

## The Gods of the Sea

Japan is often imagined as a nation with a long history of whaling. In this innovative new study, Fynn Holm argues that for centuries some regions in early modern Japan did not engage in whaling. In fact, they were actively opposed to it, even resorting to violence when whales were killed. Resistance against whaling was widespread especially in the Northeast among the Japanese fishermen who worshiped whales as the incarnation of Ebisu, the god of the sea. Holm argues that human interactions with whales were much more diverse than the basic hunter–prey relationship, as cetaceans played a pivotal role in proto-industrial fisheries. The advent of industrial whaling in the early twentieth century, however, destroyed this centuries-long equilibrium between humans and whales. In its place, communities in northeast Japan invented a new whaling tradition, which has almost completely eclipsed older forms of human–whale interactions. This title is also available as Open Access.

Fynn Holm is a junior professor for Japanese Studies at University of Tübingen.

*Cambridge Oceanic Histories*

*Edited by*

David Armitage  
Alison Bashford  
Sujit Sivasundaram

Across the world, historians have taken an oceanic turn. New maritime histories offer fresh approaches to the study of global regions, and to long-distance and long-term connections. Cambridge Oceanic Histories includes studies across whole oceans (the Pacific, the Indian, the Atlantic) and particular seas (among them, the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, the North Sea, the Black Sea). The series is global in geography, ecumenical in historical method, and wide in temporal coverage, intended as a key repository for the most innovative transnational and world histories over the *longue durée*. It brings maritime history into productive conversation with other strands of historical research, including environmental history, legal history, intellectual history, labour history, cultural history, economic history and the history of science and technology. The editors invite studies that analyse the human and natural history of the world's oceans and seas from anywhere on the globe and from any and all historical periods.

# The Gods of the Sea

*Whales and Coastal Communities in Northeast  
Japan, c.1600–2019*

---

Fynn Holm

*University of Tübingen*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,  
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of  
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781009305518](http://www.cambridge.org/9781009305518)

DOI: [10.1017/9781009305532](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009305532)

© Fynn Holm 2023

The open access publication of this book has been published with the support of  
the Swiss National Science Foundation.

This work is in copyright. It is subject to statutory exceptions and to the provisions of  
relevant licensing agreements; with the exception of the Creative Commons version  
the link for which is provided below, no reproduction of any part of this work may  
take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

An online version of this work is published at [doi.org/10.1017/9781009305532](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009305532)  
under a Creative Commons Open Access license CC-BY-NC 4.0 which permits  
re-use, distribution and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial  
purposes providing appropriate credit to the original work is given and any  
changes made are indicated. To view a copy of this license visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>

All versions of this work may contain content reproduced under license from  
third parties.

Permission to reproduce this third-party content must be obtained from these  
third-parties directly.

When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI [10.1017/  
9781009305532](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009305532)

First published 2023

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*A Cataloging-in-Publication data record for this book is available from the Library of  
Congress.*

ISBN 978-1-009-30551-8 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence  
or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this  
publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will  
remain, accurate or appropriate.