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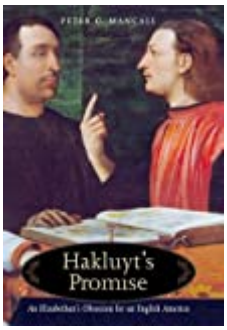

Peter C. Mancall. *Hakluyt's Promise: An Elizabethan's Obsession for an English America.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007. 378 pp. $38.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-11054-8.

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The Principal Navigations of an Armchair Explorer

Peter C. Mancall's biography of Richard Hakluyt covers a great deal of territory. The Elizabethan literature of travel and exploration, much of which can be traced to Hakluyt in one way or another, is naturally a consistent theme. The reader also learns of the broader European fascination with ethnography, geography, and navigation; and of Atlantic commercial and religious rivalries, and the intellectual collaboration that in some cases transcended them. Remarkably, we learn all this through the life of a man who spent most of his life at a desk near London. A collector, compiler, translator, and publisher of many texts, Richard Hakluyt left very few writings of his own. His life combined moments of public acclaim and influence with long periods of obscurity. As Mancall presents him, Hakluyt's life is both summed up in the texts he created and effaced by them.

The contributions of *Hakluyt's Promise* to current scholarship on the Atlantic world are several. Mancall describes the creation, distribution, and publication of key texts, including *Divers Voyages* (1582), the manuscript "Discourse of Western Planting" (1584), successive editions of the *Principall Navigations* (1589, 1598-1600), and Hakluyt's translation of a Portuguese account that he titled *Virginia Richly Valued* (1609). Mancall pays close attention to Hakluyt's rhetorical efforts and editorial decisions, noting his efforts to refigure strange places and people as a way of encompassing them within his vision of English colonization and his efforts to establish his own voice as authoritative. But Hakluyt's aim was always to persuade his contemporaries to act, and the importance of the texts he created lies not only between their covers but in the fact that so many traveled on the voyages he helped to inspire. His collections therefore had practical as well as literary value, as guides to past experience and current knowledge of navigation, commerce, and ethnography. Through his own efforts, Hakluyt continually inspired new voyages and collected accounts of them, as well as to redistribute that knowledge as a means to further discoveries.

Another important Atlantic context for Mancall's book is the vast range of influences on the Elizabethan colonial project as Hakluyt saw it: Iberian voyages and the texts that explained and inspired them; Dutch travel accounts, maps, and publishers; and French accounts like

those of Jean de Lery, Andre Thevet, and Rene de Laudonniere. Atlantic historiography aims in part to avoid a provincial perspective on the early modern period, and Mancall's book hits this mark. Hakluyt was as narrowly focused on the benefits of colonization to England as he was wide-ranging in seeking lessons from the experience of other Europeans.

Hakluyt and his contemporaries also saw a much larger world than most Atlantic historians. The publication of Mancall's book on the occasion of Jamestown's four-hundredth anniversary is probably no accident, but one of its chief accomplishments is to place the Virginia Company in the context not just of Hakluyt's life and interests, but in the full Atlantic (and Pacific) scope of English interests in foreign lands, peoples, languages, cultures, religions, and commodities.

As biographies do, Mancall's book moves chronologically, in this case through eleven chapters each centering on the publication of an important text or key event that shaped Hakluyt's work. The book's title refers to a 1568 meeting between Hakluyt and his older cousin of the same name, at which the elder Hakluyt (referred to throughout Mancall's book as "the lawyer") showed Hakluyt a map of the world and a passage of Scripture that set him on his future course.

In the 1570s, accounts of Martin Frobisher's voyages appeared in print, an Inuit captured by Frobisher made a sensation in London, and Humphrey Gilbert secured a patent and began plans for a 1578 voyage. The details of Hakluyt's life during these years are vague to say the least, and Mancall has to stretch and speculate a bit to fill in how Hakluyt learned of these events and what he thought of them. But by the end of the decade, according to Mancall, Hakluyt had "realized that the time had come to marry the twin goals of exploration and evangelization" (p. 71).

Hakluyt also realized that these goals required publication. By 1582, with the appearance in print of *Divers Voyages*, Hakluyt's goals and rhetorical strategies had become clear. He hoped to spur English merchants and the crown to emulate Catholic efforts, to show that colonization was necessary to spread English Protestantism and profit through trade, and to prove that the climate of North America was suitable for settlement and its peoples suitable for conversion. The discovery of a Northwest Passage promised even more wealth in the future, but in the meantime colonies would draw off England's surplus population and provide a market for its wool. Heading off the arguments of other European powers, Hakluyt drew from his library proof that the English had a legal right to settle based on prior discovery, whether by John Cabot in 1497 or the legendary Welsh prince Madoc more than three centuries earlier. "Every account in *Divers Voyages*," Mancall writes, "had a political purpose": to entice, inspire, or goad the English nation to colonize (p. 97). In 1584, Hakluyt refined and combined his arguments into the manuscript "Discourse on Western Planting." The "Discourse," which Mancall refers to as "The Grammar of Colonization," made a pointed argument aimed at the monarch and the court: "England had to embrace western expansion. Failure to do so would guarantee ruin at home" (p. 154).

With these arguments in mind, Hakluyt supported Walter Ralegh's fledgling Roanoke colony in print, publishing maps that included English claims in North America and urging publication of the famous 1590 Frankfurt edition of Thomas Harriot's description of the colony. His efforts intensified in the 1590s, culminating in the publication of a new, three-volume edition of the *Principall Navigations*. Mancall's discussion of this period includes a convincing explanation of Hakluyt's decision to drop some accounts that, like that of David Ingram, were included in the earlier edition. According to Mancall, Hakluyt later in life became focused on ensuring the truthfulness of the accounts he published. In the first edition, the hopeful tone of Ingram's relation outweighed its many dubious observations. Preparing the exhaustive new edition, with Hakluyt's expertise resting on what Mancall keenly describes as "his superior knowledge and his ability to know things," Hakluyt began to exercise more editorial discretion (p. 228).

When, toward the end of his life, the Jamestown settlement promised an opportunity to realize Hakluyt's overlapping goals of expanding English Protestantism, national greatness, and commercial expansion, he signed on. An investor in the Virginia Company, Hakluyt was listed along with Robert Hunt as a minister for the settlement; although, he then decided not to travel to Virginia after all. It is a mark of Hakluyt's varied interests and Jamestown's place in the English colonial project that he seems to have been distracted by his interest in publishing a series of dialogs in the Malay language and the possibility of another, eastward direction for the English: the spice islands. Mancall by no means downplays Jamestown's importance, but for students of the early period it is crucial to understand Jamestown in this light: both a culmination and a beginning.

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