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The Sea Dogs as the builders of the international colonialist network

Andrii Pastushenko, Iryna Otenko

The given article analyses the impact of the Elizabethan seafarers on the development of the early international communication networks connecting separately shaped world zones of the so-called agrarian civilizations. The research is concentrated on the complex role of piratical and privateering activities in the process of linking those zones together, or on the question how such ventures stimulated new colonization, new exchanges and new discoveries. At the same time it has been argued why the late sixteenth century piracy and privateering were features of not only distinctive group of seafarers but of the whole group of English seamen. Among those piratical adventurers selected for the current examination are as follows: John Hawkins, Martin Frobisher, John Oxenham, Francis Drake, Humphrey Gilbert, Walter Raleigh, Thomas Cavendish and Richard Grenville. Each of them is well known for his achievements. John Hawkins made first attempts of the English slave trade across the Atlantic Ocean, Martin Frobisher established the earliest contacts of the Europeans and the Esquimaux, John Oxenham became the first Englishman who reached the Pacific Ocean, Francis Drake and John Cavendish conducted the circumnavigations with the huge profits for their shareholders, Humphrey Gilbert founded the first English settlement at Newfoundland, while Walter Raleigh and Richard Grenville actively participated in the earliest colonization of Virginia territory. However its destructive role, seaborne robbery in some cases provided motivation, remuneration and seamen's preparation for these early modern discoveries and explorations eventually aimed at linking different world zones together into one international colonialist network.

Key words: England, world zones, agrarian civilizations, the Elizabethans, seamen, the late Middle Ages, piracy, privateering, international relations.

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Recent studies of the world history focus on the appearance of civilized hubs and cross-cultural networks between them distinguishing several world zones with hubs of agrarian civilizations which formed separately from each other but, in the course of time, began to merge into the one global interconnected world due to the network of communications increased. Investigating this process some authors appreciate trade, travels and conquests as the main activities creating such intercivilizational network links, while totally omitting piracy in spite of the essential contribution it made to the processes considered (Christian 2011, 335–363; Brown 2007, 188–209; McNeill 2003, 178–212) or superficially touching piracy as a negative or positive byproduct of colonialism (Marr 2012, 268; Weisner-Hanks 2015, 221). Of course piracy played a destructive role in the history of international network, but, as it is well known, historical reality is far more complicated than just black and white. Hence, the final goal of the current study is to fill the gap in the studies of the world history by examining the role of the Elizabethan piracy in the formation of stable networks between Afro-Eurasian and other world zones.

In terms of definitions, *the Elizabethan piracy* is considered the English sea robbery that occurred during the reign of Elizabeth I Tudor (1558–1603), while the term *sea dogs* reflects the famous Elizabethan seafaring figures. However one should specify that in relation to the sixteenth century the word *piracy* is, to some extent, a conventional term due to some sea law ambiguity.

The period, which has been chosen for the current study, is the reign of Elizabeth I, since it played a crucial role in the emergence of the British colonial empire which eventually connected all world zones into the one network.

To some extent, the problem raised here has its novelty, although the aspects of the role of piracy in the development of the British colonial empire, synthesized in the given article, have already been illuminated by many scholars including such as K. R. Andrews, J. Appleby, D. B. Quinn, P. Gerhard, O. B. Diomin, V. K. Gubarev, I. P. Magidovich, etc (Andrews 1986; Appleby 2009; Quinn 1975; Gerhard 2004; Diomin 2001; Gubarev 2013; Magidovich 1983).

In the late 1400s, Spain and Portugal with the help of the Roman Pope made a division of all oceans and lands both discovered and those which would be discovered. The Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) and the Treaty of Saragossa (1529) secured this division. The demarcation crossed the globe 370 leagues (1770 km) westward of the Cabo-Verde islands, — all the territories west of it were allocated to Spain and all the territories east of it were granted to Portugal. The Iberian countries prohibited other countries to enter their overseas territories without a special permission from them (Rodger 2014, 8). Of course, other European states could not but go against these politics of Spain and Portugal. Although Illegal for the Spaniards and the Portuguese, piracy appeared to be the only way for those non-Iberians.

Moreover, the traditional medieval custom seemed to allow seamen to travel and make pillage in open sea. The latter had never been treated as a zone under jurisdiction of any Christian prince and now was rather the territory of marcher law (law of military) for seafarers. Hence the Spain's and Portugal's treaties were arranged as, to some degree, juridical innovations. At the same time, tradition and rationality provided many people with good excuse for taking loot at sea to satisfy their greediness. Acting as marauders the Elizabethans behaved in the ordinary way of medieval warlike merchants. To provide themselves with good legal excuse they could take special *letters of reprisal* (or *letter of marque*) from their Admiralty court, or be granted by the Queen in some exceptional cases, to make up their losses by seizure from any subject of a foreign ruler, if his or her subject had been found guilty of causing these losses. In many studies such legally backed piratical activity is called *privateering*, though the term *privateer* itself was first coined in

the middle of the seventeenth century in order to designate the private seafarers acting as mercenaries in the war between states. In other words, the concept of privateering is based rather on public law than on private one which makes it more conventional if applied to the sixteenth century realities (Rodger 2014, 6).

Besides legal tradition, the piratical activities of the English were encouraged by uneasy religious confrontations of the long Reformation in Europe and terrible economic crisis in England particularly. There was some necessity for merchants to maximize their profits by capturing weaker vessels in the course of voyage. In N. A. M. Rodger's words, "robbery under arms was a normal aspect of seaborne trade" (Rodger 2014, 6). To some degree, sea robbery was undoubtedly that tool which diminished financial risks of merchant ventures.

What is clear is that one should not say that the sixteenth century piracy was committed by some distinct group of pirates. The calculations given below provide relevant basis for this statement. During the Anglo-French war (1543–1546) nearly 30 to 60 privateering ships acted at sea annually (Appleby 2009, 44), and during the Anglo-Spanish war (1585–1604) the respective ships came to the number of 100 to 200 (Appleby 2009, 214; Andrews 1985, 15). If one takes 50 tons, the minimal burden of privateer vessel (usually there were ships of 50 to 100 and more tons, like, for example, 350 tons Merchant Royal; in 1590, one of four ships was over 100 tons (Andrews 1959, 16–18). As a rule, privateer ships were staffed with two men per ton in order to manage captured prize. Hence, minimal number of people aboard must be 100 per vessel, and, if one takes given average number of 100 to 200 ships per year, the total minimal average number aboard must be 10 000 to 20 000 seamen for the period between 1585 and 1604. In relation to the general number of seamen in England it appears to be especially interesting. As C. Senior calculates, in 1582, England had nearly 16 000 seamen (or 16 255 in 1583, according to N. A. M. Rodger (Rodger 1997, 314), and by 1601 the number increased up to 50 000 (Senior 1976, 9). Thus, the number of those seamen involved in piracy and privateering was significant enough. In other words, concerning piracy, famous Elizabethan seafarers were apparently far enough from being exceptional. No wonder that contemporaries called England the state of pirates (Childs 2014, 9).

In 1562, 1564 and 1568, the English seafarer John Hawkins performed three voyages to the Americas. He sold African slaves to Spanish and Portuguese colonists. Sometimes the colonists bought willingly, sometimes they were forced to buy. As the Portuguese claimed, in 1562 Hawkins seized nearly 1000 negroes and one ship (Loades 2000, 88). Although John Hawkins himself denied any accusations of being involved in piracy, many modern scholars, including P. E. H. Hair, N. A. M. Rodger, O. B. Diomin, K. R. Andrews, J. C. Appleby, D. Childs and even patriotically biased N. Williams (who seems to be inclined to agree) agree that Hawkins and his men committed piracy in his 1560s expeditions (Hair 1970, 209; Williams 1975, 36; Rodger 1997, 201; Diomin 2001, 171; Andrews 1986, 110–111; Appleby 2009, 105; Childs 2014, 19–20). However D. Loades casts some doubt on Hawkins' piracy in 1562 by saying that "the Portuguese dealers, even if they had traded willingly and been properly paid, would have had to plead coercion in order to escape the wrath of their own government", which, as it is known, prohibited any business contacts with unsanctioned foreigners beyond the 1494 and 1529 demarcations (Loades 2000, 88).

In 1568, when the Portuguese rejected to trade in Guinea, John Hawkins and his men captured their ships and set Cacheo town on fire, and fought a battle with an army of Portuguese and Africans. This episode is evidenced in one testimony of an English account ("a skirmish occurred on shore with the Portuguese and negroes because they did not want to trade") and in many Portuguese complaints (Hair 1970, 209–210).

In 1568, Hawkins's third expedition suffered failure at San Juan de Ulua, not far from the town of Vera Cruz in the Mexican Gulf (Diomin 2001, 170–173). Although after this

miserable incident the English did not do their slave trade for a long time, Hawkins's expeditions somehow enriched their knowledge of the cross-Atlantic navigation.

Martin Frobisher became the next seafarer from Hawkins's generation who virtually established new international communications. He began his sea career as a typical pirate. From the 1550s to 1560s he together with his brother John raided the French and Spanish shipping at the European coast of the Atlantic. In October 1566, he was arrested in England under suspicion of capturing merchants from Antwerp (Andrews 1985, 100–101). Then, he abandoned his piratical ventures for a while and turned to make discovery voyages searching north-west straits from the Atlantic to the Pacific. In 1576, Martin Frobisher and his men became the first in history Europeans that encountered the Esquimaux. The meeting occurred on the coast of Baffin Land, the largest island of modern Canada. Frobisher managed to establish the first exchanges with these people (Magidovich 1983, 321). The Europeans gave bells, mirrors and trifles in exchange for skins of bears and seals (Williams 1975, 68).

It seems that piracy was a good school of navigation for Frobisher. To quote D. Childs, "By 1574 his unsuccessful independent piratical career was over: in future Frobisher was to serve the state, which valued the skills which they thought he must have acquired through his illegal activities" (Childs 2014, 17). D. Childs' statement about piracy as a school, to some extent, echoes W. H. Woodward's idea which he first expressed in the late nineteenth century (Woodward 1926, 29–30).

The first English who reached the Pacific Ocean were pirates led by John Oxenham. They deserved the glory of the first in history foreign enemies of the Spanish Crown in the Pacific Ocean (Gerhard 2001, 55). In 1577, these pirates crossed the Panama Isthmus, seized two Spanish barks with a cargo of 60lbs (27 kg) weight of gold and 100 000 pesos of silver and robbed a settlement of pearl-hunters but, then, they were captured by the Spanish. Finally, John Oxenham was executed in the city of Lima in Peru in 1580 (Gerhard 2001, 56–58; Childs 2014, 71).

John Oxenham was an associate of Francis Drake, the most famous of the Elizabethan sea dogs. From 1577 to 1580, Drake undertook circumnavigating expedition, during which he explored the coast of Chili and Peru (Magidovich 1983, 217–318) and established contacts with the Amerindians in North America, where he christened newly discovered territory as New Albion (Drakes Bay in modern California) before crowds of the indigenous (Magidovich 1983, 319). One of the main results of Drake's voyage was the discovery "for the English and Dutch ships sea routes known before only to the Spaniards and the Portuguese" (Magidovich 1983, 320).

As K. R. Andrews properly argues, Drake's main aim was exclusively piratical, not explorative (Andrews 1968, 741). The outcome of Francis Drake's voyage (the Queen gained 160 000 J, 4 700 % more than her share), in J. M. Keynes' opinion, became the "origins of British foreign investments", since Elizabeth I began to finance the Levant Company, and, then, the money received from the latter was invested in the East India Company which, in its turn, would be serving as a prime mover of the British colonial expansion from 1600 to 1800 (Williams 1975, 261). In general, Francis Drake's expedition brought 500 000 J to its investors (3 600 J invested), when the annual total income of the English treasure was only 300 000 J (Gubarev 2013, 182).

Another Elizabethan, Humphrey Gilbert, first performed as a pirate in 1578, when his fleet of seven ships plundered the French and Spanish shipping in the eastern Atlantic waters (Andrews 1985, 8; Andrews 1964, 190). A year earlier he wrote two proposals titled "Discourse how her Majesty may annoy the King of Spain" where he advocated capturing Spanish and Portuguese shipping (Andrews 1964, 190). In August of 1583, Humphrey Gilbert founded the first settlement on the isle of Newfoundland. Later on, a new city of Saint

Johns (the modern capital of the isle) emerged there (Magidovich 1983, 334). During that voyage one of Gilbert's ships attacked a French fishing vessel (Andrews 1985, 8).

Another one who contributed to the breaking of the international barriers became Walter Raleigh, a favourite of Elizabeth I. In 1578 he commanded one of Gilbert's seven ships (Andrews 1964, 190). As K. R. Andrews says about him, "Edmund Spenser in the *Faery of Queen...* described him as the "shepherd of the ocean"... But at least in the role of privateering promoter, organizer of ventures of single ships, squadrons or huge fleets, and as a privateering captain, admiral and conquistador of the sea Raleigh easily qualified as a wolf in sheep's clothing" (Andrews 1985, 9).

In 1585, an expedition (five ships including the queen's 160 tons *Tiger* and two pinnaces with 600 men in all) furnished by Walter Raleigh and commanded by Richard Grenville, one of subscribers, established the first English colony on the isle of Roanoke, near the southern entrance of the Albemarle gulf in North America (Magidovich 1983, 335). Coincidentally one of those 1585 expedition members was Thomas Cavendish (or Candish), a pirate who later undertook the third in history circumnavigation. In 1585, he commanded a small bark *Elizabeth* (50 tons burden) which he had furnished himself (Quinn 1975, 8).

The newly discovered in 1585 province was named Virginia in honour of Queen Elizabeth I. Having left colonists in Virginia, on his return way to England, Richard Grenville succeeded in taking "a rich Spanish prize, which probably at least paid for the whole expedition" (Andrews 1985, 10; Andrews 1986, 206–207). Probably, this way he tried to minimize the financial losses of the colonization project.

Walter Raleigh and his associates considered the settlement on the Roanoke Island a future base from which the English pirates would attack the Spanish shipping and ports in the Caribbean region and the Spanish fleets which were going from Havana to Seville (Andrews 1985, 10). By the way, Raleigh's and Gilbert's colonizing projects were not the earliest. In 1574, Grenville and Oxenham already planned a settlement on the River Plate in South America and only unwillingness of Elizabeth I, who feared to deteriorate relations with Spain, prevented them from doing it then (Andrews 1986, 139–140; Andrews 1964, 189). However, two years earlier Drake and his men constructed a piratical fort at Port Pheasant in Central America (Appleby 2009, 128–129).

The attempt to colonize Virginia in 1585 failed due to supply shortages in the colony. Next year, in spring, Francis Drake's expedition picked up the last colonists back to England. In 1587, Walter Raleigh made another attempt of colonization, but this one also failed because of the supply problems (Magidovich 1983, 335–336). Although the first colonizing expeditions to North America were lost, it is worthy of saying that the reconnaissance for the next European colonists in this region had been made.

No doubt, "privateering... was already proving an unfortunate distraction from the colonial enterprise", since it promised immediate large profits, "whereas colonization seemed to be simply a bottomless bag into which money poured and disappeared" (Andrews 1985, 11), but one must also agree that privateering and piracy established the first northern Europeans' beachheads, such as, for example, Drake's fort at Port Pheasant.

From 1586 to 1588, above mentioned Thomas Cavendish undertook his own circumnavigation during which his small fleet of three vessels (*Desire* (120–140 tons), *Content* (60 tons), small bark *Gorge* taken from the Spaniards earlier) boarded huge Manila galleon *Santa Ana* (600 tons) nearby Californian cape of San Lukas (Quinn 1975, 12). In the galleon's hull, besides great luxury, Thomas Cavendish's men captured two Japanese men (Christopher and Cosmus), three Philippine boys and a Portuguese, Nicolas Rodrigo. The information received from them about China, Japan and the Philippine islands became later useful for developing trade contacts in those regions. Also Thomas Cavendish found a big map of China which he, then, brought to England (Quinn 1975, 14).

Without doubts, piratical circumnavigations of Francis Drake and Thomas Cavendish essentially expanded knowledge of non-Iberian peoples, mainly the English, about geography and trade communications in the Far East (Quinn 1975, 15).

Neville Williams claims that, apart from influence on shipbuilding, preparation of improved maps and discovery of sea routs, sea dogs contributed to the scientific knowledge about tides and winds, practical application of astronomy, the problem of magnetism, variations of compass and the development of nautical instruments (Williams 1975, 264). Obviously, the deeper the knowledge of seagoing became the denser and more sophisticated the network of global communications was.

All in all, oversea expeditions of the Elizabethan piracy played an important role in the unification of separate world zones of the agrarian civilizations into one network. In this process piracy might provide necessary incentives and training for seamen and profits for shareholders and organizers. In the sixteenth century, piracy, though being destructive for trade and transportations in general, in some cases broke artificial barriers created by Spain and Portugal on the way to the New World, maximized profits, served as a school of seamanship enriching scientific knowledge on geography and navigation and stimulated connections with such non-European peoples as the Amerindians and Esquimaux.

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Резюме

Пастушенко А. О. Отенко І. П. «Морські пси» як організатори міжнародної колоніальної мережі

Найважливіша стаття аналізує вплив мореплавців періоду правління в Англії Єлизавети I Тюдор на розвиток ранньомодерної міжнародної мережі світових зон аграрних цивілізацій. Дослідження сконцентроване на комплексній ролі піратства та каперства у процесі з'єднання цих зон разом та на тому, як такі авантюри стимулювали нову колонізацію, нові обміни та нові відкриття. Разом із цим показується, чому у другій половині XVI ст. піратством і каперством займалася більшість англійських моряків. Серед таких піратських авантюристів (морських псів), які зробили свій внесок у розвиток системи міжнародних комунікацій можна виділити Джона Хокінза, Мартіна Фробішера, Джона Оксенхама, Френсіса Дрейка, Гемфрі Гілберта, Волтера Релі, Томаса Кавендіша та Річарда Гренвіла. Кожен з них набув слави серед співвітчизників за свої авантюри. Джон Хокінз став тим, хто почав англійську работоргівлю через Атлантику; Мартін Фробішер започаткував контакти європейців із ескімосами; Джон Оксенхам став першим англійцем, який досяг Тихого океану; Френсіс Дрейк та Джон Кавендіш керували навколосвітніми експедиціями; Гемфрі Гілберт заснував перше англійське поселення на Ньюфаундленді; Волтер Релі та Річард Гренвіл були активними учасниками перших спроб колонізації Вірджинії у Америці. Як випливає з результатів дослідження, попри свою деструктивну роль, морське піратство у деяких випадках стало чинником, який відіграв певну роль у мотивуванні та підготовці моряків, а також у зменшенні фінансових ризиків пов'язаних із тими проектами, які, зрештою, стали основою для подальшого розвитку колоніальної мережі міжнародних відносин.

Ключові слова: Англія, світові зони, аграрні цивілізації, Єлизавета I Тюдор, моряки, пізнє Середньовіччя, піратство, каперство, міжнародні відносини.

Резюме

Пастушенко А. А. Отенко І. П. «Морские псы» как организаторы международной колонизальной сети

В данной статье рассматривается влияние мореплавателей периода правления в Англии Елизаветы I Тюдор на развитие ранне-модерной международной сети аграрных цивилизаций. Исследование сосредоточено на комплексной роли пиратства

и каперства в процессе соединения этих зон и на том, как такие авантюры стимулировали новую колонизацию, новые обмены и новые открытия. Вместе с этим показывается, почему во второй половине XVI в. пиратством и каперством занималось большинство английских моряков. Среди пиратствующих авантюристов (т. н. морских псов), которые сделали свой вклад в развитие системы международных коммуникаций можно выделить Джона Хокинса, Мартина Фробишера, Джона Оксенхама, Френсиса Дрейка, Хемфри Гилберта, Уолтера Рели, Томаса Кавендиша и Ричарда Гренвилла. Каждый из них прославился среди своих соотечественников благодаря своим авантюрам. Джон Хокинс стал тем, кто предпринял первые попытки английской трансатлантической работоторговли; Мартин Фробишер установил первые контакты европейцев с эскимосами; Джон Оксенхам стал первым англичанином, который достиг Тихого океана; Френсис Дрейк и Джон Кавендиш руководили кругосветными плаваниями; Хэмфри Гилберт основал первую английскую колонию на Ньюфаундленде; Уолтер Рели и Ричард Гренвилл были активными участниками первых попыток колонизации Виргинии в Америке. Как следует из результатов исследования, вопреки своей деструктивной роли, морское пиратство в некоторых случаях становилось фактором, играющим определенную роль в мотивировании и подготовке моряков, а также в снижении финансовых рисков связанных с теми проектами, которые, в итоге, стали основой для дальнейшего развития колониальной сети международных отношений.

Ключевые слова: Англия, мировые зоны, аграрные цивилизации, Елизавета I Тюдор, моряки, позднее Средневековье, пиратство, каперство, международные отношения.

