

Hakluyt's Promise: An Elizabethan's Obsession for an English America. By PETER C. MANCALL.
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In this remarkable achievement, Peter Mancall has drawn on cultural, social, intellectual, and political history to produce an intellectual biography of extraordinary depth and luminosity. On several occasions Mancall wonders why Richard Hakluyt, who was such an enthusiast for plantations, came so close to voyaging to the New World himself yet always stepped back. The answer is surely that it was obvious even to this most ardent promoter of English colonies that all English attempts to establish colonies before and during his lifetime were disastrous and extremely dangerous. And yet at the same time, largely due to Hakluyt's own efforts, writing about plantations in early modern England was a spectacularly successful enterprise. Promoting colonies was so successful that it not only helped persuade large numbers of people to get themselves killed in colonization attempts but also made Hakluyt a wealthy man in the process.

Though Hakluyt was prolific in his production of texts concerning English voyages, he left relatively few traces concerning his own life and motivations. Mancall has accordingly chosen to reconstruct the contexts of Hakluyt's life and work. The reconstructions of Hakluyt's actions and motivations are persuasive and offer new insights into Hakluyt's thinking. Moreover this method supplies the reader with a sense of the texture of Hakluyt's life. Mancall emphasizes the fragile and unstable nature of the world in which Hakluyt, like all early modern Europeans, lived. Hakluyt navigates his life through disease, famine, disaster, and uncertainty. It is a wonder that he managed to write at all. Certainly, readers are left with a powerful sense of why early modern Englishmen might have sought greener pastures.

Hakluyt's Promise painstakingly and progressively reconstructs the context for each of Hakluyt's major publications from the 1570s through his last years in the 1610s. Mancall rightly emphasizes that books were not only the center of Hakluyt's life but also regarded as crucial instruments in the foundation of English colonies. He furnishes a thorough account of the motivations behind all but one of Hakluyt's works, including previously neglected texts such as his *Malayan Dialogues* (which, if not Hakluyt's text, was certainly produced under his supervision). The exception, consistent with almost all Hakluyt scholarship, is that Mancall largely ignores Hakluyt's analysis of Aristotle's *Politics*. Hakluyt jointly presented the *Analysis* with the "Discourse on Western Planting" to Queen Elizabeth in 1583. David Armitage has convincingly placed the *Analysis* in the context of the *Discourse*.¹ The "Discourse on Western Planting" showed how plantation could be used to reform the English commonwealth, and plantation was understood to be a means of establishing commonwealths. Mancall is reluctant to explore Hakluyt's analysis of Aristotle's canonical text, which Hakluyt understood could help Englishmen think about the foundation of colonies in America, because it makes no "direct links" with colonizing enterprises. This

¹ David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000), 72–74.

omission seems excessively timid given that one of the virtues of *Hakluyt's Promise* is the reconstruction of probable meaning from context.

The book is teeming with detail and sometimes poses as many questions, large and small, as it answers (as Mancall clearly intends it to do). Why, for example, would the French merchant Etienne Bellenger agree to meet Hakluyt in his house in Rouen and supply details of a voyage to a land his own sovereign had claimed when he must have known Hakluyt's purpose in arranging the meeting? On a larger scale, *Hakluyt's Promise* provokes a question central to the understanding of early modern English expansion: what was the relationship between western and eastern voyages? Any historian working on Hakluyt and American colonization is faced with the sometimes-uncomfortable fact that only one-third of his greatest work, *The Principal Navigations*, concerned American voyages. The other two-thirds concerned eastern and northeastern voyages. Mancall correctly points out that Hakluyt saw the eastern voyages as a kind of preparation for western plantation. But a more complex relationship and more complex distinctions existed between the two. Western voyages were initiated as an alternative route to the East, and even the ambition to create colonies was often understood at least partly in terms of creating staging posts for the route through the Northwest Passage. Eastern voyages were justified primarily in terms of commerce, but trade was also important in the ambition to establish western plantations. On another level eastern trade and western plantation were joined in the actions of contemporaries such as Sir Thomas Smythe, who was both treasurer of the Virginia Company and governor of the East India Company, at the same time that East and West were linked in the minds of cosmographers such as Hakluyt or Giovanni Battista Ramusio. Still East and West were nevertheless separated in English minds by a very different anthropology. Peoples of the East were understood to rival or even surpass European sophistication (Hakluyt's thoughts on the Chinese are particularly instructive in this regard, 83) whereas North American peoples were generally considered to occupy a low rung in the emerging progressive theory of history. These assumptions played a central part in the ambition to establish plantations in the West compared with the desire only for trade in the East. Thus Mancall cannot and does not ignore the Eastern aspect of Hakluyt's work, devoting the final two chapters of this fascinating study to an examination of his interest in eastern voyages. As Mancall observes, after 1600 Hakluyt's interest turned increasingly from the West to the East. Sometime between 1609 and 1616, he translated Hugo Grotius's *The Free Sea*, by which point he was apparently emphasizing eastern trade. Though there are no direct links between Hakluyt's translation of Grotius and his involvement with the East India Company from 1600, Mancall suggestively shows from the context (as Armitage has also suggested in his edition of that text) that there is a strong possibility that Hakluyt produced the translation to aid the company's claims for free passage and access to eastern ports in competition with Dutch and Portuguese traders (though historians often overlook that Grotius, citing Francisco de Vitoria, also criticized the Spanish in the West Indies, particularly Spanish claims to the exclusive right of trade and navigation).² By the seventeenth century, Hakluyt would indeed

² Hugo Grotius, *The Free Sea*, ed. David Armitage, trans. Richard Hakluyt (Indianapolis, Ind., 2004), xxii.

appear to have transferred much of his enthusiasm for western plantation to eastern trade. But this shift only further underlines how and to what degree voyages to East and West were related.

One of the strengths of this book is Mancall's desire to put religion back into the center of discussions about Hakluyt; he argues convincingly that Hakluyt took the spread of Protestant religion in America as one of his central aims. As David Harris Sacks has recently argued, however, Hakluyt's religious ambitions were even greater. Here we return to the importance of treating Hakluyt as someone concerned with America as only a part of his overall design. Hakluyt, as Sacks argues, was concerned above all with writing ecclesiastical history to attain God's apocalyptic goal: "the certayne and full discoverie of the world."³ That goal would only be achieved by persuading men to bring to light all the dark corners of the earth. This perspective reiterates Hakluyt's universal scope. Mancall's reflection on Hakluyt's work underscores the increasing need for historians to attend to the relationship between eastern voyages and the English colonization of America. Though his book takes Hakluyt's "Obsession for an English America" as its subject, it leads us to conclude that his career must also be seen in these broader contexts.

³ David Harris Sacks, "Richard Hakluyt's Navigations in Time: History, Epic and Empire," *Modern Language Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (March 2006): 31.