

The Titanic and Other Shipping Disasters

George Ivanoff



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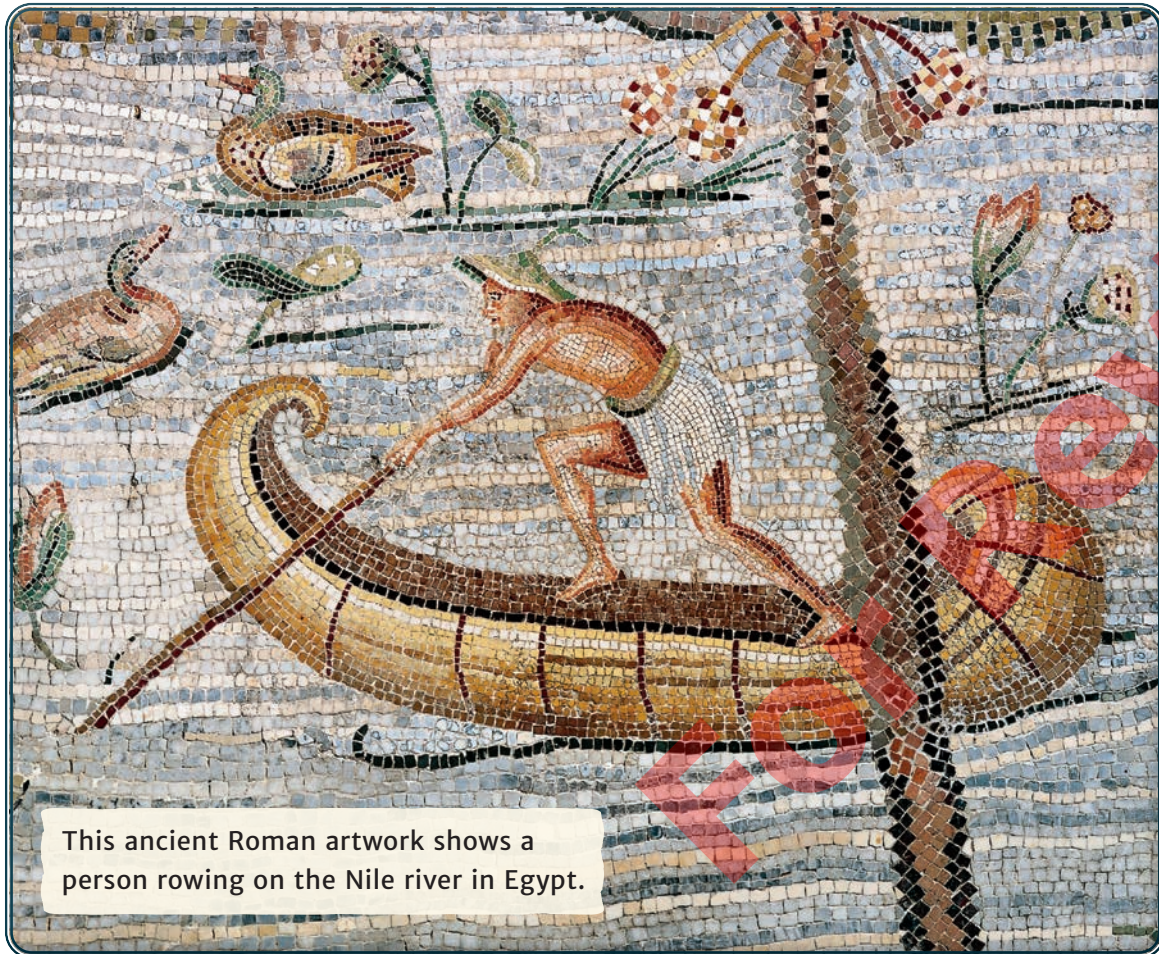
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Contents

Danger on the Water	2
The <i>Cataraqui</i> , August 1845	4
The <i>Princess Alice</i> , September 1878	8
The <i>Doña Paz</i> , December 1987	12
The <i>Exxon Valdez</i> , March 1989	16
The <i>Costa Concordia</i> , January 2012	20
The <i>Titanic</i> , April 1912	24
The <i>Titanic</i> : The Ship of Dreams	28
Glossary	31
Index	32

Danger on the Water

Humans have been travelling across water for as long as there has been recorded history. Like any form of travel, venturing out onto an ocean, lake or river comes with risk. Accidents happen and disaster can strike – from a **capsizing** rowboat to a sinking passenger liner.



This ancient Roman artwork shows a person rowing on the Nile river in Egypt.

A common factor among many shipping disasters is human error. People make mistakes – they make poor decisions, they get distracted, or they forget to do something important. Mistakes like this can lead to problems. And problems out on the water can lead to disaster.



The wreck of the *Atun* fishing boat lies in the ocean off the coast of Papua New Guinea.

The *Cataraqui*, August 1845

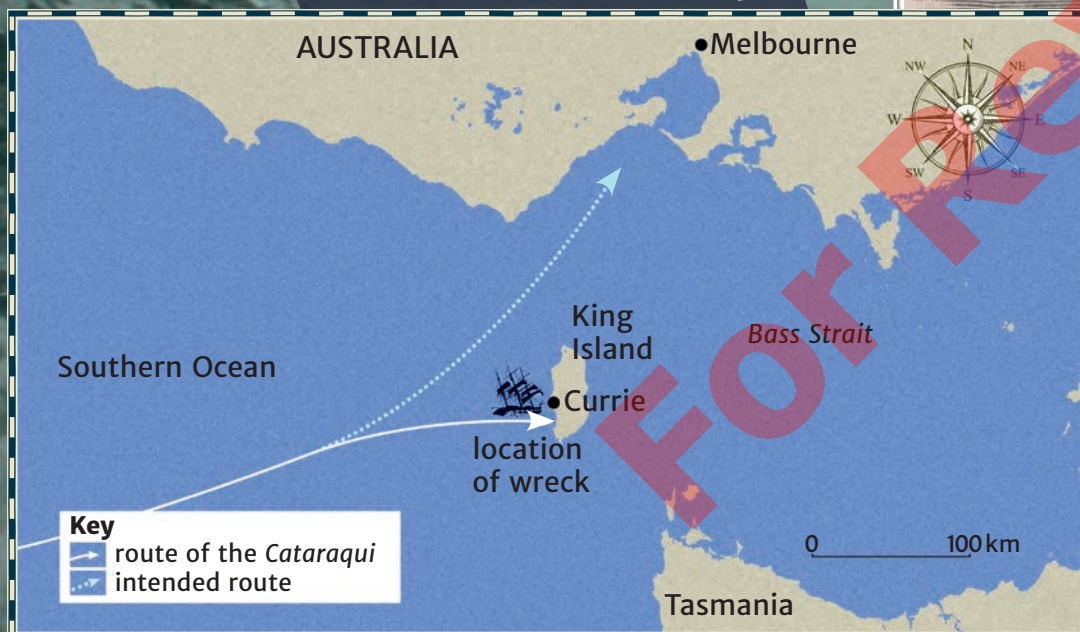
Striking a Reef

Built in Quebec, Canada, in 1840, the *Cataraqui* (pronounced *cat-ar-ah-kwee*) was a 73-metre-long “barque”, which is a type of sailing ship. The wrecking of the *Cataraqui* in 1845 is Australia’s deadliest civil shipping disaster.

The *Cataraqui* set sail from Liverpool in England on 20 April 1845 to bring emigrants to Melbourne. It had a crew of 44 and was carrying 367 passengers. During its long voyage, seven people died and five babies were born, so when disaster struck, there were 409 people on board.

After two weeks of heavy weather in the Southern Ocean, the *Cataraqui* sailed into Bass Strait during a bad storm. The ship struck a reef on the west coast of King Island at 4:30 am on 4 August 1845. It took many hours for the ship to break apart and sink, but the bad weather made escape to shore extremely difficult. Even though the ship was only 100 metres from shore (near what is now the town of Currie), 400 people died. Only one of the passengers and eight of the crew survived.

The Wreck of the *Cataraqui*



This illustration shows the wreck of the *Cataraqui* off King Island.

Human Error

Navigating at sea in the nineteenth century was difficult, as it involved observing the Sun, Moon, planets and stars, then taking measurements with a special instrument called a **sextant**. The storms that the *Cataraqui* was sailing through made navigation even more difficult. When entering Bass Strait, the ship's **navigator** miscalculated the position of the ship. The *Cataraqui* was 160 kilometres off course, meaning it was a long way from the route the navigator had planned. This meant the ship's captain had no idea they were so close to the reef.



Sailors used sextants to calculate where they were on a map.



This monument on King Island marks the burial place of 206 passengers of the *Cataraqui*.

What If?

What if the navigator on board the *Cataraqui* had double-checked his calculations? Imagine how differently things might have turned out if the crew had known they were off course.



A broken piece of the *Cataraqui* wreck lies on the bottom of the ocean.