridge’s beauty and from the whole city near the river. What Evelyn had in mind was a London of lovely vistas and architectural properties in which the movement and manufacture of goods could be kept to a minimum. Christopher Wren’s plan for London also gave prominence to a regular linear embankment along the Thames, and the plans of both men gave prominence to the commercial City at the expense of courtly Westminster. But neither seems to have grasped the fact that merchants would show little interest in grand perspectives and symmetrical alignments. There is an additional damaging criticism of plans by Evelyn and Wren: the appearance of feasibility notwithstanding, neither set of plans would have helped London solve its problems of growth. Those problems required political and financial solutions before a spatial plan for metropolitan expansion would be relevant. Either Evelyn and Wren overlooked this or they presumed that their plans would raise the vision of the City fathers beyond the City’s walls—in either case, they were wrong. Evelyn referred with praise to the great variety of cityscapes in Italian stage design; he wanted London to dazzle and impress the spectator; and he would have made the city’s appearance into something that could be contemplated aesthetically for its own sake, without reference to political, social, and economic activities that made the space possible and gave it usefulness. Evelyn demanded too much of
London's leaders, but he was not the last person to hope that London might become as beautiful as it was powerful.

Defoe, who hinted that this was his vision as well, imagined the result in different terms than Evelyn. Defoe found the activity and color of the port evocative of London's greatness and vitality. He refused to contrast (as Evelyn had) economic and industrial activity with a quieter, more dignified urban lifestyle—to the port's disadvantage. To Defoe the life of the city—what people did in it—made the city interesting. Defoe described London's markets, trade, and harbor at great length in his Tour, and in his concluding survey of the city's prominent features he ranked markets after churches and before palaces. But Defoe was dissatisfied with the London he knew: "It is the disaster of London that it is thus stretched out in buildings, just as the pleasure of every builder or undertaker of buildings, and as the convenience of the people directs, whether for trade or otherwise; and thus has spread the face of it in a most strange line, confus'd manner out of all shape, uncompact and unequal; neither long or broad, round or square." Defoe explicitly included London's waterfront in this criticism. It would be wrong, however, to say that Defoe thought of beauty in conventional terms. His praise of neoclassical, Newtonian symmetry did not refer to spatial, geometric order as a reflection of pure form or as a symbol of absolute political power. Rather, Defoe wanted to order space so that the impression of what occurred in that space would be more easily and pleasurably seen. This objective represented a more complex idea than Evelyn's. Defoe could not articulate or explain this, but could only hint at it. He was in fact invoking the appeal of the sublime, which few others of his day cared to explore.

It is important to take notice of Defoe: he wanted to monumentalize a specific and unique part of the city, its waterfront, that was being spurned because it was of economic interest only, and he wanted to do so for the reason that the activities associated with seafaring were important and interesting enough to deserve an architectonic stone frame. A beautified waterfront would add to London's total impression of orderedness. Defoe's view of ordered space attributed to certain architectural or spatial elements the power to stimulate the imagination by provoking the spectator to notice the activities they contained. Whereas Evelyn had been dismayed by the apparent disorder maritime commerce created in London and had wanted to remove the sight of it as completely as possible, Defoe wanted to make dockside and waterfront activities attractive to see.

Defoe wrote about London early in the eighteenth century, when artists and architects had limited opportunities to act on his or anyone's ideas. By the end of the eighteenth century architects began to rebuild large areas of the city. The planning for Georgian London remains a rich area for research; the work of George Dance the Younger (1768–1825) is representative of the period. Dance confronted London's enormous growth as it approached one million inhabitants. As clerk of the City Works he found government willing, for the first time, to tear down the old walls and take an interest in development beyond. Dance planned a number of residential developments and
communications roads, principally for Corporation land, some of which were executed. He also planned major portside works, a double bridge to replace old London Bridge (1786), the Bridgeyard Warehouses (1796), and the Legal Quays (1796–1802), none of which was executed. Dance, who understood the conditions for residential-estate development far better than he did those for waterfront development, emphasized the value of central city land in order to enforce the City’s monopoly over customs, taxation, and trade. His Legal Quays project would have lured commodity traffic away from the south and southeast bank to London’s center so areas that had a semi-industrial character could become residential areas. Dance must have hoped that the merchants who owned land already given over to commerce and industry outside the City could be lured into approving his schemes by the prospect of profits to be made on the redevelopment of their property. But the merchants must have understood that their cooperation would enhance the City’s control over trade and at the same time limit their activities to a monumental structure (adapted from Roman models), which lacked as necessary a feature as a network of streets around it to alleviate the inevitable traffic congestion. There were good reasons why the future users of Dance’s warehouses wanted nothing to do with his projects.

The solution that was in fact executed instead of Dance’s schemes in the early nineteenth century simply transferred the City’s privileges to downstream docks that were privately financed and built by engineers, not by architects. The amount of available land in central London could not have been adequate to match the annual increase in the volume of trade: in the period from 1800 to 1815 the new docks built along the southeastern reaches of London’s Thameside totalled 172 acres, and that figure omits warehouses and roadways. Thus Dance’s schemes seem poorly adapted to the scale of late-eighteenth-century London. Dance should have tried to regularize and rationalize two centuries of London waterfront development; instead, he tried to undo that pattern with his schemes for docks (truly monumental structures by size alone) to be installed in parts of the city where they did not belong. One can only hypothesize that he was led by the conviction that central London’s beauty could be enhanced with the Legal Quays project as a centerpiece in a vast scheme to redevelop the riverfront for residential space, as if the upper classes would enjoy being nearer to a dock than a garden. Dance’s projects echo the more absolute, dominating role for architecture in city space typical of the late eighteenth century because he apparently had no sense of the demands seafaring placed on a port city. He seems to have thought of maritime commerce as something that could fit into a building, like a parish into a church; he did not consider whether his projects might enhance or threaten London’s commercial and industrial activities. Defoe only wanted to improve the architectural settings in which Londoners worked; Dance wanted to alter the spatial distribution of activities in order to create opportunities for himself to design great buildings. What is important is not the caution of London’s government, which failed to approve any of Dance’s three port schemes, but Dance’s feeling that the schemes should be approved. The re-
jected plans for Restoration and Georgian London have more than antiquarian value, for they help illuminate the widening separation of port city planning from an understanding of maritime affairs.

Bordeaux

Helen Rosenau has suggested that Dance might have been influenced by projects for Bordeaux that had been reproduced as engravings and circulated across Europe. From 1726 on, successive intendants and architects had promoted schemes to beautify Bordeaux, a port city that had preserved its traditional role as a wine-exporting base while becoming one of the critical links in the European-African-American trade of manufactured goods, slaves, and sugar. The principal harbor area stretched along the Garonne riverfront of the old city. Most of the projects called for straightening out the city’s riverfront facade with new housing and with symmetrically designed formal squares for principal buildings such as the Bourse (construction begun in the 1730s). No overall plan dominated the work of successive architects and administrators. They approached the city instead with a critical sense that so much maritime trade deserved a more flattering harbor than Bordeaux could as yet offer. New structures—houses, the Bourse, a halle for the tax authorities—were assigned a place in the city along the river according to where they might best improve the city’s appearance. The number of images of Neptune decorating the new buildings and monuments (statues, arches) must have been truly remarkable.

Two unexecuted projects best represent the spirit that encouraged so much construction. Both date from around 1785 and had as their inception the proposal to tear down the Château-Trompette fort, which stood alongside
the river and blocked the city's growth to the southeast. Remodeled (by Mazarin) after the city's mid-seventeenth-century revolt (the Ormée) had been crushed, the fort had come to symbolize political relations between city and state that Louis XVI's enlightened ministers thought anachronistic. (They were obviously unaware that Bordeaux still stood for a different approach to politics than that expressed by the Bourbon centralized state, an approach articulated during the Revolution through the Girondins.) The architect Victor Louis offered a project, sometimes attributed to his subordinate Combes, for a great semicircular place with a statue of the king in its center and thirteen streets radiating inland from it (figure 6.3). The thirteen streets represented the newly independent United States, with which Bordeaux's merchants traded so heavily. This project was accepted in favor of another one by Lhote in 1785. The place was to have carried the name of the sponsoring minister, Calonne, who soon fell from power. Only one building was ever constructed from Louis's plan. Another project for this space was put forward by Dupré de Saint-Maur, intendant for Guyenne from 1776 to 1784, who tried to do much more than plan a place where the Château-Trompette stood. His place was smaller than Louis's and called for only five radiating streets, but he compensated by imagining a bridge across the Garonne, several new streets in Bordeaux, and a long semicircular canal enclosing the entire city beyond its limits.

A Hamburg merchant named Meyer visited late-eighteenth-century Bordeaux, and his impressions reveal why Louis and Saint-Maur conceived such impractical if formally stunning projects: "Along the Garonne and for a league in length stretches a line of great houses... the continual coming and going of great and small boats, the tumult of loading and unloading on the banks, what a pleasant painting [this is], ceaselessly renewed by the effects of light which change at all hours of the day!" Meyer's image of Bordeaux related art to life in a way that illuminates the eighteenth-century decline of port city planning. Artist-planners were no longer concerned with making Bordeaux a more permanent or profitable commercial base (they failed to improve the inadequate traffic connections between the quays and the rest of the city); their concern was with satisfying the tastes of all the Meyers of Europe, those who wanted to ennoble commerce by surrounding it with aesthetic symbols that were divorced from the problems and profits of commercial activity. The architectonic harmony of a row of new buildings along the waterfront did nothing for shipping; it could be evaluated only by aesthetic or stylistic criteria that were derived from notions of sensibility and beauty that had nothing to do with maritime affairs.

Ironically, all that remains to be seen of Bordeaux's participation in the open Atlantic world are its eighteenth-century buildings. The city's commercial enterprise did not survive the Revolutionary-Napoleonic era with enough resources and flexibility to prosper in an industrial age. Had Bordeaux been as great a nineteenth-century port as it had been an eighteenth-century one, then it is doubtful if so many of its eighteenth-century buildings would have survived intact to the present. Bordeaux, even more than London, is a symbol of what happened when port city planning, having lost its claim to sustain
conditions favorable to commercial expansion and sea power, became a dec-
corative, monumental reflection of the importance of the maritime world. As
a survey of American cities illustrates, even monumental planning had so little
to offer that it barely survived in the nineteenth century.

**Port City Planning**
**since the Eighteenth Century: The American Example**

Neither an in-depth study nor a full survey of American sea and river port
cities belongs in this book. What follows are some views of and comments
upon the place of American ports in the evolution of port city planning.
Mention of American cities is appropriate for two reasons. First, American
maritime culture, already referred to in earlier sections of this chapter, can be
seen as an integral part of the European-dominated Atlantic world. And
second, reference to American cities illustrates, perhaps more graphically
than a further discussion of European cities could (given existing research),
what happened when monumental planning could do little to alleviate the
problems encountered by fast-growing port cities: engineering replaced art
and architecture as the principal method of approach for those concerned
with the urban spatial dimensions of maritime commerce and sea power.41

American eighteenth-century ports, serving as colonial outposts of Euro-
pean empires, had neither the role nor the resources to make use of decora-
tive, monumental planning. This does not mean that the colonial period lacks
interest—on the contrary. For example, there were differences between
French, Spanish, and English colonial cities that can be traced to the absence
or presence of planning.42 The Spanish Law of the Indies provided for a
distinctive colonial checkerboard pattern with an emphasis on the community
center. The French were concerned with beautifying their colonial cities by
regularizing the street patterns and inserting prominent public structures and
spaces into the urban form. English attempts to regulate colonial cityspace
were more limited, but occasionally, as in Annapolis, Savannah, and in some
New England towns, an appealing spatial form was imposed on the land. The
scale of eighteenth-century port cities of America, like that of the new Baltic
ports of the seventeenth-century Swedish empire, was too small to make use
of highly conceptual and sophisticated planning.

The port city of Halifax, England’s response to the French fortress city of
Louisbourg, reflects a typical pattern of development and some of the un-
usual problems planning encountered. In April 1764 Captain Hugh Debbieg,
an English engineer, surveyed English possessions in order to provide the
cartographic information necessary to the proper placement of fortifications.
About Halifax he wrote:

> In the Year 1759 a large careening wharf was begun at Halifax; Lieut. Col-
> onel Meckellar Engineer was there at that time taking a survey and making
> reports for military works; he represented to the proper officer the impossibility
> of the works affording the least protection the Wharf and Storehouses . . . before
> any progress had been made in that expensive work; but no regard was paid to his
remonstrances. The work was continued, large storehouses built; a great space of ground enclosed, and every other convenience provided for heaving down his Majesty's Ships of War. If the Building of the Wharf and Storehouses had been postponed until the Engineers Report and Plans had been considered at home, doubtless a more defendable Situation would have been chosen: where it now stands, it is past the power of Art to cover it with Works; for such is the uncommon Bizarrity of the Ground round Halifax Harbour, that the only spot capable of being Fortified is that on which the Town stands, and the stockaded Fort and line were formerly built. The Memorialist himself sounded the harbour in the most particular manner, and found a greater depth of Water before the Town than where the Dock is now placed; and My Lord Co will assured him many times that there were several places upon the harbour equally fit for the Dock Yard or Careening Wharf.

This last Circumstance alone might be sufficient to convince all Men of the absolute and indispensable necessity of a Co-operation between the Sea Officers and the Engineers, before such important concerns are begun.... The Indiscriminate method of granting Lands at Halifax, and in many other parts of America, where Forts have been Erected, merits the most Serious attention of the Government: It has been already observed how much the Batteries on the Beach are confined by the Wharfs where Houses, and dwellings of the Merchants at Halifax, the purchase of which will cost the Crown Forty or Fifty Thousand pounds; and if it should ever be Resolved to Fortify on that Harbor, the Lands and Tenements which must also in such a case be purchased by the Crown, will amount to half as much more.43

The problems facing those who would plan American port cities included more than a lack of cooperation among authorities and lack of control over a local community. These problems alone make us wonder what the French achieved when they regularized the streets of Montreal44 and saw to it that Louisbourg grew according to plan (figure 6.4); we can also only wonder what they hoped to achieve by a project to add to Quebec's waterfront by extending the city onto land to be reclaimed from the St. Lawrence (figure 6.5). These were to have been monumental cities in the New World, built not according to Old World standards, but according to the colonial norm. Planners who could not overcome these problems—and that most clearly was the situation for those in the English colonies—were confined to small projects of local improvements. Perhaps this was fortunate, because planners who did design complete cities for America often did not take into account how a city and its society would utilize city space. Indeed, it appears that concern for the aesthetic and functional benefits of planned city space were of such low priority in America that the relations between different parts of the city were never really understood. Without such an understanding practical and monumental planning were equally unlikely phenomena. Philadelphia was one of the few cities to receive large-scale planning, and so a look at it might demonstrate how irrelevant port city planning was in the American colonial setting.

Philadelphia was originally laid out by William Penn to fill in all the land between the Delaware and the Schukyll Rivers, but the city grew into, rather than according to, its plan. In Penn's plan the five principal squares of the city were to sustain a rich social community life looking inward, away from the
rivers, but Philadelphia finally covered the space between the two rivers only in the nineteenth century. Philadelphia first grew north and south along the Delaware; near the river were concentrated its principal buildings and most animated life. The consequences of that pattern of growth on the city’s social and political life were enormous. Philadelphia’s merchants were located in the middle of the city, and not just at its edge; even as a minority, their influence outweighed that of any other group. This cannot be attributed to spatial geography alone, but clearly Penn’s plan was out of proportion to the city’s first century and a half of growth, and it clearly failed to provide the structures that could have influenced the city’s growth during that period.

What can be seen in Philadelphia can also be noticed in many other eighteenth-century American cities (New York and Boston, for example): people worked from the assumption that the waterfront was an adjunct space of a land city, and they did not realize that the reverse, a preponderant influence of the waterfront over the city, was closer to the truth.

Given the circumscribed role and limited value of planning in the New World, Americans had little reason to believe that the growth of their port
cities owed anything to urban appearance and spatial patterns. The absence of port city planning, however, did not mean that the waterfront was unimportant, but only that its relation to the larger city did not need to be structured, or even understood. The impact of this development on planning’s evolution was the same in the New World as in the Old: neither practical nor ideal port city planning any longer seemed relevant to those concerned with expanding maritime affairs.

Americans appreciated the waterfront and its adjacent district as a place for work and social gathering in a way that they did not care to transform into formal order, a way that owed nothing and taught nothing to the city planner. Port cities with their congestion, noise, and dirt must have appeared to city planners as particularly inauspicious places to set off works of architectural magnificence; planners were interested in beauty in contrast to, not as a functional part of, the material world. At least the inhabitants of the port city could still discover for themselves the singular pleasures of the waterfront. Warehouses, docks, quays, and the movements of men, ships, and cargoes were all close at hand to the pedestrian. The crowds of “water-gazers” fasci-
nated Melville, who placed this description of New York at the beginning of *Moby Dick*:

Circumambulate the city of a dreamy Sabbath afternoon. Go from Corlears Hook to Coenties Slip, and from thence, by Whitehall, northward. What do you see? —Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries. Some leaning against the spikes; some seated upon the pier-heads; some looking over the bulwarks of ships from China; some high aloft in the rigging, as if striving to get a still better seaward peep. But these are all landsmen; of week days pent up in lath and plaster—tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks. How then is this? Are the green fields gone? What do they here?

But look! here come more crowds, pacing straight for the water, and seemingly bound for a dive. Strange! Nothing will content them but the extremest limit of the land; loitering under the shady lee of yonder warehouses will not suffice. No. They must get just as nigh the water as they possibly can without falling in. And there they stand—miles of them—leagues. Inlanders all, they come from lanes and alleys, streets and avenues—north, east, south, and west. Yet here they all unite. Tell me, does the magnetic virtue of the needles of the compasses of all those ships attract them thither? Melville answered that question with a long statement on his idea of the effect of the sight of water on man: it sets him to thinking, dreaming.

The point is that Melville’s New York was similar to Turner’s London: in both cities people found their way to the waterfront without the planner guiding them there. By the middle of the nineteenth century such access became increasingly difficult in port cities. The eighteenth-century port city could survive the introduction of the steamboat, which put few additional burdens on it, but it could not survive the railroad. Business and government introduced the railroad onto the land between the waterfront and the city, and then used it to extend new port facilities beyond the principal areas of urban growth to places where greater room made economies possible. With the railroad, the carriage of bulk commodities on land became as practical as their transport on the sea. The railroad, not the steamship, introduced new economic requirements and material structures into the port city, and indeed, made the development of some new port cities possible (Tacoma, for example, and such English seacoast suburbs as Southport and Brighton). The practical considerations of Van Schoonbeke and Colbert of course seem far removed from the industrial age, but it is useful to remember that the distinctive era of European city-building they nurtured had already come to an end before the industrial revolution made new demands on port city space.

Because port city planning evolved in the context of Western culture, only engineers were considered qualified to adjust the port city to the railroad. Usually that process of adjustment put an end to the easy, informal access of the city dweller to the waterfront because no one cared to find a way to make urban growth and public access to the waterfront compatible. Historians who assume the task of exploring nineteenth- and twentieth-century port cities will face the challenge of explaining successive phases of growth.
and the subsequent separation of port from city. (Ironically, Manhattan kept its earlier qualities as a port city for a longer period of time than most cities because accidents of nature left the railroads in New Jersey or uptown and inland: the city Melville and Whitman knew could still provide Henry James and Alfred Stieglitz with literary or visual images based on the waterfront.) In the 1968 Report of the President's Council on Recreation and Natural Beauty, From Sea to Shining Sea, only 11 of 300 pages refer to the seacoast.

"From 1824 to 1966, the federal government invested $22 billion in coastal and Great Lake dredging and other harbor construction to facilitate economic development. How much the government spent to rehabilitate the waterfront... is too negligible to have been tabulated."

We should not minimize the inherent aesthetic architectural strength of the structures engineers built in the eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century port city. Engineers created the appropriate spatial settings for the maritime world once artist-planners ceased doing so. Some of their achievements are easy to recognize and appreciate today: nineteenth-century bridges, warehouses, docks, even housing districts, can be assigned cultural and historical value now more than ever before. But we remain dismayed and bewildered when we confront massive railroad staging yards and the precise interweaving of tracks with buildings and piers that set a "maritime style" in the nineteenth-century city as much as or maybe more than anything else. Moreover, we find it easier to pay homage to the nineteenth-century engineers whose works are close enough to Boston, San Francisco, Bristol, and London to call attention to themselves than to those twentieth-century engineers whose industrial and transportation structures extend between Newark and the Hudson, around San Francisco Bay, or between Rotterdam and the North Sea. There is a potential contradiction in the present-day appreciation and preservation of historical engineering structures in port cities. We now try to preserve and even reuse port structures that, at the time they were built, were praised only for their technical features and commercial value; at the same time, we criticize those contemporary structures that are as strictly utilitarian and devoid of cultural appeal and significance to us as the warehouses and docks of the nineteenth-century were to people then. Is this not another sign that those who operate the maritime world and those who grant cultural significance to its artifacts still belong to two separate cultures, cultures which, apparently, continue to have little to say to one another?

When the railroad became critical to the growth of port cities and the operation of commercial and military maritime affairs, opportunities to embellish port cities with monumental planning diminished greatly. Even today in Bordeaux a railroad track stands between some of the noble facades of the eighteenth century and the Garonne River. Planning for port cities in the nineteenth century became indistinguishable from planning for other kinds of cities. Yet the multiplication of railroad lines, the competition among them, and their influence over municipal politics, land-use patterns, and economic growth could create problems of such magnitude that even business interests agreed to help solve them with port city planning. When the Chicago business community, at the beginning of the twentieth century, realized that the pros-
pects for their city’s growth were threatened by such problems, they sponsored a master plan for their city. The result, produced by Daniel H. Burnham and Edward H. Bennett and their staff in 1908, is one of the most famous proposals for molding city space ever set forth. It is important to mention this plan here because, for the first time in nearly a century, planners tried to design a city from the shoreline inland. In their ambition to regularize Chicago’s transportation, commercial and civic activities, and social development, Burnham and Bennett rediscovered that the imaginative use of waterfronts could have an immense value. How they arrived at that understanding and what they did with it are topics germane to this discussion.51

The authors of the plan traced its origins to the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago. This World’s Fair did indeed play a decisive role in American urbanism. “For the first time,” wrote historian Talbot Hamlin, “hundreds of thousands of Americans saw a large group of buildings harmoniously and powerfully arranged in a plan of great variety, perfect balance and strong climax effect.” Water was used to great effect in the exposition. The more informal (from the point of view of architecture and landscape) and the more formal parts were related to each other by means of a waterway between the lagoon and an inner lake, and the broad sweep of Lake Michigan itself was woven into the whole composition, deemed “a stroke of genius.” Whether the exposition itself retarded the development and diffusion of the modern architectural idiom remains a point of controversy. From the point of view of port city planning, however, this architectonic use of water represented a decisive break with convention and inherited taste.

What made the exposition the point of departure for a plan for Chicago was, as Burnham and Bennett noted, the realization that the “dignity, beauty and convenience” of the fairgrounds “seemed to call for the improvement of the water front of the city.” The first plans, initiated in the year after the fair, called for the expansion of Chicago parks to extend the length of the city’s South Shore. After that plan was adopted, in 1904, the city passed legislation to permit authorities to acquire the shoreline from private owners. In the final plan (1908), Burnham and Bennett opened the entire shoreline from Evanston to Indiana (23.5 miles long) to recreational use and scenic promenades, with docks for shipping located at the Calumet River and immediately north of the Chicago River. The shoreline was to be divided into two parallel elements, the outer one a succession of peninsulas and narrow islands created by filling along a line following the profile of the shore, the inner a necklace of lagoons protected by the filled areas. The design was scientifically and economically sound, for it was based on the hydrography of Lake Michigan and on the prospect of using the city’s waste (then one million cubic yards yearly, enough to raise twenty acres of material seven feet above the water in a depth of twenty feet).54

This waterfront plan, with its yacht and commercial harbors, boulevards, beaches, and breakwaters, was not an embellishment, but a central part of Burnham and Bennett’s larger vision of Chicago. They saw the city as a commercial center, and understood that its growth would continue. They devoted the rest of their plan to an inland park system, a ring loop of railroad
lines, a network of diagonal circulation roads, and a monumental civic center. By providing sufficient room for and connection points between each of these elements, they put together a comprehensive plan, “presenting the city as a complete organism in which all its functions are related one to another in such a manner that it will become a unit.” To that end, they protected the shorelines from most commercial uses (having found room for them elsewhere) and opened it up to the large numbers of the city’s inhabitants who might otherwise not have access to it. The lakefront became, as they put it, “the great base of Chicago’s street circulation.” One need only see their plan (figure 6.7) to understand that they located all the other parts of the city in relation to the waterfront.

The planners extended their attention to the waterfront even to the point where the business center straddled the Chicago River. Vehicular traffic over the river was slowed considerably by many bridges, the river itself was polluted, and riparians encroached upon the channel itself. Existing patterns of waterfront use were among the most important problems Burnham and Bennett had to solve. They proposed new lakeside docks to draw most shipping away from the river and to take account of the barge traffic that would then connect river and lake, and they proposed that riverside and surface traffic be separated from each other (figure 6.6). They even arranged the movement of pedestrians and vehicles in such a way that dockside activities would be clearly visible to anyone on his way from one part of the city to another: the utilitarian and aesthetic features of the new Chicago as a water-oriented city could be introduced by similar structures.

Criticism of the Chicago plan is easy: it did not take slums or the automobile into account, and its balanced, axial, geometric design seems removed from more progressive aesthetic trends of the early twentieth century. But serious as such comments are, they do not diminish the importance of that plan in a history of port city planning. For the first time in a century, a plan for the progressive development of a merchant metropolis began at the water’s edge. If flaws and contradictions make the Chicago plan seem anachronistic today, we should also remember that few plans or projects since have attempted such an intimate relation between water and land. Does this mean that such plans are impossible, or at least impractical? I believe the answer is “no,” but that the need for them will not be strongly felt as long as Western man can increase his exploitation of maritime resources without demanding changes in existing urban forms. New port cities in the 1970s are seen as nothing more than transshipment points for container traffic and bulk cargoes such as oil. In this country, environmental impact studies, now required by law, have prevented government and public alike from allowing anything more than the most limited economic activities at these places. Such studies often fail to identify what standards are to be used to determine environmental impact, and that lack of clarity reflects general confusion about what aspects of development are harmful. The prediction value of environmental impact studies is perhaps less important, however, than their role in encouraging the belief that secondary growth problems (population expansion, intensive land use, pollution, etc.) overwhelm authorities because they
lack adequate planning enforcement mechanisms. So in America it has become easier to limit the scale of a new port project initially than to develop new spatial forms and planning mechanisms appropriate for the creation of new port cities. Things are likely to remain this way until the scale of maritime exploitation compels the pursuit of more radical, innovative alternatives.

There is evidence that this may be happening. The cause of historical preservation in New Orleans produced a plan to protect the Vieux Carré with due concern not only for that area's economic welfare but for the economic and commercial growth of the city as well. In New York the high cost of land has encouraged the development of two housing projects on waterfront land, heretofore despised for housing because of its location (the two projects, one at the Battery, the other on Roosevelt Island, may be compromised by the financial weakness of city and state). In Monte Carlo, Loews has constructed a hotel by the Mediterranean that required the construction of an artificial rock, an indication that many projects of significance can be identified in resort locations. Riverfronts and seafronts may well be the last open space in the city, and new architectural forms may be needed for such sites. An even better example than the Loews Monte Carlo is the new megastructure, Re-

naissance Center, along the Detroit River in downtown Detroit. It stands above railroad tracks, suggesting an effective way to undo the work of the nineteenth century. Combining a hotel, offices, apartments, and shops, the Renaissance Center may well be a civic symbol of an even larger undertaking, the systematic study of the entire Detroit River and the land adjacent to it (the first such study of any industrial American river). Taken together, the Center and the river study suggest the scale of thought and imagination a riverfront metropolis may require for its survival in the late twentieth century.

Approaching the waterfront from the utopian perspective of the megastructure as the solution to technical and formally aesthetic problems in architecture, several people have already envisaged new forms of urban and social organization to be built along or above the water. Captain Jacques Cousteau’s own thinking on artificial islands aptly parallels their work. There is an English project for a sea city “2000.” Others are Yona Friedman’s “Paris spatial,” Kiyonori Kikutake’s Marine Civilization, and Kenzo Tange’s plan for Tokyo. The Japanese models reflect a particular concern for evolutionary change and flexibility of structure—what had been, in seventeenth-century Europe, the distinguishing feature of all practical city planning. But these
architects have relied on new structural forms and technical construction features to allow a city to grow and change, whereas seventeenth-century planners could easily manipulate only the spatial design.

All these examples illustrate the idea that is repeated in every chapter of the Chicago plan, namely, that the survival of a city may depend in part upon man’s ability, first, to criticize existing approaches to building near the water, and second, to reformulate the space of the port city in completely new ways. Port city planning and architecture with a nautical style may have a future as individuals and societies, perhaps with little knowledge of or concern for maritime affairs but with a stake in enhancing the opportunities cities provide, perceive the waterfront as a new frontier. The result in cultural terms may be impressive if it allows people to recover access to the water and the activities associated with its exploitation. Of course it is impossible to predict how access to the waterfront would affect the thoughts and actions of city residents. On the basis of the historical record presented in this book, however, it is not unreasonable to suggest that an understanding of present and future uses of the sea will only be deepened by attention to what happens to port city space.

There is more: the Western world is poised at the beginning of a new age of maritime exploitation, one that is expected to be as different from the previous three hundred years of maritime exploitation as the age that began in the seventeenth century was different from its predecessor. The ongoing United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea derives its importance from that very perception. No one expects the political or legal formulas, the military strategies, or the economic methods developed during the seventeenth century and since to be relevant much longer. Although the current expansion of maritime commerce and naval power has not produced any significant rethinking of the way port cities should be built, the creation of new types of port cities, of new forms for existing ones, and of new models for community living beside the sea may become as important to those concerned with maritime affairs as to those devoted to the growth and welfare of cities. Port city planning is not and has never been a substitute for either the material and technological resources that effective commercial and military sea power commands or the political will to marshall those resources toward specific goals, but it can provide a setting for the development of those resources and for the exercise of that will. If planners and architects are called upon to provide such settings, then the seventeenth-century record of port city planning may give us a point of departure for understanding yet-unimagined ways of building port cities. Even if port city planning plays a minuscule part in the maritime age about to begin, that, too, will be worth noticing. Both the history of planning and the history of the absence of planning bring us a recognition that the urban environment, however men fashion it, conditions and symbolizes how a society approaches the world beyond itself. The effort, which began in seventeenth-century Europe, to place an understanding of maritime affairs at the center of urban civilization may not be over.