

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.

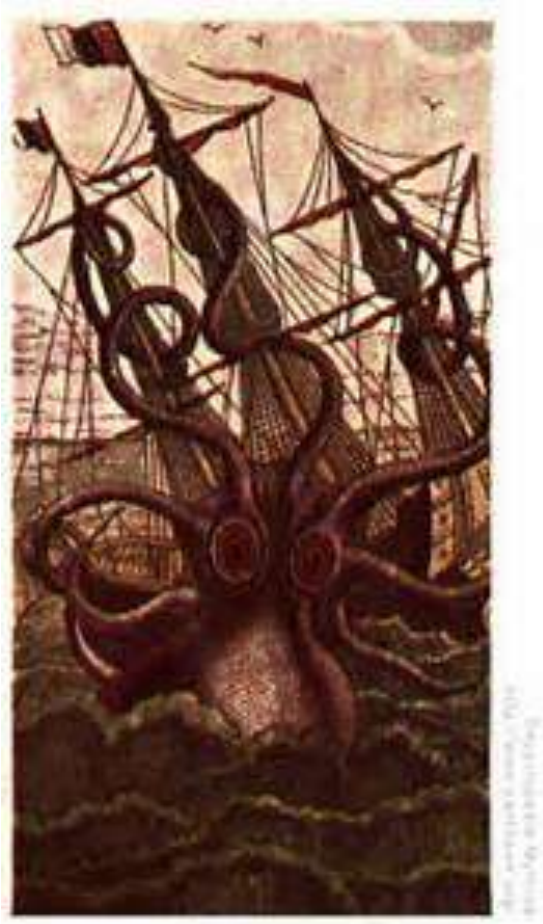


There are many cultures in which there are these mixed human/animal creatures. The Apache have a deer woman who is human (upper) and deer (lower). Mohawk has a kind of mermaid that inhabits the St. Lawrence River. Transformers or shape shifters who can alter their appearance often from

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.

Anthropologist Victor Turner points out that some African masks exhibit creatures 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

The sea serpent may have the “oarfish” – the largest bony fish – as its inspiration.

Aside from food tabus and the like there is the ability to move something through religion into a sacred realm through a sanctification process. This is in effect what Abraham Lincoln says when, in the Gettysburg Address he says:

We are met on a great battle field of that war. We come to dedicate a portion of it, as a final resting place for those who died here, that the nation might live. This we may, in all propriety do.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate we cannot consecrate we cannot hallow, this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have hallowed it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here; while it can never forget what they did here. Here the idea of consecration or sanctification is through deed – not somebody simply saying something. Religion allows for the

process of moving things into the “sacred” realm. There are several rituals both here and in other cultures in which this can happen:

The use of water in a ritual.

Western Baptism: spiritual cleansing. Since water is a kind of universal solvent and cleans things, then symbolically it can clean as well. Hence water frequently plays a part in religions often “cleaning” the profane” realm from the “sacred”.

Baptism is a ritual which Christ ostensibly went in Jan 6th – epiphany and on that day Orthodox Christians celebrate. In Tarpon Springs Florida and a few other places in the world, a crucifix is thrown into the water and young men dive for it. The person who recovers it is supposed to have good fortune thereafter.

VIDEO

The actual baptism of people today may involve simply the sprinkling of water on the person, or full immersion. In some sects of Baptism, especially in the South, the baptism takes place in a river, paralleling the baptism of Jesus.

Pearl Primus, a famous dancer who studied African dance had her son with her when she was in Africa studying the dances. Her son became old enough to get a name when they were with the Ashanti – a rather large nation of people. So he got name there even the head of the Ashanti got up and danced.

When she and her son returned to the US she took him to be baptized. When they finished the ritual (which by the way includes an exorcism) the son’s reaction was “When do they dance?”

This is a powerful event and has been turned into dance form by Alvin Ailey in his signature dance piece “Revelations”

Video of Revelations

Discussions of religion have led us to questions of food and non-food taboos, mythical stories and mythical animals, ghost ships and mystery ships. Now we look at some rituals that have to do with baptism, purification and changes of status – rites of passage or transition

Japanese Misogi: Not all religions have a moral base, or, more importantly, a revealed text. Judaism, Christianity and Islam – three religions seen as separate, but all having a shared history (Judaism predicts a messiah; Christianity produces one and Islam sees Mohammed as the last of the prophets, but regards Jesus as a great prophet as well). All of them have a divinely inspired text to which one can refer – The Old Testament, the New Testament and the Koran.

In Japan there are 2 major religions: Shinto, an indigenous religion and Buddhism which arrived in Japan some 1300 years ago, It is not regarded as “alien” the way say “Christianity” is.

According to one set of figures, there are about 120 million people in Japan of whom 92 million are Shintoists and 89 million are Buddhists. This often confuses people who realize that 91 million and 89 million add up to 180 million not 120 million. The puzzle is easily resolved when one realizes that most Japanese practice both. Shinto is generally involved with forces of life, while Buddhism deals with death. A Shinto priest may have funeral services performed by Buddhist priest, while a Buddhist priest may be married by a Shinto priest or have the construction of a new temple protected by a Shinto ritual

The Kojiki – the oldest book in Japan tells of the creation of the universe and hence many Americans and Europeans equate it with the Bible. But in fact, it is the work of the court of one of the early rulers who was concerned about the fact that everywhere he went in Japan there were different stories about how the world came into being. So he asked to court to conduct an investigation into how the world began. The members of the court went around and finally produced the Kojiki – “The Writing of Ancient Things”. This they gave to the emperor with the statement that they have no idea how the world came into being, but this is what people say. So rather than a resealed text, the Kojiki is a sort of Senate Subcommittee Hearing on the origin of things. While the book is important since it documents much of what was going on in the religious thought at about 600 AD it does not count as “divine revelation”. If you recite the opening in Japanese to many Japanese they think it sounds odd, but don’t know what it is. Compare that with asking Americans “Where does the line come from that says ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’.”

Now in the Kojiki two of the kami (a word that translates as "sacred" or "divine" or "god" and is known to most Americans in the phrase "kami kaze") are involved in a story in which one dies and the other goes to the afterworld to bring her back (this is a common story found in many many cultures) Although he fails, on his return he must purify himself from his contact with dead things and proceeds to wash himself. From various parts of his body spring the pantheon of the Japanese gods – or kami. People when they die become kami so there are a lot of them in Japan - several million in fact!

Today, people in Japan do a kind of ritual purification with water called "misogi". This is often done in the winter in the cold ocean water or by standing under a cold waterfall while in effect, detaching one's self from the mundane world.

Video of Japanese misogi ritual

Sanctifying by salt: Salt is what remains after sea water evaporates. In Japan, salt is used ritually for purification.

In Japan, there are several stratified classes of people, the lowest of which are called "The Eta". These are something akin to the untouchable caste members in India and like them have been involved with dead bodies (often animals) which can be polluting.

In pre WWII Japan the Eta lived in separate parts of the city known to be where Eta lived. They are physically indistinct from the other Japanese (Unlike the Ainu – an aboriginal population somewhat akin to American Indians here).

If an Eta came into a shop, it was not unusual for the owner to put a small pile of salt by the entrance way to purify the place.

During the war, extensive bombing caused a good deal of dislocation and people were forced to move quickly. Often Eta moved from an Eta neighborhood to a non Eta neighborhood in another city, before anyone could check where they lived previously. With enough moving around, many Eta simply blended in with the rest of the Japanese and lost their identity as Eta.

After the WWII it was illegal to discriminate against Eta. While many had simply "passed" into Japanese society, some Eta demanded some sort of

action on the part of the government. As a result, they were given special status in terms of things like the handling of dead animals. This presented a problem that will be discussed later relative to whaling

Most commonly now, the use of salt as a sanctifying device can be seen in Sumo matches. Sumo is a form of Japanese wrestling. It is done on a raised platform and the action is confined to a circle or ring on the top. (Boxing in America claims to be done in a ring, but in fact is done in a square!)

At any rate, Sumo wrestling is very old and has links to the religion. Before an actual bout begins, the wrestlers throw salt around the ring, purifying it before the bout.

Video of throwing salt in Sumo

Now we look at some rituals that have to do with baptism, purification and changes of status – rites of passage or transition

Crossing the line ceremonies: A rite of passage or transition marking a change of status. These transitions may be marked on the body with things like tattoos.

Among individual rituals are tattooing as well (One song says "A sailor ain't a sailor til a sailor's been tattooed"). Tattooing falls under a number of categories – religious, artistic and practical.

At one level, it is a symbolic marker of a rite of passage. The subject of body modification has received a lot of attention.

Several kinds of body modification are defined:

Note that the same modification can be symbolized in different ways:

Accidental – a scar resulting from an accident (a fall, a car crash - even a dueling match)

By product – a scar resulting from an operation

A deliberate act: ritual scarification to mark status or achievement (runner has a road running on his leg; military person gets a tattoo when he completes basic training, goes into a specialized unit). Some sailors crossing the line get tattoos.

There is a tradition to tattoo a compass on the shoulder - these are often personally done rather than required by the organization. In a sense, one's life history is written on the body. People have written about corporal punishment as the state writing the punishment on the body. Tattoo as a word comes from Polynesia, a place known for its elaborate tattoos. This photo is an old one showing an elderly man with complete face tattooing.



This is more current - there has been an increase in the return to the old custom:



Some men get full body tattoos that are more elaborate:





There is some sexual differentiation in that women tend to tattoo only the chin and lip areas:



The Latin word is "Stigma" and its feeling of negativity still comes through in that word in English.

Tattoos were learned from the Persians who used them to mark slaves so they could be identified if they ran away. The Greeks and Romans seem to have followed this tradition and tattooed "barbarians" who had been brought into the Roman armies to identify them if they deserted.

Ancient Roman sailors did some tattooing since it was a kind of identification of the body in the sense that if a sailor drowned at sea, the readily identifiable parts of the body might be destroyed but a body part with a tattoo might be usable to identify the person.

When Western seafarers picked up the art form (believed to have been on Cook's voyages, the idea was borrowed from the Polynesians, but the style of the art was western.





Tattoos can also be considered an art form. We have talked a bit about some “sailor arts” before like scrimshaw – the etching on ivory. For seafarers it is usually on sperm whale teeth and walrus tusks.



In the crossing of the equator rituals, Poseidon/Neptune holds court and “pollywogs” or “tadpoles” (who have not crossed the equator) are hazed by shellbacks (who have crossed the equator). Hazing is a kind of testing during an invitation. You can see it in the misogi as well as here.

These rituals often do a kind of role reversal where the Traditional social structure is overturned. This happens in some Lenten festivals as well for example. There is generally a good deal of playing with social categories - cross-dressing; a particularly dense or somewhat retarded person being made mayor; and a general reversal of the social order.

Sailors who have already crossed the Equator are known as Shellbacks, and those who have not are nicknamed as Tadpoles or Pollywogs. A Golden Shellback is a person who has crossed the equator at the 180th meridian (the International Date Line). If a person crosses the Equator at the Prime Meridian, they gain status as a Royal Diamond Shellback (aka Emerald Shellback in the USA). Similar ‘fraternities’ in the US Navy and have been adopted by many others. Various sources indicate that these include:

- – Order of the Blue Nose for sailors who have crossed the Arctic Circle.
- – Order of the Red Nose for sailors who have crossed the Antarctic Circle.
- – Order of the Golden Dragon for sailors who have crossed the International Date Line.
- – Order of the Ditch for sailors who have passed through the Panama Canal.
- – Order of the Rock for sailors who have transited the Strait of Gibraltar.
- – Safari to the Suez for sailors who have passed through the Suez Canal.
- – Realm of the Czars for sailors who crossed into the Black Sea.
- – Order of Magellan for sailors who circumnavigated the Earth.
- – Order of the Lakes for sailors who have sailed on all five Great Lakes.

The ritual is a ceremony presided over by King Neptune (the ancient ruler of the seas) who wears a gold crown and holds a trident. Sitting beside him is his wife Queen Amphitrite.

A villainous surgeon, a barber, guards and people dressed as bears, surrounds them. The form and make-up of the ceremony is far from standardized, and the cast can include a wide range of Characters, depending on the experience and imagination of the participants. The cast of characters in the 'play' usually includes:

King Neptune

Queen Amphitrite

Herald

Secretary

Judge

Davey Jones

Chief Police

Chief Bear

Doctor

Barber

Trident Stamper

Policeman

Bear

Video of "Crossing the Line"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B719EplQrYU>

People crossing the line get a certificate like this one:



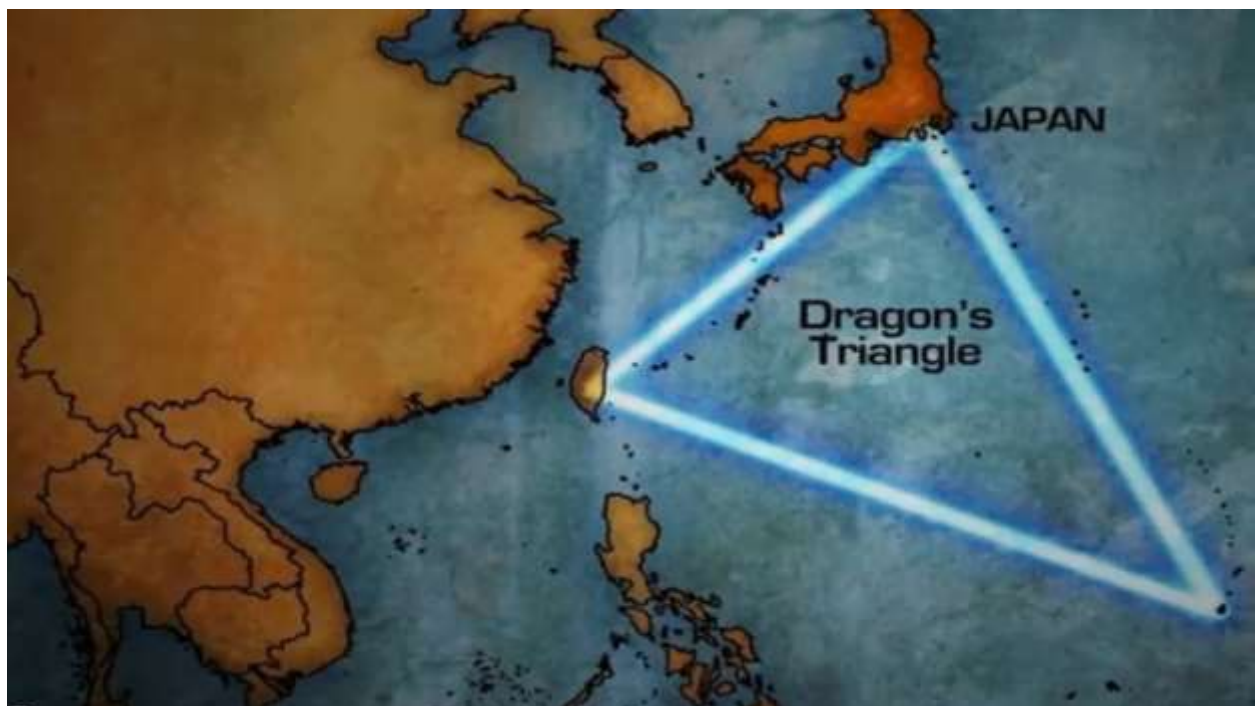
Crossing the line deals with special places in the ocean. There are a number of areas of the ocean which appear "supernatural" - The Bermuda Triangle; The Sargasso Sea and the Devil's Triangle. Doubtless there are others



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 ships which have sunk there, but given the fact it is intensively traveled this is not odd.

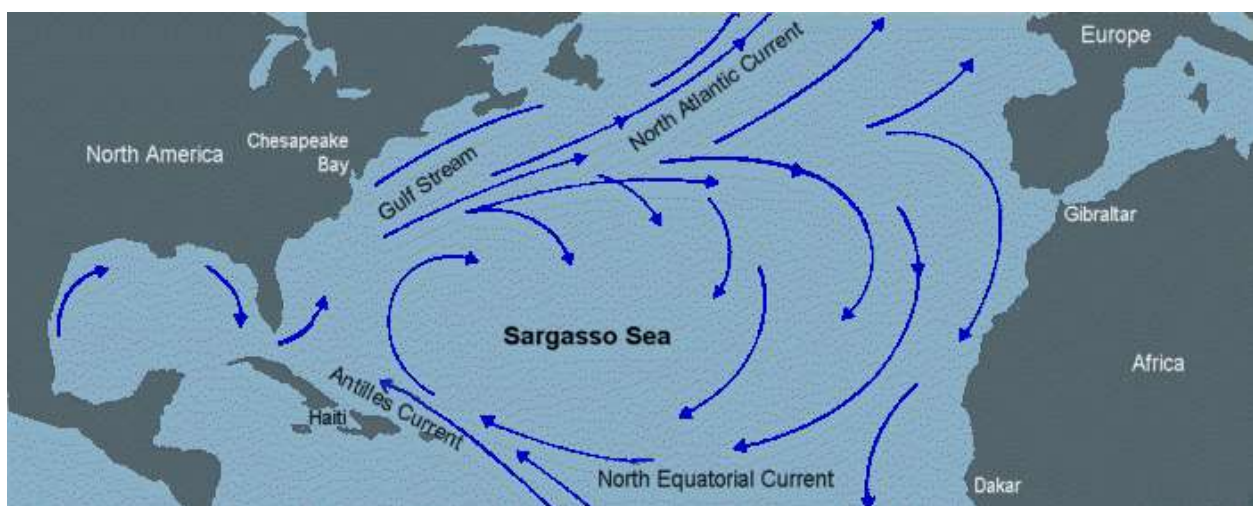
The triangle expands to include anything mysterious and was even extended far enough to include the Mary Celeste mystery, which is no longer a mystery,

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 eels.