

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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Richard Hakluyt. 1553-1616

## VOYAGES

**Diverse Voyages Tracking the Discovery of North America 1582**  
**The Principal Voyages, Traffics, and Negotiations of the English Nation. 1589**

### BACKGROUND

Richard Hakluyt was born in 1553, into an England which was beginning to savor its new role as a world naval power. (British fleets had been operative from the early mediaeval period, but an organized and battleworthy British Navy first began to assemble in the sixteenth century, and would from that time on go on to spearhead the formation of the British nation as a seafaring power. The fact need hardly be mentioned, that the location of sea girt Britain mandated both a vigilant coastal fleet and a readiness for all kinds of commercial transactions. Britain was, by Hakluyt's date, mistress of the seas.

It was into this world that Richard Hakluyt was born. In Hereford, England, and it was largely from England itself that he extended his considerable influence over the burgeoning European culture of his time. (He exercises his masterly reputation not as a navigator or adventurer, but as a geographer, a map maker, and, of course, both as a diplomatic secretary, operating influentially at the highest courts in Europe, as well, of course, as an ordained priest. An education at Christ Church Oxford, as well as a number of fascinating encounters at the Middle Temple in London, where he gained his credentials as a barrister, firmly fixed Hakluyt's passion for learning, scholarship and the world itself.

The world profited in knowledge and breadth by Hakluyt's writings, and collections of writings, on geography and the new world, and it is our intention here to sketch what seem so to us a pot pourri of several of the main themes which appear to emerge, say, from a number of Hakluyt's collections.

### THEMES

In the present entry, thematic considerations play a large role: replacing the attention we would typically give to 'characters' or 'plot.' We are into an historical phase where new discoveries, new concepts and new experiences add continually to mankind's store of universals. During the sixteenth century our human experience widens rapidly, and with it our capacity to understand our place in the world. Themes can serve as a term for these conceptual aggregates by which we grow steeply in our capacity to understand our world.

### Colonization

The theme of colonization protrudes everywhere on the sixteenth century thought landscape. The mindset of colonialism formed early in Hakluyt. He was not actually an adventurer but a mind adventurer, who came into the world drawing his breath at the fascination of discovery. He grew up exposed to the intellectual currents of his time, a time when the British navy was accumulating power and prestige, British commercial transactions dominated the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, and tales of the Americas filled schoolboy imaginations in faraway Britain. Hakluyt was raised in a family crowded with siblings, and was from early on engaged with the world.

He was educated at Christ Church Oxford, then, after his law studies, he was taken on as private secretary to the British Ambassador in France. Needless to say this position increased Hakluyt's knowledge and fascination for the world around him. Subsequently he widened his correspondence and

his acquaintance with the history and development of maps; until in the end his thinking was global and colonization a natural move on the puzzle piece of the globe.

### ***Colonizer Mindset; Social Superiority***

Colonizer mind, as we see from a quick bio of Hakluyt, has in the West tended to walk in step with a certain downward squint of the nose, as though the 'colonizer' is inevitably 'looking down' on less developed specimens of human achievement--uncultured native or immigrant. The mindset of the chief players, in Hakluyt's verbal documentaries, revels in precisely the above senses of superiority. Whether it is native clothing, alien religious beliefs, or extreme cruelty in warfare or punishment, the Indians of Virginia and Chesapeake Bay earn a nearly uniformly bad press from Hakluyt. Exceptions, however, are always welcome:

*The king of the said province is called Menatonnon, a man impotent in his limbs but otherwise, for a savage, a very grave and wise man, and of a very singular good discourse in matters concerning the state, not only of his own country, and the disposition of his own men, but also of his neighbors round about him...*

One is reminded, in such an account, of the humanity of Montaigne's contemporary *Essays*, which at just this moment in history were reflecting their author's sensitivity to the wide range of styles and perspectives that primitives were contributing to the western world.

### ***Esprit de corps***

Hakluyt presents us with a wide documentation of texts pertaining to the British government's policy of exploring, exploiting, and in certain cases brutally colonizing; especially during periods of actual settlement-founding in the Americas. (A now classic study, of this bold and rough period of acquisition, can be found in Bernard Bailyn's *The Barbarous Years: The Peopling of British North America: The Conflict of Civilizations (1600-1675)*.) As we see from Hakluyt's texts the quality of government commitment could not be relied on. However among the British expeditionary forces, a significant fidelity to Mother England was growing, whether simply to a source of livelihood, or to an increasingly respected symbol of nationalism.

### ***Adventurousness***

The texts Hakluyt puts before us are part of the expression of the needs of a particular social class, the ruling class of his contemporary England, and in particular of that class as it merges tightly with mercantile and military components of its society. Nonetheless the challenge of reaching out to the unfamiliar or unknown began at this time, and was to remain a trademark of British cultural personality. Hakluyt does not introduce us to heroes of survival, in his gallery of more or less anonymous wayfarers for the honor of the King. Even commanders command in the median voices of conversation or control. But Hakluyt makes us fully aware that we are now dealing in an incursion from a culturally new World, the world of what from that times' perspective was fresh with new kinds of science. The men making the hejira to Chesapeake Bay were graduates of advanced and systematic post mediaeval universities. What had first blossomed as the late mediaeval universities of Europe was now in England a full-fledged British intellectual Renaissance.

### ***The discovering spirit***

The final theme in this account, but then again also the primal one, is the *discovering spirit*. Not only did the Royal Patent, under which the men of Sir Francis Drake or Sir Walter Raleigh explored the East Coast of America, incentivize its men to review the possibilities for enlarging British territory, but that same patent gave leave to the men in question, whose number included a diversity of capable intellectuals, an opportunity to sample the tobacco we smoke, to back extensive scientific observations, and on the whole to extend human knowledge. The consequences of this royal mandate were huge, not necessarily all to the advantage of humanity, but huge as to our understanding of the world we are placed in. It will be

worth considering a number of the examples in question, while keeping in mind the broader conception behind our theme--the functioning conceptual block, in terms of which we are trying to organize the kinds of thought-practices operative in the writings and writing-collections of Hakluyt. It is worth reviewing the setting of a few of these discoveries.

It is not surprising that a group of discovery pleasures claimed the particular attention of these colonizing adventurers: smoking etc., the tobacco we smoke, the beer we drink, all these native recreational resources were easy to find among the native Indians of the eastern coast of the United States. It is easy enough, with time, to characterize and evaluate the details of such discoveries as these, but the thematic characteristics leave us in no doubt about the universal prospects of indiscriminate discovery. The thematic universal behind the British discovery process, on the American East Coast, is less a universal than a wedge of indiscriminate indulgences in the pleasure principle.

While some intoxicating or aromatic presences charmed the adventurers, a vast range of native agricultural products caught the British attention. Britain itself, of course, was no wild land when the early adventurers sailed away from its shores. But all kinds of new land-based discoveries awaited the discoverers. In addition to the pleasure-giving products of the earth, the British curiosity was taken by many unfamiliar products of the soil such as roots--edible and plantable-- which still serve as staple potato and other tuberous nourishment; good breadmaking grains hitherto unknown in Britain; grains for excellent malt, fine broad leaf beans, marigold heads from which a textured flour can be made, succulent melons of many kinds, silk grass resembling the ornamental grasses of Persia, wines, oils, furs, skins, even minerals like copper. This extensive list, the byproduct of a couple of years of expeditionary study and investigation--the usual duration of an expedition--was designated for the settlers' pleasure, as well as for the London markets.

### ***Events, themes, history***

The events in question are large expeditionary forays, sent out by Britain--the contemporary parallels could as well have been taken from impulses deriving from Spain or Italy. Less than fifty years before Hakluyt's texts, the westward drift toward Europe, was beginning to make its way into men's thinking. Naval construction and security were improving daily, and returning reports of the New World, like those of Columbus, were giving the interested something concrete and practicable, toward which to direct their plans. Mercantile vessels emanating from Britain were emerging from British ports to crisscross the Mediterranean. Hakluyt brought map making savvy, and a canny sense of the widespread explorations of his time, to the texts he collected, concerning the immense new movement of people and goods in his time.

It has been our earlier practice, in this cultural encyclopedia, to formulate *themes* more precisely than *events*. *Recent themes* in previous encyclopedia entries:

Lightness  
Forgiveness  
Chivalry  
Resignation  
Humor  
Betrayal  
Thrift  
Childhood  
Credulity

Such conceptual pin pointings as these were ways of specifying details of conceptual precision.

*Events, on the other hand*, were larger expressions of action, perhaps a coagulation of themes like those that converged through western European intelligence onto the hitherto little explored dimension of newly discovered lands. Themes developed in the course of the laying out of events. More general and broad than either themes or events would be *histories or history*. To say this is to skirt the Platonic element

covert in the notion of a theme, or event, or of a large sequence of events on the ground. Under the broad shelter of that intelligibility preside over the sequences that constitute daily life. History, then, is that broad shelter, the comprehensive name for a coherent series of events on the ground. Hakluyt was foremost a history maker.