



The Buccaneers of America

Alexandre Olivier Exquemelin , Alexis Brown (Translator)

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A cross between genuine privateers, commissioned to defend a country's colonies and trade, and outright pirates, buccaneers were largely English, French, and Dutch adventurers who plied the waters among the Caribbean Islands and along the coasts of Central America, Venezuela, and Colombia more than 300 years ago. The activities of these bands of plundering sea rovers reached a peak in the second half of the seventeenth century, when this remarkable eyewitness account was first published (1678).

Alexander Exquemelin, thought to be a Frenchman who enlisted with the buccaneers for a time, chronicles the bold feats of these raiders as they ravaged shipping and terrorized Caribbean settlements. Exquemelin provides fascinating details of the French presence in Hispaniola (now comprising the island nations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic) describes the features of that country and its inhabitants, and comments at length on the origin of the buccaneers, vividly recounting their rules of conduct and way of life. These bold plunderers come across as shrewd strategists, crack shots, fine navigators, wild debauchers, and greedy adventurers who frequently engaged in vicious acts of cruelty. Among the figures in his rogues' gallery, none stands out more than the infamous Henry Morgan, whose exploits culminated in the seizure and burning of Panama City.

A bestseller in its own time, *The Buccaneers of America* will fascinate any modern reader intrigued by piracy and by the often sordid history of European conflicts in the Caribbean and on the Spanish Main.

The Buccaneers of America Details

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From Reader Review The Buccaneers of America for online ebook

Artie says

Does a nice job of being accessible for modern readers but also conveying the impression that the author witnessed the events described in the book.

Coy says

This is a journal and reads like one. I prefer historical fiction. I gave it three instead of two stars because I did learn a few things. These pirates were not the romanticized ones we think of in this day and age. They tortured and pillaged as a matter of routine. Some of the book details that but much of the book is detail of the routine such as headings, types of flora and fauna, weather, water depth and wind, which is not the most captivating reading.

N.N. Light says

Very dry reading. While I tried to get through it, I ended up stopping at 47%.

Mike says

Lengthy read, mainly because it is written in period language. But a worthwhile read if you're looking for something definitive on pirates during the Golden Age of Piracy.

Great pace throughout, but it does get a little dry towards the end as the author succumbs to sickness and simply shares daily journal entries on direction of travel and weather. But there is a large chunk dedicated to the adventures of some pretty well known pirates - an eye opener to be sure.

Sergio says

Interesante. Para tomárselo con calma.

Stephen says

It's good a historical document rife with detail and description. It's a little repetitive, and though it's about 230 pages, it's dense and a bit of a slow read.

Rhiannon D'Averc says

Exquemelin is ever-informative, and keeps a quite unbiased account of his time with the buccaneers, often separating them as "the buccaneers" but sometimes slipping into "us". Although he doesn't cover the whole story - how could he? He was only retelling what he saw - this glimpse into the exploits of Morgan and L'Ollonais is at times thrilling, educative, and even laugh-out-loud funny. It has sections taken from letters by important figures of the time, quotes in both French and Spanish, and lots of detail into the lives of the native American Indians, often stuff that's really interesting. It's very harsh towards the Spanish since he hated them, kind to the French since he was one, and also kind to the English since that's who he spent his time with. The chapters are short and concise, allowing you to dip in and out whenever you want. Altogether, a great read.

Lothar Krechel says

Avast, dun't yer get a'scared of a hist'ry book... - this is not a dry collection of dates and maps, lists and morally raised eyebrows. Yes, it is old, and the language may be funny in places, but it's real life of the pirates, by one who lived among them.

For its age, Exquemelin has an anstoundingly modern and distinctive view on the actions of his employers, not judging them outright or praising them for political reasons, but looking at the men behind the yarn.

You won't find your John Silver or Captain Jack Sparrow in here, but the realism, the explanation of pirate life, even the economics and biology studies will take you back into the age of pirates as it was in daily life. A rare gem - and even after it's done, the publishing history, the author's biography, and the influence of the book on the whole genre of pirate novels is another adventure.

j

Ken Angle says

Looking out of the portals of El Moro @ viejo San Juan whispers of fortunes and empires. The books adds fact to the popular fables. Fills in some of the blanks of history.

Nigel Holloway says

I first heard the name Alexandre Olivier Exquemelin on New Year's Day 2008 floating in the middle of the Caribbean Sea. I'd better explain...

The man who introduced us (so to speak) was Professor Roderick McDonald of Rider University (New Jersey).

He had the unenviable task of giving a lecture at 10:00am on New Year's Day, following the party-to-end-

all-parties on board the Queen Mary 2 the previous New Year's Eve. Using the cunning ploy of calling his lecture 'Buccaneers and Pirates of the Caribbean', Professor McDonald ensured himself an audience, and I remember sitting fascinated by the information that he presented about that short period in history when pirates roamed the West Indies in search of plunder and wealth.

I confess I knew little about pirates apart from what I'd seen on the big screen. For instance, I didn't know the difference between a pirate, a privateer and a buccaneer. And as I delved deeper into the subject, I realised that maybe there was more to these 'pirates' than an undisciplined rabble of sea-borne cowboys, raping and plundering their way around the tourist spots of the Caribbean. Perhaps even a hint of international high politics.

So when I got home, I decided to renew my acquaintance with Alexandre Olivier Exquemelin. And having read his journal, I realised that here was the opportunity I had been looking for - a man who had sailed with Henry Morgan, the most misunderstood 'pirate' of them all: the Henry Morgan who had been born not five miles from where I live, and who had sued the publishers of Exquemelin's book for libel - and won!

But it wasn't Henry Morgan's story that formed my main interest. It was Exquemelin himself. I wanted to know why a student of medicine would leave France for brutal, lawless Tortuga. What made him give up six years of study to become an indentured slave? Was it religious persecution? Or forbidden love? How did he come to join Henry Morgan, a Welsh soldier in the service of England? Why did he write his book about the exploits of these pirates? And why did the English version of his book cause Henry Morgan to sue the publishers for defamation of character?

So I wrote my first historical fiction novel, *The damning of Henry Morgan*, based on Exquemelin's journals about his experiences in that short period of history when piracy abounded in the Caribbean, before politicians decided that there was more profit in organised commerce than in random violence, and the 'real' pirates gradually faded away to be replaced by bankers, merchants and politicians - plus ca change...

So, I owe a real debt of gratitude to Alexandre Olivier, for being the first to set down an eye-witness account of his experiences, and for leaving sufficient gaps in his story - 'holes in history', I like to call them - for me as a novelist to fill in with my own imaginings.

Merci, Alexandre.

Evan says

Interesting! Exquemelin offers a really revealing contemporary history of the buccaneers. It's totally engrossing, horrifying, and sometimes even funny. It digresses almost immediately into anecdotes about plants and wildlife, but I love those narrow glimpses of life in the Caribbean. I love that I now know that the frigate bird pummels other seabirds until they vomit (a prepared meal!) and that the ink derived from genipa fruit disappears after 9 days

Exquemelin's slow descent into first-person is pretty amusing. Evidently they didn't have great editors in the 17th century.

The terrible:

The buccaneers found nobody in the village but a poor ignorant simpleton. They asked him where the folks had fled. He said he did not know - he had not inquired. They asked whether he knew of any plantations; he said he must have been on twenty in his lifetime. Then they demanded whether he knew where to find the gold and silver of the churches.

Yes, he replied, and brought them to the church sacristy, saying he had seen all the gold and silver there, but he did not know where it was now. When they could get no more answers out of him, they tied him up and beat him. Then the simple fellow began to shout, 'Let me go! I will show you my house and my goods and my money!'

This made the rovers think they were dealing with a rich man who had pretending to be a fool. They unbound him, and he brought them to a hovel, where he had buried a few earthenware dishes, plates and other trash, together with three piece of eight. They asked him his name. 'I am Don Sebastian Sanchez,' he said, 'brother of the governor of Maracaibo.' Then they began to torture him anew, tying him up and beating him til the blood ran down his body. He cried out that if they would let him go, he would take them to his sugar-mill, where they would find all his wealth and his slaves, but when they untied him he was unable to walk. They flung him on a horse, but in the forest he told them that he had no sugar-mill, nor anything in the world, and that he lived on the charity of the hospital. This was true, as they afterwards discovered.

Again they took him and bound him, hanging stones from his neck and his feet. They burned palm leaves under his face, making it so sooty with smoke he did not look like a man, and they beat him violently. He died after half an hour of these torments. They cut the rope and dragged his body into the woods, where they left him lying.

The funny:

Some writers assert that the food the Indians take to their dead is carried off by the devil, but I do not consider this to be true. I have often helped myself to these offerings, as the fruit they put on the grave is always the ripest and most delicious they can find.

The 1969 Penguin translation is impeccable although the book would have benefited from footnotes rather than bracketed interjections in the text itself.

Mark says

Murder, torture, and disfigurement have never been so dry.

This is a source text, not literature, so don't expect it to win a Pulitzer, but it is interesting. Although it reads like a registry, rather than a narrative account, there is no shortage of heart-eating, village burning, nose and ear removal, and other feats of morally questionable badassery. As an example, you'll learn how a member of Captain Morgan's crew was shot with an arrow, pulled it out of the other side of his body, wrapped it in gunpowder and shot it back at his assailant with a musket, setting fire to their whole tower. If you like that kind of thing, and you're interested in history, this book is worth the time it takes to read it.

Redsteve says

The publisher was sued by Captain Henry Morgan (Yes, THAT Captain Morgan) for his portrayal in this book.

Joe Schilp says

If you want to learn the real truth about pirates, this is the book to read.

Kagan McLeod says

Repetitive with the looting and pillaging, and peppered with lengthy descriptions of new world fauna and fruit. But as far as first-hand accounts of piracy in its golden age, this is one of the oldest and best.
