

The Significance of Richard Hakluyt's Cosmographic Literature for the English Nation During the Elizabethan Era (1582-1603)

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ABSTRACT: *As the English Navy defeated the Spanish Armada and European powers kept being reported as leading enterprises exploring successfully far overseas lands, the English felt likewise increasingly heartened to make voyages of their own up to America as well as the Far East with determined economic or nationalistic aims. This heartening and the rationale behind English oceanic navigation crystallized in the compiled epic English literature exposed by Richard Hakluyt whose ultimate aspiration was seeing England not only superseding Spain and the other preponderant powers, as the top maritime commercial power, but also heading up the European trend of expansionism as the uppermost ruler diffusing home religion and culture as far as possible across the globe.*

KEYWORDS: Richard Hakluyt, expansionism, anglicism, trade, America, Far East.

Introduction

It may be largely incomplete to study Elizabethan¹ exploratory trade without dealing with the role performed by Richard Hakluyt² between around 1580 and 1603. His writings, being either published or simply addressed, came about at the time when the then major neighbours of England had already embarked upon a rivalry-involving process of maritime exploration. (Payne, 2023, pp. 80, 81) Being fundamentally jingoistic, Hakluyt's literature was meant to all his co-subjects in order to enhance the realm's contention in the worldwide political, economic, and religious scene especially after the defeat of the Spanish Armada³. (Hakluyt, 1584, pp. 1, 2) In which sense was Hakluyt's compiled literature useful vis-à-vis the English nation? One may presume that his writings received wide home readership and were thoroughly influential since his name became then increasingly associated with State foreign affairs. This research work aims to emphasize that Hakluyt's writings constituted a

¹ The adjective *Elizabethan* refers to the epoch of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I of England, in which English foreign-trade expansion is qualified as dramatic courtesy of diplomatic relations woven by English ambassadors with different eastern or far-eastern rulers. (Sherman, 2004, p. 204)

² Welsh by origin and English by career, Richard Hakluyt was a priest and member of Westminster. He rose as the most prominent Elizabethan cosmographer and then as an advisor to the English East India Company. His book *The Principal Voyages and Navigations of the English Nation* was ordered to be placed in the main English factories in India so as to invigorate the spirits of the Company's servants. (Taylor, 1947, pp.165-170) The English East India Company was established in 1600 by Queen Elizabeth I authorizing it to trade eastwards between the Cape of Good Hope and the Straits of Magellan. This company was to become the agent of English trade in India. (Sherman, 1976, p. 332) It exchanged silk and spices with India and its vicinities but encountered persistent competition from the Portuguese and the Dutch. (Sherman, 2004, p. 205)

³ The Spanish Armada was a huge naval expedition sent in July 1588 by King Philip II to the English Channel to combat England partly because of her growing aggressive commercial ambition overseas. Instead, it was the English Royal Navy that fought more skilfully and triumphed thanks to its ships being less heavy and better steered than those of Spain. (Bourde, 2009, p. 723)

driving force for early English maritime commercial expansion through a style deliberately stuck to for the advantage of English empowerment and reputation.

Hakluyt's Commitment to the National Cause

The English growing foreign-trade ambition in the second half of the sixteenth century did not materialize solely in the Far-Eastern or American riches and rarities being much sought after but also in Hakluyt's written narratives reckoned as an exponent of Anglicizing expansionism.

The language of Hakluyt served as a vehicle of newly-emerging English aspirations for overseas territory. Still in the 1580s, almost a century after the discovery of America, England could have no pretension on this discovered land, unlike her neighbouring rivals. His initial writings could hail no English navigational outer success that could comparatively have raised the nation up to the position of her European rivals. The particularity of those 1580s publications is that they stuck to the catchable characteristic of English repeated failures across the Atlantic to keep up the ambition of English mariners to conquer America. Hakluyt could reflect the image of a new paradise that the Divinity destined for the benefit of the Englishman although so far no concrete profit could be made from English expeditions thereto. Through his words, he could create the wholly-hypothetical condition according to which no such expansional victory could be attained without the Englishmen applying themselves continuously to that strenuous and perilous involvement. (Borge, 2003, pp. 1-2)

Hakluyt was spurred on by his anxiety about Spanish expansion in America and his phobia of English omission and lack of prestige. He was aware of English pessimism due to a series of misfortunes in trying to make profit following the example of Spain, and hence had the vocation to contribute to cheer his countrymen up. (Borge, 2003, p. 3)

His literature is reckoned as cosmographic because it matches the then factual details about geography and new discoveries with his theoretical and imaginative perceptions. He never contented himself with telling about the impressions and experiences of English or foreign travellers. His literature is much broader than travel literature as it bears a political dimension viewing the whole overseas unknown or little known land and nature as suitably and preferably submittable to English mapping, description, civilisation, and exploitation.

The initial epic publication of Hakluyt appeared in 1582 and was entitled *Divers Voyages Touching the Discovery of America*. It presented a collection of foreign or national travel narratives endorsing Humphery Gilbert who was then organising a maritime enterprise for the settlement of the first English colony in North America. (Payne, 2023, pp. 84, 85) Though this document showed some weaknesses, it also voiced the author's main aim as a defender of his nation's overseas interests : establishing English legitimacy to have and maintain a lucrative foothold in America. Hakluyt would defend this aim in later publications with even more eagerness and devotion. (Borge, 2003, p. 3)

Two years later, Hakluyt dedicated to Queen Elizabeth his *Discourse of Western Planting* being a long point of view favourable to the Atlantic venture to be led by Walter Raleigh to found an English colony in America. According to Borge, this narrative is the best of Hakluyt's writings in terms of how his nation was to create her empire. While still unpublished but commonly read and appreciated, this masterpiece best explained the Elizabethan approach to get a share in the New World. This document justified Raleigh's enterprise so that it would be accepted by the sovereign, financed by rich investors, and applauded nationwide. For the first time in England, America was not conceived of as a distinct entity to be occasionally harnessed but rather as an extension of English soil overseas with the futurist

vision of England as becoming the globe's mightiest nation. (Borge, 2003, pp. 4-5)

Throughout the following decades however, Hakluyt's writings would much contribute to stir the will to establish an English empire in still unknown or little known far areas. What would make Hakluyt's words sound louder was the English victory against the Spanish Armada in 1588, a defeat said to be humiliating for Spain and promising for England. Indeed, since then, the English spirit was to be filled with optimism and self-confidence. (Borge, 2003, p. 5)

The Principal Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries of the English Nation republished between 1589 and 1600 is deemed a piece of propaganda for English global expansion, economy, and foreign prestige. (Borge, 2003, pp. 2, 3, 5) This piece of work, listing the voyages and discoveries of Englishmen eastwards or westwards, increased English nationalism assigning the English People the leadership of worldwide exploration and trade. (Burrage, 1959, pp. XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX, XXI, 129, 207, 368, 379) This book made the English mariner and merchant think proudly of themselves by providing a series of impressive geographical and explorative descriptions. These were provided in such a vibrant and theatrical style that heartened the nation to go ahead in her pursuit of economic glory overseas in challenge to danger and risk. (Cormack, 1994, p. 21) Indeed, like any of Hakluyt's writings, this compiling book was meant as a companion to the Elizabethan venturer called, through ideological arguments, to claim his rights in the New World. (Borge, 2003, p. 5)

The Principal Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries of the English Nation provided a long series of translated documents highlighting the nautical adventures of the Portuguese in the Far East. (Hakluyt, 1589, pp. 4-79) It is a collection of records and testimonies resulting from the author's continuous attachment to the theme of exploring the unknown or little known world : from his

geographical command accumulated during his academic instruction at Oxford, his numerous conversations with friendly European traders dealing with the Far East, and his exhaustive reading of similar narratives. The third edition of this collective book coincided with the formation of the English East India Company for which Hakluyt operated as an advisor until his demise in 1616, keeping on his literary role, collecting and writing information especially about India. (Puga, 2002, p. 82)

Yet, according to Sherman, the English were aware of their belatedness in the whole continental project of exploring and mapping the Far East in comparison to their neighbour rivals. England's lagging behind these ocean powers in geography and navigation alongside the fruitlessness of her many expeditions to find out a free all-water route, away from those rivals, leading to India gave her no choice but to resort to her competitors' findings. All the then English collections of cosmographic writings did not appear after notable national success in overseas expansion; all of them were elaborated as a torch enlightening the English way for that money-making expansion. (Puga, 2002, p. 83) Therefore, so as to fill in the gap and voice English maritime potential for mercantile presence to the national audience, Hakluyt's words made use of exaggerated rhetoric in praising the notion of Englishness. (Sherman, 2004, pp. 201, 203, 205) It is claimed that this use of overstatement proved to be effective in increasing English aspiration for India though it was really known in England that the Portuguese and the Dutch were heading up European eastward trade expansion. And, what was indicative of the great influence of Hakluyt's writings over his compatriots is the fact that it met with profuse domestic marketability and readership.

Moreover, so as to stir up English avidity for oriental riches, Hakluyt implicitly instigated piracy and violence against England's rivals telling about repeated English interceptions of Portuguese expeditions coming from the Far East. (Scammell, 1982, pp. 177-179) According to Newitt, England and Portugal were at intermittent sea

confrontation from the 1580s partly owing to their trade interests, which occasioned the English seizure of ship treasures coming from India. (Newitt, 2005, p. 166) Pepper booty, for example, rose so much in amount that it, together with other pepper amounts legally imported, inundated the English markets and consequently went redundant. (Scammell, 1982, pp. 177-179)

In this respect, Hakluyt's descriptions included the plunder in 1587 of the *Sao Felipe's* freight worth £ 100,000 and equal in value to around 10 per cent of England's then yearly imports. Not only did the *Sao Felipe's* looters confirm the true magnitude of Far-Eastern natural richness but they also unveiled Portugal's naval weaknesses. (Scammell, 1982, pp. 179-180) English marine was multiplying its offensives against both Portuguese coast and shipping. (Newitt, 2005, p. 189) So, Hakluyt reported that Portuguese vessels could be easily subdued in the offing, which would reduce the apprehension of the English and increase their self-confidence at ocean waters to and back from India. Two other similar pillages were played out in 1592 first aboard the *Santa Cruz* being forced ashore in the Azores⁴ and its crew being coerced into revealing valuable information on other Portuguese watercrafts coming from the Indian Ocean. And then, it happened to the *Madre de Deus* ransacked of jewels, spices, and silks evaluated in all at £ 500,000 in equivalence to half England's then yearly imports. (Scammell, 1982, pp. 179-180)

One may stress on the reliability of Hakluyt's reedited handbook *The Principal Navigations* in describing such adventurous facts because it is said that these, being narrated in his own style, could help emotionally the English to move eastwards or westwards. Being read by commoners and merchants alike, those international facts raised England's ambition of expanding her trade in the Americas and from the Levant to India as well as the East

⁴ The Azores, situated in the north Atlantic ocean, are a Portuguese archipelago where the English exercised piracy on Portuguese and Spanish treasure-carrying ships. (Encyclopaedia Britannica Incorporate, 1974, p. 700)

Indies. Moreover, Hakluyt's description strongly suggested to the English reader that still much more wealth and geographical information from the targeted lands were to be gained by English marine. Hakluyt told about the captured *Madre de Deus* offering the English, in addition to those aforementioned oriental goods, a range of maps, correspondence, a report on China and its riches, and above all a writing entitled *the Portuguese Register of the East Indies*. The latter document was said to contain a series of jealously-hidden secrets about China and its trade with the Portuguese. (Scammell, 1982, p. 181) Hakluyt became a prominent professional luminary paid to make maps and writings indicating Indian and East Indian areas where trade could successfully be carried out. (Ogborn, 2002, p. 162) Ash's version agrees with Ogborn's one as follows:

Hakluyt was a prominent amateur geographer, who used his many contacts in nautical circles to gather and disseminate useful information regarding trade in all corners of the world. He made it his business to be as well informed as possible about the natural resources available in distant lands, the arts practiced and goods produced by the peoples there, and their most pressing needs and desires which might be met by English

commodities. (Ash, 2002,
p. 12)

One reads through Hakluyt's own words that his Anglicist literature came about to develop the idea of English imperialism by preaching the patriotic value of English Protestant hegemony over explorable areas regarded, in fact, as future English trading colonies. (Hakluyt, 1584, pp. 1, 2) This literature did not fail to make the English mind conceive of homeland as being autonomously separate of the remainder of Europe and due to exploit foreign peoples and their riches. Indeed, Hakluyt contributed in rooting in the English mentality a sense of national superiority as well as a stereotype about the Far East as being a ceaseless source of wealth-raising goods. (Cormack, 1994, p. 22)

His literary production was not only a claim of supposed rights to take benefit of but also an assignment of spiritual duties regarding such far-living peoples. (Hakluyt, 1589, pp. 5-13) He lauded English civility as being the capacity of the Englishman, raised in England, to subdue outer barbarism through colonial subordination to English monarchical rule acclaimed as the fairest and the most concordant system for the English. (Roy, 2005, p. 10) As a Christian priest, he taught to his Elizabethan compatriots that the greatest glory was to drag the non-civilized and the pagan to the Anglican convictions and English lifestyle. (Dalziel, 2006, p. 15)

More religiously important, Hakluyt's epic literature highlighted and was driven by his belief that increasing knowledge of overseas discoveries would achieve the divine purpose of disclosing the secrets of His creation and joining the world's peoples. (Payne, 2023, p. 89) The crucial character of this epic literature, based on the translation of Portuguese and Dutch geographical writings, is corroborated by Sherman's ensuing words:

*Elizabethan travel
books — and particularly*

the epoch-making anthologies of Richard Hakluyt — have been seen and celebrated as evidence of England's first great age of maritime expansion. The nation had grown conscious of its cultural inferiority to the Continent, and suddenly burned with the desire to excel its rivals in letters, as well as in ships and gold. The translator's work was an act of patriotism. He, too, as well as the voyager and merchant, could do some good for his country: he believed that foreign books were just as important for England's destiny as the discoveries of her seamen, and he brought them into his native speech with all the enthusiasm of a conquest. (Sherman, 2004, p. 199)

Conclusion

Hakluyt's compiled published documents are reducible to an echoing verbalization of England's positive opinion towards general far overseas trade, inclusively announcing the English break of European East Indian trade monopoly. Epic narration of facts and fiction combined purposefully with rhetorical art in Hakluyt's literature as a driving force for the rise of England in the international contending scene. His writings chiefly those published from 1589 were put forward to raise the hope of the Elizabethan Englishman from flaws and failures in front of foreigners overseas to major possibilities for hegemonic imperialism and ultimately long-term transfer of wealth from America and Asia to homeland. It may be claimed that Hakluyt's literary production came about to awaken the English population for discovery, exploration, colonization, and enrichment by emphasizing labour, endurance, and insistence all after failure. By the end of the Elizabethan era, his literary list of achievements had stood up as a monument of Englishness, navigational pretension, and profit-making. The English had been able to reach a clearer and definitive understanding of themselves yet even without fully understanding the peoples and nature of the lands they were coveting.

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