The Buccaneer King: The Biography of Sir Henry Morgan, 1635–1688.

Tales of the sea told with a graceful style and an eye for picturesque details by a seaman familiar with the coasts and sailing conditions of the area in which the story is set have a peculiar charm and appeal. This biography of Henry Morgan, written by an English historian who spends his days on a yacht in the Caribbean, has such appeal, but it adds little to what has long been known about its subject. Dudley Pope's only new idea is that Morgan should be understood as a general, not as a seaman.

Like previous biographies of Morgan, this one is based on Esquemelin and the Calendar of State Papers, materials published by the Public Record Office. Only one Spanish document is used to any account, and it was captured by the English and published in translation in the seventeenth century. Thus the famous raids are presented from the English point of view and Pope misses an opportunity to not only buttress his thesis and add new details to the narrative, but also to break new ground in Morgan biographies by using to the full the voluminous documentation in the Archive of the Indies. This weakness is further compounded by his four-chapter-long sketch of the Caribbean prior to Morgan's time. It might best be described as a sea of dated, exaggerated generalizations about the Spanish dotted with a flotsam and jetsam of factual errors. But one example: the president of the Audiencia of Panama is referred to as the "Viceroy" (p. 26, repeated on pp. 130, 153, 233, and elsewhere!).

In sum, the Spanish side of Henry Morgan's life and times is wretchedly dealt with. By contrast, Pope's use of the English materials is accurate and suggestive of a real feeling for the times and men. Because the English sources carry the major part of the story, the book is worth reading if one does not already know the story or would like to enjoy a good sea story, well told.

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