[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
* 
* 
* Moderator
* 2,564 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Beautiful lush Devon, England
* Interests:Nautical history of the 16-18th centuries and living history based thereon.

Shooting pirates.

[Posted November 18, 2004](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=77070) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=77070)

Whenever the question of ranks on a pirate ship is raised the stock answer is always that the Quartermaster was second in command to the Captain. It has always puzzled me (and I've mentioned this on other threads) why that should be. On every other type of ship from the age of sail which I've seen any evidence of the Quartermasters (plural) are lowish ranking petty officers, well below the master, boatswain, pilot etc.

So I began to wonder why we think that QMs were second in command? Because the books tell us they were. Why do the books tell us they were?

If I knew that one then I wouldn't be posting this thread.

In Captain Roberts' articles the QM gets two shares while the other officers only get 1 1/2 shares, but this could be as much because of the QM's extra duties as because of his seniority.

Apart from those articles I've not managed to find a single period source which suggests that the QM was second in command, but I haven't examined every available source of course.

So, the point of this thread is: does anybody have or know of any decent period source which shows that the QM of pirate ships occupied anything other than their normal seagoing status, ie, low ranking petty officers, but senior to the crewmen?

I'm not yet suggesting that QMs were NOT generally second in command, but without the evidence it's difficult to suggest that they were either. So please, help me out here, if there is evidence then share it, if there isn't then perhaps we should rethink our stock answers regarding pirate ranks.

Thankyou,

[**corsair2k3**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/82-corsair2k3/)

* Ship's Master
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* 
* Member
* 167 posts

[Posted November 18, 2004](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=77077) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=77077)

Greetings,

It's good to be skeptical!

I'm probably opening up some bad cans of worms, but I have several thoughts on this that I'd like to throw out.

First, I'm not sure that I would describe the Quartermaster of a 17th- or 18-century ship as a "Second-in-Command"

I'm not satisfied that I have proof on this point, but am of the opinion that it is very much arguable as to whether there was ANY hierarchy aboard pirate ships; in other words, there is a fair amount of evidence that the organization of pirate crews during "the Golden Age" tended to be far more "functional" (by duties and rights) rather than "hierarchial "(formal chain of command).

Having got that off my chest: there is indeed evidence outside the pages of "Captain Charles Johnson" (whoever he, she or they really were) which attests to the atypical importance of quartermasters aboard pirate vessels.

One very important source for this would be William Snelgrave's account. Another can, I think, be found in that of George Roberts. And, if I am not mistaken, there is at least one trial where reference is made by the Prosecution as to the relative importance of that office abooard pirate vessels.

[i will be glad to post the full citations for Roberts and Snelgrave if any one wants them--at the moment, however, I'm afflicted by a very bad cold and some other physical distress, so can't be as thorough (or probably as lucid) as I might be.

Now, why the atypical role of the quartermaster aboard pirate vessels?

My theory: I've noticed that privateers of the 1680's and 1690's seem to generally have a "Captain's Quartermaster" and a "Company's Quartermaster"

I haven't the oomph tonight for a prolonged disquisition, but I SUSPECT that the Captain's Quartermaster aboard privateers might have been a sort of administrative officer as to distribution of rations and booty (in the technical sense of that overused word).

The Company's Quartermaster, however, seems to have been more like a union rep from what I've seen--a very experienced seaman who acted as an official spokewman for the crew. Because privateers of this period operated on the principle of "No Prey, no Pay" just like pirates, privateering concerns did not have the same clout as did the RN or the merchant captains. They had to take into account the crew's opinion perforce.

Pirate vessels adopted the same organization--but the two offices merged into one--thus creating a situation where what had started as a relatively lowly position became more powerful in day-to-day matters than that of captain.

Don't know if this makes sense or not, but it's time for more aspirin.

The Corsair

www.whydah.com

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
* 
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* Moderator
* 2,564 posts
* Gender:Male
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Shooting pirates.

[Posted November 19, 2004](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=77119) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=77119)

Thankyou Corsair,

I'd be very interested to see the relevant parts of the Snelgrave and Roberts documents, but only once you are feeling better.

I think we are thinking along the same kind of lines, that the quartermaster of a pirate vessels was not necessarily someone of any more importance (in fact there's plenty of evidence that he wasn't), and probably shouldn't be described as the 2IC (which he often is by modern books, articles and experts on bulletin boards), but that he did have duties, of a more civil nature, which stood him apart - a kind of non-commanding adjutant figure. The extra duties ascribed by Johnson to Bart Roberts' QMs corrsepond very closely with the duties of a master at arms on Royal Navy vessels, so in that case at least it seems that he was basically doing 2 jobs, hence the double share.

What I'm trying to show really is whether or not the QMs of pirate vessels really had the elevated status which modern writers have ascribed them, and for me the evidence suggests that they didn't (the evidence I've seen so far anyway). What I'd really like to know about is how quartermasters placed in the trial document you referred to, whether they are described as being of more importance than say, the boatswain (which modern sources tend to do), or whether they are described as having administrative duties in addition to their roles as junior petty officers.

[**JoshuaRed**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/81-joshuared/)

* Dread Pyrate
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* 
* Member
* 1,342 posts

[Posted November 19, 2004](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=77124) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=77124)

I think you're both very much on the right track. My feelings are that the quartermaster was usually just the one guy on ship who everyone trusted. Trusted to represent the crew honestly to the captain, captain to crew, to tally and divide booty, to possess any keys to arms chests, holds, etc...and that it was the venerated trust and respect that earned the QM an extra share. After all, the captain only had to worry about being captain "in matters of giving chase or being chased", yet the QM was always on duty, keeping the peace.

[**corsair2k3**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/82-corsair2k3/)

* Ship's Master
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* Member
* 167 posts

[Posted November 20, 2004](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=77223) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=77223)

Greetings,

Oh, I definitely think the qm was of greater importance than the other officers--on some vessels, even more important than the captain.

QM's were known to take a commanding role in boarding parties, and, when a likely prize was taken, they were almost always put in command of the new prize.

This doesn't mean they were a 2nd in command--as I mentioned earlier, I am of the opinion that pirates of the early 18th century did not have a chain of command--certainly not in the same way RN or merchant vessels did.

They certainly were accorded more respect, though. Definitely more than a boatswain

The William Snelgrave volume I was talking about was A NEW ACCOUNT OF SOME PARTS OF GUINEA AND THE SLAVE TRADE. 1734

The George Roberts volume is THE FOUR VOYAGES OF CAPTAIN GEORGE ROBERTS...WRITTEN BY HIMSELF (1726).

Both accounts are in CAPTURED BY PIRATES John Richard Stephens, editor (& proprietor of www.deadmentellnotales.com)

[if he won't sell you a copy, I will :-) www.whydah.com]

Regards,

The Corsair

Who is on his way back to bed...

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
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[Posted November 20, 2004](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=77233) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=77233)

 Quote

Oh, I definitely think the qm was of greater importance than the other officers--on some vessels, even more important than the captain.

You see, that's the bit I can't get my head round. Yes, I can agree that the QM had extra duties, I can even see that one one occasion at least he was entitled to shares beyond his dues as a result, and I can see that given his "shop steward" status he was more important to pirate vessels than RN or merchant ships. BUT I fail to see the evidence that he was of greater *importance* than the other officers to the ship as a whole.

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This doesn't mean they were a 2nd in command--as I mentioned earlier, I am of the opinion that pirates of the early 18th century did not have a chain of command--certainly not in the same way RN or merchant vessels did.

Any sailing vessel must, to a certain extent, have a chain of command, but I agree that pirate vessels probably had a much looser one than others. One important consideration for merchantmen was to keep the cost down, which included not paying unneccessary officers. I think it's fair to say that by looking at the ranks of merchantmen we get a much better idea of the importance of officers to the actual mechanics of sailing a ship during that period. If you have officers it stands to reason that you have - to a certain extent at least - a chain of command. If officers have no command then they are not officers. However, like I said, I do agree that they would tend to be somewhat looser, principally due I think to the fact that their power rested in the cooperation of those below them.

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That's the kind of thing I am beginning to query. Apart from noting the relative importance of quartermasters in Robert's crew is there any evidence to show that this was **generally** the case, rather than *occasionally* so? I've got quite a bit of evidence gathered which suggests otherwise.

 Quote

Both accounts are in CAPTURED BY PIRATES John Richard Stephens, editor

Thanks, I've heard of it before and thought I really ought to get a copy. I might even come to you first since you've been so helpful and friendly 

[**corsair2k3**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/82-corsair2k3/)

* Ship's Master
* 
* 
* Member
* 167 posts

[Posted November 22, 2004](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=77321) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=77321)

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The other thing to consider is the officers that pirate ships did NOT have. For example, very seldom was there a First Mate and never a Second Mate.

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I am slowly recovering from the plague to the extent that I'm interested in hearing more--one problem in understanding pirate crews of this period is that the witnesses weren't sociologiists, anthropologists or organizational analysts. They were seamen--those who had been captured by pirates. One tip-off though is that in many--if not the majority--of accounts of captured merchant captains, they are intereacting with the pirate QM as much, or more, than the pirate captain.

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I'll set aside a copy!

:-)

While I'm thinking of it: www.whydah.com is setting up a book/film finder section to the site. Watch the Plunder Pages for more details.

I'm also going to be uploading my manuscript bibs there.

Best Regards,

The Corsair

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I'm also going to be uploading my manuscript bibs there.

Best Regards,

The Corsair

[**the Royaliste**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/237-the-royaliste/)

* Pyrate Legend
* 
* 
* Member
* 2,841 posts

[Posted November 22, 2004](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=77323) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=77323)

Hmmm, methinks I be seein' double!!...Gimmee that bottle 'o rum!...Whaddaya do wif a drunken sailor??

[**corsair2k3**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/82-corsair2k3/)

* Ship's Master
* 
* 
* Member
* 167 posts

[Posted November 22, 2004](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=77327) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=77327)

It's the fever, mate!

Curse yellow jack, anyhow!

[And many apologies!]

The Corsair

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
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Shooting pirates.

[Posted November 22, 2004](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=77334) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=77334)

 Quote

Ok--I see what you're saying now. Yes, the QM was not very important to the actual operation of the pirate ship. He was more analogous to a political commissars of the early Red Army.

Precisely. The way I put it to someone else recently was to draw a parallel between the QM on a pirate ship, and a trade union rep in a factory. The TU rep is usually someone of minor impotance to the work of the factory, say a foreman or line manager. He does not really have any say in the running of the factory, he does not decide for example what the factory produces, where they buy their materials from or who they sell to, but he does have a certain sway over how the factory is run. He can for example take issue with the working hours, overtime payments, holiday allowance that sort of thing: but in this it is not his personal power, he is only acting as the representative of the workers at the factory. In the most serious of cases he has the power to bring work to a stop by calling a strike.

The way I see it a pirate QM was similarly placed.

 Quote

The other thing to consider is the officers that pirate ships did NOT have. For example, very seldom was there a First Mate and never a Second Mate.

That could be as much to do with the size of vessel as with anything else. Had any pirates got hold of any really large merchantmen for any length of time it might have been different - however, that is and can only be speculation on both our parts. The real question is how many mates a merchant vessel of *similar size* might have carried. I can't answer that off hand but I can tell you the officers aboard a RN sloop in 1686:

Captain/Master

Boatswain

Carpenter

Cook

Mate (one)

They didn't even **have** a QM!

 Quote

QUOTE

They certainly were accorded more respect, though. Definitely more than a boatswain

That's the kind of thing I am beginning to query.

I am slowly recovering from the plague to the extent that I'm interested in hearing more--one problem in understanding pirate crews of this period is that the witnesses weren't sociologiists, anthropologists or organizational analysts.

True, which is why we must take what evidence there is and analyse it ourselves.

One of my principal reason for disbelieving the importance of QM's put about by so many modern authors is the relative lack of evidence which I have seen, BUT there is quite a bit of evidence against it. There are little snippets in a few sources which suggest that the QM was not as important as otherwise believed. For example, even in Roberts' crew - where the QM is in a higher position than in any other pirate crew I've seen the evidence for - the QM is said to relinquish all authority in time of battle, which suggests that what authority he had was of a civil nature.

However, I think the most telling thing against QM's being of great importance is the evidence of the other surviving articles. As I understand it there are three reliable sets of pirate articles which we can examine (there may be more, but I've never heard of them - evidence to the contrary would be most welcome), Roberts', Lowther's and Phillips'. I have seen one other set, but I think they are a modern invention put out on one website or another. So, let us have a look at the three sets mentioned.

In Roberts' articles the QM was to oversee the settlement of quarrels on land (article VIII). The QM is given 2 shares of any plunder, equal to the Captain (article X). The first point obviosly indicates that the QM had extra civil duties - a supposition which is born out in full by Johnson's subsequent statements. It does NOT suggest that he has any more importance than anyone else except for in the pursuit of his civil duties. his extra share is, I think, a reflection of his extra duties.

I personally believe that it is these articles and Johnson's description of the QM in Roberts' crew which have coloured our opinions of QMs since. For example, the QM is often described as leading boarding parties, which I think comes from Johnson's "...is the first on board any prize...". However a more detailed reading reveals that the QM is the first aboard *after* the prize has been captured to sort out the loot.

To look at Lowther's articles: "1. The Captain is to have two full Shares; the Master is to have one Share and one Half; The Doctor, Mate, Gunner and Boatswain, one Share and one Quarter." Subsequent writers have often inserted the word "quarter" in before Master to give the QM 1 1/2 shares, but this is a modern addition, put in I think because of our belief in the importance of a QM. In the 18thC the master and the QM were totally different things and they would not, in my opinion, have written "master" if they meant "QM"

"4. If any Gold, Jewels, Silver, &c. be found on Board of any Prize or Prizes to the value of a Piece of Eight, & the finder do not deliver it to the Quarter Master in the space of 24 hours he shall...". Again, evidence of extra civil duties, but no evidence of elevated importance, in fact evidence of NO elevated importance.

And finally Phillips': "...the Captain to have one full share and a half in all prizes; the Master, Carpenter, Boatswain, and Gunner shall have one share and a quarter." In fact, no mention is made of a QM in Phillips' crew - probably because they didn't have one. Hardly the most important officer then...

Certainly that evidence is against the QM being given more respect that the boatswain or other officers on the whole.

 Quote

One tip-off though is that in many--if not the majority--of accounts of captured merchant captains, they are intereacting with the pirate QM as much, or more, than the pirate captain.

That doesn't surprise me. The QM was the civil officer with responsibility for assets and plunder. The captain of a captured vessel would surely be considered the responsibility of the QM for that reason.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

One thing I would like to make clear: I am, on this thread and others, talking *generally*. It is easy I'm sure to find one example to discredit any theory or statement, so I am not trying to suggest that my arguments go for *every* pirate ship and crew, only for *most.* .

[**corsair2k3**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/82-corsair2k3/)

* Ship's Master
* 
* 
* Member
* 167 posts

[Posted November 23, 2004](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=77447) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=77447)

 Foxe said:

 Quote

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Corsair:

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Corsair:

This is also a pretty good analogy--but for a few exceptions. It's pretty clear that the QMs of most crews were responsible for certain vital aspects of how the "factory" was run. For example, allocation of provisions, and distribution of plunder. Not to mention frequently being nominated as "plant manager" of new "factories"

Corsair:

 Quote

The other thing to consider is the officers that pirate ships did NOT have. For example, very seldom was there a First Mate and never a Second Mate.

Foxe:

That could be as much to do with the size of vessel as with anything else. Had any pirates got hold of any really large merchantmen for any length of time it might have been different -

Corsair:

>No, no difference--even among gangs like Roberts' which were comparable in size to the crew of a fifth-rate or more

Foxe:

however, that is and can only be speculation on both our parts. The real question is how many mates a merchant vessel of *similar size* might have carried. I can't answer that off hand

Corsair:

From what I've seen, a rough rule of thumb might be one mate if under a hundred tons, two if 100-300, more if it were an Indiaman.

Foxe:

but I can tell you the officers aboard a RN sloop in 1686:

Captain/Master

Boatswain

Carpenter

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Mate (one)

They didn't even **have** a QM!

 Quote

[snip]

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Corsair:

>I think that the real inference to be drawn here is that the Captain's power was absolute in time of battle--a relatively rare occurrence. I don't really think that it's evidence that the QM was no more important than any other officer.

Foxe:

However, I think the most telling thing against QM's being of great importance is the evidence of the other surviving articles. As I understand it there are three reliable sets of pirate articles which we can examine (there may be more, but I've never heard of them - evidence to the contrary would be most welcome), Roberts', Lowther's and Phillips'. I have seen one other set, but I think they are a modern invention put out on one website or another. So, let us have a look at the three sets mentioned.

In Roberts' articles the QM was to oversee the settlement of quarrels on land (article VIII). The QM is given 2 shares of any plunder, equal to the Captain (article X). The first point obviosly indicates that the QM had extra civil duties - a supposition which is born out in full by Johnson's subsequent statements. It does NOT suggest that he has any more importance than anyone else except for in the pursuit of his civil duties. his extra share is, I think, a reflection of his extra duties.

I personally believe that it is these articles and Johnson's description of the QM in Roberts' crew which have coloured our opinions of QMs since. For example, the QM is often described as leading boarding parties, which I think comes from Johnson's "...is the first on board any prize...". However a more detailed reading reveals that the QM is the first aboard *after* the prize has been captured to sort out the loot.

Corsair:

>Actually, there are a number of cases I can think of where the QM was in charge of boarding parties of unsubdued vessels.

Foxe:

To look at Lowther's articles: "1. The Captain is to have two full Shares; the Master is to have one Share and one Half; The Doctor, Mate, Gunner and Boatswain, one Share and one Quarter." Subsequent writers have often inserted the word "quarter" in before Master to give the QM 1 1/2 shares, but this is a modern addition, put in I think because of our belief in the importance of a QM. In the 18thC the master and the QM were totally different things and they would not, in my opinion, have written "master" if they meant "QM"

"4. If any Gold, Jewels, Silver, &c. be found on Board of any Prize or Prizes to the value of a Piece of Eight, & the finder do not deliver it to the Quarter Master in the space of 24 hours he shall...". Again, evidence of extra civil duties, but no evidence of elevated importance, in fact evidence of NO elevated importance.

Corsair:

>Given that their object was money, I would think that the person in charge of safekeeping the boodle would indeed have more prestige/status than, say, the boatswain, or even the sailing master.

Foxe:

And finally Phillips': "...the Captain to have one full share and a half in all prizes; the Master, Carpenter, Boatswain, and Gunner shall have one share and a quarter." In fact, no mention is made of a QM in Phillips' crew - probably because they didn't have one. Hardly the most important officer then...

Corsair:

>IIRC from other evidence related to the Phillips gang, John Rose Archer was QM. Bear in mind that we do not have an actual manuscript copy of any set of Articles from ANY pirate gang of the 18th century. What we have are the reports of "Johnson" and others as to what these Articles were. I therefore think it's important to look at the actual interactions as well as what the [reported] Articles say.

Foxe:

Certainly that evidence is against the QM being given more respect that the boatswain or other officers on the whole.

Corsair:

>I'd like to see a few more snippets of evidence toward the proposition that QMs were basically on the same footing as other officers.

Corsair:

 Quote

One tip-off though is that in many--if not the majority--of accounts of captured merchant captains, they are intereacting with the pirate QM as much, or more, than the pirate captain.

Foxe:

That doesn't surprise me. The QM was the civil officer with responsibility for assets and plunder. The captain of a captured vessel would surely be considered the responsibility of the QM for that reason.

Corsair:

>But there's a matter of relative status involved here --as well as the fact that looting a prize (and all the associated interactions) were the raison d'etre of a pirate crew. Have a look at the Snelgrave and George Roberts accounts and I think you will see what I mean: the handling of a prize was not simply a matter of "Pirate talk, prisoners listen" Captured merchants were able to bargain with pirate gangs re. some issues (and did so successfully in some instances) and the person that they generally negotiated with was the QM. This in turn implies that the pirates considered their QMs as being on a par with the merchant captain.

The 18th-century was a time when relative status was of great importance in any social interaction--whether friendly or hostile. Albeit the pirates were less bound by this than others, I don't see them sending someone little more than a glorified accountant to take charge of a prize.

Here's another possible litmus test: look at the typical piratical "career track". Which of the following tracks was most common?

Master to Captain?

QM to Captain?

Bosun to Captain?

Gunner to Captain?

Surgeon to Captain?

Carpenter to Captain?

[etc]

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

Foxe:

One thing I would like to make clear: I am, on this thread and others, talking *generally*. It is easy I'm sure to find one example to discredit any theory or statement, so I am not trying to suggest that my arguments go for *every* pirate ship and crew, only for *most.* .

ditto that,

The Corsair

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
* 
* 
* Moderator
* 2,564 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Beautiful lush Devon, England
* Interests:Nautical history of the 16-18th centuries and living history based thereon.

Shooting pirates.

[Posted November 24, 2004](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=77467) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=77467)

 Quote

This is also a pretty good analogy--but for a few exceptions. It's pretty clear that the QMs of most crews were responsible for certain vital aspects of how the "factory" was run. For example, allocation of provisions, and distribution of plunder. Not to mention frequently being nominated as "plant manager" of new "factories"

Fair points. The distribution of privisions and plunder though is still more of a civil duty, rather than evidence of a command. And yes, QMs were often given command of prizes, but more often than not that was a matter of election, indicating a high level of respect certainly, and probably a higher level of popularity, as one would expect from someone in the QM's position.

 Quote

Corsair:

The other thing to consider is the officers that pirate ships did NOT have. For example, very seldom was there a First Mate and never a Second Mate.

Foxe:

That could be as much to do with the size of vessel as with anything else. Had any pirates got hold of any really large merchantmen for any length of time it might have been different -

Corsair:

>No, no difference--even among gangs like Roberts' which were comparable in size to the crew of a fifth-rate or more

I've not yet found any evidence of pirate second mates - three captains (Roberts, Lowther and Harris) who were second mates on merchantmen at the time the turned pirate - but not so far of second mates. Benjamin Jeffrey's served as boatswain's mate under Roberts, which rather surprised me to find. Do you actually have evidence that there was no second mate aboard Roberts' vessel, or is it an inference drawn from lack of evidence. The only thing I could find on Roberts' officers was the ambiguous mention of "other officers" in his articles and the surprising position of boatswain's mate mentioned. However. The question of second mates doesn't have a huge bearing on the subject of QMs (see below)

 Quote

Foxe:

however, that is and can only be speculation on both our parts. The real question is how many mates a merchant vessel of similar size might have carried. I can't answer that off hand

Corsair:

From what I've seen, a rough rule of thumb might be one mate if under a hundred tons, two if 100-300, more if it were an Indiaman.

Precisely, so given the small size of *most* pirate vessels the lack of a second mate is not really surprising. Therefore that example can't really be used to illustrate how pirate officers differed from others.

 Quote

Foxe:

One of my principal reason for disbelieving the importance of QM's put about by so many modern authors is the relative lack of evidence which I have seen, BUT there is quite a bit of evidence against it. There are little snippets in a few sources which suggest that the QM was not as important as otherwise believed. For example, even in Roberts' crew - where the QM is in a higher position than in any other pirate crew I've seen the evidence for - the QM is said to relinquish all authority in time of battle, which suggests that what authority he had was of a civil nature.

Corsair:

>I think that the real inference to be drawn here is that the Captain's power was absolute in time of battle--a relatively rare occurrence. I don't really think that it's evidence that the QM was no more important than any other officer.

We could spend all year tossing inferences about - the real case here is that there is evidence of *something*, and the only argument anyone could put forward is how to interpet that evidence. I still think that it indicates the essentially civil nature of the QM's power, but I quite appreciate that's only my interpretation of the evidence.

 Quote

Bear in mind that we do not have an actual manuscript copy of any set of Articles from ANY pirate gang of the 18th century. What we have are the reports of "Johnson" and others as to what these Articles were. I therefore think it's important to look at the actual interactions as well as what the [reported] Articles say.

True, I quite agree. However, I think it would be equally wrong to dismiss Johnson out of hand as well, for two reasons. 1: because a fair bit of what he wrote is the only source for what it describes, so to dismiss Johnson is (in some cases only) to dismiss the *only* evidence, and 2: because whether or not Johnson is reliable on the details, he is still pretty reliable on the background. He knew (or was told) more about pirates than probably anyone else of his day, so if he doesn't ascribe any extra importance to QMs it probably means they didn't have it.

 Quote

Corsair:

>Given that their object was money, I would think that the person in charge of safekeeping the boodle would indeed have more prestige/status than, say, the boatswain, or even the sailing master.

Again, I find it hard to agree with this point, but both of us are working on supposition and opinion. Personally I think the fact that the QM was responsible for the loot is an indication that he was a man whom everyone felt they could trust, he was an officer and yet a "man of the people", everybody's friend. But trust and prestige are NOT the same thing

 Quote

Corsair:

>I'd like to see a few more snippets of evidence toward the proposition that QMs were basically on the same footing as other officers.

From A Proclamation for the Suppressing of Pyrates, September 1717

"... for every Commander of any private Ship or Vessel, the Sum of 100 l. for every Lieutenant, Master, Boatswain, Carpenter, and Gunner, the Sum of 40 l; for every inferior Officer, the Sum of 30 l. and for every private Man, the Sum of 20 l. "

From the so-called Virginia Proclamation, November 1718

"...for Edward Teach, commonly call'd Captain Teach, or Black-Beard, one hundred Pounds, for every other Commander of a Pyrate Ship, Sloop, or Vessel, forty Pounds; for every Lieutenant, Master, or Quarter-Master, Boatswain, or Carpenter, twenty Pounds; for every other inferior Officer, fifteen Pounds, and for every private Man taken on Board such Ship, Sloop, or Vessel, ten Pounds;"

 Quote

Captured merchants were able to bargain with pirate gangs re. some issues (and did so successfully in some instances) and the person that they generally negotiated with was the QM. This in turn implies that the pirates considered their QMs as being on a par with the merchant captain

Once more, that's supposition (or implication if you prefer) and opinion. I see that (equally validly) as an indication that the QM was the man who made negotiations on behalf of the crew, as he did with his own captain, and in the same way that he was responsible for the loot (I hate that word, but can't think of a better one)

 Quote

Here's another possible litmus test: look at the typical piratical "career track". Which of the following tracks was most common?

Master to Captain?

QM to Captain?

Bosun to Captain?

Gunner to Captain?

Surgeon to Captain?

Carpenter to Captain?

You got me there :) but I would like to make a couple of points. The people who would immediately be considered capable of sailing a ship out of the officers you've listed ( and I'm talking about ships generally here, not specifically pirate ships) are the Master (responsible for navigation and general sailing etc) the boatswain (responsible for the actual business of handling the sails etc) and the QM (*amongst other things* responsible for keeping an eye on the quarterdeck activities, steering, recording speed and heading etc). Of those three officers the master and boatswain were generally considered to be standing officers, ie attached to the ship rather than the crew. Therefore, given the absence of lieutenants in many cases (though, for example Kennedy was a pirate lieutenant before being made captain) it's not too shocking to find QMs being made skippers of prizes. A fairer litmus test would be the question you asked, but relating *only* to those cases in which officers were deposed or killed, and not to those when the captain of a prize was being chosen. I still think you have a very good point, but I do think the difference is important.

On the whole though, I think we are in agreement in terms of my original problem - the many books and websites (articles, TV programs, films...) which claim one way or another that the QM was second in command, or indeed "in charge of all things except when in battle or pursuit", are basically putting forward an incorrect idea.

The question of prestige is a different one, but I think we have shown between us that the QMs powers were more civil than anything else (dividing loot, dealing with offenders etc) and that he did not have any actual command which would be unexpected of any other QM. Is it my imagination or are we agreed on that? 

[**corsair2k3**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/82-corsair2k3/)

* Ship's Master
* 
* 
* Member
* 167 posts

[Posted November 29, 2004](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=77724) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=77724)

Greetings,

Apologies for the delay in response. Aside from being ill, the holiday weekend intervened in a major way.

This thread has gotten pretty cluttered and so I'd just like to make a few points.

From the contemporary source evidence I've seen, QMs exercised command functions of various sorts (prize command, boarding parties etc) but that their most important functions were "civil" (distribution of plunter & provisions, watch- and quarter-bills, settling disputes, assorted adjudications and negotiations, etc)

[What I can NOT find evidence of is that the pirate QMs actually exercised the traditonal functions entailed by this office/title in either the merchant or the naval services--it's my opinion that, however the office might have started life among the privateers/pirates, it rapidly evolved into a unique position.]

Be that as

it may, it's my opinion that the QM can be considered the most important officer within a pirate crew in terms of both assigned duties as well as considerations of status/prestige--and that the relative importance of the QM to a pirate crew was considerably greater than that of the importance of a merchant or naval QM to a merchant or naval crew.

Where we ARE in agreement, however, is that the pirate QMs should not be described as a "second-in-command". It is also a generalization to describe them as being "in charge of all things except when in battle or pursuit"

Regards,

The Corsair

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
* 
* 
* Moderator
* 2,564 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Beautiful lush Devon, England
* Interests:Nautical history of the 16-18th centuries and living history based thereon.

Shooting pirates.

[Posted November 29, 2004](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=77733) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=77733)

 Quote

From the contemporary source evidence I've seen, QMs exercised command functions of various sorts (prize command, boarding parties etc) but that their most important functions were "civil" (distribution of plunter & provisions, watch- and quarter-bills, settling disputes, assorted adjudications and negotiations, etc)

Yep, I agree with that more or less. QMs on any ship had a certain amount of command so I'm not disputing that for a second. The extra "civil" duties basically cover what I've been trying to say less eloquently.

 Quote

What I can NOT find evidence of is that the pirate QMs actually exercised the traditonal functions entailed by this office/title in either the merchant or the naval services

That surprises me. However, much of the duty of a QM on any vessel was civil - for example 17thC descriptions often mention rummaging in the hold, which is something that seems to be covered by pirate QMs as well. I'm also of the opinion that it's often particularly difficult to prove the norm.

For example, I've recently had a long heated debate about the use of bells on pirate vessels with someone on a different board. Their point was that they hadn't seen any evidence to say that pirates used bells, so they didn't believe that they did. My argument then was that apart from the evidence (which is minimal but extant) you've got to answer the question, if bells were commonplace on ships of that period, how often would you expect to find them specifically recorded? I think the QM question is along the same lines, except in a very few circumstances is it that surprising that not many records state "...and the QMs went around doing the usual QM sort of stuff"? Nowadays if we're trying to describe to a contemporary what someone does we just say "he works in an office" or "he's a barman". We assume the person we're talking to understands what we mean, so we don't elaborate much.

 Quote

Be that as

it may, it's my opinion that the QM can be considered the most important officer within a pirate crew in terms of both assigned duties as well as considerations of status/prestige

Well, given the evidence I'm still not in total agreement, but that is merely a matter of my interpretation of the evidence against yours. Since arguing over interpretation could go on forever and still be wrong shall we agree to differ on the fine points since we agree on the main ones? 

 Quote

Where we ARE in agreement, however, is that the pirate QMs should not be described as a "second-in-command". It is also a generalization to describe them as being "in charge of all things except when in battle or pursuit"

See? 

Many thanks for all your input, if you've got anything new anytime I'd love to hear it.

I'm just off to start a new potentially argumentative thread now...

[**corsair2k3**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/82-corsair2k3/)

* Ship's Master
* 
* 
* Member
* 167 posts

[Posted November 29, 2004](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=77746) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=77746)

I'll join you there!



I think that having a look at Snelgrave and Roberts will provide additional insights on QMS.

Anyhow, onto "De-Whoops-Johnson"

Regards,

The Corsair

[**Misson**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/4957-misson/)

* Dread Pyrate
* 
* 
* Member
* 1,001 posts
* Gender:Male
* Interests:Who me?

[Posted April 16, 2008](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=311138) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=311138)

Well, I'm ferocious late to the discussion, but I've now come across two references to the QM having a great deal of power and even the second-in-command position. Both of these come from the book Captured by Pirates edited by John Richard Stephens (the language of which has been modernised). Each is originally from an original period manuscript.

The first is from William Snelgrave's book A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea, and the Slave Trade.of 1734, although I am actually quoting the account from Stephen's edition . I'd quote the original, but I don't presently have a copy of it. (Note: this was mentioned above, but never actually put down, so here it shall be. Snelgrave is talking about his slave ship being taken in 1719 by a crew under the command of Captain Thomas Cocklyn. Cocklyn took over the crew marooned by the previous captain, Christopher Moody. To point:

"Upon mentioning this, I think it necessary to observe in this place that the captain of a pirate ship is chiefly chosen to fight the vessels they meet with. Besides him, they chose another principle officer whom they call quartermaster, who has the general inspection of all affairs and often controls the captain's orders. This person is also to be the first man in boarding any ship they shall attack [which is what had happened to Snelgrave] or go in the boat on any desperate enterprise. Besides the captain and quartermaster, the pirates had all other officers as is usual on board men-of-war." (Stephen, quoting Snelgrave, p. 131)

Curiously, in the same account, Snelgrave outlines an uneasy alliance of sorts between Cocklyn's group and another pirate gang under the command of Howell Davis. Roberts, of course, took over when Davis was killed. Also mentioned is another gang under the command of Oliver LaBouche (whom Snelgrave calls 'LeBouse' which, according to editor Stephens, means "the cow pie".) I don't know where the quartermaster stood in LaBouche's hierarchy.

The second is from Captain George Roberts' account of his capture by pirates in his book The Four Voyages of Capt. George Roberts...written by himself (1726). He is captured by Captain John Russel (aka John Lopez) and taken to company commodore Edward Low's ship in the Fall of 1722. Russel wants to force Roberts to join the crew on their upcoming raid, but Low protests because Roberts is married and forcing a married man to turn pirate violates their article about this (which, curiously, is not included in the list of articles that are often cited for Low's crew...more on that elsewhere.)

Russel continues to insist that Roberts be made part of the crew, but Low takes a vote of the company who side with him and agree that Roberts should be put back on his vessel after all the items of value are removed. He will be placed there with his mate and two boys at Roberts request. However, this makes Russel mad, so pulls a sneaky trick to put Roberts in the worst possible position using his position as quartermaster for the company and the articles to do so. From Stephen's edited version:

"...says Russel to Captain Low, 'The mate of [Robert's] sloop is willing to enter with us as a volunteer.' (This later is shown to be most likely false, but no one protests, so Russel manages to pull it off.]

Low made answer and said, 'How must we do in that case? For then the master of the sloop will have nobody to help him, but one boy; for,' says he, 'the little child is no help at all.'

Russel said he could not help that. 'But,' said Low, 'we must not take all the hands from the poor man if we design to give him his sloop again,' adding that he thought in reason there could not be less than two boys and the mate.

'Zounds,' says Russel, 'his mate is a lusty young brisk man and has been upon the account before and told me but even now, for' said he, 'I was on board the sloop but just before I came here, and Frank Spriggs (captain of another ship in Low's fleet) was along with me and heard him say that he was fully resolved to go with us and would not go any more in the sloop unless forced; and when he came out of Barbados, he said, his design was to enter himself on board the first pirate that he met with; and will you refuse such a man, contrary to your articles which you all so much profess to follow; and which enjoin you by all means, not repugnant to them, to increase and fill your company? Besides,' continued he, 'he spoke to me the first day that he was resolved to enter with us.'

Low replied that to give the man his sloop and no hands with him to assist him, was but putting him to a lingering death, and they had as good almost knock him in the head, as do it.

Russel answered, as to that, they might do as they pleased; what he spoke now was for the good of the whole company and agreeable to the articles, and would fain see or hear that man that would oppose him in it. [Vicious mother, isn't he?] He said he was the quartermaster of the whole company, and by the authority of his place, he would enter the mate directly, and had a pistol ready for the man that should oppose him in it.

Low said, as for what was the law and custom among them (as what he now pleaded, was) he would neither oppose, nor argue against; but if they thought fit to take a man's mate from him, then they might let him have one of his own men with him.

Russel said no, for all [Captain Robert's] sloop's men were already enrolled in their books, and therefore none of them should go in her again. 'Gentlemen,' continued he, 'you must consider I am now arguing, as well for the good of the company, as for the due maintenance and execution of the laws and articles, and as I am the proper officer substituted and entrusted by this company with authority to execute the same, so (as I told you before) I have a pistol and brace of balls ready for anyone who dare oppose me herein,' and turning to me said, 'Master , the company has decreed you your sloop, and you shall have her; you shall have your two boys and that is all. You shall have neither provisions, nor anything else more than as she now is. And I hear there are some of the company design to make a gathering [or items] for you, but that also I forbid by the authority of my place because we are not certain but we may have occasion ourselves for those very things before we get more, and for that reason I prohibit a gathering; and I swear by all that is great and good that if I know anything whatsoever carried or left on board the sloop against my order or without my knowledge, that very instant I will set her on fire, and you in her." (Stephen, quoting Roberts, p. 229-31)

While this does not say anywhere that he is second-in-command, it is interesting how much power this position gives him to have his way - he can even stop the commodore and the rest of the crew from being civil to Roberts. The majority of the crew later are shown to disagree with Russel, but no one can get him to change his mind and the majority seems powerless to stop him.

So I'd say there are several accounts showing the Quartermaster to be quite powerful. In addition, both are given from outside witnesses to the events who have little to gain from altering such facts.

[**Misson**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/4957-misson/)

* Dread Pyrate
* 
* 
* Member
* 1,001 posts
* Gender:Male
* Interests:Who me?

[Posted June 8, 2008](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=316358) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=316358)

I found another reference to this. It's from Dampier's *New Voyage Round the World*. Captain of the voyage John Cook died of an illness in Mexico, leaving the position vacant. Dampier comments:

"The Day before we went from hence, Mr. *Edward Davis*, the the Company's Quarter-Master, was made Captain by consent of all the Company; for it was his Place by Succession." (Dampier, p. 88)

[**Jack Roberts**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/2837-jack-roberts/)

* Dread Pyrate
* 
* 
* Member
* 1,063 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Orlando, FL

[Posted January 19, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=377565) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=377565)

Ha I just found this thread. (with good reason) Very interesting... thanks Mission!

[**Capt. Bo of the WTF co.**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/2748-capt-bo-of-the-wtf-co/)

* Scourge o' the 7 Seas
* 
* 
* Member
* 2,339 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Spanish Louisiana - on the river Osage
* Interests:Many and varied.

[Posted January 19, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=377570) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=377570)

The Whydah story also indicates that Richard Noland as Bellamy's QM was second in command, and given command of one of the prizes that escaped the storm (obviously a better captain than Bellamy due to this foresight taking his ship out of harms way before the full brunt of the storm hit), and it was Noland whom the survivors followed back to the carribean after the Whydah and Bellamy didn't show at the rendevous.

Bo

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
* 
* 
* Admin
* 5,082 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Monroe, MI
* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

[Posted January 19, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=377573) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=377573)

Yeah, let's see if Ed pays any attention to it this time. (This is one of his pet peeves, you know.)

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
* 
* 
* Moderator
* 2,564 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Beautiful lush Devon, England
* Interests:Nautical history of the 16-18th centuries and living history based thereon.

Shooting pirates.

[Posted January 20, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=377602) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=377602)

I'm always paying attention Mission, I just don't always show it...

Since this thread was first abandoned I've actually been looking at pirate hierarchy quite seriously, and I'm prepared to revise some of my views above. I'm still essentially of the opinion that the QM was the creature of the crew, just as much as the captain, and shouldn't really be considered second in command (which was the original question IYR).

I'm not sure whether we can use the terms 'hierarchy' and 'chain of command' interchangeably - they're not quite the same thing - but I'd definitely argue the case for a hierarchy stretching from top to bottom of most/many pirate crews.

However, I'm also coming to the conclusion that even small sweeping statements about pirate social history are fraught with danger. The evidence relating to, for example, Roberts' and Anstis' crews suggests that they operated in somewhat different ways, despite sharing a core of the same pirates.

I'm also coming across a lot more evidence of additional officers (including lieutenants, gunner's mates etc) than appears to have been previously supposed, though how much actual authority (if any) they wielded is often unclear.

[**Wayland**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/6370-wayland/)

* Deck Swabber
* 
* 
* Member
* 30 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Landlocked in t' North o' Blighty
* Interests:Living History, Photography, Bushcraft, Reading and makin' stuff. I run a living history education service for schools and museums called Lore and Saga

[Posted January 20, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=377646) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=377646)



[**Daniel**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/352-daniel/)

* Pyrate Captain
* 
* 
* Member
* 652 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:McLean, VA
* Interests:History, pirates, fiction, writing, writing historical fiction about pirates, jokes, games, law.

[Posted January 21, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=377700) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=377700)

There's quite a good bit of evidence for the high power of quartermasters other than Bartholomew Roberts' that I haven't seen mentioned yet in the thread.

I would agree with Foxe that the quartermaster was ultimately the creature of the crew, as were all officers on a pirate vessel. One must guard against thinking of pirate officers in the same way as merchant and naval officers, who could rely on outside support against their subordinates; in a pirate crew, every officer ultimately stands or falls by his ability to win over or intimidate his fellows. But that doesn't mean that their power wasn't real. Prime ministers are creatures of their constituents, and can be deposed by a no-confidence vote, but nobody would say that they don't wield real power!

1. Stede Bonnet's quartermaster

Stede Bonnet's quartermaster, Robert Tucker, was apparently very powerful, according to the boatswain, Ignatius Pell, as seen in this excerpt from Bonnet's trial:

 Quote

JUDGE TROTT. But he [bonnet] was commander in chief among them, and that after they went a-pirating; was it not so, boatswain?

*Pell.* He went by that name; but the quartermaster had more power than he.

JUDGE TROTT. What do you mean by your evasion? Was he commander in chief or was he not?

*Pell.* He was.

JUDGE TROTT. Then who had the greatest power?

The *Attorney General.* Do you know if he received his share of Captain Manwareing's goods? Or did any receive it for him?

*Pell.* Sir, it was the quartermaster took care of that.

Bonnet himself also claimed that Tucker had more power than he did.

 Quote

But when we came to sea, and saw a vessel, the quarter-master, and some of the rest, held a consultation to take it: but I opposed it.

Bonnet's testimony, of course, must be viewed skeptically: he was pleading for his life. But Pell had no reason to try to excuse Bonnet; on the contrary, he was King's evidence and was saving his own neck by putting his fellow pirates on the gallows.

2. Thomas Tew's quartermaster

Johnson clearly refers to considerable power of the quartermasters in crews other than Bartholomew Roberts', particularly Thomas Tew's.

 Quote

[Tew] desired they would chuse a Quarter Master, who might consult with him for the Common Good, which was accordingly done.

I must acquaint the Reader, that on Board the *West-India* Privateers and Free-booters, the Quarter master's opinion is like the Mufti's among the *Turk*'s; the Captain can undertake nothing that the Quarter Master does not approve. We may say, the Quarter Master is an humble imitation of the *Roman* Tribune of the People; he speaks for, and looks after, the Interest of the Crew.

 Quote

They had intelligence from the Prisoners, of five other rich Ships to pass that Way, which *Tew* would have attacked, tho' they were very strong, if he had not been Over-ruled by the Quarter-Master and others.

3. Charles Vane's quartermaster

Charles Vane's quartermaster was the infamous Calico Jack Rackham.

 Quote

*Vane*, the Captain, was for making off as fast as he could, alledging the Man of War was too strong to cope with, but one *John Rackam*, who was an Officer, that had a kind of a Check upon the Captain, rose up in Defence of a contrary Opinion . . . . The Mate, one *Robert Deal,* was of *Vane's* opinion, as were about fifteen more, and all the rest joined with *Rackam,* the Quarter-Master. At length, the Captain made use of his Power to determine this Dispute, which, in these Cases, is absolute and uncontroulable, by their own Laws, *viz.* in *fighting, chasing,* or *being chased*; in all other Matters whatsoever, he is governed by a Majority . . . . But the next Day, the Captain's Behaviour was obliged to stand the Test of a Vote, and a Resolution passed against his Honour and Dignity, branding him with the name of Coward, deposing him from the Command, and turning him out of the Company . . . . *John Rackam* was voted Captain of the Brigantine, in *Vane's* Room.

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
* 
* 
* Admin
* 5,082 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Monroe, MI
* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

[Posted January 21, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=377704) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=377704)

Interesting!

I am reading several different (non-Johnson) sources and when I come across something that has been debated in the past (even on our other forum, Daniel), I post the information here. It's as much storage of the info as anything. In many cases the books I read are from inter-library loan and take weeks for me to get. (Mostly because they're far to expensive to purchase for what I'm doing.) Since this sort of info is not related to the Surgeon's role - which is what I'm really researching - I stick it in here. Plus others sometimes find the info interesting.

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
* 
* 
* Admin
* 5,082 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Monroe, MI
* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

[Posted February 11, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=379659) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=379659)

In *The Memoirs of Pére Labat 1693-1705*, translated and edited by John Eaden, he comes right out and says it:

“The conditions of Roving [for filibusters] are set forth in what is called *Chasse Partie*. If the vessel belongs to the

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filibusters themselves, their booty is shared equally. The captain and quartermaster (who is always second in command in these ships), the surgeon and the pilot receive no more than anyone else except a gift which is given to them by the rest of the crew. As a rule the captain is given a present which is equivalent to three and sometimes to four extra shares. The quartermaster is presented with an additional two shares. The pilot and surgeon each receive an extra share and a half.” (Labat, p. 36-7)

[**Jack Roberts**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/2837-jack-roberts/)

* Dread Pyrate
* 
* 
* Member
* 1,063 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Orlando, FL

[Posted February 12, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=379666) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=379666)

Hey Mission can you explain that first sentence? Conditions of the Roving? Filibusters? I'm a little lost.

[**michaelsbagley**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/3724-michaelsbagley/)

* Smells Like Wet Sheep
* 
* 
* Moderator
* 2,548 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Columbus, Ohio
* Interests:Mostly into GAoP, but starting to develop more Buccaneer era stuff for re-enacting as well. Generally I do re-enact both piratical/nautical and other impressions from the period. I am focusing on more "common" impressions from the period (i.e. average sailor/pirate, rank and file Red Coat, early Colonial huntsman, etc.)

[Posted February 12, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=379668) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=379668)

 On 2/12/2010 at 8:39 AM, Jack Roberts said:

Hey Mission can you explain that first sentence? Conditions of the Roving? Filibusters? I'm a little lost.

I'm going to go out on a limb here, but since the book was translated from French, "Filibuster" in French is an equally appropriate term for "pirate" or "privateer". "Conditions of the Roving" is likely in reference to conditions for engaging in the act of Privateering or Pirating. I hope I am correct in my assumption, but as Mission has the book, his take may clear things up more.

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
* 
* 
* Admin
* 5,082 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Monroe, MI
* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

[Posted February 12, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=379669) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=379669)

Filibuster is (as I understand it) the French word for privateer. Labat is outlining the conditions for becoming a French privateer. (There is more following the above quote about what a man is paid for losing a limb, digit, eye, etc. which I didn't reprint.) Note that he later calls crews who are just taking any ship pirates, so there is definitely a difference between a pirate and a filibuster in this book.

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Thinking more on what I quoted, I would guess that this statement is probably the source of the idea that the QM is second in rank to the captain since it's the only place I've seen it so baldly stated. What this means to the QM position vis-a-vis the GAoP pirates is impossible to pinpoint, though. On the one hand, it could be that modern pirate authors have taken this statement and just applied it to every GAoP pirate group, which is sloppy. OTOH, as Littleneckhalfshell alluded in the [Religion during the GAoP thread](http://pyracy.com/index.php?showtopic=8268&st=0), with Buccaneers, filibusters and pirates most likely consorting in the safe Caribbean ports, the idea could have filtered through the various groups as being a good one and been applied broadly amongst them. This is all if Labat's statement (which is pretty sweeping) is truly accurate for *every* filibuster crew.

Which is all just more proof of my dictum that the more period 'facts' you uncover about pirates from 300+ years ago, the less certain you actually become of anything. For example, I think it's really funny that some of the pirates and privateers were so piously religious (Er, after a fashion. See the above linked thread.) despite the fact that many people think they were all a bunch of atheists. At the bottom of all this, people are people, they are creative and thinking creatures. Put in the same situation, different people will do different things. (Rules are made to be broken, *especially* by people like pirates. And even ***that*** is a generalization!)

[**Jack Roberts**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/2837-jack-roberts/)

* Dread Pyrate
* 
* 
* Member
* 1,063 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Orlando, FL

[Posted February 12, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=379684) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=379684)

Thanks Mickey and Mission (ooohh alliteration)! I'm interested in the topic so my persona is correct and it seems to fit with my character's situation. (I'm Quartermaster of the Archangel and the Archangel is a privateer) We've talked that Jack would be the second in command and taking care of the stowage aboard ship. (ie loading and unloading) I was concerned that maybe I was inaccurately portraying the QM but kind of info helps to confirm I'm on the right track. Especially for a Privateering vessel.

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
* 
* 
* Admin
* 5,082 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Monroe, MI
* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

[Posted February 12, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=379688) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=379688)

Jack, I've been tweaking Foxe a bit on this. This is mostly because we've actually been discussing it... well, he's been complaining about it and I have been reading his complaints about it... ever since he started talking about creating his own website back in our bad old piratesinfo daze.

That aside, his site is one of the better sources for accurate, researched info on such things IMO. He provides a nice outline of the QMs job [here](http://www.bonaventure.org.uk/ed/ranks.htm). Just ignore all his opining about the extra duties of a QM. (But if you really want to be safe, I wouldn't assume that what's being discussed here will necessarily be true for every crew as it doesn't seem to have been so.)

[**Jack Roberts**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/2837-jack-roberts/)

* Dread Pyrate
* 
* 
* Member
* 1,063 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Orlando, FL

[Posted February 13, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=379732) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=379732)

The way I understand Foxe's position is a chain of command aboard a "Pirate Ship". I'm looking at a Privateering vessel, one owned by the Capt'n. From what I've gathered in this thread and Foxe's site (Thanls for the Linky Mission.) It's seems plausible to have a powerful QM in my persona's situation. Please feel free to correct me. (Chime in any time Foxe, )

SO perhaps in the situation of a Capt'n hiring the crew that he wants perhaps the Quartermaster could have extra power aboard. Not a rag tag group of random pirates together. Perhaps I should start to look at merchant vessels and see what QM's were like on them.

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
* 
* 
* Moderator
* 2,564 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Beautiful lush Devon, England
* Interests:Nautical history of the 16-18th centuries and living history based thereon.

Shooting pirates.

[Posted February 13, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=379746) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=379746)

 On 2/13/2010 at 11:31 AM, Jack Roberts said:

The way I understand Foxe's position is a chain of command aboard a "Pirate Ship". I'm looking at a Privateering vessel, one owned by the Capt'n. From what I've gathered in this thread and Foxe's site (Thanls for the Linky Mission.) It's seems plausible to have a powerful QM in my persona's situation. Please feel free to correct me. (Chime in any time Foxe, )

SO perhaps in the situation of a Capt'n hiring the crew that he wants perhaps the Quartermaster could have extra power aboard. Not a rag tag group of random pirates together. Perhaps I should start to look at merchant vessels and see what QM's were like on them.

As noted so often, very few things hold true for all crews. Labat quoted above (thanks Mission) says that the QM was second in command, and evidence of Kidd's privateering venture also suggests a strong QM position. On the other hand Woodes Rogers' circumnavigation included so many officers that it's hard to figure out an actual 'chain of command'. I suspect it depends very much on period; port of origin; and vessel ownership. To take the argument a little further in the wrong direction, QMs in the Royal Navy had plenty of responsibility, but very little actual 'command'.

So, in answer to your question, certainly plausible, but you could equally play it other ways.

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
* 
* 
* Admin
* 5,082 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Monroe, MI
* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

[Posted March 19, 2012](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=findComment&comment=407171) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/3694-quartermasters-the-evidence/&do=reportComment&comment=407171)

This is from Captain England's account in the 3rd Edition of the *General History*. I don't think it proves anything one way or the other, but I find it interesting that the Captain and QM were both commanding the prisoner, who played James Bond in one movie. (If I remember correctly, the QM had charge of the prisoners according to one account I read.)

"Mr. *Lasinby*, who was one of Captain *Mackra's* Officers, and detained, was under the Deck at this Time, and commanded both by the Captain and QuarterMaster of the Pyrates, to tend the Braces on the Booms, in hopes, it was believed, a Shot would take him before they got clear, asking the Reason why he was not there before? And when he would have excused himself, threat'ned on the like Neglect to shoot him, at which the other beginning to expostulate farther, and claim their Promise of putting him ashore, got an unmerciful beating from the Quarter-Master. Captain Taylor, who was now Successor to *England* [because the pirates deposed England], and whose Priviledge it was to do so, being lame of his Hands and unable." (Johnson, p. 130)