

# Through the "Golden Mist": A Brief Overview of Armada Historiography

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EVERY so often in history an event so influences the human spirit that it quickly becomes shrouded in myth and legend. The defeat of the Spanish Armada is one of history's best examples. Described as "the beginning of Armageddon" or "the struggle between light and darkness," the story of the Anglo-Spanish conflict has inspired many writers, good and bad alike. The resulting body of historical literature covers virtually all facets of the campaign with a certain reverence. From contemporary accounts to recent scholarship, authors agree that it held significance for future generations and that it altered the course of history. The quatercentenary of the confrontation provides an opportunity to assess some of the most significant contributions to Armada scholarship.

Although many writers have been drawn to the events of the Armada during the last two centuries, remarkably few good contemporary sources exist. An original account of the battle can be found in a letter from Vice Admiral John Hawkins to Principal Secretary Walsingham on 21 July 1588. Written as the English began to chase the Armada through the North Sea, it provides only a brief summary of events and contains no detail on tactical maneuvers. Another account, from the pen of Lord Admiral Charles Howard to Walsingham dated 7 August reveals little more than the actions of Howard's own vessel.<sup>1</sup>

The first attempt to provide a complete account of events can be found in a document entitled "Defeat of the Spanish Armada anno 1588, a Relation of Proceedings." Apparently written for Howard, this was not confirmed until an Italian translation of the document dedicated to Howard was discovered in the British

Museum in the 1890s.<sup>2</sup> Until the discovery little was known about the original document since the translation contained no date, title, or signature. Nevertheless, many subsequent histories used it as a major source, and scholars came to recognize the "Relation" as an official narrative of the campaign.

However, the work of naval historian Sir Julian Corbett in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries revealed many errors in the "Relation." naval terms were frequently misused, ships made to sail impossible courses, and Howard glorified to the exclusion of other important players, especially Sir Francis Drake.<sup>3</sup> Although Corbett made no attempt to hide his favoritism for Drake, his analysis provided important information on the reliability of the document.

The Italian translation of the "Relation," dated 15 April 1589, was prepared for Howard by Petruccio Ubaldino, a Florentine writer living in London. Ubaldino had taught Italian and translated works for the Court periodically since the end of Henry VIII's reign. Interestingly, his translation of the "Relation" added an apology for Drake's actions in abandoning his place as the lead ship in the English fleet after the battles off Plymouth. Corbett suggested that Drake may have had some influence over the translation since he and Ubaldino had met at Court, and because Drake had asked him to write an Italian history of the campaign.<sup>4</sup>

Later scholarship revealed another twist in the story. At Drake's urging, Ubaldino produced a second, longer narrative completed some four months after the first. Drawing from the "Relation," and adding information from sources favorable to Drake,

1. John K. Laughton, ed., *State Papers Relating to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada*, 2 vols. (London, 1894), vol. 1, p. 358, vol. 2, p. 55.

2. British Library, Cotton Ms. Julius, F. X. 6 leaves, folios 95-101, formerly folios 111-117.

3. Sir Julian Corbett, *Drake and the Tudor Navy*, 2 vols. (London and New York, 1898), vol. 2, pp. 412-13.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 414-15.

Ubalduino drafted in Italian a more detailed and balanced account which corrected some of the discrepancies found in the first document. In 1590, Ubalduino offered the manuscript to Sir Christopher Hatton, then Lord Chancellor, as a New Year's gift. First used by Corbett, Ubalduino's second account, entitled "Comentario . . . L'Anno 1588," lay unnoticed in the British Museum until the late nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

Despite its corrections of the "Relation," Ubalduino's second narrative never received recognition at the time as the most accurate contemporary account of the Armada campaign. Instead, the "Relation" became the most frequently used source until Corbett revealed its errors. This occurred primarily because an English translation of the "Relation" entitled *A Discourse concernye the Spanish Fleete invadinye Englande in the year 1588*, published in 1590, gained a wide exposure throughout the country. Although Ubalduino himself condemned the "Relation" after he completed the "Comentario," the first version, through the English translation, influenced generations of historians.<sup>6</sup>

The narrative of both the "Comentario" and the *Discourse* advanced a reverence for the English cause. God surely favored the English, inspiring brave seamen in defense of the realm. The victory confirmed not only the English religion, but also the extraordinary courage of the English naval officers. If, as Ubalduino suggested in the "Comentario," it was "King Phillip's zeal to change the religion of England and introduce the Roman faith," England need not have worried. For the combined forces of the Lord Admiral Howard and Sir Francis Drake, a "politic and Christian union," happily secured a "certain and inevitable victory" for England.<sup>7</sup>

William Camden's account of the Armada in his *Annales* relied heavily on the *Discourse*, and he used these themes as a backdrop for a more detailed examination of the battle. He offered a nationalistic tone,

and found great joy in relating how, in his words, an inferior naval force managed to crush the Armada, "so arrogantly named Invincible."<sup>8</sup> Camden was also the first to assert that the efforts of armed private merchant vessels which supplemented the English fleet turned the tide against the Spanish forces. He wrote: "the youth of England, (leaving their Parents, Wives, Children, Kindred, and friends, out of their dearer love to their cuntry) with ships hyred at their own charges, joined themselves in great numbers with the Fleete, with generous alacrity, and incredible courage."<sup>9</sup> Later scholarship, especially Corbett's work, challenged this interpretation, yet Camden's version remained unquestioned until the early twentieth century.

Another issue raised by Camden became an important historiographical debate. His portrayal of the Duke of Medina Sidonia as a bumbling, amateur seaman unable to adjust his strategy to the changing conditions of battle has often come under attack and will most probably remain a focus of debate.

Camden's chronicle of the English victory concludes with a discussion of James VI's "embrace of the Queen's friendship" and the Scottish king's "sincere profession of the true religion."<sup>10</sup> The significance of a Protestant accession, first asserted by Camden, appeared often in subsequent histories. In fact, the *Annales* became the most frequently cited historical source until the great expansion of available primary research materials in the nineteenth century enabled more detailed studies.

During the eighteenth century the Tory view of English history which emphasized the rights of sovereign over parliamentary authority dominated treatments of the Armada campaign. The work of David Hume illustrates this trend. Although best known as a philosopher, Hume, a Scot, was the most popular and influential British historian of the eighteenth century. His multivolume *History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688* (1754) teems with Tory philosophy.<sup>11</sup>

Hume maintained that the privileges of Parliament

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 416-18. Ubalduino's second narrative (British Library, Royal Mss. 14 A. XI.) was contained in the same collection as his translation of the "Relation" (British Library, Royal Mss. 14 A. X.).

6. Petruccio Ubalduino, *A Discourse Concernye the Spanish Fleete Invadinye Englande in the Year 1588 . . .*, trans. for A. Ryther (London, 1590). Corbett, p. 419.

7. Ubalduino's "Comentario" was translated in full for the first time in George P. Naish, ed., "Documents Illustrating the History of the Armada," in Christopher Lloyd, ed., *The Naval Miscellany*, vol. 4 (London 1952), pp. 1-85.

8. William Camden, *Annales* (London, 1625). Short Title Catalog #4497.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, 8 vols. (London, 1791), vol. 8, pp. 333-46 *passim*.

were not "exactly ascertained" nor the royal power "fully limited" during Elizabeth's reign. Although his biases best befit his discussion of the Stuarts, the events of the Armada also provided a ripe forum. Hume praised Elizabeth for having "foreseen the invasion" and for engendering the "confidence which her subjects reposed in her prudent judgment." Unlike the Whig historians of the following century who criticized the Queen for her indecision and weakness in the face of the Spanish, Hume contended that Elizabeth was the major force behind the victory. He also did not hesitate to criticize members of Parliament who objected to the subsidies granted her after the defeat of the Armada.<sup>12</sup>

A landmark in modern historiography, Hume's *History* changed the discipline. He became the first modern historian to advance interpretations of historical events and perceive the importance of causation. Although Hume relied primarily on Camden for factual information, as he was notorious for his refusal to undertake basic research, the *History* nevertheless became a classic for its sweeping narrative and underlying perceptions of politics and human nature. Moreover, Hume's work became a sounding board for later interpretations and an outright target for Whig historians.<sup>13</sup>

Not until the nineteenth century did the events of the Armada become associated with a coherent national history. Previously, several factors worked against the evolution of Armada scholarship. Large stores of primary sources preserved by the government lay uncataloged and virtually inaccessible, and historians made little effort to master the available sources. Considered a branch of literature, professional history did not develop in England until the late nineteenth century. Previously, history was written by dilettantes, gentlemen of leisure, statesmen, politicians, or literary scholars, and remained unencumbered by extensive documentation and verifiable research.<sup>14</sup>

Both Oxford and Cambridge Universities focused historical study on the ancient classics, and offered little instruction in modern history. Endowed chairs in

history at these institutions were considered sinecures, and conservative forces in academia often severely criticized serious historical research. In the face of these obstacles, substantive research on the Armada campaign did not appear until a group of British scholars developed a new framework for historical study known as the Whig interpretation.<sup>15</sup>

Led by historians such as James A. Froude, Thomas Carlyle, T. B. Macaulay, and J. R. Green, much of British historical scholarship in the nineteenth century reflected the Whig interpretation. By 1830, the basic elements of this philosophy; historical romanticism and nationalist zeal, found expression in the writings of these men. The Whig interpretation embraced the traditions of Parliament, progress, and Protestantism in the British past, and viewed history with a perpetual reference to the present. Whig history often abstracted events from their historical context and judged them to advance a specific view of the present.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, Whig historians, the most influential occupying newly formed chairs at Oxford and Cambridge in the last half of the century, viewed British history as a perpetual struggle. Protestants and Whigs were perennial allies of liberty, while Catholics and Tories represented the forces of tyranny and reaction. The Whig view became a Victorian era standard, and left an indelible mark on Armada historiography. After all, what better event than the Armada to trumpet the heroic, patriotic Protestants in defense of their homeland against the vile regime of Phillip II. The Whig historians exploited the story of the Armada on many pages of colorful, descriptive, if often biased historical accounts.<sup>17</sup>

The availability of new sources and the organization of existing ones prompted the expansion of Armada scholarship during the nineteenth century. After 1830 the organization of the public records of England and their subsequent "discovery" provided a wealth of new material for enterprising historians. The Whigs used original sources freely, especially domestic state papers. They also benefited from the completion of the

12. Ibid.

13. Thomas P. Peardon, *The Transition in English Historical Writing, 1760-1830* (New York, 1933), pp. 69-72. James W. Thompson, *A History of Historical Writing* (New York, 1942), pp. 69-72.

14. Thompson, *A History of Historical Writing*, pp. 280-81.

15. Peardon, p. 9. H. Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London, 1931), pp. 11, 30-31. Rosemary Jann, "From Amateur to Professional: The Case of the Oxbridge Historians," *Journal of British Studies* 22 (Spring 1983), 127-47.

16. Butterfield, pp. 30-31. Rosemary Jann, *The Art and Science of Victorian History* (Columbus, OH, 1985) offers an insightful look at several important British historians of the nineteenth century including Froude, Carlyle, Macaulay, and Green.

17. Thompson, pp. 280-333 passim.

Calendar of State Papers begun under the direction of the Master of the Rolls in 1862.<sup>18</sup>

Another important source for new scholarship on the Armada was the publication in two volumes of official Spanish documents relating to the battle by Spanish naval Captain Cesaro Duro in 1884 and 1885. This collection, entitled *La Armada Invencible* provided much new information in a readily accessible form. In the Whig tradition, though, the first work to rely on Duro's collection, Froude's *Spanish Story of the Armada*, used it to criticize the Spanish rather than relate their side of the encounter.<sup>19</sup>

Of all the Whig historians, James A. Froude provides the best illustration of nineteenth century English historical attitudes toward the Armada campaign. His forceful views related in opinionated prose formed the cornerstone of the Whig interpretation. His major work, *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada*, viewed the battle as the most dramatic event in British history. Froude and other Whig historians focused on several themes associated with the events of 1588. Foremost, they criticized Elizabeth and her approach to the Spanish threat. Opinion ranged from outright scorn to gentle criticism, with the thundering voice of Froude leading the chorus of blame.<sup>20</sup>

Whig historians often blamed Elizabeth's "feminine weakness" and her miserly reluctance to spend money as the principal causes of her careful approach to the war. The origins of this attack can be traced to the correspondence of prominent Puritans of her day. Elizabeth's vacillation, her reluctance to support Protestant leaders on the Continent, and her belief that peace could be preserved became prime targets. Through the years, the Puritan view had influenced scholars, and the works of Froude represented a culmination of this tradition.<sup>21</sup>

In his *History of England*, Froude made no attempt to conceal his unbridled admiration of Henry VIII nor his scorn for Henry's daughter Elizabeth. According to Froude, the Queen was responsible for the "starved and ragged English seamen" who were "so ill fur-

nished by their sovereign that they were obliged to take from their enemies the means for fighting them." The defeat of the Armada, he claimed, was not only a military victory, but a victory over the "weakness of the Queen"<sup>22</sup>

Froude also refused to give Elizabeth credit for the strategic planning behind the Armada campaign. Instead, he praised Burghley and Walsingham as the "soul of the policy which had placed Elizabeth in triumph at last as the head of Protestant Europe." Only in his discussion of the events after 1588, when Elizabeth began to spend more on the war with Spain and for aid to foreign Protestants, did Froude relax his strident criticism.<sup>23</sup>

The Whig historians' Protestant fervor, nationalistic zeal, and enthusiasm for progress found full expression in Froude. To him, the victory over the Spanish was the sermon that transformed Catholics into Anglicans, and made "Catholic England . . . into the England of progressive intelligence." One of the most obvious manifestations of this "progressive intelligence," Froude argued, was the flowering of Elizabethan literature in the years following the Armada. The atmosphere in which the talents of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Marlowe developed directly from the mood of optimism pervading the country after the defeat of the Armada. These were years of "splendour and triumph," years rich in events of "profound national importance."<sup>24</sup>

In addition to providing a favorable climate for the development of great literature, Froude asserted that the English victory assured supremacy on the seas and "broke the back of Spain" both commercially and religiously. English commerce now penetrated to every corner of the Old World, and colonial expansion to the New World foreshadowed certain domination of the Atlantic trade. Froude attributed these developments, and nearly all of England's progress in the Whig sense, to the optimistic national mood which he described.<sup>25</sup>

The most important result of the victory, however, was the religious transformation of England and Europe. England would never again "pass through the farce of a reconciliation with Rome." Instead, the

18. *Ibid.*, p. 311.

19. C. F. Duro, *La Armada Invencible*, 2 vols. (Madrid, 1885). James A. Froude, *The Spanish Story of the Armada and Other Essays* (New York, 1892).

20. James A. Froude, *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada*, 12 vols. (London, 1870).

21. Garrett Mattingly, *The 'Invincible' Armada and Elizabethan England* (New York, 1963), p. 2.

22. Froude, *History*, vol. 12, pp. 537-38.

23. Froude, *The Reign of Elizabeth*, vol. 5 (London, 1912), p. 431.

24. Froude, *History*, vol. 12, pp. 538, 555.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 530.

struggle remained within the Anglican church where the conflicts of the seventeenth century led to the second Reformation. Camden's argument concerning the safe Protestant accession of James VI as a result of the victory also became part of Froude's interpretation.<sup>26</sup>

Froude also argued that the English victory determined the fate of the Reformation in Germany, for if Phillip had been victorious, the Catholic League would have triumphed, France would have backed the Spanish, and the Thirty Years War might have never begun or at least been brought to a swift conclusion. Furthermore, he asserted that the defeat of the Armada signaled a permanent downfall of Spanish influence throughout Europe.<sup>27</sup>

Froude's conclusions on the significance of the Armada campaign remained influential until the revisionism of the twentieth century corrected much of his exaggeration and inaccuracy. Yet his emphasis of the Whig ideals made his works extremely popular and influential among the public as well as the scholarly community.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the historical profession underwent a transformation that changed Armada scholarship. Typically, nineteenth century historical writing blended poetry and philosophy to weave an epic story. The evolution of occupational professionalism in the historical community created new priorities. No longer was it the historian's responsibility to attract and educate the general public, or engage in the "might have" approach to tempt readers with historical possibilities. The discipline itself became the audience, and verifiable, objective scholarship replaced unscientific methods of historical inquiry. Professional training became the only accepted method for pursuing the historical truth, and the subsequent rise of formal graduate programs in history throughout Europe and the United States brought a wealth of new writing based on professional research techniques.<sup>28</sup>

The evolution of the research ideal became the force behind the transformation of the historical profession. Under the influence of German historians Carsten Niebuhr and Leopold von Ranke, who insisted that history be based strictly on contemporary sources,

"scientific history" spread to England primarily through the efforts of Oxford professors William Stubbs and E. A. Freeman. The influence of the new methodology resulted in fewer narrative histories which covered many centuries and gave rise to more specialized works covering narrow subjects.<sup>29</sup> Historians studying the Armada began to delineate new areas of research. Naval and tactical analysis of the strategy surrounding the battle soon became the most popular areas of inquiry.

The completion of state papers relating to the defeat of the Armada by naval historian Sir John Laughton in 1894 provided researchers with a valuable new source.<sup>30</sup> It remains the most complete collection of English documents concerning the Armada campaign, and includes selected Spanish and French sources as well. Laughton's volume proved to be a great success, as he is cited in all of the major works on the subject in the twentieth century.

Until the late nineteenth century, naval history most often recounted battles or eulogized important admirals. Illustrative of the movement toward more specialized areas of historical inquiry, Laughton delivered a lecture at a meeting of the Royal United Service Institution in 1875 entitled "The Scientific Study of Naval History." He called for a new appraisal of naval history that would reveal not only the reasons for success or failure of campaigns, but also the "influences which . . . at different periods, rendered different countries powerful by sea." Throughout Laughton's career he encouraged naval historians to abandon their narrow focus on "the fighting" and attempt to examine naval history within the context of national development.<sup>31</sup>

Laughton's contributions to naval history, particularly the 1875 lecture, greatly influenced the work of American naval officer and historian Alfred T. Mahan. His *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* (1890) fulfilled the agenda proffered by Laughton. Apart from

29. For examples of the transformation of historical scholarship in England see William Stubbs, *Seventeen Lectures on the Study of Medieval and Modern History*, 3rd edition (Oxford, 1900) and E. A. Freeman, *The Methods of Historical Study* (London, 1886). For a general discussion of this change see Sheldon Rothblatt, *Tradition and Change in English Liberal Education* (London, 1976).

30. *State Papers Relating to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada*, 2 vols. (London, 1894).

31. Laughton, "The Scientific Study of Naval History," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 18 (1875), 508-27. Daniel A. Baugh, "The Navy to 1714," in Robin Higham, ed., *A Guide to the Sources of British Military History* (Berkeley, 1971), pp. 84-97.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 531.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Jann, "From Amateur to Professional," pp. 126-27.

its political significance, especially to policy makers in the United States, the book led naval history into the mainstream of political history.<sup>32</sup> The concept of "sea power," the role of naval power in international politics, captured the imagination of naval historians such as Sir William Clowes, Sir Herbert Richmond, Michael Oppenheim, and Sir Julian Corbett. Their studies reflected not only an attempt to relate naval tactics in an intelligible manner, but to place topics within the framework of political events.<sup>33</sup>

Sir Julian Corbett's *Drake and the Tudor Navy* (1898) was the first "scientific" examination of the Armada battle. Corbett detailed the naval tactics surrounding the preparations for the Armada, their relationship to political events in England, and the battle itself. Examining the relative strengths and weaknesses of both fleets, including the armaments, the capabilities of various ships, and the tactical skill of the commanders, Corbett shattered many myths surrounding the battle.

The traditional account of the fighting, perpetuated by contemporary chroniclers and heightened through the years by myth and the Whig interpretation, claimed that the English navy was inferior in both firepower and number to the great Spanish fleet. Only with the aid of a few fire-ships and small armed merchant vessels which inflicted well-placed volleys for their homeland did the valiant English gain victory.

Corbett offered a more balanced interpretation based on extensive research. He maintained that the English victory resulted from the actions of "a regular trained navy of specially built warships." Rejecting Camden and others who maintained that English merchant vessels had forced the formal Spanish navy from the seas, Corbett asserted that "it was England who had the formal navy, not Spain, and it was the navy not the privateers that decided the campaign."<sup>34</sup>

This important revision inspired many other tactical

studies which explored the capabilities of both fleets, especially respective armaments. Corbett also dispelled the view that the English navy was far inferior to the Armada. After careful analysis, he concluded that the English fleet was on a "fair equality with the Armada in the galleon class," and possessed "an overwhelming preponderance of gunpowder."<sup>35</sup>

Corbett also argued that Sir Francis Drake was the guiding spirit of the Armada campaign and that full credit for the tactical victory belonged to the colorful admiral. This thesis reflected another continuing controversy in Armada historiography. Contemporary chroniclers and professional historians alike have wrestled with the question of whether Drake or Howard deserved credit for the victory. Since meaningful research on the tactics of the battle did not appear until Corbett's study, most accounts reflected either the influence of the two men, as with Ubaldino, or the personal affinity of the writer for the myths surrounding both naval officers.

J. A. Williamson's *The Age of Drake* (1938) also traced the tactical aspects of the Armada battle. Williamson's major revision of Corbett concerned the roles of Drake and Howard. Despite Corbett's claim that Howard's command was "a courtly fiction," Williamson argued that Howard was the real commander of the English fleet. Williamson also reasoned that since contemporaries heard and wrote more about Drake than Howard, historians had been too quick to accept Drake's preeminence.<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps the most significant research on the tactical aspects of the Armada campaign appeared in a series of articles by Michael Lewis in the British maritime journal *The Mariner's Mirror* during 1942 and 1943. Entitled "Armada Guns," the articles focused on the size, number, and capability of the armaments of both fleets. Lewis argued that while the English possessed more long-range firepower, the Spanish held a great advantage in medium- and short-range guns. Thus, the two fleets were equipped for their chosen tactical roles; the English to keep the exchange at long range, and the Spanish to engage in close action. Lewis'

32. Alfred T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* (Boston, 1890). Baugh, pp. 84-85.

33. See, for example, Sir William L. Clowes, *The Royal Navy, A History from the Earliest Times to the Present*, 7 vols. (London, 1897); Sir Herbert Richmond, *The Navy as an Instrument of Policy 1585-1727* (Posthumously published, Cambridge, 1953) and *Statesmen and Sea Power* (Oxford, 1946); Sir Julian Corbett, *Drake and the Tudor Navy, England in the Mediterranean* (London, 1904), and *The Successors of Drake* (London, 1900); Michael Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy: from MDIX to MDCLX* (London, 1896) and ed., *The Naval Tracts of Sir William Monson*, 5 vols. (London, 1902).

34. Corbett, *Drake and the Tudor Navy*, p. 284.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 179, 185.

36. J. A. Williamson, *The Age of Drake* (London, 1938). See also Williamson's *Sir John Hawkins* (Oxford, 1927) and the revision *Hawkins of Plymouth* (London, 1949), and *Maritime Enterprise 1485-1558* (Oxford, 1913). R. W. Kenny provides a balanced view of the role of the two commanders in *Elizabeth's Admiral: The Political Career of Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham, 1536-1624* (Baltimore, 1970).

conclusions differed sharply from Corbett's, who had portrayed the Armada as inadequately armed.<sup>37</sup>

Lewis' thesis faced its major challenges from the scholarship of I. A. A. Thompson and Colin Martin during the 1970s.<sup>38</sup> Thompson found the Spanish deficient in all classes of armaments. He wrote: "the Spanish Armada was at such a decisive disadvantage in firepower, in both weight of shot and range, that it was probably incapable of winning the sea battle on whatever terms it was fought." Martin, using data collected from the salvage of wrecked Spanish vessels, argued that the Spanish had far fewer guns of all varieties than Lewis had claimed.<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps the most influential and provocative work on the events of the Armada in the twentieth century is Garrett Mattingly's *The Armada*. This classic volume, published in 1959, remains the most widely accepted account of the political and military aspects of the confrontation. Mattingly approached the subject from a broader perspective than any scholar had previously attempted. He placed the event into a European context, using Continental sources freely, and developed an interpretation valuable for its originality as well as its scope.<sup>40</sup>

Mattingly viewed the confrontation not as a Spanish response to an English challenge for command of the ocean and for seaways to empire, but as a decisive event in the European conflict between the Reformation and the Counter Reformation. He argued that the Armada was Phillip II's answer to Elizabeth's interference in the Netherlands and her obstruction of his attempt to gain European hegemony. According to Mattingly, the future of Protestantism in Europe depended on the battle.

37. Michael Lewis, "Armada Guns: A Comparative Study of English and Spanish Armaments," *The Mariner's Mirror* 28 (1942), 41-73, 104-47, 231-45, 259-90; and *The Mariner's Mirror* 29 (1943), 100-21, 163-78, 203-31. These articles were reprinted as *Armada Guns* (London, 1961).

38. I. A. A. Thompson, "Spanish Armada Guns," *The Mariner's Mirror* 61 (1975), 355-71. Colin Martin, *Full Fathom Five: The Wrecks of the Spanish Armada* (New York, 1975).

39. Thompson, "Spanish Armada Guns," p. 370. Martin, pp. 59, 157, 179. Other significant scholarship on the tactical aspects of the Armada include D. W. Waters, "The Elizabethan Navy and the Armada Campaign," *The Mariner's Mirror* 50 (1964), 177-87; J. R. Lander, "An Assessment of the Numbers, Sizes, and Types of English and Spanish Ships Mobilized for the Armada Campaign," *The Mariner's Mirror* 63 (1977), 359-64; and J. deCoursey Ireland, "Ragusa and the Spanish Armada of 1588," *The Mariner's Mirror* 64 (1978), 251-62.

40. Garrett Mattingly, *The Armada* (Boston, 1959). Reprinted as *The Defeat of the Spanish Armada* (Boston, 1984).

The victory was decisive, Mattingly argued, and guaranteed that "religious unity was not to be determined by force on the basis of medieval Christendom." However, he rejected many of the older beliefs about the consequences of the battle. Mattingly contended that it did not mark the end of the Spanish empire and the rise of the English. Spain remained powerful. "The defeat of the Armada," he wrote, "was not so much the end as the beginning of the Spanish navy." More treasure from the New World reached Spain from 1588 to 1603 than in any other fifteen years in Spanish history. Mattingly also observed that the battle did not mark the beginning of the English colonial empire or England's sovereignty over the seas.<sup>41</sup>

Further, he argued that the victory over the Spanish did not lead to a national mood of "buoyant optimism," which affirmed God's favor to the Protestants and confirmed the destiny of an imperial people. Mattingly dismissed this Whig canard, and attacked their view that the defeat of the Armada led to a flowering of Elizabethan literature. He maintained that "there is no link in England between the Armada campaign and any literary work." Moreover, Mattingly claimed that one could find no greater prevalence of "buoyant optimism" in the decade and a half after 1588 than in the previous fifteen years.<sup>42</sup>

Mattingly also restored the images of two principal actors in the Armada story, Elizabeth and the Duke of Medina Sidonia. Long maligned for her reluctance to unleash her "sea dogs" against the "forces of the anti-Christ" before she did, Elizabeth appears in *The Armada* as a skilled politician and able tactician, largely responsible for the ultimate success of the campaign. Mattingly argued that Elizabeth knew more about the economics of naval warfare than some of her captains, including Drake and Howard. Medina Sidonia is similarly resurrected from the grave of Whig misinterpretation. Mattingly presents the Duke as courageous, administratively talented, and "sound in his personal conduct." He argued that Medina Sidonia was not a "craven coward," as Froude had presented him, but a man who did well in the face of a desperate situation.<sup>43</sup>

Mattingly's attempt to place the events of the Armada campaign into a European perspective resulted

41. Mattingly, *The Armada*, pp. 398-401.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 398.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 375.

in an important original conclusion. After the Armada, he wrote: "the pattern of territorial, ultimately (national) states which was to characterize modern Europe was beginning to emerge . . . each major state was not only to be free, but increasingly to feel free, to develop its own individual potentialities without conforming to any externally imposed system of beliefs."<sup>44</sup> This conclusion summarized what previous historians had failed to recognize, that national self-determination was perhaps the most important result of the English victory.

Mattingly was also the first to consider the legacy of the Armada story in historical perspective. He asserted that the legend of the Spanish Armada became as important, perhaps more so, than the actual event. "Magnified and distorted by a golden mist," the story "became an eternal myth of the victory of the weak over the strong, of the triumph of David over Goliath." In Mattingly's last work, *The 'Invincible' Armada and Elizabethan England*, he blamed "compulsive national fantasies" for the distortion of events through the centuries.<sup>45</sup>

Other significant works on the Armada in recent years include Michael Lewis, *The Spanish Armada* (1960) and David Howarth, *The Voyage of the Armada* (1981).<sup>46</sup> Lewis' survey of the Armada campaign focused on the major actors, especially the major naval officers involved in the battle. He also devoted a good portion of the book to tactical analysis, using data collected from his articles in *The Mariner's Mirror*. Lewis concluded that an important result of the battle, not mentioned previously, was "an abiding, almost intuitive trust of the [English] people in their Navy which, though not always justified, has never faded, and seldom faltered."<sup>47</sup> His insights into the naval personalities of the campaign are perhaps the most important contribution of the book.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 401.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 402. Mattingly, *The 'Invincible' Armada*, p. 1. Another contemporary historian, William S. Maltby, has also addressed the Armada legend. He contended that more than any other event, the Armada placed a strong anti-Hispanism into the English consciousness and led to a myth of Spanish incapacity.

46. Michael Lewis, *The Spanish Armada* (London, 1960). David Howarth, *The Voyage of the Armada: The Spanish Story* (New York, 1981). For a wider perspective on the years preceding and following the Armada, see R. B. Wernham's volumes *Before the Armada* (New York, 1966) and *After the Armada* (Oxford, 1984). Also, see D. B. Quinn and A. N. Ryan, *England's Sea Empire, 1550-1624* (London, 1983).

47. Lewis, p. 212.

Some of the more intriguing recent research on the events of the Armada appeared in Howarth's book. Using material from Duro's *La Armada Invencible*, plus additional Spanish documents, Howarth attempted to relate the story from the Spanish perspective. "After all," he wrote, "it was [the Spanish] who needed the most courage in 1588."<sup>48</sup> Interested only in the events from May to September 1588, Howarth argued that the Spanish had an unrealistic approach to the battle, defective strategy and tactics, and a tenacity which led them into further trouble. The book, though limited in scope and disappointing in its conclusions about the Spanish side of the story, gave valuable insight into the workings, both administrative and tactical, of Spain's preparations for and conduct of the Armada campaign.

Howarth's interest in administrative history evidenced the growing importance of that topic in recent years. Studies of the administrative workings behind the preparations, or lack thereof, of Elizabeth's government to meet the Spanish threat have added a new dimension to Armada historiography. Lawrence Stone first examined in detail the role of the English bureaucracy in the Armada campaign. Stone found their preparations "criminally inadequate," lacking foresight and efficiency in the conduct of military affairs.<sup>49</sup>

Focusing on the role of the Privy Council, the department of the Exchequer, and the Admiralty, Ronald Pollitt has argued instead that the bureaucratic organization of England's defense establishment was a major factor behind the victory over the Armada.<sup>50</sup> He asserted that these small but efficient branches of Elizabeth's government played a significant role in planning and executing the tactics for preventing a Spanish invasion. Pollitt wrote: "the Crown and its bureaucracy mobilized, armed, equipped, and kept at sea a fleet whose whole purpose was to keep the Spanish out of England. It did precisely that. . . ." He viewed the defeat of the Armada as the first military victory "engineered by an emerging bureaucratic state" and argued that "the importance of the victory lies as much in that development as it does in the other effects attributed to it."<sup>51</sup>

48. Howarth, preface.

49. Lawrence Stone, "The Armada Campaign of 1588," *History* 29 (1944), 120-43.

50. Ronald Pollitt, "Bureaucracy and the Armada: The Administrators Battle," *The Mariner's Mirror* 60 (1974), 119-32.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 132. For an examination of English naval planning,



With the interest in administrative history complementing previous studies of the Armada campaign, historians have assembled a reasonably complete picture of events. However, Armada scholarship remains tied to political, diplomatic and military history. The anniversary may encourage social and economic historians to examine the story from a new perspective.

Despite the effects current trends may have on Armada historiography, some old business must be concluded. The time is ripe for a synthetic account which incorporates administrative history and reexamines the domestic and foreign consequences of victory. There is also a need for additional work from the Spanish perspective, especially concerning the conse-

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preparation, and administration in the years before the Armada, especially the efforts of William Cecil and Lord Admiral Clinton, see Ronald Pollitt, "Contingency Planning and the Defeat of the Spanish Armada," *The American Neptune* 45 (Winter 1984), 25-32. He concluded that "a fair share" of the responsibility for the victory must rest with governmental officials who anticipated the crisis, surveyed resources, and devised a contingency plan for battle.

For the Spanish perspective on administration and bureaucratic organization for the Armada see I. A. A. Thompson, "The Appointment of the Duke of Medina Sidonia to the Command of the Spanish Armada," *Historical Journal* 12 (1969), 5-28, and "The Armada and Administrative Reform: The Spanish Council of War in the Reign of Phillip II," *English Historical Review* 82 (October 1967), 698-725. Also, Peter Pierson, "A Commander for the Armada," *The Mariner's Mirror* 55 (1969), 383-400.

quences of defeat.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, local history should be employed to provide new insights into less well known facets of the story such as the preparations for the war on the local level.

Another promising area of inquiry is the attitudes and perceptions of the English people as events in the 1570s and 1580s foreshadowed the war with Spain. In general additional work is needed at the opposite ends of the historical spectrum as it relates to the Armada. Although a broad survey would be useful, many details remain unexplored that may reveal a new theme in English history during the period.

In the twentieth century historians have begun to lift the "golden mist" which has shrouded the Armada story. Although long blighted in previous years by a search for a "useable past," Armada historiography has at last broken free. Yet it would be unfortunate if the grandeur of the story were lost amidst "scientific" inquiries, for the defeat of the Armada remains one of the greatest tales ever told.

52. An important step in this direction was taken by Felipe Fernández-Armesto in *The Spanish Armada: The Experience of War in 1588* (Oxford, 1988).



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