

Primary Sources: Nichols and The Drake Manuscript



Primary Sources

Introduction

Philip Nichols

Illustrations From
the Drake Manu-
script

Introduction

Both of the primary sources included in this packet relate to the voyages of English captain Sir Francis Drake. The first describes Drake's on-shore partnership with communities of self-emancipated Africans, as he raided Spanish settlements and caravans in Panama. The second source includes several images and descriptions of the Caribbean composed by an anonymous author who was likely a Protestant Frenchman traveling with Francis Drake. The sources illustrate both how deeply piracy was embedded in the sixteenth-century Caribbean, how information and knowledge was gathered, and how essential cross-cultural collaboration (and coercion) were both to the making of the Atlantic world and to piracy itself.

Primary Source 1: Philip Nichols, "Sir Francis Drake Revived," 1573

In the 1570s, English captain Sir Francis Drake was making a name for himself raiding Spanish colonies. At that time, attacks by foreign corsairs on Spanish Panama were increasing. Drake and his crew reached Panama in 1572, where they captured enslaved people gathering wood on the Isle of Pines. The captives told them about the nearby Nombre de Dios, which Drake and his crew raided shortly after. In the attack, Drake was wounded, but his men made contact with and cultivated alliances with nearby maroons through the rest of the year. In January 1573, they informed Drake that the Spanish fleet had arrived in Nombre de Dios. Instead of sacking the settlement, Drake and the maroons decided to raid the mule trains that brought precious metals and merchandise from Panama City.

The excerpt below begins as the maroons guided the English crew into the interior of Panama. It goes on to trace a raid made by Drake and his maroon allies in which they attempted to capture a caravan carrying goods and silver from Panama City to Nombre de Dios. Philip Nichols compiled the account from firsthand accounts of Drake and his men, and published it in 1628.

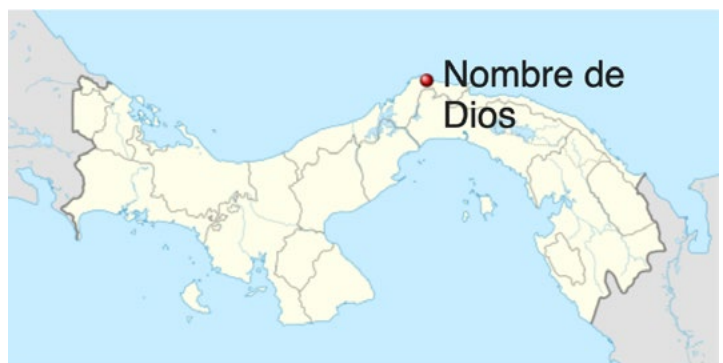
As you are reading, consider the following questions:

- How does the natural world appear in this account? What role does it play in the success or failure of the maroon community and the English pirates?
- What is the general tone of this description of the Panama maroons?
- How does this account describe the politics of the maroons? How does maroon political organization, technological skill, and knowledge about the natural world shape the fortunes of the English pirates writing this account?
- How does this description of the English pirates' collaboration with Panamanian African maroons shape how you think about pirates and piracy?

Source: Philip Nichols, "Sir Francis Drake Revived," excerpted from Robert C. Schwaller, ed., *African Maroons in Sixteenth-Century Panama: A History in Documents* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021), 103–7.

We were in all forty-eight, of which eighteen only were English; the rest were Cimarrons, which beside their arms, bore every one of them, a great quantity of victuals and provision, supplying our want of carriage in so long a march, so that we were not troubled with anything but our furniture.

And because they could not carry enough to suffice us altogether; therefore (as they promised before) so by the way of their arrows, they provided for us competent store from time to time.



Nombre de Dios mapped in contemporary Panama

They have every one of them two sorts of arrows: the one to defend himself and offend the enemy, the other to kill his victuals. These for fight are somewhat like the Scottish arrow; only somewhat longer, and headed with iron, wood, or fish bones. But the arrows for provision are of three sorts, the first serveth to kill any great beast near at hand, as ox, stag, or wild boar: this hath a head of iron of a pound and a half weight, shaped in for like the head of a javelin or boar-spear, as sharp as any knife, making so large and deep a wound as can hardly be believed of him that hath not seen it. The second serveth for lesser beasts, and hath a head of three-quarters of a pound: this he most usually shooteth. The third serveth for all manner of birds: it hath a head of an ounce weight. And these heads though they be of iron only, yet are they so cunningly tempered, that they will continue a very good edge a long time: and though they be turned sometimes, yet they will never or seldom break. The necessity in which they stand herof continually causeth them to have iron in far greater account than gold: and no man among them is of greater estimation, than he that can most perfectly give this temper unto it.¹

The expedition marched in the morning from sunrise till ten, rested from ten till after noon, then travelled from noon until four. After the day's march, the maroons prepared shelters.

As soon as we came to the place where we intended to lodge, the Cimarrons, presently laying down their burdens, fell to cutting of forks or posts, and poles or rafters, and palmito boughs, or plantain leaves; and with great speed set up the number of six houses. For every of which, they first fastened deep into the ground, three or four great posts with forks: upon them, they laid one transom, which was commonly about twenty feet, and made the sides, in the manner of the roofs of our country houses, thatching it close with the aforesaid leaves, which keep out water a long time: observing always that in the lower ground, where greater heat was, they left some three or four feet open unthatched below, and made the houses, or rather roofs, so many feet the higher. But in the hills, where the air was more piercing and the nights cold, they made our rooms always lower, and thatched them close to the ground, leaving only one door to enter in, and a louvre hole for a vent, in the midst of the roof.² In every of these, they made for [the] several lodgings three fires, one in the midst, and one at each end of every house: so that the room was most temperately warm, and nothing annoyed with smoke, partly by reason of the nature of wood which they use to burn, yielding very little smoke, partly by reason of their artificial making of it: as firing the wood cut in length like our billets at the end, and joining them together so close, that though no flame or fire did appear, yet the heat continued without intermission.

Near many of the rivers where we stayed or lodged, we found sundry sorts of fruits, which we might use with great pleasure, and safety temperately: Mammaes, Guayvas, Palmitos, Pinos, Oranges, Lemons, and divers other; from eating of which they dissuaded us in any case, unless we eat very few of them, and those first dry roasted, as Plantains, Potatoes, and such like...

1. Maroons could only access iron by raiding Spanish mule trains or cities. To forge the arrowheads they melted other iron items down.

2. Comments such as these reveal the extent to which maroons adapted their shelters to the conditions of the landscape and climate.

The third day of our journey, they brought us to a town of their own, seated near a fair river, on the side of a hill, environed with a dyke of eight feet broad, and a thick mud wall of ten feet high, sufficient to stop a sudden surpriser. It had one long and broad street, lying east and west, and two other cross streets of less breadth and length: there were in it some five or six and fifty households; which were kept so clean and sweet, that not only the houses, but the very streets were very pleasant to behold. In this town we saw they lived very civilly and cleanly.



Illustration of imagined Nombre de Dios, 1672

For as soon as we came thither, they washed themselves in the river; and changed their apparel, as also their women do wear, which was very fine and fitly made somewhat after the Spanish fashion, though nothing so costly. This town is distant thirty-five leagues from Nombre de Dios and forty-five from Panama.³ It is plentifully stored with many sorts of beasts and fowl, with plenty of maize and sundry fruits.

Touching their affection in religion, they have no kind of priests, only they held the Cross in great reputation. But at our Captain's persuasion, they were contented to leave their crosses, and to learn the Lord's Prayer, and to be instructed in some measure concerning GOD's true worship.⁴ They kept a continual watch in four parts, three miles off their town, to prevent the mischiefs, which the Spaniards intend against them, by the conducting of some of their own coats [i.e., Cimarrones], which having been taken by the Spaniards have have been enforced thereunto: wherein, as we learned, sometimes the Spaniards have prevailed over them, especially when they lived less careful; but since, they [watch] against the Spaniards, whom they killed like beasts, as often as they take them in the woods; having aforehand understood of their coming.⁵

We stayed with them that night, and the next day till noon; during which time, they related unto us diverse very strange accidents, that had fallen out between them and the Spaniards, namely one. A gallant gentleman entertained by the Governor of the country, undertook, the year last past (1572), with 150 soldiers, to put this town to the sword, men, women, and children.⁶ Being conducted to it by one of them, that had been taken prisoner, and won by great gifts; he surprised it half an hour before day, by which occasion most of the men escaped, but many of their women and children were slaughtered, or taken: but the same morning by sun rising (after that their guide was slain, in following another man's wife, and that the Cimarrons had assembled themselves in their strength) they behaved themselves in such sort, and drove the Spaniards to such extremity, that what with the disadvantage of the woods (having lost their guide and thereby their way), what with famine and want, there escaped not past thirty of them, to return answer to those which sent them.⁷

Their King [chief] dwelt in a city within sixteen leagues southeast of Panama; which is able to make 1,700 fighting men.⁸

3. These distances do not offer much help in identifying the location, as they are based on overland travel along rivers and ridgelines which cannot be easily reconstructed.

4. While Aguado perceived maroon religious to be a twisted form of Roman Catholic rites, the Protestant English saw the maroons as practicing a form of devotion similar to their own. The simplicity of maroon practice mirrored the "low church" practices that had become common in Protestant England.

5. Brackets in original. These comments likely refer to maroons recounting of Ursúa's campaign.

6. This certainly refers to Esteban de Trejo's campaign.

7. If true, this embarrassing outcome could explain why Spanish sources do not mention the conclusion of Trejo's campaign.

8. Brackets in original. The political organization of the maroons of this period is unclear. The English suggest that there may have been a new king. Subsequent Spanish sources similarly identified a singular leader but only occasionally referred to him as king.

Primary Source 2: Illustrations from The Drake Manuscript, c. 1586

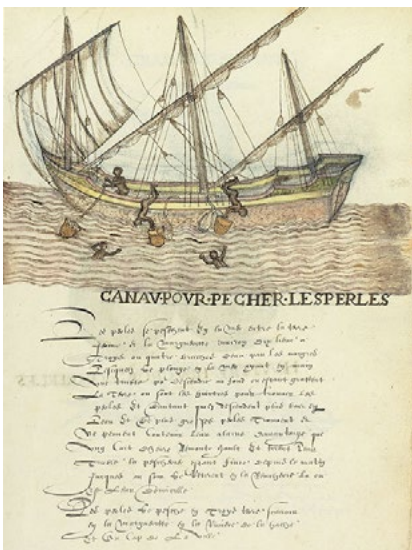
The Drake Manuscript is a pictographic manuscript – or handwritten book – whose paintings and accompanying descriptions describe the plant, animal, and human life of the Caribbean late in the sixteenth century, when Spaniards, indigenous Americans, and people of African descent (both free and enslaved) were joined by increasing numbers of Europeans who hoped to seize American wealth and land for themselves and their sponsoring kingdoms. Two or more artists wrote the manuscript (in French) and drew the illustrations; they were most likely French and may well have been French Protestants (Huguenots) who were known to have traveled with English slave trader and pirate, Francis Drake. Although Drake's connection to the manuscript is uncertain, he is mentioned on more than one occasion by the authors.

As you are reading, consider the following questions:

- If the authors of this document were traveling with Francis Drake, can they be considered “pirates”? If so, how does this change—or not—your ideas about piracy?
- What does the Drake Manuscript suggest about who and how knowledge about the emerging Atlantic world was produced in the sixteenth century?
- What, if any, evidence do these pictures offer concerning the limitations of imperial authority? What do these images suggest about interest in labor regimes and the natural world?
- How do these images help us think about how the geography of American settlements and wealth production shaped piracy?
- How might we use these images to think about the opportunities available to pirates in the Caribbean in this period?

Source: *The Drake Manuscript* (Histoire Naturelle des Indes), held by the Morgan Library & Museum in New York City. Available online at <https://www.themorgan.org/collection/Histoire-Naturelle-des-Indes>.

Image 1, Pearl Divers:



The translation of the text accompanying this image of pearl divers is as follows: “Canoe for Pearl-Fishing: Pearls are being fished in the ocean between the main-land and Isla de Margarita approximately ten leagues, in three-or four fathoms of water by the negroes who dive into the sea, holding a hoop-net to descend to the bottom where they scrape the soil where the oysters are, in order to find the pearls. And the deeper they descend in the water, the larger are the pearls they find. Not being able to hold their breath any longer than a quarter or an hour, they come up again and pull their hoop-net. The fishing from morning to evening having been completed, they return to La Rancheria where they live. Pearls are being fished in three places, namely, on Isla de Margarita, in Riohacha, and at the Cabo de la Vela.”

Image 2, Mantte/Conche:



The translation of the text accompanying this image of a pearl diver, Manta Ray and conch shell and pearl is as follows: Mantte (Manta Ray): This fish is very large and no less vicious. When the negroes dive in the sea for pearls it jumps on them to make them drown and afterwards eats them. Conche (Conch): It grows where one fishes for pearls. In this conch is found a certain hair like human hair the color of gold and it is very excellent for people who have an earache or who are somewhat deaf. They dry it in the sun and then put it in their ears and immediately feel its benefit. The negroes often use it, their ears being hurt by frequent dives.

Image 3, Hinde Flecher (Indian Wounded By Arrow):

The translation of the text accompanying this image of an indigenous healing practice is as follows: When the Indians are mortally wounded by arrows, one lays them on a rack and makes an oven with a tube leading to the wound of the sick man. When the fire is lighted, they put in it a leaf of tobacco together with a resin called balsam and as soon as the smoke enters the wound of the patient, they take a leaf of tobacco with some of the balsam and make a plaster which they apply to the wound of the patient, and he is cured.



Image 4, Come Les Esclaues Naigres Trauailent Et Cherchent Lor Aux-Mynes En La Terre Nommee Veraugue (How the Negro Slaves Work and Look for Gold in the Mines of the Region Called Veragua [Panama]):

The translation of the text accompanying this image of enslaved African workers mining for gold is as follows: In these mountains there is up high a great quantity of gold which is recovered and found in the falling rain which forms small brooks carrying much gold in small grains from the heights which the Indians collect at the foot of the mountains in small bowls as you see here above. It represents great wealth and convenience beyond the fact that the water coming down from the mountains is extremely good for drinking and does not harm a person. It is even very nourishing for having passed through gold and has besides a particular virtue so that whoever drinks it urinates promptly and frees his kidneys of gravel and other things. This region is very dangerous. The negroes live there only a short time and no day and night passes without rain, lightning and thunder because this land is so close to the equinoctial line. Being not fertile in goods, it has however a great deal of good gold. The King of Spain permits the Spaniards in the Indies to settle to build mines and own the gold in them as long as they pay him the tribute of a fifth of everything they find, of gold, silver, as well as of precious stones.



Image Citations

Page 1:

Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, Sir Francis Drake, 1591, National Maritime Museum, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gheeraerts_Francis_Drake_1591.jpg

Page 2:

Location map of Panama, CC-BY-SA 3.0, Alexrk, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Panama_location_map.svg

Page 4:

Illustration of an imagined Nombre de Dios, in Peter Schenk, Hecatompolis, 1672, Public Domain, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Nombre_de_Dios_-_Project_Gutenberg_eText_19396.jpg

Page 5:

“Pearl Divers,” The Drake Manuscript (*Histoire Naturelle des Indes*), held by the Morgan Library & Museum in New York, NY), 57r.

Page 6:

“Mantte/Conche,” The Drake Manuscript (*Histoire Naturelle des Indes*), held by the Morgan Library & Museum in New York, NY), 47r.

“Hinde Flecher (Indian Wounded By Arrow),” The Drake Manuscript (*Histoire Naturelle des Indes*), held by the Morgan Library & Museum in New York, NY), 92r.

Page 7:

“Come Les Esclaues Naigres Trauailent Et Cherchent Lor Aux-Mynes En La Terre Nommee Veraugue (How the Negro Slaves Work and Look for Gold in the Mines of the Region Called Veragua [Panama]),” The Drake Manuscript (*Histoire Naturelle des Indes*), held by the Morgan Library & Museum in New York, NY), 99v—100r