

Accuracy of the Portrayal of Pirates in Exquemelin's Henry Morgan Biography

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The core premise of Alexander Oliver Exquemelin's *Bucaniers of America* is the account of Captain Henry Morgan and his crew of pirates. The biography concerns who Captain Morgan is and how he turned to piracy. It also examines the targets for the pirates, along with the treatment of the victims. Exquemelin's account of pirates in *Bucaniers of America* is rendered the most accurate history of Buccaneers of the Golden age in spite of it reading like an entertainment. Eye-witness documentation triumphs the possible misrepresentations that renders it a fiction.

“For such their hunger, as more resembled Cannibals than Europeans at this Banquet, the blood many times running down from their beards onto the middle of their bodies.”¹ And this was the attitude of the Buccaneers hitherto invasion of Panama: the Pirate of the Caribbean who barbecues game for survival, thus *Buccaneer*.

Henry Morgan was born in Wales where he would be raised with his father on a farm. Having no desire to become a farmer, Morgan went to endeavor new fortunes and sailed to the West Indies as a privateer in service to the English Crown. After seizing Spanish occupied Jamaica, the seamen autonomously elected Henry Morgan as their captain.² *Bucaniers of America* depicts various invasions of Spanish ports and merchant ships subsequent to their refusal to surrender³ during the Anglo-Spanish war. In other words, this was the moment when the privateers, licensed to commit piracy, were stripped of their license which converted them into pirates or Buccaneers. In due time, Morgan would amass colossal crews of Buccaneers for his high spirits to continue piracy after the war commissioned other jobless seamen to join.⁴ Morgan's treatment of his crew could also give greater insight into the life of Piracy, “... our

¹ Alexander Oliver Exquemelin, *Bucaniers of America*, (1684 English Translation), part 3, 22.

² Exquemelin, *Bucaniers of America*, 32.

³ Exquemelin, *Bucaniers of America*, 37.

⁴ Exquemelin, *Bucaniers of America*, 47.

hearts are great. And the fewer persons we are, the more union and better shares we shall have in the spoil.”⁵ Motivated and brought together by booty, the Buccaneers are in search of new union and leadership outside of government in hopes of attaining fortunes. This was not always the case since Morgan divided his spoil in a manner, “to what he was pleased to give them,”⁶ which testifies that even when turned to piracy, the anarchic utopia they dreamed of, was simply another form of economic injustice where there would still be a head giving out commission. Nonetheless, they did live lavish lives with their spoils where they spent large sums.⁷ The Buccaneers acquired their booty primarily through raiding Spanish merchant sailors⁸ transporting goods such as tobacco, sugar and hides from the West Indies and bound to the Spanish crown. The main port of trade was San Tiago in which “was miserably fack’d by the pirates of Jamacia and Tortuga.”⁹

Acquiring spoils was at the expense of the victims of the Buccaneers of Henry Morgan. That meant rape and pillage small towns and holding Spaniards captive,¹⁰ men who were wicked sexually assaulting women by the sword¹¹ and worst of all torturing prisoners to demand insight on the whereabouts of other Spanish merchant ports.¹² Some of these acts of torture included burning their skin with fire, hung on trees and lay 200 pound rocks on the victim.¹³ Captain Morgan was not fond of giving mercy,¹⁴ to the extent that entire Spanish fleets were burned and with that all of the sailors in it.¹⁵

⁵ Exquemelin, *Bucaniers of America*, 48.

⁶ Exquemelin, *Bucaniers of America*, part 3, 37.

⁷ Exquemelin, *Bucaniers of America*, 54.

⁸ Exquemelin, *Bucaniers of America*, 42.

⁹ Exquemelin, *Bucaniers of America*, 41.

¹⁰ Exquemelin, *Bucaniers of America*, 33.

¹¹ Exquemelin, *Bucaniers of America*, 52.

¹² Exquemelin, *Bucaniers of America*, 49.

¹³ Exquemelin, *Bucaniers of America*, 63.

¹⁴ Exquemelin, *Bucaniers of America*, part 3, 34.

¹⁵ Exquemelin, *Bucaniers of America*, 72.

The above described dramas documented in *Bucaniers of America* written by the eye-witness Exquemelin is considered the most vivid account of Buccaneers, Captain Morgan and his crew, who were committing piracy. After arriving in the Caribbean in 1666, Exquemelin worked for the French West India Company, and after its collapse, he joined Captain Morgan's Buccaneers in 1670. Morgan later sued the publishers of *Bucaniers of America* for reputation sabotage in damages of 200 pounds, worth 15,000 today. *Bucaniers of America* was originally published in 1678, then translated into English in 1684, along with many other languages.¹⁶ That said, it was read by a broad audience in what Exquemelin claims to be a history, "Mansvelt took the island of St. Catherine, as was related in the second part of this history."¹⁷ But since it was widely read in a time where many people were illiterate, it is likely *Bucaniers of America* was used for entertainment purposes. Still, historians deem the text as one of the greatest sources on the Buccaneers affairs of the Golden age. Similar to how *Don Quixote* is read a fiction but regarded as a treasure trove for the courtesies of knight errantry.

¹⁶ *Bucaniers of America*.

¹⁷ Exquemelin, *Bucaniers of America*, part 3, 11.

Bibliography

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