

There are many stories about ghost ships and mystery ships. Ghost ships are generally supernatural, like the Flying Dutchman which appears and disappears. The story has many forms as expected in folklore, but in general it involves a captain who swears to round a stormy cape if it take all eternity. For a kind of blasphemy he is punished for having to sail forever and it is considered very unlucky to meet the ship. The story has become the subject of an opera by Richard Wagner (Der fliegende Holländer) and of some films like Pandora and the Flying Dutchman. An excerpt from the overture to the opera can be heard on the web site for the course.



In Chile, a ghost ship called the Caleuche.



There are stories that deal with it carrying the people who have died at sea and who now revel in constant parties. The workers are deceased sailors (no rest for the weary). It is one of the most well known legends of the Chilota mythology of southern Chile describes the Caleuche, a ghost ship that appears every night near the island of Chiloe. According to local legend, the ship is a kind of conscious being that sails the waters around the area, carrying with it the spirits of all the people who have drowned at sea. When spotted, the Caleuche is said to be strikingly beautiful and bright, and is always accompanied by the sounds of party music and people laughing. After appearing for a few moments, the ship is then said to disappear or submerge itself under the water. According to Chilota mythology, the spirits

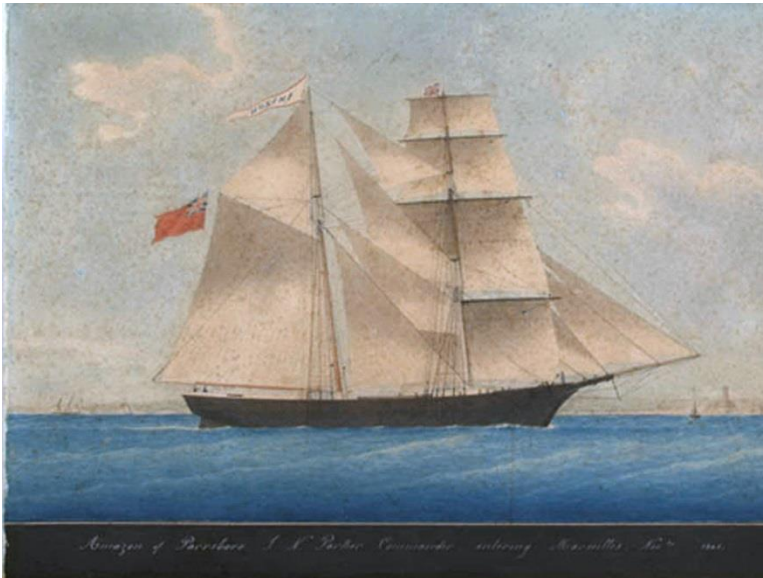
of the drowned are summoned to the ship by the Sirena Chilota, the Pincoya, and the Picoy, three Chilota "water spirits" who resemble mermaids. Once aboard the phantom ship, the drowned are said to be able to resume their life as it was before they died. It is unusual in that the ship is thought to be conscious. People are invited on board

A glow on ships can be caused by "St. Elmo's Fire" an atmospheric condition that cause as "glow" on masts and yard arms.





Another famous “phantom ship” is the Mary Celeste which left the East River in NYC bound for Genoa.



A ship, the Dei Gratia, which had also left NY (before the Mary Celeste) found the Mary Celeste sailing with no crew and everything on board as though the crew had suddenly vanished. The captain, his wife and daughter and crew members were never heard of again. The story was made famous by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle J. Habakuk Jephson's Statement, which veered off from the facts and led to much of the confusion about what actually happened. Recently it has been concluded that the ship had only one chronometer (clock) on board – which appears to have been in error. Most ships carried many – up to 20 and more. Why would this have been? What problems would a damaged clock be to the Mary Celeste?

Also involved in folklore are interesting “creatures” like Mermaids, Giant Krakens and Sea serpents.

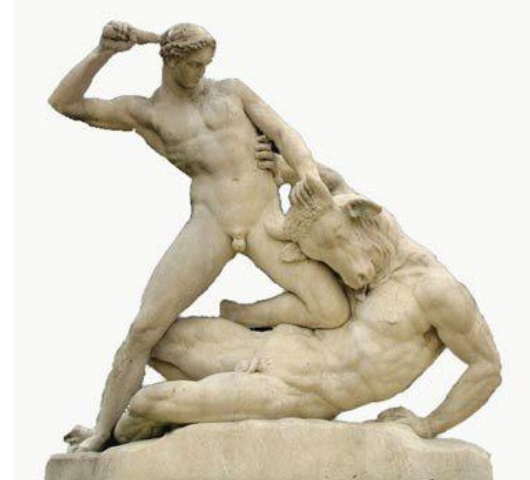
Mermaids are thought to be the result of sailors (being at sea so long) seeing manatees and believing them to be women.



It seems to me you would have to be at sea a pretty long time to mistake these for this:



On a more realistic note, however, the sailors may have seen or heard about manatees from other sailors who sailed along the coast of Africa where they are also found. More significantly though, there are many half animal half human critters in western mythology: Satyrs (1/2 goat 1/2 human), centaurs (1/2 horse 1/2 human), minotaurs (1/2 bull 1/2 human) and so on.

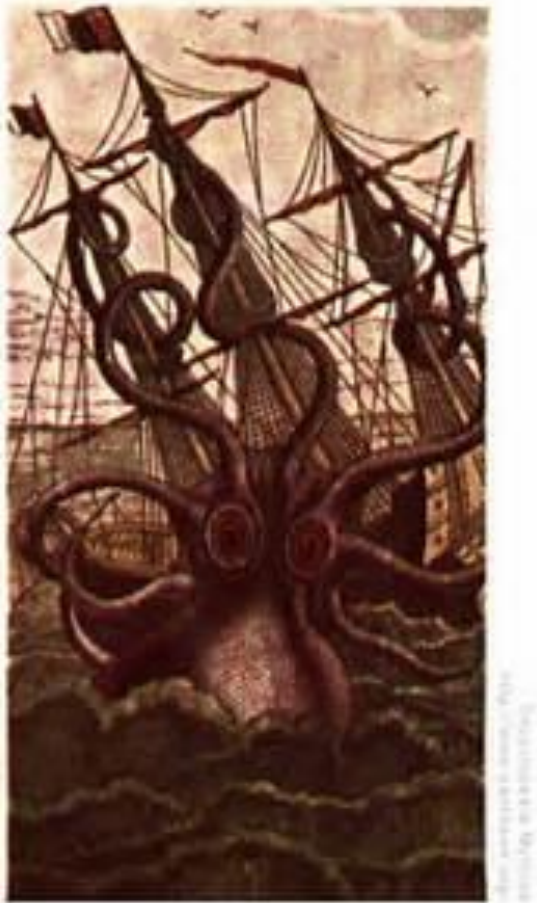


There are many cultures in which there are these mixed human/animal creatures. The Apache have a deer woman who is human (upper) and deer (lower). Mohawk has a kind of mermaid that inhabits the St. Lawrence River. Transformers or shape shifters who can alter their appearance often from human to animal as happens with werewolves, and the occasional vampire who seems able to change into a bat or other animal are also found in many cultures.

Anthropologists Victor Turner points out that some African masks exhibit creature which are half human and half other animal and in some cases half human half plant or thing. He suggests that this is a "questioning" of

boundary categories – in what ways are humans like other animals and in what ways different?

Other mystical sea beasts include the “kraken” an animal believed to have been inspired by the appearance of a giant squid.



The idea that the squid could actually reach up into a ship and pluck sailors off the masts seems far fetched. The squid uses buoyancy from the water for support. Once out of the water the ability to raise its arms up would be very limited.

Sea Serpents





Video

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6oUkMJE\\_ko](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6oUkMJE_ko)

The sea serpent may have the "oarfish" – the largest bony fish – as its inspiration

Folklore is another aspect of culture. Any bit of folklore is generally defined as not having an "authentic" version. That is to say there is no known "author" or definitive version which can be cited as correct or not.

Generally, folklorists may make technical distinctions between different kinds of narratives (called "oral literature"). For example, some folklorists define three types "myths", "tales" and "legends".

Technically, myths are stories which are believed to be true and sacred (thereby making them something quite different than the dictionary use of the word where it means something untrue).

Legends are stories believed (more or less sometimes) to be true about real people but are not sacred (George Washington and the Cherry Tree).

Tales (as in fairy tales) are stories not believed to be true at all. Many of these have specific forms. For example, in the West, Fairy Tales begin "Once upon a time", and end "and they all lived happily ever after". In Japan they begin "mukashi, mukashi" "A long time ago, a long time ago"

Within different cultures there are many folkloric stories about the ocean and the creatures (real and imaginary) that live in it. The idea that the manatees

inspired the concept of the mermaid is not a narrative, so it isn't any of the three. But stories about mermaids catching people and drowning them are. The Japanese have a critter called a Kappa that looks something like a turtle with a dish on its head. There must always be water in the dish or it will die. There are stories about these creatures drowning people.

The indigenous people on the NW Coast have a belief about animals. Each animal is a kind of person – salmon people, otter people who dress in the skins of that animal. Salmon people swim up the rivers from the ocean where they are caught. The fishermen must be careful to return all the bones of the fish to the river so that they may return to the “salmon home” where they redress as salmon fish and can return up the rivers again. In some stories all the bones are not returned and a person appears in a village, who is missing some body part. The people recognize the person as one of the animal people all of whose bones have not been returned to the water and are now missing the part of the body which lacks the bone. There is often a frantic hunt to locate the bone and return it to the water. Once done the animal-person disappears and can regain their full body.

The salmon are born in the streams and then head out to the ocean where they live most their lives. They finally return to the stream of the birth where they spawn and die.

Some comparative psychologists (animal behaviorists) have thought that the chemicals in the bones of the fish may clue the offspring later as to which stream to come up to spawn, since the salmon return to the streams of their birth.

The Mohawks, an Iroquoian speaking nation located in upstate New York and Canada have stories in which creatures that are half human and have fish appear – a kind of mermaid. In the stories they can be dangerous and often lure men into the water. In some cases the men turn into mermen (or whatever male mermaids are called – merbutlers?). The creatures are usually female but occasionally they are male.

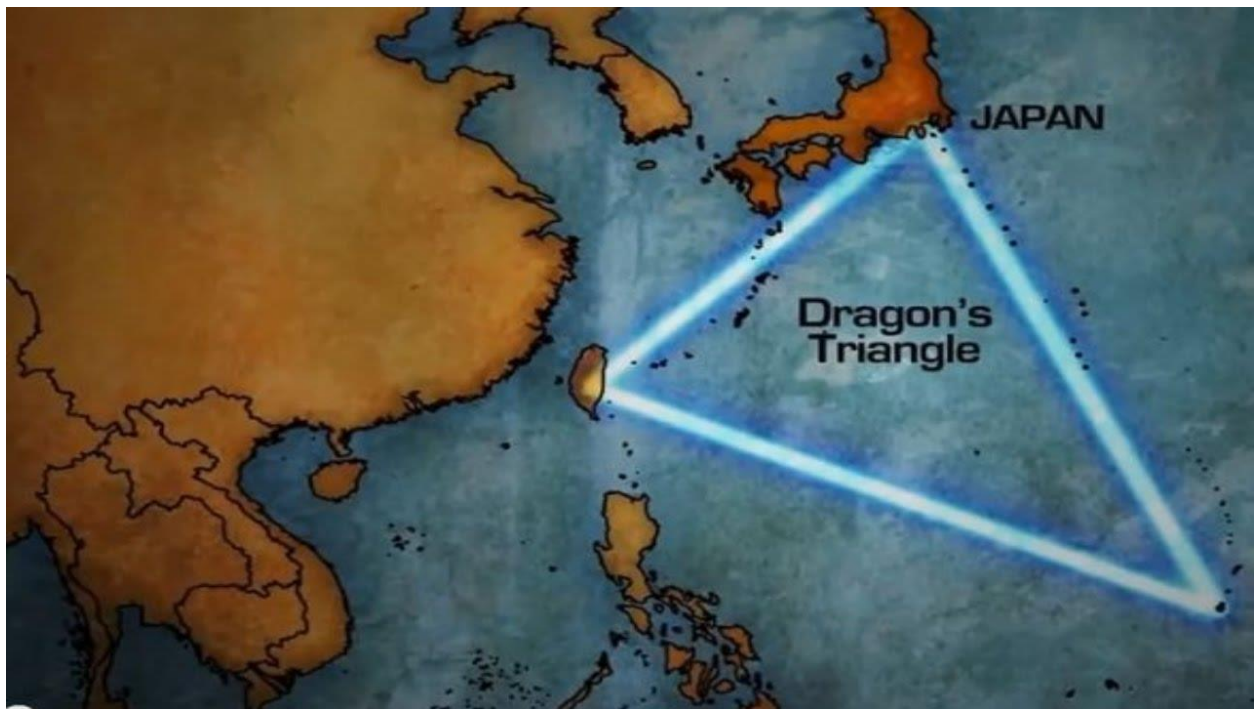
There are a number of areas of the ocean which appear “supernatural” - The Bermuda Triangle; The Sargasso Sea and the Devil's Triangle. Doubtless there are others



The Bermuda Triangle is a loosely defined area in which ships, planes, people and the like seem to have disappeared in what are thought of as abnormally high numbers. This view is not shared by the insurance companies who do not raise your rates if you are travelling through the area, nor by the US Coast Guard whose records show no abnormalities. It is true there are a large number of ship which have sunk there, but given the fact it is intensively traveled this is not odd.

The triangle expands to include anything mysterious and was even extended far enough to include the Mary Celeste mystery, which is no longer a mystery,

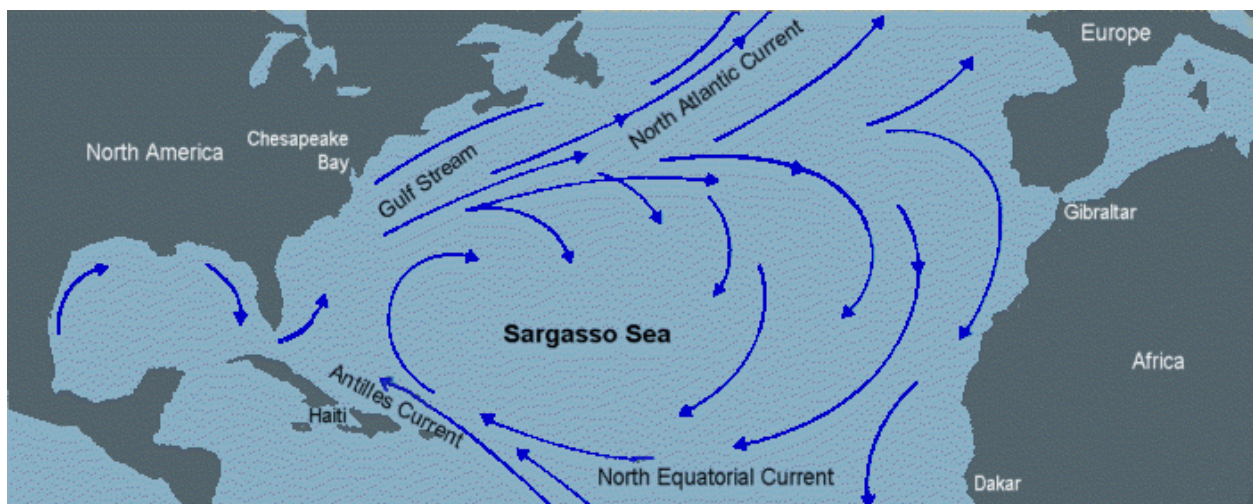
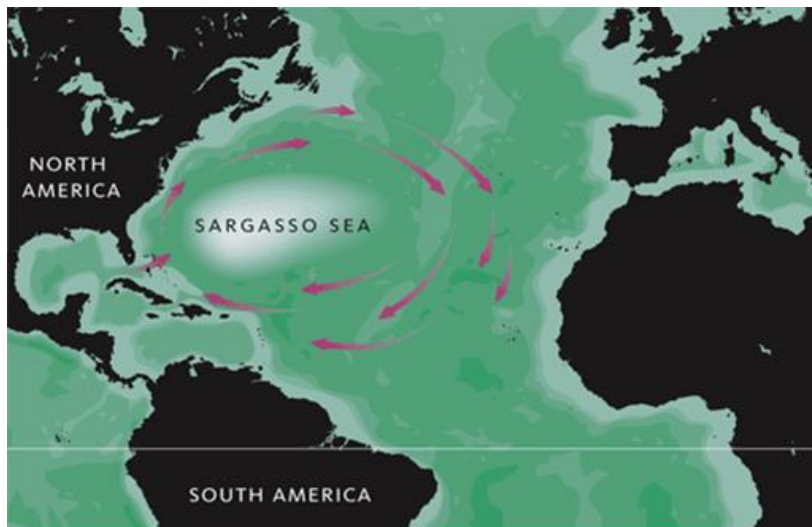
**A similar area has been "located" near Japan called "The Devil's Triangle". The word "Ma" (魔) is basically "an evil spirit" It sometimes occurs as "Maoo" (魔王) where the "oo" means "king"**





This is an area which is prone to undersea earthquakes and volcanic activity so there is some geological activity here. It seems no more dangerous than the Bermuda triangle and many of the "reports" of happenings here are grossly misrepresented – and many happened well outside the area. Like the Bermuda triangle is can be increased in size to include some new event.

Finally there is the Sargasso Sea – the only sea with no land boundary.





The Sargasso sea is named for a kind of sea weed called "sargassum". It is basically a "gyre" It lies in the "horse latitudes" (about 20-35 degrees N) and often has little or no wind. It has become popularized in horror stories as a place where ships have been becalmed for generations. Actually it poses no threat to navigation or shipping. Because of the currents it has a high degree of plastic pollutants in it.

Ecologically it is important since it is the spawning place for many catadromous (organisms born in the sea, but live in fresh water) eels.