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# Drake and the Tudor Navy with a History of the Rise of England as a Maritime Power

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# PROFESSIONAL READING



A book reviewer occupies a position of special responsibility and trust. He is to summarize, set in context, describe strengths, and point out weaknesses. As a surrogate for us all, he assumes a heavy obligation which it is his duty to discharge with reason and consistency.

Admiral H.G. Rickover

## 1588: An Armada of Books

John B. Hattendorf

- Corbett, Julian S. *Drake and the Tudor Navy with a History of the Rise of England as a Maritime Power*, with an introduction by R. B. Wernham. London: Temple Smith and Brookfield, Vt.: Gower Publishing, 1988. 2 volumes in 1, 415pp, and 462pp. \$107.50
- Corbett, Julian S., ed. *Papers Relating to the Navy during the Spanish War 1585-1587*. London: Temple Smith for the Navy Records Society; Brookfield, Vt.: Gower Publishing, 1987. 363pp. \$65.95
- Fernandez-Armesto, Felipe. *The Spanish Armada: The Experience of War in 1588*. York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988. 300pp. \$24.95
- Kemp, Peter. *The Campaign of the Spanish Armada*. New York and Oxford: Facts on File Publications, 1988. 159pp. \$24.95
- Laughton, John Knox, ed. *State Papers Relating to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada Anno 1588*, 2nd ed. London: Temple Smith for Navy Records Society; Brookfield, Vt.: Gower Publishing, 1987. 2 volumes in 1, 365pp. and 418pp. \$93.95
- Martin, Colin and Parker, Geoffrey. *The Spanish Armada*. New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1988. 296pp. \$27.50
- Mattingly, Garrett. *The Armada*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1988. 443pp. \$24.95

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- Padfield, Peter. *Armada*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1988. 192pp. \$24.95
- Rodger, N.A.M. *The Armada in the Public Records*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1988. 76pp. \$7.50
- Rodriguez-Salgado, M. J. and the staff of the National Maritime Museum. *Armada 1588-1988*. London: Penguin Books in association with the National Maritime Museum, 1988. 295pp. \$20
- Rowse, A. L., ed. *Froude's "Spanish Story of the Armada" and Other Essays*. Gloucester: Sutton, 1988. 262pp. \$7.50
- Whiting, Roger. *The Enterprise of England: The Spanish Armada*. New York: St. Martin's, 1988. 248pp. \$29.95
- Wernham, R.B., ed. *The Expedition of Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake to Spain and Portugal, 1589*. London: Temple Smith for the Navy Records Society; Brookfield, Vt.: Gower Publishing, 1988. 380pp.

Of all the anniversaries in 1988, most lavishly celebrated was that of the Spanish Armada. Bonfires and ceremonies are but memories now. What remains is a solid contribution to scholarship and to our understanding of late 16th century naval history. A host of authors and publishers joined in the fray to compete for the public's attention, and this list of a dozen is one reviewer's choice of the most memorable.

The publications which appeared in 1988 created a wealth of printed pages that outline the fashion in which Armada historiography has changed during the past century. They fall into three general categories: those that reprint standard works long out of print; those that provide new evidence and insights, advancing scholarship; and those designed to attract the general reader. Each, in its way, makes a contribution.

Among English scholars, interest in the Spanish Armada dates from the work of Professor J. A. Froude. As regius professor of history at Oxford, Froude revised his earlier view of the Armada in an essay written in 1892. It is this which A. L. Rowse uses as the title for his edition of Froude's essays. It is a much revised version of the story originally told in Froude's 1870 *History of England* and is based on Captain C. Fernandez Duro's two-volume collection of documents from the Spanish archives, *La Armada Invencible* (Madrid, 1884-85). To Froude, the five-day battle in the Channel during August 1588 was an epic fought between gallant and noble men. Although marred by a number of factual errors, the general outline of the story is that which we today hold to be authentic.

While Froude's work marked the beginning of serious English scholarship, the next major step was taken by the Navy Records Society. Established in 1893 to print unpublished manuscripts and rare works of naval interest, it continues today as the most important organization promoting the scholarly study of naval history. Its very first volume, published in 1894, was Sir John

Knox Laughton's *State Papers Relating to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada*. In 1988 the Society reprinted the second edition of that work (1895) which corrected "a few trifling errors or misprints." Designed as the English counterpart to Fernandez Duro's collection, it made available for the first time the most important official papers for the English side of the battle, drawing primarily from State Papers, Domestic, in the Public Record Office, as well as a few from the British Museum and one at Hatfield House. It remains the most important collection of documents on the English side.

In 1898, the Navy Records Society followed up this subject with a volume of papers devoted to the English Navy in the years leading up to the battle—Sir Julian Corbett's *Papers Relating to the Navy during the Spanish War 1585-1587*. The Navy Records Society reprinted this volume in 1988 and, complementing both Laughton's and Corbett's collections, it issued a new volume edited by Professor R. B. Wernham on *The Expedition of Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake to Spain and Portugal, 1589*. Wernham's volume documents England's reaction to the failure of the Spanish campaign, the strategic choices which England faced, and the subsequent action planned for making use of the opportunities England had. The story of the expedition, however, is one of disobeyed orders, botched operations, great expense and lost opportunity. Together, these volumes of documents from the Navy Records Society provide a permanent and authoritative source for study of the Royal Navy in the years 1585-1589. The only other significant group of documents which the Navy Records Society has published (but which were not reviewed for this occasion) are George Naish's edition of a collection of Spanish documents in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. This small collection appeared in Christopher Lloyd, ed., *The Naval Miscellany, Volume 4* (Navy Records Society, 1952).

Upon completing his collection of documents, Sir Julian Corbett published two interpretative studies. In 1898, he published *Drake and the Tudor Navy*, which has remained the classic account and analysis of the Armada battles. Gower Publishing reprinted this two-volume work for the Armada anniversary, with an introduction by Professor R. B. Wernham, and also Michael Oppenheim's 1896 study of *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy from 1509 to 1660*, with an introduction by Professor K. R. Andrews.

In 1959, Garrett Mattingly wrote his great narrative *The Armada*, setting the battle in the broad context of European politics. Immediately recognized as a masterpiece of historical writing, Mattingly superseded the general aspects of Corbett's account, but failed to match the depth of his understanding in naval tactics. However, for the past thirty years, Mattingly's book has remained the best and most readable, general account. In 1988, it reappeared, unaltered.

During the years since Mattingly wrote, a number of important monographs have appeared which have broadened understanding of the

general context of European politics and naval affairs in this period. Most important among them are M. F. Keeler, ed., *Sir Francis Drake's West Indian Voyage* (Hakluyt Society, 1981); Kenneth Andrews' works, including his edition of documents on *The Last Voyage of Drake and Hawkins [1595-96]* (1972) and his interpretive studies of *Drake's Voyages* (1967) and *Elizabethan Privateering* (1964); Charles Cruickshank's *Elizabethan Army* (1966); Geoffrey Parker's important studies using Spanish, Dutch and Belgian archives, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road* (1972), *The Dutch Revolt* (1977), *Philip II* (1978), and *Spain and the Netherlands* (1979); and Professor R. B. Wernham's two magnificent studies of English affairs, *Before The Armada: The Growth of English Foreign Policy 1485-1588* (1966) and *After the Armada: Elizabethan England and the Struggle for Western Europe 1588-1595* (1984).

Parallel to these studies based on archival sources, a whole new range of information has become available through underwater archaeology. Researchers have identified more than twenty Spanish Armada wrecks off the coast of Ireland. Over the years, collectors have recovered a number of artifacts from the wrecked ships, but it was not until the late 1960s that marine archaeologists began a series of systematic investigations. Their work continues to produce new insights into the particular circumstances of each ship and life on board Spanish warships in that period. As their information accumulates, archaeologists produce interim reports and studies. Notable among them are R. Stenuit, *Treasures of the Armada* (1972) and Colin M. Martin, *Full Fathom Five: Wrecks of the Spanish Armada* (1975).

Complementing the Spanish contributions is Margaret Rule's *The Mary Rose* (1983). This is the story of the excavation and recovery of an English warship that sank in an action with the French in 1545. The data that it furnishes about shipboard life in the Tudor period have also been applied to conditions during the Armada campaign some 40 years later.

In combination with the standard accounts that have been published in connection with the Armada anniversary, this new archival and archaeological work provides the basis for new writing on the subject. It informs the works that are intended for the general reader and provides the bases for new research work.

Most of the remaining books that introduce this essay are designed for the general reader. Roger Whiting's *The Enterprise of England*, which is readable and objective, includes information on the shipwrecks as well as the background to, and events of, the Armada campaign. Peter Kemp's *The Campaign of the Spanish Armada* and Peter Padfield's *Armada* are similar to each other in appearance and valuable for their differing, but fine selection of illustrations. Of the two, the book by Padfield is larger, more richly illustrated and includes insights from scholarship that are new since Mattingly's 1959 book. Recent scholarship has also been brought to general attention in another way—through the three valuable articles by Simon Adams, Geoffrey Parker

and Felix Barker that appeared in the May 1988 issue of *History Today*. Altogether, they provide a useful summary of recent trends in scholarship.

The subtitle to Felipe Fernandez-Armesto's book gives the clue to his approach. While he uses already published source material, *The Spanish Armada: The Experience of War in 1588* has a much different emphasis than the other books that have appeared. Following, although not acknowledging, John Keegan's example in *The Face of Battle*, Fernandez-Armesto turns to personal accounts to examine the individual in warfare. Unlike Froude, he sees the Armada not as a great epic, but as a typical event of 16th century warfare. He emphasizes war experiences common to both sides, and he argues that the Armada campaign was not a defeat for Spain, or at least only a very qualified victory for England. Although his book is designed for a wide audience, using standard sources, Fernandez-Armesto's different focus and new interpretation make an important contribution to scholarship.

Of the recent writings that provide both new evidence and new insights on the naval and maritime history of this period, the previously mentioned Professor Wernham's volume of documents for The Navy Records Society is the only book-length undertaking which follows a traditional, scholarly approach. There have also been articles written in scholarly journals, notable among which are those that appear in the special Armada issue of the *Revista de Historia Naval* (1988, vol. 6, no. 23) by Simon Adams, Mia Rodriguez-Salgado and Jonathan Israel, three scholars in Britain, writing in Spanish. Like Wernham's book, these articles are most valuable and take a traditional scholarly approach. Some works have been remarkably successful in combining both the presentation of new scholarly evidence and interpretations with an approach to reach the general reading public.

In this regard, one very useful small booklet is N.A.M. Rodger's *The Armada in the Public Records*. The special value of this work is the photo reproduction of seventeen representative documents, with a careful transcription of each one. Chosen because they illustrate the flavor of the rich stock of documents on this subject in the Public Record Office in London, their contribution is heightened by the side-by-side presentation of facsimiles and the transcripts. Not only can one learn about the type and range of source materials on the English Navy in this period, but this illustrated selection can serve as a practical teaching device for learning the intricacies and peculiarities of late 16th-century English handwriting.

The official catalogue of the international exhibition to commemorate the Spanish Armada, written by M.J. Rodriguez-Salgado and the staff of The National Maritime Museum at Greenwich, is more than just a catalogue. It is a major contribution to scholarship. The exhibition, held at Greenwich from April to September 1988 and at the Ulster Museum in Belfast from October 1988 to January 1989, is the largest ever to commemorate the Armada. It brought together, for the first time, materials from all over the United

Kingdom, Spain, France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, Austria and the United States. Dr. Rodriguez-Salgado of the London School of Economics was the research historian and consultant during the four years of preparation for the exhibit. Her introductory essay to *The Armada 1588-1988* summarizes the ideas presented by the exhibit. She also provides a valuable reassessment of the diplomatic situation leading up to the Armada, adding new insights beyond the information which Garrett Mattingly provided 30 years ago. In addition, she wrote several of the introductory sections to the exhibit themes, which included topics ranging from the courts of Elizabeth and Philip II, life on board ship, navigation, rival armies, commanders, and detailed descriptions of the battle at sea.

Colin Martin and Geoffrey Parker's book, *The Spanish Armada* (1988), is the most important recent book to use new evidence and provide new insights. While featured in a BBC television series, the authors have produced more than a television text. Their book is the product of 13 years of research when the authors were both at the University of St. Andrews. The results of Martin's archaeological work are placed within the context of Parker's work in previously unused material in Spanish and Dutch archives. Breaking down the intellectual barriers between these two research approaches, the authors have produced an exciting and vivid account of the events surrounding the Armada. They deal evenhandedly with the historical controversies surrounding the events. Among their key points, they conclude that Spanish gunnery was inferior to English, but the English had much to learn about how to use their guns effectively.

While observers at the time failed to understand its broad significance, in looking back we can see that the Armada marked a turning point for some major trends. It was not an apocalyptic event as some used to say, yet it marked the point where Spain's imperial power began to decline. Spain did not achieve the immediate objectives she had set out to accomplish in 1588, and in that sense the Armada was a failure. Yet, if the Armada's messengers had made contact with the Army, and if it had been able to reform and return to the Channel to embark troops, it might have been successful while English shot-lockers were still empty. If that had happened, the results and our judgment of them would have been far different. It was still a remarkable achievement.

This Armada of books published in 1988 is the fruit of a century of scholarship. Clearly they evidence a change of emphasis in the English language literature. While the general outline of events was clear in Froude's work, we now have a greater appreciation for the broad context of international relations and the details of the Armada story. We no longer see the Armada as a great epic fought between heroic men, but rather as an event which we can use to mark slow changes in the continuum of human history and as a point to search for insight into the life of ordinary men and

women. In contrast to the historians of the 1880s and 1890s, today we are reluctant to declare victory or defeat, but, instead, have sought to use various forms of evidence in trying to understand a range of human activities in the complex world of the 16th century.

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Ferling, John, ed. *The World Turned Upside Down: The American Victory in the War of Independence*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1988. 250pp. \$39.95

In this book, eleven essayists—ten Americans and a Canadian—attempt to answer the question “Why did America win the Revolutionary War?” They fail.

True enough, there are some good pieces. Fred Anderson traces very well the development of American military institutions and shows how they diverged from their British forebears at the beginning of the American Revolutionary War. James Kirby Martin shows how and why the Continental Army was formed and then goes on to show that the Army not only produced victory on the battlefield, but it also broke down the “localist-oriented horizon” of many Americans. It was a truly national institution and set a standard for civil-military relations for America.

In a well-written and well-researched essay, Paul David Nelson tries to answer why the American soldier fought despite the conditions, which at times were awful. This essay is a study of what makes soldiers carry on to the bitter end despite lack of food, equipment,

clothing, and everything else required to keep body and soul together.

With skill, Mark Edward Lender’s essay on the army’s logistical support shows how the Americans—standing on a legal and monetary sand castle—were able, just barely, to procure the supplies needed, and managed to keep their forces in the field. James H. O’Donnell’s excellent essay on frontier warfare portrays the complexity and savage nature of war on the frontier.

John Ferling’s essay, “Washington and American Victory,” hits all the usual points but adds nothing to our knowledge of Washington. Neither do Hugh F. Rankin’s thumbnail sketches of Generals Charles Lee, Horatio Gates, Nathanael Greene, the Marquis de Lafayette, and Henry Knox add much to what we already know about these men. Jonathan G. Rossie’s “Politics and American Victory” should be entitled “The Politics of Who Commands What.” There is nothing new here. The author published this information in book form in 1975.

W.J. Eccles’ “The French Alliance and American Victory” is an account of how, for reasons of *realpolitik*, the French became involved in the American Revolu-