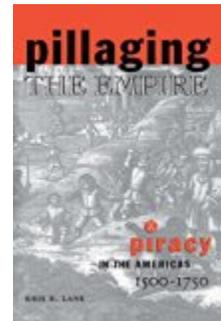


Kris E. Lane. *Pillaging the Empire: Piracy in the Americas 1500-1750*. Armonk, New York and London: M.E. Sharpe. xxiv + 237 pp. \$58.95 (cloth) ISBN 0-7656-0256-3; \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7656-0257-2.

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## Piracy in Spanish America

Kris Lane weaves a tale of pirate activities in the Americas and of Spanish responses to those activities that reveals aspects of pirate life and culture not usually addressed in the standard histories of Latin America. He demythologizes the pirates of popular culture and places them in their broader historical context in which their activities are seen as more pecuniary than nationalistic. Lane presents a concise narrative of the seaborne attackers of Spain's colonial empire, and, to a much lesser extent, Portugal's. The book's claim to originality and to revisionism is that it presents a concise overview of piracy in American waters during the early modern period—including considerable discussion of the often overlooked piracy in the Pacific.

Except for some archival research in South American archives, this work is based on, and, as Lane admits, dependent on, the work of scholars such as David Cordingly, David Marely, Peter Bradely, Peter Gerhard, Charles Boxer, and Carla Rahn Phillips—to name a few. In producing this work, Lane has been more interested in producing a companion text on piracy suitable for World History or similar courses than in providing an original text based on primary research (p. xvii). Despite the existence of regional and chronological studies of pirates, until now, no one has attempted an aggregate treatment of pirates in the Americas. This is what Lane has undertaken.

In doing so, he had to deal with the often nebulous distinction between corsairs, pirates, privateers, bucca-

neers, and freebooters. These distinctions are largely a matter of perspective, but they are, nonetheless, important because they represented different kinds of activities. Piracy refers to unsanctioned sea-raiding, while privateering refers to raids authorized by a monarch or other governing body. Corsario was the Spanish term for pirates and privateers alike. The terms buccaneer and freebooter (*filibustier* in French) arose during the seventeenth century to refer to the motley mix of Dutch, French, English, Spanish, and Portuguese sailors who formed groups of raiders independent of nationalist ties often operating without even symbolic legal sanction. The actual distinctions were usually unclear and, for the recipients of these violent attacks, the distinction made little difference. To the Spanish inhabitants of the Americas, they were all foreign criminals who deserved no quarter.

Lane divides the history of piracy in the Americas into five periods—the French corsairs between 1500 and 1559, the Elizabethan pirates (1558-1603), Dutch pirates and privateers (1570-1648), the seventeenth-century buccaneers, and the end of buccaneering with the last of the freebooters around 1730. He begins with a discussion of anti-Spanish piracy along the Barbary Coast in the sixteenth century as a context for the activities of the French corsairs in the Americas. These corsairs were led by petty nobles and Huguenots of the sixteenth century. The patterns that arose out of Berber and French piracy in the Mediterranean and later French piracy in the Americas set the stage for the patterns that marked the piracy

of the early modern period. This piracy reflected the broader religious and political tensions within Europe with Protestant countries tolerating and often supporting piracy against the shipping and colonies of Catholic countries and vice versa. Privateering became a shield for pirate activity and gave pirates the cloak of legitimacy and legality. The practice of hostage-taking also developed during this time, and Spain found itself forced to pay high ransoms and to adopt costly defense measures that it could ill afford. The Spanish settlements in the New World also found that they had to defend themselves against pirate attacks because the empire was simply too large to be defended effectively and defense measures were too costly for the crown to maintain.

The Elizabethan piracy of such notables as John Hawkins and Francis Drake can be broken down into three major periods. The Elizabethans engaged in contraband slave trading between 1558 and 1568 as English merchants refused to accept Spain's monopoly of the slave trade and smuggled slaves into the Americas. This contraband trade led to increased hostility between the Spanish and the English which gave way to open piracy on the part of the English between 1568 to 1585. With the declaration of war in 1585, English piracy turned into privateering which lasted until about 1603. The privateers of this period carried on much as the pirates of the earlier period—except now they had official backing for their raids.

By 1600, English piracy in the Americas began to give way to the Dutch who resented Spain's religious orthodoxy and political domination. The Dutch privateers also represented the commercial interests of the fledgling Dutch state. Dutch privateering differed in two significant ways from the French and English pirates. Dutch privateering was a business and the sailors were employees of Dutch companies which meant that they were not loosely organized and that they could not expect equal shares of the proceeds of their work. These seafarers, many of whom became disgruntled and even rioted in Holland, formed the core of the next wave of Caribbean buccaneers.

The last half of the seventeenth century was the golden age of piracy in the Americas. Seafarers from all of the major European countries involved in the Americas were represented among these groups who attacked first Spanish and later English, Dutch, and French shipping in the Caribbean. These buccaneers were a self-governing, more or less egalitarian conglomerate of adventurers seeking freedom from rigid class hierarchies

and intent on enjoying the fruits of their labors. They also moved into the Pacific after the political climate in the Caribbean began to turn against piracy. The Pacific pirates were most active between 1680 and 1694. They spread destruction along the Pacific coast which reduced the level of trade, increased the isolation of towns and cities, exacerbated regionalist animosities, and diverted crucial shipments of bullion away from Spanish coffers to meet local defense needs.

The golden age of buccaneering began to decline after 1680 when an increasingly hostile legal and political environment developed as the European countries found that the privateering wolves unleashed among the Spanish sheep did not always distinguish between Spanish and English, French or Dutch sheep. What had been a cost effective mechanism for challenging the Spanish commercially and politically in the Americas had become a threat to their own commercial and political interests in the area. After 1680, with the passage of anti-piracy laws in Jamaica, a pirate could be executed simply for being a pirate. The English Act of Piracy of 1699 also allowed colonial courts to try sea-robbers rather than sending them to England. The famous Captain William Kidd was executed in 1701 as a result of this change in the political climate. Even though efforts at pirate repression began in the 1680s, it was not until 1716 that a genuine extermination campaign began. The European states still found pirates to be useful at times. These extermination efforts were largely successful, and, after 1730, even though piracy continued, it never enjoyed the freedom it had experienced in the seventeenth century.

Lane's presentation is engaging and well constructed. The informational sections included at the end of each chapter are interesting and contribute to the overall presentation of pirate life. There are sections on currency, navigation, shipbuilding, gambling, shipwreck salvage, and seafaring diet.

Although Lane includes a brief discussion of French and Dutch activity in Portuguese America, on the whole, he avoids discussions of pirate activity in Brazil. His stated purpose in studying piracy in aggregate is, at least, partially undermined by this exclusion. Besides the French presence in the sixteenth century, which Lane mentions briefly, the English were very active also in Brazilian waters. Robert Wethington and Christopher Lister attacked the Reconcavo, the important sugar producing region of the modern day state of Bahia, in 1587 and Thomas Cavendish attacked the village of Sao Vicente and pillaged the port at Santos in 1599. The English

and Irish also spent considerable efforts in colonizing the Amazon River between 1550-1646.[1] Lane relies heavily on Boxer's *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800* for his discussion on the Dutch in Brazil while ignoring Boxer's earlier work *The Dutch in Brazil 1624-1654*. Despite the Dutch interest in Spanish shipping, the Dutch West India Company saw the Portuguese empire in Asia, Africa, and the Americas as the prime target for its military, naval, and commercial expansion.[2] The profitable sugar producing regions of Northern Brazil drew them in the early seventeenth century just as the newly discovered gold deposits in the interior drew the French in the early eighteenth century. With the convenient excuse of Portugal's alliance with England in the Wars of the Spanish Succession, the French attacked Rio de Janeiro, the main artery through which Brazilian gold flowed to Portugal, in 1710 and again in 1711.[3]

All of these assaults were costly and devastating and they forced the Portuguese to respond with expensive defense strategies, just as they did the Spanish. A comparison of the effects of pirate predation on Brazil and Spanish America and the Spanish and Portuguese responses to it would have enhanced the book and made it a more truly aggregate view of piracy in the Americas. A more thorough discussion of Spanish and Portuguese piracy as a specific response to piratical predation would have filled out the discussion.

Nevertheless, Lane does a good job of showing that piracy in the Caribbean was not separate from piracy in the Pacific, and that the events in one theater effected the events in the other. Likewise, his discussion of Henry Avery and Captain Kidd demonstrates how piracy in the Americas was connected to piracy in Africa and Asia. It is this quality of the book that would make it a useful addition to a world history course. The book presents a broad hemispheric narrative that connects American piracy to broader historical events. Because of the hemispheric nature of the work, however, it would be necessary to contextualize it with a more detailed discussion not only of European piracy in Asia, Africa, and the Indian Ocean, but also of the transformations of the world economy during the early modern period which stimulated European piratical activity.

In demythologizing the pirates of the early modern period, Lane argues that they do not need to be romanticized, debunked or accused. He states:

Their actions were often irrational, even in the short run, and it was not uncommon for them to miss enormous payoffs due to drunkenness, infighting, or ignorance. In the long run, however, the pirates appear to have followed a generally rational pattern of economic action; they identified and clustered around choke points, singled out straggling ships, repeatedly attacked known bullion storage ports, and so on. To paraphrase Butch Cassidy's famous reference to bank robbers affinity for banks in the late nineteenth-century United States, the pirates robbed Spanish ships and ports because that's where the money was.

Specialists of piracy in Latin America will likely find little that is new in Lane's presentation (he presented his original research on South America in an article in the *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* in 1997). Those who are not specialists will find an intriguing, concise, and informative work that students are bound to enjoy.

#### Notes

[1]. Joyce Lorimer, ed. *English and Irish Settlement on the River Amazon: 1550-1646*. (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1989).

[2]. Frederic Mauro, "Political and Economic Structures of Empire, 1580-1750," in *Colonial Brazil*, ed Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 47.

[3]. Ana Maria dos Santos, "Corsarios," in *Dicionario da historia dacolonizacao portuguesa no Brasil*, ed. Maria Beatriz Nizza da Silva (Sao Paulo: Verbo, 1994), 215; also discussed in C.R. Boxer's *The Golden Age of Brazil, 1695-1750. Growing Pains of a Colonial Society* (Berkeley, The University of California Press, 1975).

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