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Foundation of Empire in the Tudor Era:
Further Explorations of the Northeast and Northwest Passages

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of History
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in History

by
Richard Harold Lloyd, III
May 2023

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ABSTRACT

Foundation of Empire in the Tudor Era:

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by

Richard Harold Lloyd, III

The British Empire is often traced back to the late sixteenth century and Sir Francis Drake's circumnavigation, but Tudor monarchs had been eyeing expansion beyond Britain long before Drake. John Cabot, commissioned by Henry VII in the late fifteenth century, became the first European to step foot in the Americas in five centuries. Half a century later, adventurers like Richard Chancellor and Sir Hugh Willoughby sought a possible Northeast Passage to Asia, interacting with the Sami and Russians along the way. These expeditions and others like them, funded by the English monarchy and merchants, aimed to expand the kingdom's economic base and help England find its place in the world. Although the Northeast Passage and Northwest Passage were not successfully charted during the European Age of Exploration, these Tudor explorers contributed to geographic, social, and cultural knowledge and laid the foundation of the largest empire in world history.

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DEDICATION

To my dad, who taught me to love learning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my thesis committee. Dr. John Rankin not only served as the chairperson for this thesis, but also helped mold my amateur interests in British history into a far more academic form through both my bachelor's and master's degree programs. Dr. Julie Fox-Horton, who served as second reader for this thesis, has provided valuable guidance and support throughout my writing process and her expertise in all matters medieval helped guide my own research to the liminal space between the medieval and early modern worlds. The final member of my committee, Dr. Brian Maxson, exudes endless enthusiasm in all matters academic and his advice during both my undergraduate and graduate studies has helped considerably.

Second, I would like to extend my gratitude to our Department of History and Department of Appalachian Studies. The faculty and staff members of these departments have helped me grow both personally and professionally throughout my time at ETSU. They have helped guide and nourish my academic interests, no matter how insignificant they may have seemed at the time. While time and space would fail me in mentioning every individual by name, I would be remiss to not bring special attention to Dr. Doug Burgess and Dr. Ron Roach, chairpersons of their respective departments, who have both served as shining examples of the style of academic I aspire to be: one dedicated not only to research and learning but, first and foremost, to students. I must make special mention of Mrs. Kim Woodring as well, who served not only as supervisor for my graduate assistantship but as a close friend and sounding board.

Finally, I would like to extend my eternal love and gratitude to my family and friends. My dad, Rick Lloyd, taught me from a young age to love learning in all its forms and to continually seek to expand my knowledge through study, discussion, and many other forms. He taught me how to relax, too, be it through reading, video games, or simply getting out of the house for a bit and exploring. My mom, Sandy Lloyd, has been endlessly supportive throughout my entire life. She has taught me that, even though life is far from easy at times, even when we have nothing else, we have the love and care of those we hold close. My mom also taught my exceptionally introverted self how to truly be a people person through her endlessly outgoing attitude. All four of my grandparents – Richard Lloyd, Sr., Edna Foster Lloyd, J.R. Pogue, and Pearl Spurling Pogue – each taught valuable life lessons of their own. While I know they, alongside my dad, are spending their eternity in Paradise fishing, gardening, and enjoying being reunited with other friends and family long since passed, I know, too, each of them is also watching over every step I take and that they continue to be insurmountably proud of me. I am also grateful for the newest part of my family, my soon-to-be-wife Lexi Doutrich and her family, especially her mom, Tammy Ickler, and her papa, Harold Campbell. While they have known me only a relatively short time, they have truly accepted me as a member of the family and continually provide endless encouragement.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

At the turn of the sixteenth century, Europe was emerging from the Middle Ages. The exact year in which that period gave way (if such a monumental shift can be distilled into a specific year) to the Early Modern is still endlessly debated.¹ Regardless of the exact dating, the shift from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern was not quick and was not uniform across the continent, with some areas – such as Italy, where the Renaissance and its ideas were already deeply entrenched – making this massive ideological shift before others. Just off the northwestern coast of mainland Europe, the kingdoms located on the British Isles were – as they so often have throughout history – operating on their own time scale that was, in some ways, entirely disconnected from the events on the continent. The preceding century had seen the Kingdom of England lose the Hundred Years' War to France and, with the war, all of their continental possessions beyond Calais and its immediate area.² Only a few short years after the conclusion of that more-than-a-century long conflict, long before England had truly even begun to recover in any way, the Wars of the Roses began, hurling the kingdom into a decades-long civil war. This century and a half of nearly nonstop warfare changed the face of England proper

¹ Many monographs exist for the sole purpose of trying to best determine what date or event truly precipitated the onset of a new epoch, among them Donald M. Nicol's *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261–1453* from 1993 and David B. Quinn's *England and the Discovery of America, 1481 – 1620* from 1974. Nicol posits that the fall of Constantinople in 1453, and the ensuing collapse of the Byzantine Empire (the final vestige of the once-glorious Roman Empire) was the precipitating event that forced the Western world out of the Middle Ages and into the Early Modern period. Quinn argues instead that it was not the defeat of the Byzantines, but rather the early dawn of the European Age of Exploration – which came to a head with Christopher Columbus's ill-fated voyage in 1492 which nonetheless saw the European rediscovery of the New World – that most greatly contributed to the shift from one epoch to the next.

² Ernest F. Jacob, *The Fifteenth Century, 1399–1485* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1961), vi–viii.

and, arguably more significantly, changed how the English interacted with those outside of their island home.³ The most long-lasting shift brought about by the Wars of the Roses was certainly the rise of the House of Tudor to the English throne. The Tudors, in their roughly twelve decades of rule, would manage to change the kingdom even more than the combined wars and would pull England (and, by extension, most of the British Isles as a whole) into the Early Modern Period and would lay the foundation of the largest empire the world has ever known.⁴

The first Tudor monarch, Henry VII, ascended to the throne of England in August 1485 and reigned until his death nearly twenty-four years later in early 1509. From his near two-and-a-half decades as King of England, a number of significant accomplishments are attributed to Henry; primarily, his ending the Wars of the Roses by conquering England and by marrying Elizabeth of York, uniting the Houses of York and Lancaster. As far as foreign policy, the first Tudor monarch's feats were a mix of great success and significant failures. Among his success abroad, he managed to find a level of peace with England's northern neighbor, Scotland, and allied his kingdom to the Holy Roman Empire. Through the marriage of his young heir apparent, Arthur, to Catherine of Aragon, he also won an amount of favor in Iberia. On the other side of the proverbial coin, however, he did find England at war with France once again – this time, over the lands of Brittany – though peace was made in 1492. Henry VII also improved royal

³ Ibid., 702.

⁴ Ibid., 723.

finances, bringing the exchequer from near bankruptcy to a far more stable institution by way of effective taxation and expanded external trade.⁵

It is from this trade expansion during Henry VII's reign that the earliest foundations of what would in time become the British Empire were born. While the king, through his Lord High Treasurers, managed to expand England into European markets previously overlooked, Henry wanted even more for his realm. After seeing the great successes of Columbus and others like him in expeditions funded by other European powers, a portion of the newfound funds brought to the crown under Henry's fastidious eye were put toward funding similar expeditions to find new markets and faster, more efficient trade routes. Much like the Spanish and Portuguese, the English viewed the lands of Asia as the best sources of high value trade in the world. Many of the products found there and nowhere else at the time – particularly silk and certain spices – were highly valuable and sought after by nobles and other well-off individuals throughout England.⁶ The largest issue with trading between Europe and Asia, though, was distance. The land route, following the Silk Road, had been active and well-traveled since the days of the Roman Republic; it was a very long journey, though, and at times highly dangerous. The sea route available, the Cape Route around the southern tip of Africa, was exceptionally long as well with the stretch across the Indian Ocean leading to the deaths

⁵ John D. Mackie, *The Earlier Tudors, 1485–1558* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1952), 37–184.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 189–277.

of near-countless sailors and merchants at the hand of various disasters and diseases.⁷

While Henry VII would die of tuberculosis in 1509, his son Henry VIII would continue in his father's footsteps of expanding England's reach beyond the shores of Great Britain.⁸

Henry VIII's greatest contribution to the foundation of the English (and, later, British) Empire was his creation of the Royal Navy in 1546, the year before his own untimely death (possibly due to complications from obesity) at age 55.⁹ It was the Royal Navy, and Henry's focus on maritime power in general, that helped ensure adventurers sent out by Henry's successors had a greater possibility of success.¹⁰ Henry's son, Edward VI, was in his minority throughout his six-year reign, dying at the young age of 15. He was, however, the reigning monarch in the spring of 1553 when three ships under the command of Richard Chancellor and Sir Hugh Willoughby set out from London in search of a Northeast Passage to China.¹¹ Mary I was Queen of England at the completion of this expedition and was very pleased with the historic trade agreement between her realm and Russia. The great success of Chancellor, even with the loss of Willoughby and two-thirds of those that set out from London, impressed upon the queen and her councilors that further seafaring exploration was not only warranted, but it was a must in an ever-expanding world.¹² Only 42 at her demise, Mary's younger half-sister ascended

⁷ Edmund D. Morgan and Charles H. Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels to Russia and Persia by Anthony Jenkinson and other Englishmen* (London, England: Hakluyt Society, 1886), 4–21.

⁸ Mackie, *The Earlier Tudors*, 281.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 295.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 301.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 514.

the throne in 1558. Under Elizabeth I, England's nascent overseas holdings and trade agreements would truly blossom into the beginnings of the English Empire, seeing the colonization of many locations along the eastern seaboard of North America and modern-day Canada as well as continued strong relations with Russia's Ivan IV.¹³ The narrative of Tudor exploration in North America is often centered around that foundation of what would become the Thirteen Colonies and, at times, the most eastern provinces of Canada.¹⁴ Less often studied, though, is the fabled Northwest Passage – yet another hope for a shorter sea route from England to China in much the same vein as the Northeast Passage. English monarchs and merchants believed that discovery of the Northwest Passage would give England a large advantage in trade with East Asia by providing a significantly shorter shipping lane than sailing around Africa or South America. The Northwest Passage would also give the English a sea route to East Asia that was not controlled by the Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch.

There are a number of well-known Tudor adventurers involved in these many ventures, the search for new lands, and fabled sea routes to distant kingdoms. The aforementioned Willoughby, Chancellor in the Northeast, and John Cabot (sent out by Henry VII in 1497) in the Northwest are certainly some of the most prominent Tudor adventurers. Other names, such as Sir Francis Drake who led the first successful circumnavigation of the globe, added to the expansion of Tudor England as well. A

¹² Ibid., 532.

¹³ John Bennett Black, *The Reign of Elizabeth, 1558–1603* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1959), 77.

¹⁴ Ibid., 132–140.

number of other lesser-known figures – from knighted men to everyday seamen – contributed to the success of these expeditions as well and, truly, to a global empire on which the sun never sat. It is on these sea route passages, though, both the Northeast and the Northwest, which this study focuses. These elusive direct routes to East Asia, which had long been hoped for but never found, provided the English with the initial impetus to expand beyond their island home.¹⁵

Many explorers set sail from England in search of these fabled passages, with men such as Hugh Willoughby to the Northeast and John Cabot to the Northwest having been written about extensively by historians. Others and their ventures, like Anthony Jenkinson's follow-up on and expansion of Willoughby's work and John Knight's loss in search of the Northwest Passage have far less of an impact on the traditional historical record. Primary documents and firsthand accounts, many of which were collected by Richard Hakluyt, and early writings (many coming from members of the Hakluyt Society in the nineteenth century) show that these lesser-known individuals also contributed greatly not only to the foundation of English empire but to England's understanding of the various peoples and cultures they encountered in their pursuits to find the Northeast and Northwest Passages.¹⁶ The concerted efforts made by many of these individuals – some out of personal interest and others being officially charged with gathering as much cultural data as possible about the peoples they encountered – helped form the basis of what became a centuries-long bilateral cultural exchange. While the Tudors and their

¹⁵ Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages*, 22–98.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

culture certainly had an impact of the various peoples they encountered, primarily Inuit in the Canadian Arctic and both Russian and Sami in the Eurasian Arctic, those cultural groups unquestionably had an impact on English culture of the period as well.

One of the earliest works speaking in depth of the search for a Northeast Passage comes from Henry Yule, a member of the aforementioned Hakluyt Society, writing in 1866. In his *Cathay and the Way Thither: Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China, with a Preliminary Essay on the Intercourse between China and the Western Nations Previous to the Discovery of the Cape Route*, Yule discusses the strong desire and efforts of most every major European power, particularly those in the west and north of the continent, in finding a sea route to China (more commonly known in Europe at the time as Cathay) as early as the first decades of the fourteenth century.¹⁷ Yule explains the issues with the Cape Route around Africa and how the long, arduous, often dangerous route along the ancient Silk Road was not only an expensive undertaking but was, in many ways, impractical for nations such as England and France to directly undertake. *Cathay and the Way Thither* provides great insight into the European mind and the difficulties facing European nations as they attempted to find reliable trade routes to China.¹⁸

Comprised of three dissertations completed by doctoral students at the University of Pennsylvania and combined into a single tome in 1912, *Studies of the History of*

¹⁷ Henry Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither: Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China, with a Preliminary Essay on the Intercourse between China and the Western Nations Previous to the Discovery of the Cape Route* (London, England: Hakluyt Society, 1866).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

English Commerce in the Tudor Period represents some of the earliest work focusing entirely on English trade and commerce during the Tudor period. Armand J. Gerson's contribution, entitled "The Organization and Early History of the Muscovy Company," discusses not only the foundation of the eponymous trade company in early 1555 during the reign of Mary I but also of its spiritual predecessor, The Mystery and Company of Merchant Adventurers for the Discovery of Regions, Dominions, Islands, and Places Unknown established in 1551 by Sir Hugh Willoughby, Sebastian Cabot, and Richard Chancellor.¹⁹ Written by Earnest V. Vaughn, "English Trading Expeditions into Asia under the Authority of the Muscovy Company (1557–1581)" analyzes the first quarter century of activities of the Muscovy Company, which principally funded many of the Tudor era ventures in search of the Northeast Passage.²⁰ Neva Ruth Deardorff's "English Trade in the Baltic During the Reign of Elizabeth," focuses on Tudor England's trade interactions with the many kingdoms and principalities located on and nearby the Baltic Sea including Denmark, Sweden, Poland, and Muscovy from the reign of Elizabeth I until the early seventeenth century. Similar to Gerson's work, Deardorff delves into the historical context of England's early trade partnerships with nations surrounding the Baltic Sea. These partnerships were established during the kingdom's initial expeditions in search of the Northeast Passage to China, which ultimately led instead to the

¹⁹ Armand J. Gerson, Earnest V. Vaughn, and Neva Ruth Deardorff, *Studies in the History of English Commerce in the Tudor Period* (New York, New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912), 1–115.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 127–210.

Muscovite court. Her work provides evidence for the impact, both economic and political, of voyages to discover the Northeast Passage.²¹

Richard Hakluyt (c. 1553 – 23 November 1616,) after which the Hakluyt Society is named, was an English author who, during his life was a staunch supporter of English colonization in North America. His greatest work, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques & Discoveries of the English Nation: Made by Sea or Over-land to the Remote and Farthest Distant Quarters of the Earth at any time within the compasse of these 1600 Years*, completed in 1589, was, in its final edition, a multivolume reference that was, ostensibly, an attempt at a comprehensive accounting of all the voyages undertaken (and the discoveries and connections made thereon) by Englishmen all throughout history. In reality, the collection focuses primarily on the period from Henry VII to the end of the sixteenth century during which Hakluyt wrote. This particular collection of Hakluyt's work, selected and edited by Irwin R. Blacker, focuses entirely on this aforementioned period, giving a contemporary picture of the English world of adventuring during the overwhelming majority – all but roughly the final decade – of Tudor reign in England.²² This extensively detailed work of Hakluyt's, when paired with his earlier writings, provides invaluable primary documentation of Tudor era exploration. In writing this multivolume work, Hakluyt traveled extensively to study court documents and other physical records of these early English voyages. He also conducted interviews with those

²¹ Ibid., 219–328.

²² Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques & Discoveries of the English Nation: Made by Sea or Over-land to the Remote and Farthest Distant Quarters of the Earth at any time within the compasse of these 1600 Years*, Irwin R. Blacker, ed. (New York, New York: Viking Press, 1965), iv–xi.

involved with the voyages whenever possible to provide a record that was as complete and detailed as possible.²³ Many of the lesser-known individuals discussed in this study, along with lesser-known information about more luminary figures, are sourced solely from Hakluyt's work.

Eva Germaine Rimington Taylor was a noted English geographer and historian throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Melding together her two primary academic interests, Taylor produced a number of works focusing on the maps and geographical knowledge of the Tudor and Hanoverian eras, with a particular emphasis on the voyages and discoveries made during those periods. In her *Tudor Geography, 1485–1583*, published in 1930, Taylor surveys all the geographical literature available from the Tudor period through 1583, with a particular emphasis upon merchant explorer Roger Barlow; John Cabot, known for his exploration of the North American; and John Dee, a well-known mathematician who took an interest in the adventures and exploits of Sir Francis Drake and Sir Martin Frobisher and hoped to combine his own knowledge with their accounts of the globe and the New World in the hopes of finding a more direct route from England to China than that available via the Cape Route. Taylor's work provides not only another early historian interested in the field of adventuring during the Tudor period, but also gives her more unique perspective as a trained geographer as well.²⁴ Examining the Tudors' understanding of geography provides crucial context for the pursuit of both the Northeast and Northwest Passages, as it highlights the knowledge gaps

²³ Ibid., 1–29.

²⁴ Eva Germaine Rimington Taylor, *Tudor Geography, 1485–1583* (London, England: Methuen Publishing, 1930).

that led financiers to believe in the existence of these routes, while also fueling the explorers' desire to fill in these gaps and achieve a greater understanding of the world.

One year after Eva Taylor's *Tudor Geography*, Foster Rhea Dulles released a monograph that serves as one of the earliest works dedicated solely to the idea of English adventuring: *Eastward Ho! The First English Adventurers to the Orient: Richard Chancellor, Anthony Jenkinson, James Lancaster, William Adams, and Sir Thomas Roe* from 1931. Much about Dulles's study is revealed in his title alone, listing five English adventurers of the Tudor period who explored lands well beyond those on which Englishmen had previously tread.²⁵ Dulles shaped the direction of historiographical conversations surrounding the Tudor search for the Northeast Passage for decades by thoroughly examining the accounts of the adventurers named in the title of this work. *Eastward Ho!* discusses the economic impact of Tudor adventuring, the vast amount of geographic knowledge gained, and the socio-cultural information learned by the various people groups encountered while searching for the Northeast Passage.

A few years later, in 1934, Eva Germaine Rimington Taylor published her *Late Tudor and Early Stuart Geography, 1583–1650: A Sequel to Tudor Geography, 1485–1583*. In this volume, Taylor opens with a brief overview of the life and works of Richard Hakluyt. She then follows this up with an in-depth discussion of both editions of Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations*. Taylor's work explains that the voyages undertaken by English adventurers, which were often directly funded by the English crown and its

²⁵ Foster Rhea Dulles, *Eastward Ho! The First English Adventurers to the Orient: Richard Chancellor, Anthony Jenkinson, James Lancaster, William Adams, and Sir Thomas Roe* (London, England: The Bodley Head, 1931).

subsidiary companies, were driven by the desire for profit.²⁶ Taylor's work shows that economic forces drove England to reach beyond its traditional borders. The geographic, social, and cultural knowledge gained on these journeys – while regarded as important and helped shape Tudor views of the wider world – was mostly incidental.

Published in 1952, Boies Penrose's *Travel and Discovery in the Renaissance, 1420–1620* provides a broad overview of European adventuring and exploration throughout the fifteenth, sixteenth, and early seventeenth centuries. Penrose establishes the importance of stories – both factual and fictional – urging Renaissance explorers to seek out lands discussed in earlier literature. Especially interested in the career of Sir Francis Drake, Penrose provides a listing and breakdown of the firsthand accounts of Drake and his contemporaries as well as surviving accounts from those who served on their ships. These later accounts, those of more common men with less-known names, provides important insights and context to the overall story of Tudor adventuring.²⁷

In 1954, Eleanora Mary Carus-Wilson published her *Medieval Merchant Venturers: Collected Studies*. A noted historian of British economic history, Carus-Wilson explains the economic motivation behind exploration. Set almost entirely before the Tudor period, Carus-Wilson's work demonstrates the importance of finance and how all adventuring is influenced by economic and financial considerations. Carus-Wilson asserts that the great voyages undertaken during the Tudor period were, almost wholly,

²⁶ Eva Germaine Rimington Taylor, *Later Tudor and Early Stuart Geography, 1583–1650: A Sequel to Tudor Geography, 1485–1583* (London, England: Methuen Publishing, 1934).

²⁷ Boies Penrose, *Travel and Discovery in the Renaissance, 1420–1620* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1952).

an extension and realization of thoughts and ideas that had been in formulation in England since as early as the twelfth century.²⁸

Gordon Connell-Smith's *Forerunners of Drake: A Study of English Trade with Spain in the Early Tudor Period* was published in 1954. Connell-Smith's work delves into the economic acumen of Henry VII and highlights his unwavering determination to maximize the revenue of his kingdom. This work explores England's early attempts to collaborate with other European powers in exploration instead of engaging in direct competition, and delves into the reasons why England ultimately had to venture out on its own. Among the reasons discussed by Connell-Smith are continued reliance on a foreign power to ensure England's economic success and increasingly one-sided trade agreements that profited Spain. Connell-Smith also offers a brief listing of the names and exploits of some of England's earliest adventurers who preceded Drake's circumnavigation, thereby incorporating them into the historiographical discourse of Tudor exploration albeit in a modest manner.²⁹

In 1958, Matthew S. Anderson published his *Britain's Discovery of Russia, 1553–1815*. Although much of this work covers a period beyond the Tudor era, its discussion of Tudor adventuring is crucial in comprehending the full extent of achievements by English explorers during that time. Anderson discusses how Richard Chancellor, Sebastian Cabot, and Sir Hugh Willoughby – under the auspices of the Muscovy Trading Company and the

²⁸ Eleanora Mary Carus-Wilson, *Medieval Merchant Venturers: Collected Studies* (London, England: Butler and Tanner Limited, 1954).

²⁹ Gordon Connell-Smith, *Forerunners of Drake: A Study of English Trade with Spain in the Early Tudor Period* (London, England: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1954).

English crown established the foundations of what would become a very strong, close trade relationship between England and Russia.³⁰ Despite failing to succeed in their mission to discover the Northeast Passage, Anderson's monograph highlights the significant impact that these explorers had on Anglo-Russian relations during the early nineteenth century.

John H. Parry's study, *The Age of Reconnaissance: Discovery, Exploration, and Settlement, 1450–1650* from 1963, is centered around the questions of why, when, where, and how as they pertain to the idea of adventurers exploring new lands and searching for new trade routes to already known places. The work provides a great deal of insight into the motives behind expanding English reach while examining the private funding of ventures not fully supported by the English crown. This analysis of merchant interests demonstrates that even during tumultuous periods in the monarchy, such as the reign of Edward VI, private investors persisted in financing exploratory expeditions in pursuit of economic benefits. Cognizant that English exploration was shaped by what came before and the efforts of other empires, Parry examines the great conquests of the Spanish and Portuguese and how their own explorers helped build their empires into some of the strongest and richest the world had seen to date with an eye to compare them to that of Tudor expansion and empire.³¹

³⁰ Matthew S. Anderson, *Britain's Discovery of Russia, 1553–1815* (London, England: MacMillan Publishers, 1958).

³¹ John H. Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance: Discovery, Exploration, and Settlement, 1450–1650* (Cleveland, Ohio: World Publishing Company, 1963).

First published in 1968 from editors Lloyd E. Berry and Robert O. Crummey, *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom: Russia in the Accounts of Sixteenth-Century English Voyagers* is a collection of the accounts taken directly from Tudor adventurers including Richard Chancellor and George Turberville regarding their voyages to Russia. Edited to be easily readable and digestible to modern readers, these firsthand accounts provide valuable insight into the minds of the men who undertook these exploratory ventures for the Tudor crown as well as giving the firsthand perspective of the peoples and places they encountered in sixteenth century Russia.³² The work demonstrates that while the primary objective of England's Eurasian Arctic expeditions was to find a viable sea route to China, the adventurers also had interest in learning about the culture of the people they encountered in the Arctic.

Beginning in the 1970s, historians became interested in the social aspects of maritime life. Influential in this line of investigation is historian of the British navy Charles Christopher Lloyd. Published in 1970, Lloyd's *The British Seaman, 1200–1860: A Social Survey* is significant in comprehending the seafaring life of Englishmen over a substantial period of history. His examination of the Tudor mariner explains the backgrounds and types of men that crewed the vessel commanded by more-known adventuring figures throughout the Tudor period. This point of view provides insight not only into the common sailors themselves, but provides insight, too, into how those

³² Lloyd E. Berry and Robert O. Crummey, eds., *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom: Russia in the Accounts of Sixteenth-Century English Voyagers* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968).

common seafarers viewed men such as Richard Chancellor and Sir Francis Drake.³³ The rise of social history had a tremendous impact of how historians view and understand the complex social intricacies of maritime life and exploration.

The European Discovery of America, Volume I: The Northern Voyages, A.D. 500–1600, released by Samuel Eliot Morison in 1971, provides an extensive history of early European exploration and colonization of North America. The monograph provides some explanation for the reasons the Tudors were so interested in North America once the New World was rediscovered by Europeans at the close of the fifteenth century. English economic interests sought a trade route to East Asia that bypassed the need for cooperation with Spain and Portugal as with the Cape Route – the Northwest Passage offered this potential alternative. Morison provides further information about Richard Hakluyt, his *Principal Navigations*, and his persistent push for English colonization of North America. This information helps establish Hakluyt’s credentials and reliability. Morison also discusses Sir Humphrey Gilbert, who is important not only for the role he played in helping pioneer the establishment of England’s colonial empire in North America but also in the search for the Northwest Passage.³⁴

Sir Percival Joseph Griffiths’ *A License to Trade: The History of English Chartered Companies* from 1974 helps provide an overview of how English trading companies were structured and their relation to the English crown. The most relevant

³³ Charles Christopher Lloyd, *The British Seaman, 1200–1860: A Social Survey* (Teaneck, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickson University Press, 1970,) 28–51.

³⁴ Samuel Eliot Morison, *The European Discovery of America, Volume I: The Northern Voyages, A.D. 500–1600* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1971).

portion of Griffiths' work to this study is his early focus on the Mystery and Company of Merchant Adventurers for the Discovery of Regions, Dominions, Islands, and Places Unknown and how that group directly led to the founding of the Muscovy Trading Company. Griffiths credits these groups, chartered in 1553 and 1555 respectively, with forming the framework on which later joint stock companies (such as the far better-known East India Company, founded nearly half a century later) were built.³⁵

First published in 1976, *A Nation of Pirates: English Piracy in Its Heyday* by Clive M. Senior discusses privateers and pirates who came to significance at the end of the Tudor period in England. As the explorers setting out from England, Spain, the Netherlands, and other European powers saw more and more success, greater proportions of international trade than ever before were sent by sea rather than by land. According to Senior, this allowed for far faster transport than land-based trade – as was the hope from the earliest days of adventuring – due to the ability of ships to sail at swifter speeds than wagons, trade caravans, or even horses could move over land. However, this opened unprotected merchant vessels up to attack from anyone with a gun-bearing ship, be it small, private crews or large ships funded by rival foreign governments.³⁶ Although this aspect of the European Age of Exploration does not feature prominently in the discussion of early Tudor adventuring, it nonetheless offers a broader context to the repercussions of exploration, particularly during the reign of Elizabeth I and the Stuarts.

³⁵ Percival Joseph Griffiths, *A License to Trade: The History of English Chartered Companies* (London, England: Ernest Benn Limited, 1974).

³⁶ Clive M. Senior, *A Nation of Pirates: English Piracy in Its Heyday* (Newton Abbot, England: David and Charles Limited, 1976).

As historians shifted to new topics such as social history and the economics of warfare, the topic of Tudor exploration fell from view and from around 1970 to the 1990s, few works dedicated to the field appear. Published in 1992, David Loades' *The Tudor Navy: An Administrative, Political, and Military History* provides an extensive history of the Tudor navy. The navy, being the backbone of not only overseas trade but increasingly exploration was of vital importance to the Tudor government. The Tudor monarchs were aware of this. Henry VIII, in particular, is well-known for his official establishment of the Royal Navy in 1546 and the vast expansion of seafaring vessels owned by the English crown during his long reign. Loades also writes of the support given by the Royal Navy to merchant vessels by way of protecting newly-established shipping lanes trailblazed by the adventurers working under the sponsorship of the Tudor monarchs and the newly-founded joint stock companies.³⁷

From 1997, *Arctic Routes to Fabled Lands: Oliver Brunel and the Passage to China and Cathay in the Sixteenth Century* by Marijke Spies provides a short but focused look at the strong Tudor desire to find a Northeast Passage allowing them a far shorter route to the kingdoms of East Asia than that available via the Cape Route and the long, seabound trek across the Indian Ocean. Spies offers that, while the Tudors were clearly disappointed that the fabled Northeast Passage was nothing more than a myth, their newfound trade relationship with the Tsardom of Russia was likely more profitable than a similar relationship would have been with China had the Northeast Passage existed.

³⁷ David Loades, *The Tudor Navy: An Administrative, Political, and Military History* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

According to Spies, the opening of the Russian markets to England and – by extension – Europe was a monumental shift in the overall landscape of the continent, one that helped shape the economy of not only England but of other nations as well.³⁸

At the end of the 1990s, Peter T. Bradley published his *British Maritime Enterprise in the New World: From the Late Fifteenth Century to the Mid-Eighteenth Century*. This monograph provides an exhaustive, detailed overview of a large number of seafaring voyages undertaken by English (and, later, British) adventurers from the time of Henry VII through George III some three and a half centuries later. Bradley's primary focus is on well-known figures such as Sir Francis Drake and Henry Hudson; however, he also delves into Hakluyt's *Principal Voyages* and sheds light on several lesser-known expeditions that took place during the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII which are documented in Hakluyt's work.³⁹ Similar to *Principal Voyages*, Bradley demonstrates that Tudor exploration was not exclusively carried out by prominent figures. It emphasizes the importance of including lesser-known individuals in the historiographical discourse on the subject.

Published in 2000, Susan Brigden's *New Worlds, Lost Worlds: The Rule of the Tudors, 1485–1603* provides a comprehensive overview of the territories that England acquired and colonized during the Tudor reign, as well as the significant efforts made to maintain control over them. Brigden provides an extensive look at the entirety of the

³⁸ Marijke Spies, *Arctic Routes to Fabled Lands: Oliver Brunel and the Passage to China and Cathay in the Sixteenth Century* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 1997).

³⁹ Peter T. Bradley, *British Maritime Enterprise in the New World: From the Late Fifteenth to the Mid-Eighteenth Century* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1999).

Tudor period includes fruitful investigations of the ventures taken to the New World during the reign of Elizabeth I and of the frictions caused by this expansion (along with frictions avoided earlier on due to England's early focus on finding a Northwest Passage rather than on colonizing more southerly portions of North America.)⁴⁰

From 2005, Kit Mayers's *North-East Passage to Muscovy: Stephen Borough and the First Tudor Explorations* provides a short, very focused narrative of the first English adventurer (under the patronage of the newly formed Muscovy Trade Company) to reach the White Sea and, in turn, open trade with the newly unified Russian tsardom. Mayers also delves into other attempts to find a Northeast Passage, but suggests that the Tudor monarchs did not exert greater efforts in discovering the route due to the nation's strong trade agreement with Russia. Despite this, the merchants of England at the time still sought to discover a more direct route to China and financed expeditions to find the Northeast Passage, led by several lesser-known figures who are discussed in this monograph.⁴¹

The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus from 2008 provides an analysis of the human cost and condition associated with the overall Age of Exploration in Europe. In this monograph, David Abulafia focuses primarily on Spanish and Portuguese expeditions to Atlantic and Caribbean islands such as those led by Christopher Columbus and Vasco de Gama. Nonetheless, much of the information

⁴⁰ Susan Brigden, *New Worlds, Lost Worlds: The Rule of the Tudors, 1485–1603* (New York, New York: Viking Press, 2000).

⁴¹ Kit Mayers, *North-East Passage to Muscovy: Stephen Borough and the First Tudor Explorations* (Stroud, England: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2005).

provided translates well – based on other accounts – to the Tudor English views of the Russian peoples encountered during the search for the Northeast Passage and, to a lesser extent, even to the denizens of the many nations centered around the Baltic Sea. Abulafia's monograph offers compelling evidence to support the idea that Tudor adventurers not only achieved economic success through their interactions with new cultural groups but also gained valuable cultural and social knowledge.⁴²

The most recent monograph focused solely on English adventurers from the Tudor period, and one of the most substantive works in the field to date, is that of James Evans: *Tudor Adventurers – An Arctic Voyage of Discovery: The Hunt for the Northeast Passage*. Published in 2014, this thoroughly-researched and well-cited volume provides insight into the fated exploratory ventures of two men: Sir Hugh Willoughby and Richard Chancellor. Evans compares and contrasts the lives and fates of these two men who served as the principal leaders on the same voyage. Willoughby's death, along with the entirety of two of the three ships which set out from London in search of a Northeast Passage, in many ways allowed for Chancellor and the third ship to reach the Russian court of Ivan IV and, in turn, establish a trade relationship with that new tsardom. This relationship, Evans contends, served as the impetus for Tudor England to continue reaching beyond the shores of Great Britain in hopes of further riches and, in turn, served as the initial keystone in the formation of the English empire.⁴³

⁴² David Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁴³ James Evans, *Tudor Adventurers – An Arctic Voyage of Discovery: The Hunt for the Northeast Passage* (New York, New York: Pegasus Books LLC, 2014).

The Tudor dynasty in England spanned from 1485 to 1603 and was a period of significant transformation in many areas of life. During this time, Western Europe was experiencing a major shift from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern period, and England was at the forefront of this change. The Tudor monarchs, starting with Henry VII, recognized the importance of expanding their knowledge and influence beyond the confines of their island nation. This led to an era of exploration, discovery, and expansion, both in terms of geographical exploration and the pursuit of knowledge, power, and wealth.

During this era of exploration, the continents of the Western hemisphere were rediscovered by European powers. It soon became apparent that these lands were far more extensive than originally thought. While the Spanish and Portuguese were the first to explore the Americas, the English soon embarked on expeditions of their own, focusing on Greenland and Canada. Despite failing in their primary goal to find the fabled Northwest Passage, their efforts expanded geographical knowledge in the northern reaches of the North American Arctic. Hudson Strait and Hudson Bay were among the waterways extensively explored, and the English encountered various indigenous peoples, including the Inuit. These meetings led to extensive recordings of their languages and cultures, and trade routes were established. While the Northwest Passage remained elusive, the English achieved much success in their explorations.

Significant advancements in knowledge were achieved during the pursuit of the Northeast Passage as well. Although Tudor England did not witness a successful mapping of this waterway, the explorers dispatched in search of it significantly

broadened England's trade network. In the mid-sixteenth century, when the explorers met the Russian people, they established trade relations that persisted for centuries.

Furthermore, these expeditions strengthened relationships with other Baltic nations.

These interactions, akin to those with indigenous peoples in the Canadian Arctic, greatly enhanced the understanding of the languages and cultures encountered.

During the Tudor era, England's understanding of cultures beyond Western Europe rapidly expanded due to the numerous encounters made by adventurous explorers. Without the tireless efforts of these daring individuals, both well-known and obscure, England may have remained as no more than a regional power in Europe. The Tudor period was a time of immense growth and transformation, fueled by the Tudors' unwavering commitment to exploration and knowledge. Their ambitious exploratory and territorial policies paved the way for England's eventual rise to global dominance, making them a key player in world affairs. Overall, the Tudor era was a critical period that helped shape the course of English history and the world at large and it was on the successes and failures of those who embarked on these ventures that this massive impact was founded.

CHAPTER 2. THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE

Following the successful voyage of Vasco de Game to India and most of those undertaken by Christopher Columbus, the European Age of Exploration was well underway by the final decade of the fifteenth century.⁴⁴ Seeing the successes and failures of other nations – particularly the Spanish and Portuguese – Henry VII of England set his sights on carving a place for his nation out of this new period of history. Henry VII had ascended to the throne in 1485, shortly before Columbus’s first voyage to the New World. Archaeological evidence now shows that Columbus’s voyage was not the first European transit of the Atlantic. The Norse peoples had, by way of Iceland and Greenland, made their way to the northeastern shores of North America centuries beforehand.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, it was Columbus’s first voyage that captured the imaginations of Western European nations and their leaders. By sanctioning a voyage to the newfound lands, Henry VII hoped to profit economically while demonstrating that the House of Tudor was a force to be reckoned with in international politics.⁴⁶

In 1497, Henry VII commissioned Italian explorer and navigator John Cabot to lead a venture to explore the eastern coast of North America. Setting sail from Bristol, England, with a small crew and a single ship (HMS *Matthew*) Cabot and his fellow adventurers sailed for roughly five weeks across the Atlantic. After this journey, they reached the coast of what is now Newfoundland, Canada, which they claimed for the

⁴⁴ Ernest F. Jacobs, *The Fifteenth Century, 1399–1485* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1961), 507.

⁴⁵ Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind*, 19.

⁴⁶ Brigden, *New Worlds*, 241.

English crown. This landfall made Cabot and his crew the first Europeans to make landfall on the North American mainland since the aforementioned Norse expeditions of the eleventh century. Upon their return to England, Cabot was lauded as a hero by Henry VII and his advisors and was quickly awarded a lifelong pension by the king.⁴⁷

The following year, Cabot – in part to increase his own fame – set out for North America once again.⁴⁸ The details of this second voyage, though, are less clear than those of his first. Although significantly larger, consisting of five ships and some two-hundred men, this expedition never returned to England. It is now believed that they were shipwrecked in a severe storm in the North Atlantic.⁴⁹ Due to this, second-hand accounts from the late sixteenth century must be relied on for insights into early English exploration during the Tudor period. Richard Hakluyt, in his *Principal Navigations*, contends that Cabot and his crew most likely returned to the area they had previously explored, extending their voyage further around Newfoundland and into Labrador.⁵⁰ A collection of letters and papers from the reign of Henry VIII, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, implies the expedition may have reached as far south along the continent's eastern seaboard as the Chesapeake Bay or possibly even as far south as Florida.⁵¹ Regardless, Cabot's voyages helped to establish England's claims to parts of

⁴⁷ Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind*, 47–98.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 101.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 118.

⁵⁰ Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, 19.

⁵¹ James Gairdner and Robert H. Brodie, eds., *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII* (London, England: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1872), 358.

North America and paved the way for future English explorers and colonizers in what to the English was still largely an unexplored landmass of boundless potential.

Cabot, like Columbus, initially believed that his first expedition had landed on the shores of eastern Asia. He and his men had, after all, wound through what seemed to be endless waterways in North America in their explorations before returning to England. Cabot later realized the error of his ways, but this expedition did lead to the foundation of belief in a Northwest Passage that would allow merchants to sail north of the North American continent and onward to potential trade partners in Asia.⁵² Cutting out the long, dangerous, arduous route to Asia around the Cape of Good Hope which had been discovered by Portuguese navigator Bartolomeu Dias roughly a decade prior was certainly of great interest to Henry VII and the other powers, both political and economic, controlling England. Although the English were aware of and made use of this route, the Spanish, Portuguese, French, and – to a lesser extent – the Dutch held a distinct advantage of having a shorter trip due to their own geographical locations. A Northwest Passage, if found, would conversely work in the favor of England rather than its rivals.⁵³

The same year as Cabot's second voyage, João Fernandes Lavrador – a Portuguese explorer – set sail from his home nation, making his way as far as Greenland. Upon returning from this journey, Lavrador then went to England where he set sail in the name of Henry VII. During this voyage, in which he returned to Greenland and from there set sail toward North America, Lavrador and his men charted the coasts of the

⁵² Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind*, 372.

⁵³ Bradley, *British Maritime Enterprise*, 121.

northeastern portion of the continent along with the southwestern coast of Greenland.⁵⁴ Lavrador returned to England where the news of his discoveries and cartography spread quickly. Henry VII was told of encounters with indigenous peoples and the abundant fishing grounds along the coast. These discoveries had a significant impact on the history of the region leading to increased exploration, settlement, and development of the fishing industry by multiple European powers. Upon his return to England, Lavrador also recounted many tales told by the Inuit peoples he encountered, regaling the Tudor court with stories of a culture very different from their own.⁵⁵ Seeing this great success, the king then commissioned Lavrador to return to North America – this time in search of the Northwest Passage. In 1501, Lavrador set sail once again from Bristol toward the New World in hopes of discovering new lands and trade routes for the English crown; he was never seen again.⁵⁶ There is no evidence that Lavrador and his final expeditionary venture ever reached North America, let alone the long-sought-after Northwest Passage.

Following the death of Henry VII in April 1509, his expansionist and economic plans were quickly deemphasized by his son and successor, Henry VIII. This shift in policy would not hold for the entirety of Henry VIII's nearly four-decade-long reign, though it assuredly led to a period of disinterest from the English in exploring beyond the borders of the British Isles.⁵⁷ That is not to say, though, that the early reign of Henry VIII

⁵⁴ Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, 287.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁵⁷ Gerson, Vaughn, and Deardorff, *Studies in the History*, 73.

had no bearing on later English adventuring and exploration. Prior to Henry VIII's reign, the English navy was small and mostly relied on privateers and merchant ships to defend the country's interests at sea. Recognizing the importance of having a strong and organized navy to protect English trade and territory, as well as to project English power abroad, Henry began a program of extensive naval expansion that included the construction of larger, more powerful warships and the establishment of permanent naval bases. He also appointed a series of naval officials, including the Lord High Admiral, to oversee the navy's operations. Henry's naval reforms also included the establishment of a system of impressment, whereby men were forcibly recruited into the navy to serve as sailors and marines. This allowed the navy to maintain a large and well-trained workforce, which was essential for successful naval operations.⁵⁸ Overall, Henry VIII's efforts to build a strong and professional navy laid the foundations for the Royal Navy that would become one of the most powerful naval forces in the world in later centuries and would, in many ways, support the naval ventures and expansions seen in the later part of his reign and throughout the reigns of his successors.⁵⁹

In 1536, Henry VIII commissioned a group of explorers to search for the Northwest Passage. The king's hope, like his father's before him, was that a new sea trade route to Asia would be discovered that would bypass the monopolies established by the Spanish and Portuguese during his earlier reign when he was more concentrated on internal affairs in England. While this expedition was more successful than their

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁵⁹ Brigden, *New Worlds*, 287.

predecessors and delved as far inland as the Arctic Circle, it was also ultimately unsuccessful in finding the Northwest Passage.⁶⁰

With the death of Henry VIII in January 1547, his nine-year-old son ascended the throne as Edward VI. Being in his minority for the entirety of his reign, Edward VI had relatively little input into the policy and practices of the realm over which he ruled. This lack of involvement extended beyond the borders of England as well, though that is not to say England's exploratory efforts stagnated.⁶¹ During Edward VI's reign, there were a number of significant scientific discoveries made by Englishmen – particularly in the realms of medicine and mathematics – that would positively impact and further English exploration in the following decades.⁶² While Mary I, Edward's ultimate successor, showed an interest in exploring abroad, her sights were seemingly never set westward in the way that her father's and grandfather's had been.⁶³ By the end of the 1550s, though, Elizabeth I came to occupy the English throne. It was during the near half-century long reign of the final Tudor monarch that England's efforts to find the long-fabled Northwest Passage would be redoubled. Numerous expeditions set out from England in search of this direct water route to Asia, some headed by well-known historical figures and others helmed by names not so well-known.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Hakluyt, *Principal Voyages*, 317.

⁶¹ Connel-Smith, *Forerunners of Drake*, 29.

⁶² Loades, *The Tudor Navy*, 164.

⁶³ Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance*, 241.

⁶⁴ Morison, *The European Discovery of America*, 215.

Martin Frobisher was an English navigator and explorer who undertook three voyages in the 1570s in search of the Northwest Passage. Born in Yorkshire, England, in 1535, Frobisher had previous experience as a privateer and had made several voyages to the New World before he was commissioned by Queen Elizabeth I to lead an expedition in search of the Northwest Passage.⁶⁵ In 1576, Frobisher set sail with three small ships – HMS *Gabriel*, HMS *Michael*, and HMS *Judith*. So interested in this voyage was Elizabeth I that, as they sailed down the Thames, the queen waved to the departing ships.⁶⁶ Within a few weeks, the expedition had made its way to the Shetland Islands and – another two weeks later – reached the coast of Greenland. From there, Frobisher sailed westward in search of the Northwest Passage. Frobisher hoped to sail through the Strait of Anian, a passage that was believed to link the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, but was forced to turn back due to unfavorable weather and icy conditions. Frobisher and his crew returned to London on 9 October, being well-received by Elizabeth I who was eager to hear the results of their voyage.⁶⁷

The following year, Frobisher made a second attempt, this time with an even larger fleet of 15 ships. Setting sail from England, they made their way across the Atlantic to Greenland. From there, they continued north, once again encountering icebergs and harsh weather conditions, but he and his crew managed to navigate their way through the ice and, after several weeks at sea, Frobisher’s crew spotted land which

⁶⁵ Black, *The Reign of Elizabeth*, 423.

⁶⁶ Hakluyt, *Principal Voyages*, 269.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 276.

they named Frobisher's Straits. They then sailed through the straits to reach what is now known as Frobisher Bay on the coast of Baffin Island.⁶⁸ Believing that he had found a passage to Asia, Frobisher sent out a landing party to explore the area. They discovered what they believed to be gold and brought back several samples to England. The samples were later found to be iron pyrite, or "fool's gold," but at the time they sparked a great deal of excitement and interest among the queen and her closest advisors in Frobisher's voyage.⁶⁹

In 1578, Frobisher made a third and final voyage to the Arctic, but this time his efforts were focused on mining the supposed gold deposits in Frobisher Bay. The expedition was a commercial failure, as the ore was found to be of little value, but it did result in the first English settlement in North America, which Frobisher named Fort Frobisher.⁷⁰ Frobisher, like those who went before him, never found the Northwest Passage, although his voyages helped to expand English knowledge of the Arctic and paved the way for future explorations. During his voyages, Frobisher and his crew frequently interacted with the indigenous Inuit of the region. Through these interactions, much information about their society and snippets of their language were recorded and shared on Frobisher's return trips to England. His efforts also helped to establish

⁶⁸ Ibid., 284.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 298.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 303.

England's claim to the region and contributed to the eventual English colonization of North America's eastern coast and eastern Canada.⁷¹

Following shortly on the heels of Frobisher was John Davis, an English navigator and explorer who headed multiple voyages to the Arctic and the Americas in the name of Elizabeth I. In 1585, he was tasked by a group of London merchants (with the blessing of the queen) with “undertaking a voyage of discovery to the far north with the goal of finding a new trade route to Asia – the fabled Northwest Passage” linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.⁷² During this voyage, Davis encountered the Inuit people of Greenland and Labrador and became interested in their language and culture. He recorded some of his observations and recordings related to natural language in his journal. Davis noted that the Inuit language had "many strange and uncouth sounds" and was difficult to learn. He attempted to learn some of the language himself and recorded a few words in his journal, including the Inuit words for "yes" and "no." He also noted that the Inuit communicated with each other using a combination of speech, gestures, and facial expressions, which he found to be a fascinating aspect of their language. In addition to the Inuit, Davis also encountered the Beothuk people of Newfoundland and noted that they spoke a different language from the Inuit. He recorded some of their words and phrases in his journal, but did not make significant progress in his attempts to learn their language.⁷³ While this voyage failed in discovering the Northwest Passage and

⁷¹ Morison, *The European Discovery of America*, 199.

⁷² Bradley, *British Maritime Enterprise*, 406.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 418.

his linguistic observations did not contribute greatly to that field due to their overall lack of detail, Davis's encounters with the Inuit and the Beothuk contributed to the growing European body of knowledge concerning the cultural diversity of the Arctic and the Americas in the sixteenth century.⁷⁴

One of Martin Frobisher's chief backers was Humphrey Gilbert, a soldier and member of the English parliament. Following the popularity of Frobisher's ventures, Gilbert became an adventurer himself and led two voyages to the New World on behalf of Elizabeth I.⁷⁵ The first of his voyages, in 1578, saw Gilbert set out from England with five ships with the intent to explore the coast of North America and claim territory for England. He eventually landed at what is now Newfoundland, and claimed the land in the name of the queen. His efforts to establish a permanent settlement at Newfoundland were unsuccessful, however, and he returned to England without accomplishing his goals.⁷⁶ On his second voyage, which set out half a decade later in 1583, Gilbert set out with a larger fleet having two major goals in mind: establishing a permanent English colony in North America and, following that, using that colony as a base from which to launch his personal exploration for the Northwest Passage. Gilbert encountered several setbacks during this second voyage, including the loss of one of his ships and the deaths of many of his crew members from disease. Despite these setbacks, Gilbert continued with his plan to establish a settlement. This expedition landed at Saint John's, Newfoundland, in

⁷⁴ Morison, *The European Discovery of America*, 199–201.

⁷⁵ Hakluyt, *Principal Voyages*, 225.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 227.

August 1583. Gilbert then took possession of the land in the name of the queen and began building a settlement. The settlement quickly faced many difficulties, among them harsh weather, food shortages, and conflicts with the local indigenous peoples. Gilbert was lost at sea during a storm in September, bringing his hopes of establishing a North American base for English exploration to an end. Soon thereafter, the nascent settlement was abandoned by the few surviving colonists who successfully returned to England afterward.⁷⁷

By this point in Europe's Age of Exploration, a pattern had certainly emerged from England's attempts at finding the Northwest Passage. No one had succeeded in finding the Passage or even establishing a settlement in the New World from which to launch further explorations. That is not to say the explorations had been in vain, though, as each subsequent expedition had built on the ever-expanding knowledgebase of the English and Europeans as a whole as it related to North America. Not only did each subsequent expedition push further into the Canadian Arctic, but they continued to interact with the area's indigenous population. Along with the trade goods brought to England on the return journeys of the explorers were journals containing troves of information pertaining to the language, practices, and customs of the various peoples encountered.⁷⁸

The following year, in 1586, Davis embarked on a second voyage to the Arctic in search of the Northwest Passage during which he once again encountered the Inuit people

⁷⁷ Ibid., 230.

⁷⁸ Gerson, Vaughn, and Deardorff, *Studies in the History*, 241.

of Greenland and Labrador, as well as other indigenous peoples.⁷⁹ During his 1586 voyage, Davis continued to attempt to learn some of the Inuit language, recording additional words and phrases in his journal. He also noted that the Inuit language had different dialects depending on the region, and that certain words had different meanings depending on the context in which they were used. Davis also encountered the Beothuk people of Newfoundland again, and recorded additional words and phrases in their language. He noted that the Beothuk language had many guttural sounds and was difficult to learn.⁸⁰ In addition to the Inuit and the Beothuk, Davis also encountered the Naskapi people of Quebec, whom he called the "Esquimaux of the land." He recorded some of their words and phrases in his journal, and noted that their language was different from that of the Inuit.⁸¹ Much like his voyage in 1585, Davis's second voyage also failed in its mission to find the Northwest Passage but contributed even more to the cultural and linguistic understanding of the people groups he encountered. Davis's observations from his Arctic voyages have been used by linguists and historians to study the development and evolution of these languages over time.⁸²

A far more recognizable name, Sir Francis Drake also made concerted efforts during the reign of Elizabeth I to discover and traverse the Northwest Passage. Drake and his crews made several attempts to find the fabled route linking the Atlantic and Pacific

⁷⁹ Bradley, *British Maritime Enterprise*, 413.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 415.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 418.

⁸² Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind*, 283.

Oceans. He extensively sailed the northern waters of Canada and, differentiating himself from his contemporaries, also spent some time searching for the Pacific start of the Northwest Passage. Due to the ever-present and dangerous icepacks and the bitterly cold weather, Drake was also unsuccessful in his search for the fabled waterway.⁸³ Much like Davis, though, Drake's efforts contributed greatly to increasing knowledge about the North American coast, inland waters, and the indigenous people groups that called those lands home.⁸⁴

In 1602, nearing the end of Elizabeth I's reign, George Weymouth became one of the first English adventurers to be hired by the English East India Company. Weymouth's contracted work with the Company was to voyage to the New World and search for the Northwest Passage, just as many had before him. Under this contract, Weymouth led two voyages to the coast of what is now Maine: one in 1605 and a second the following year (marking them, notably, as being commissioned under Elizabeth I but not taking place until a few years into the dual reign of James I/VI.) Also, like those who were sent out for over a century before him, he explored the North American coast and made contact with the various indigenous peoples living in the area.⁸⁵ Weymouth's initial voyage, like many first voyages of unproven and unknown adventurers, consisted of a small crew. Setting sail in March, Weymouth and his men landed along the coast of Maine. They explored the area, made contact with the indigenous groups living there, and – upon heading back

⁸³ Hakluyt, *Principal Voyages*, 210.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁸⁵ Penrose, *Travel and Discovery*, 384.

to England – took five of those indigenous peoples back to Europe with them.⁸⁶

Weymouth’s second voyage, in 1606, had as its primary mission to establish a permanent English colony in Maine which would, like the Canadian hopes of Humphrey Gilbert, serve as a base from which further North American and – perhaps more importantly – Northwestern Passage exploration could begin. This second expedition of Weymouth’s faced a great deal of challenges, though, from disagreements among the crew to conflicts with the indigenous peoples of the land to the harsh, ceaseless weather of the far northern lands of North America. The colony established by Weymouth and his men, like the others before it, was ultimately abandoned with Weymouth and his crew returning home to England.⁸⁷ As for his original charge from the English East India Company and the late Elizabeth I, his search for the Northwest Passage included what is considered to be the first European journey into the Hudson Strait, sailing his ship, HMS *Discovery*, 300 nautical miles into the strait before turning back.⁸⁸ Despite yet another observable failure, the work of this lesser-known early English explorer contributed even further to England’s knowledge of North America’s landscape and waterways along with significant, important insights into the cultures and ways of life of the indigenous peoples of the continental coast.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Ibid., 387.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 391.

⁸⁸ Griffiths, *A License to Trade*, 274.

⁸⁹ Penrose, *Travel and Discovery*, 398.

Directly following up on the discoveries and expeditions of Weymouth was the little-known John Knight. Given the time in which he lived, Knight, who likely embarked on a career as a sailor at a young age, almost assuredly had many opportunities to gain experience and explore the seas closer to home.⁹⁰ In 1605, the Danish recruited Knight to serve on an expedition to Greenland. The few extant accounts of the expedition describe it as a relatively short, uneventful journey. At the exploration's fullest extent, the ships reached Greenland, named a few significant landscape features, and, rather than risk navigating through the massive sheets of ice they had sighted from afar, returned back to Denmark.⁹¹

The following year, Knight was employed by the English East India Company on a voyage charged with traveling to North America and, from there, to search like so many before him for the Northwest Passage. Knight led an expedition of three ships to the northern coast of Labrador. There, they established a trading post and set out to explore the surrounding region. Knight's crew made contact with the area's indigenous Inuit people, with whom they developed friendly relations.⁹² In his attempt to find the Northwest Passage, Knight and his men encountered extremely hard weather and lost a ship and its crew to the harsh, relentless ice in the waters. Nonetheless, the expedition was considered a success upon their return to England. While the Northwest Passage had yet again eluded English explorers, the increased knowledge of the area's geography and

⁹⁰ Ibid., 407.

⁹¹ Ibid., 410.

⁹² Ibid., 416.

the new trade post pleased both the crown and English merchants who had helped fund the expedition. The learned members of the court were pleased, too, with the new cultural information gleaned during Knight's trade negotiations with the Inuit.⁹³

The next significant, concerted effort by an Englishman were the voyages led by Henry Hudson. In early 1607, Hudson – with the blessing of James I/VI – had attempted to set out from Bristol toward North America in search of a Northwest Passage. An ill-fated voyage, it took nearly a month to reach the Shetland Islands. Deciding at this point a journey across the Atlantic may well mean total loss of all involved, they continued north instead, reaching the Arctic Circle another two weeks later. Sailing on toward what they believed to be the North Pole, they eventually turned back and returned to England in late July, less than four months after setting out and with no new lands explored.⁹⁴

The following year, in 1608, Hudson tried again. On this second voyage, he succeeded in reaching the coast of modern-day Canada. This expedition sailed up the Canadian coast as far as possible, but bad weather and icepacks forced them to once again turn back and return to England.⁹⁵ In the first week of April 1609, Hudson once again set out in search of the Northwest Passage – this time working for the Dutch East India Company which had been founded in 1602. On this voyage, Hudson determined that the route through and around Canada was perhaps not the best option due to his previous experiences with ice and weather and believed that the highest probability of

⁹³ Ibid., 419.

⁹⁴ Taylor, *Late Tudor and Early Stuart*, 128.

⁹⁵ Penrose, *Travel and Discovery*, 427.

discovering the Northwest Passage lay in attempting an entirely new route. He started up what is today known as the Hudson River in New York, hoping that the river would connect to the Northwest Passage and allow his expedition to sail through to the Pacific Ocean. After sailing as far up the river as possible and discovering it did not connect in the way which he hoped, he disappointedly turned his third expedition back toward Europe (though he did manage to establish trade relations with the Native American peoples living along the river.)⁹⁶

In 1610, Hudson set out on a fourth voyage, this time aiming for the northern part of Canada. Once again, though, the adventurers were blocked by icepacks and bad weather. Being blocked yet again by natural forces, Hudson's crew turned mutinous and set Hudson and a few others adrift in a small boat; they were never seen again.⁹⁷ Hudson, like the others before him, did not manage to find the fabled Northwest Passage. His explorations, though, certainly contributed greatly to European knowledge of North America and its waterways, especially the Hudson River, Hudson Bay, and James Bay.⁹⁸

Following the loss of Hudson, several potential successors set sail from English shores in search of the Northwest Passage over the course of the next decade. Thomas Button was the first of these adventurers, who was not only charged with continuing Hudson's work of seeking the Northwest Passage but also Hudson's flagship, and was asked to do his best to find and recover Hudson and the others left behind when the crew

⁹⁶ Ibid., 439.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 443.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 449.

mutinied.⁹⁹ Button set out in 1612 with two ships and reached the coast of Labrador with little issue. The expedition then sailed through Hudson Bay and established a camp at which to winter on its eastern coast. They were able to establish friendly relations with the local Inuit, but due to illness, extreme cold, and severe isolation, the expedition returned to England not long into the following spring.¹⁰⁰ Later in 1613, Button set sail toward North America once again, this time making it further into the Arctic and reaching the western shore of Hudson Bay. This second expedition, though, much like the first was plagued by harsh weather and disease and they were once again forced to turn back toward England having failed to discover the Northwest Passage.¹⁰¹ Two years later, in 1615, Button embarked on his third and final journey in search of the Northwest Passage. They once again sailed to the western coast of Hudson Bay where they hoped to continue on into what they believed to be the Northwest Passage. Button's continued efforts along the western portion of Hudson Bay were based on information he gained from discussions with local Inuit hunters and fishermen. The information was either mistaken or misunderstood though, because the expedition once again failed to reach their intended goal, turning back to England for a third and final time.¹⁰²

Inspired by Thomas Button's first voyage, William Gibbons in 1614 set out from the coast of England in search of the Northwest Passage. Little is known about Gibbons,

⁹⁹ Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance*, 278.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 286.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 290.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 293.

though contemporary accounts do give some insight into his voyage to the New World. With a single small ship and a crew of roughly a dozen, Gibbons made his way to Hudson Bay and, like so many others, was turned back toward home by the relentless ice flows in the Bay. After his unsuccessful attempt in Hudson Bay, records indicate that Gibbons tried to sail into Baffin Bay, but the heavy ice conditions quickly forced his crew to abandon the effort and return to England.¹⁰³

In 1616, experienced Arctic explorers joined forces in an attempt to finally find the Northwest Passage. A survivor of Hudson's ill-fated crew, Robert Bylot made a total of four voyages to the Arctic (including his part in Hudson's final expedition.) Bylot's second journey into the Arctic was along with Thomas Button, during which they set what was then a record for northward journey in Canada. For his third and fourth journeys, Bylot was teamed with veteran navigator and cartographer William Baffin. Their first voyage saw them set out from England and, upon arrival in the Canadian Arctic, sail westward from the Hudson Strait before, like so many others, being blocked by ice – this time at the eastern side of what Bylot then named the Frozen Strait.¹⁰⁴ The second joint voyage of Bylot and Baffin set out the following year and saw the team of adventurers make several notable discoveries and set a number of records for Arctic exploration. The expedition managed to successfully traverse and map the bay now named after Baffin and, through it, reached Lancaster Sound (named on this same voyage

¹⁰³ Taylor, *Late Tudor and Early Stuart*, 173.

¹⁰⁴ Bradley, *British Maritime Enterprise*, 447.

by Baffin) – setting another record for northerly exploration in the Canadian Arctic that would stand for nearly two-and-a-half centuries.¹⁰⁵

The constant failure to find the Northwest Passage did not dissuade others to follow in the footsteps of early explorers like John Cabot. If anything, those who followed in Cabot's footsteps – from luminary explorers who have large, significant geographical features named after them still today to far lesser-known adventurers – were made even more determined by the perceived failures of their predecessors. While the Tudors and their contemporaries never saw the Northwest Passage successfully traversed, the information gained by that era's explorers in the Canadian Arctic was invaluable.¹⁰⁶ These Tudor explorers made significant contributions to the foundation of the British Empire, from negotiating trade agreements with indigenous peoples and establishing early English colonies in North America to acquiring cultural and ethnolinguistic knowledge and advancing navigational technologies to support further Arctic exploration.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 481.

¹⁰⁶ Taylor, *Late Tudor and Early Stuart*, 302.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 312.

CHAPTER 3. THE NORTHEAST PASSAGE

More than half a century after Henry VII commissioned John Cabot to search the Canadian Arctic for a fabled Northwest Passage, the Company of Merchant Adventurers to New Lands was chartered. Formed by merchants and other private investors in hopes of finding a new sea route to Asia heading east from the British Isles and sailing through the European and Asian Arctic (rather than through the Canadian Arctic).¹⁰⁸ The Company expected to receive its full incorporation from the Crown in 1553, but given Edward VI's premature death the Company did not receive its royal charter until 1555. The company would then be known by its more familiar name: the Muscovy Company.¹⁰⁹ This trading company, through its many sponsorships and commissioning of adventurers, made important contributions to the cultural, social, and geographic knowledge base of the English during the long Tudor era.

The earliest expedition sponsored by what would become the Muscovy Company, and arguably the most well-known, was that led by Hugh Willoughby in 1553. This expedition consisted of three ships: HMS *Bona Esperanza* under direct command of Willoughby; HMS *Edward Bonaventure* commanded by Stephen Borough and carrying the expedition's chief pilot, Richard Chancellor; and the HMS *Bona Confidentia*.¹¹⁰ While the expedition set out in early May, due to unfavorable weather conditions they did not arrive at the Norwegian coast – where they planned to restock their ships before

¹⁰⁸ Griffiths, *A License to Trade*, 27.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹¹⁰ Evans, *Tudor Adventurers*, 87.

beginning the Arctic journey – until 14 July, over two months after they set out from London. Due to having already encountered harsh weather, the expedition planned a rendezvous point in the far northeast of Norway should the three ships become separated when sailing north of the Scandinavian Peninsula.¹¹¹ Upon resuming their course in search of the Northeast Passage, the ships became separated in late July due to heavy storms and ice. The ship carrying Borough and Chancellor successfully arrived at the rendezvous point. Here, they waited a full week but the other two ships, along with Willoughby, were never seen again.¹¹²

Willoughby's journal chronicling the events post-separation was eventually recovered and, though his writings, a complete account of his fate is available.¹¹³ The ships were blown heavily off course by the Arctic winds, into the open sea and away from the Norwegian coast upon which they had been relying for navigation. Willoughby attempted to meet at the rendezvous point, but due to a variety of factors – inaccurate maps, bad compass readings due to the proximity to the North Pole, and unrelenting weather – were not able to find their way there. The splintered expedition continued their search for any form of civilization but found little more than geese and more ice. With the Arctic winter quickly approaching, Willoughby decided to winter along the coast of northwestern Russia's Kola Peninsula. Multiple search parties were sent out on land, recorded Willoughby, but none were successful in locating any other people. It was here

¹¹¹ Ibid., 106.

¹¹² Dulles, *Eastward Ho!*, 6.

¹¹³ Berry and Crummey, eds., *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom*, 20.

where Willoughby's journal, along with the remains of his expedition, were later discovered.¹¹⁴ While Willoughby did not survive his journey, interact with any peoples previously unknown to the English, or even establish any new trade relations, the other leaders of the expedition which he led – Chancellor and Borough – would go on to succeed in each of those areas and more. Willoughby's legacy relative to expansion of English social and cultural knowledge, then, is indirect but nonetheless crucial in establishing the foundation on which later adventurers built.

Stephen Borough, prior to being selected by the Company of Merchant Adventurers to New Lands to accompany Hugh Willoughby on his expedition, had long served under his uncle as a mariner serving throughout the Mediterranean Sea as far as the Levant.¹¹⁵ Following the split of Willoughby's expedition off the Norwegian coast in July 1553, Borough successfully saw his ship to the planned rendezvous point on one of Norway's northeastern-most islands. After a fruitless week of waiting, Borough decided to press on with the planned expedition to search for the Northeast Passage. The small expedition, now primarily under the leadership of Borough, quickly found its way to the White Sea south of Russia's Kola Peninsula and dropped anchor near the Dvina River on the sea's southern coast. This successful entry into the White Sea is the first recorded instance of an English vessel exploring this far into the Russian arctic.¹¹⁶ Here, Borough made contact with the region's indigenous peoples along with the Kievan Rus who had

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 22.

¹¹⁵ Hakluyt, *Principal Voyages*, 156.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 161.

come to populate the land as well. Through the interactions with these people groups, Borough determined pressing on by sea in search of the Northeast Passage would be foolhardy and likely would end in disaster. The majority of his crew then weathered here on near the coast with the direct help of and skills learned from the indigenous denizens of the land, returning to England early the following year after the winter weather broke.¹¹⁷

A few years later, in 1556, Borough was charged with leading another small expedition in search of the Northeast Passage. On this voyage, his goal was to sail beyond the White Sea and onward into what was thought to be the start of the fabled passageway.¹¹⁸ With his discovery of the Kara Strait between Vaygach Island and Novaya Zemlya, two other significant geographic features previously unknown to the English, Borough believed he had in fact found the beginning of the Northeast Passage. The expedition was unable to explore further into the Kara Sea, however, due to eastern side of the strait being blocked by densely packed ice flows. Returning to the White Sea, Borough once again decided to winter along the coast.¹¹⁹ During this time, Borough was careful to record his interactions with the indigenous Sami people of the region. In total on this expedition, Borough collected near one-hundred Sami words and phrases.¹²⁰ This careful documentation by Borough remains the earliest-known physical record of

¹¹⁷ Berry and Crummey, eds., *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom*, 39.

¹¹⁸ Evans, *Tudor Adventurers*, 122.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 144.

the Sami languages and Borough's list, along with his further accountings of the Sami people and their culture, is among the plethora of information recorded in Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations*.¹²¹ Borough's record also serves as one of the earliest instances of an English adventurer purposefully recording his interactions with an indigenous culture for the sake of expanding the nation's cultural and social knowledge of a newly contacted people group.¹²²

Following his return to England in 1557, Borough shared his knowledge of the Eurasian Arctic and the culture groups that inhabited it throughout Europe. He was able to trade his knowledge with other European powers in exchange for navigational knowledge about other regions of the world, particularly those explored by the Spanish and Portuguese such as the Caribbean Sea and South America, further expanding England's knowledge relative to geography and culture.¹²³ Throughout the 1560s, Borough made numerous journeys back to the Scandinavian and Russian Arctic where he recorded further information about the Sami society and introduced his son – Christopher Borough – to the indigenous leaders with which he was acquainted.¹²⁴ Christopher, while not following in his father's footsteps of searching for the Northeast Passage, would nonetheless build on Borough's work in other ways including expanding English knowledge of Russian and other languages and cultures.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, 359.

¹²² Lloyd, *The British Seaman*, 253.

¹²³ Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance*, 157.

¹²⁴ Anderson, *Britain's Discovery of Russia*, 42.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

Along with Hugh Willoughby and Stephen Borough, Richard Chancellor set out from London in 1553 in hopes of finding the Northeast Passage. Chancellor served as Willoughby's second-in-command and chief navigator though rather than sailing aboard the HMS *Bona Esperanza* alongside Willoughby, he journeyed on the HMS *Edward Bonaventure* with Borough.¹²⁶ For the Company of Merchant Adventurers to New Lands, Chancellor was an unrivaled choice for the expedition's navigator: he had learned from Sebastian Cabot, son of renowned fifteenth century explorer John Cabot, and noted geographer John Dee. Due to his knowledge of Cabot's journeys in search of the Northwest Passage some five and a half decades prior, Chancellor had long desired to search for such a passage to Asia heading east from the British Isles rather than west.¹²⁷

Under charge from his mentor (the younger Cabot) Chancellor agreed to keep a detailed journal of the expedition as well, recording not only geographic features discovered along the way but also any interactions the adventurers may have with people groups previously uncontacted by the English.¹²⁸ Following shortly after the unintentional split from Willoughby and the other two ships that were part of the expedition, Chancellor's ship off of Norway's North Cape – which was recorded and named by Chancellor. Proceeding to the planned rendezvous point, the small crew futilely awaited Willoughby for a week before continuing on to the White Sea and the inhospitable coast of the Russian Arctic. Through Chancellor's concerted effort to

¹²⁶ Dulles, *Eastward Ho!*, 2.

¹²⁷ Griffiths, *A License to Trade*, 63.

¹²⁸ Anderson, *Britain's Discovery of Russia*, 52.

communicate with the indigenous peoples located along the coast of the White Sea, the expedition was guided to the mouth of the Dvina River where they made anchor and Borough – who was leading the expedition by this point – determined they would winter.¹²⁹

News of the adventuring party's camp along the White Sea traveled quickly through the Russian lands. The locals that had helped direct the party to the Dvina passed word of their arrival to those they traded with in nearby villages and homesteads and, before long, the news had reached the court of Tsar Ivan IV. The tsar, who had unified the Russian lands a half decade prior to the arrival of the English, was eager to establish new trade relations to strengthen the economy of his nascent tsardom. Ivan quickly sent word to the explorers inviting them to an audience with his royal court in Moscow.¹³⁰ While Borough was determined to remain with the majority of the party and the ships at the over-winter camp on the coast where he could continue to learn more about the local Sami and Kievan peoples, Chancellor agreed to accept the tsar's invitation. Journeying overland by sleigh some three-hundred fifty leagues, Chancellor arrived in the Russian capital and quickly began recording his observations and interactions in the tsarist capital.¹³¹ Chancellor recorded the architectural style of Moscow to be "primitive when compared to London, and mostly wood" but also "far larger, spread across a vast

¹²⁹ Taylor, *Tudor Geography*, 220.

¹³⁰ Berry and Crummey, eds., *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom*, 53.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

space.”¹³² This perception of primitivism, though, quickly changed upon arrival at Ivan’s grand palace. Chancellor describes the seat of the Russian tsar in detail along with discussing the extravagant meals he was served while Ivan’s guest, giving insight into the skill of Russia’s artisans of the era as well as the foods that the higher echelons of society had access to prior to the establishment of trade with Western European powers.¹³³

Chancellor and Ivan IV quickly reached agreeable trade terms between England and Russia. While the primary goal of Chancellor’s expedition was to find the Northeast Passage, a goal not met, the secondary goal laid out by the expedition’s backers was to find a market for an abundance of English wool. In Russia, Chancellor found this market and, in return, the Russians supplied England with a variety of goods (primarily consisting of various types of fur).¹³⁴ Chancellor returned to the remainder of his party along the White Sea’s coast and, the following spring, set out for England. Upon his return in the summer of 1554, Chancellor discovered much had changed in their absence: Edward VI had died, his cousin Jane Grey had reigned for less than two weeks before being deposed, and Mary I – daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon – sat the English throne.¹³⁵ Mary had aspirations much like those of her grandfather, Henry VII, to see England’s reach extend well beyond the shores of the British Isles. The queen was

¹³² Ibid., 67.

¹³³ Ibid., 69.

¹³⁴ Carus-Wilson, *Medieval Merchant Venturers*, 336.

¹³⁵ Mackie, *The Earlier Tudors*, 673.

very much pleased by the letters from Ivan IV delivered by Chancellor that promised trade privileges for her realm.

So interested in exploration was Mary, she granted a royal charter to the Company of Merchant Adventurers to New Lands in early 1555, which thereafter was known as the Muscovy Company.¹³⁶ Later that year, the Muscovy Company sent Chancellor to the White Sea once again. Upon his arrival in Russian territory during this second journey, Chancellor was given Willoughby's journal that had been found by Russian fishermen. From this, he discovered not only the fate of Willoughby and the ships that were lost on that initial journey into the Eurasian Arctic, but also of some of the geographic discoveries made after their expedition was split – most notably Willoughby's discovery of Novaya Zemlya prior to Borough's discovery of the same.¹³⁷

Throughout the remainder for 1555, Chancellor spent most of his time at the tsarist court interspersed with ventures into other nearby parts of Russia to study the language and society of what was still viewed by the English as a new, exotic culture. During this time, he developed closer relation with Ivan IV, furthering Anglo-Russian trade agreement, and recorded much information about the Russian language.¹³⁸ Chancellor also used this time to seek out any information he could find about the Northeast Passage and how the English could reach China by way of the Arctic: speaking with fisherman who had worked the northern waters for generations, searching through

¹³⁶ Griffiths, *A License to Trade*, 104.

¹³⁷ Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, 150.

¹³⁸ Berry and Crummey, eds., *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom*, 319.

official records of expeditions previously made by the various Russian peoples, and even studying local rumors of the fabled sea route to China.¹³⁹ The following summer, Chancellor set out for England once again with a small fleet of four ships; he carried with him generous new trade terms from that tsar, untold amounts of information about Russian culture, and the first ambassador sent from Russia to England. Due to the unpredictable weather of the northern waters, though, Chancellor was killed after his ship was crashed upon the coast of Scotland. The ambassador and a few of the mariners survived and eventually reached London, but any information Chancellor may have discovered that may have led the English to the Northeast Passage – and the veritable treasure trove of social and cultural information Chancellor had recorded while in Moscow – was lost along with him.¹⁴⁰

Following the arrival of the Russian ambassador in London, Mary I sent an ambassador to Moscow under the auspices of the Muscovy Company in early 1558. This ambassador, Anthony Jenkinson, was tasked with continuing to foster closer trade relations between the English and Russians as well as continuing Chancellor's work of studying the various cultures encountered in the Russian lands. Jenkinson was also tasked with seeking out any information available in Russia pertaining to the Northeast Passage.¹⁴¹ On this journey, Jenkinson spent the majority of his time traveling and exploring on foot, reaching as far as modern-day Uzbekistan and learning of land routes

¹³⁹ Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither*, 479.

¹⁴⁰ Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, 168.

¹⁴¹ Dulles, *Eastward Ho!*, 41.

connecting Russia to India and China. Those routes were impassable at the time, though, due to a number of regional wars. Jenkinson returned to Moscow where he wintered and continued to search records for word of the Northeast Passage before returning to England in 1560, where the maps he created of the more far-flung Russian holdings were widely shared.¹⁴²

Jenkinson quickly set in motion plans to return to Russia with the backing of the Muscovy Company and the blessing of the new queen, Elizabeth I. Upon arriving in Moscow in mid-1561, he sought an audience with the tsar but was not able to meet with Ivan IV until the following spring. During this half year wait, Jenkinson continued his search for evidence of the northernly sea route to Asia while also planning another land-based expedition. While there is no record of Jenkinson acquiring any information about the Northeast Passage on this journey, his eventual meeting with the tsar was a great success and greatly expanded England's trading rights with the Russians.¹⁴³

After a few years serving in the waters off the coast of Scotland during an international crisis between the English and the Scots, Jenkinson returned to Russia once again in 1566. This expedition, along with a fourth in 1571, focused almost solely on reinstating and expanding trade relations with the increasingly-isolationist tsardom. This period of Jenkinson's work also saw the first truly bilateral cultural exchange between the two nations, as several Englishmen – most of which were seasoned military commanders – were sent to live in Russia, learning their military tactics in exchange for teaching those

¹⁴² Taylor, *Tudor Geography*, 139.

¹⁴³ Black, *The Reign of Elizabeth*, 68.

of the English.¹⁴⁴ On his return to England following his fourth expedition to Russia, Jenkinson settled into a more peaceful domestic life. Many of his extensive notes and travel accounts were examined by Richard Hakluyt, serving as one of Hakluyt's premier sources relative to the exploration and geography of the Russian lands.¹⁴⁵

Due to the instability in Russia from both invasions and invading, along with the Crown concentrating more heavily on domestic matters as had happened early in Henry VIII's reign, further English expeditions in search of the Northeast Passage were halted for nearly a decade.¹⁴⁶ In 1580, however, two adventurers set out from Essex on a voyage of exploration in the name of Elizabeth I. Little is recorded about this expedition, jointly led by Charles Jackman and Arthur Pet, though Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Voyages* provide an account of the voyage.¹⁴⁷

After an uneventful journey to northeastern Norway, the two explorers had planned to sail their two small barques, HMS *William* and HMS *George*, along the northern coast of Siberia and onwards to China. Just over a month into their journey, Jackman and Pet had made it as far as the Kola Peninsula but then encountered unfavorable weather that caused the two ships to separate. To ensure they would find each other again, the explorers had agreed to meet at Vaygach Island located to the south of the Kara Strait. Pet arrived at the island and began mapping the area while waiting for

¹⁴⁴ Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages*, 116.

¹⁴⁵ Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, 297.

¹⁴⁶ Black, *The Reign of Elizabeth*, 74.

¹⁴⁷ Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, 457.

Jackman, who had not yet arrived. After six weeks of waiting, Pet sailed through the Kara Strait, marking the first time anyone from Western Europe had traveled into the Kara Sea. He went as far as the Kara River, which flows into Baydaratskaya Bay in the southern part of the Kara Sea, before finally being reunited with Jackman. Unfortunately, heavy ice prevented them from making further progress along the Siberian coast, and they had to abandon their mission. They returned to Norway and onward to England, but on the journey home to England, Jackman and his ship were lost.¹⁴⁸ The expedition did not yield any significant cultural or social discoveries, but from the English perspective, it provided a wealth of geographical knowledge. In addition to mapping the Kara Strait, Pet's journal, according to Hakluyt, contained numerous sketches of the Kara Sea and other landmarks from this voyage.¹⁴⁹

Throughout the remainder of the sixteenth century (and the reign of Elizabeth I), England's exploratory journeys were focused entirely on the search for the Northwest Passage and charting of the Canadian Arctic.¹⁵⁰ The search for the Northeast Passage continued during this time primarily under the Dutch flag, particularly the voyages undertaken by Willem Barentsz (after whom the Barents Sea is named).¹⁵¹ In 1605, while British King James I/VI and British merchants remained focused on the Northwest Passage, John Cunningham (a native Scot which had long lived in England) was recruited

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 458–460.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 462.

¹⁵⁰ Morison, *The European Discovery of America*, 218.

¹⁵¹ Jeroen Toirkens and Petra Sjouwerman, *Solitude in the Wake of Willem Barentsz* (Tielt, Belgium: Lanoo Publishers, 2014), 31.

by the Danes to lead an expedition into the Eurasian Arctic.¹⁵² Cunningham captained HDMS *Trost*, a ship of the Danish navy. The *Trost*, alongside two other ships, were commissioned by Christian IV, King of Denmark, to better map the northern lands of Norway (in union with Denmark at the time) and, if possible, seek out the Northeast Passage far to the north of where previous adventurers has searched.¹⁵³

Cunningham and his compatriots encountered heavy storms and thick fields of ice in the Arctic, failing to find the Northeast Passage. By the second decade of the seventeenth century, Christian IV made Cunningham governor of Finnmark, where many English explorers before him had regrouped and restocked before heading further into the seas of the Arctic. While serving in this capacity, Cunningham frequently interacted with the region's indigenous Sami people as well as the neighboring Russian peoples.¹⁵⁴ Following his death in the mid-seventeenth century, his personal letters and records were shared with the English adding his knowledge of Sami culture – particularly of their language and traditional religious practices – to the growing English wealth of knowledge about peoples from outside Western Europe.¹⁵⁵

The final Englishman of this period to make any concerted effort in searching for the Northeast Passage was Thomas Edge. Edge began his career as a mariner and later merchant under the employee of the Muscovy Company near the end of Elizabeth I's

¹⁵² Penrose, *Travel and Discovery*, 381.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 382–387.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 391–392.

¹⁵⁵ Boris Ford, ed., *The Cambridge Cultural History of Britain: Volume 4, Seventeenth Century Britain* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 170.

reign. A few years into the reign of James I/VI, Edge had once again shifted positions within the ranks of the Muscovy Company and commanded a small contingent of whaling ships in the Norwegian Arctic.¹⁵⁶ Edge's interests, though, were not limited to the life of a whaler. Inspired by Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Voyages* and the grand tells of exploration contained within, Edge determined to explore the Arctic to the fullest extent possible in pursuit of new whaling grounds. Much of his adventuring was done far off the northern coast of Norway, meticulously mapping the islands and waterways of the Svalbard Archipelago (then known as Spitsbergen).¹⁵⁷ Edge also believed that he could push further east into the Arctic, hopefully discovering the Northeast Passage at last. Setting out from Spitsbergen in 1612, Edge sailed east in search of the passage. Edge's expedition crossed the Barents Sea and rounded the northern coast of Novaya Zemlya with little issue. Edge's plan was to then cross the Kara Sea to resupply in the Russian lands before returning north to sail further eastward.¹⁵⁸ Based on Hakluyt's reports from the sixteenth century, the expedition expected a warm welcome in Russia. They found, however, that the majority of the Russian peoples they encountered were exceptionally insular and some were outright hostile. Fearing a total loss, Edge secured what supplies were made available via local trade and charted a course back to Spitsbergen and never returned to the Russian Arctic.¹⁵⁹ By the time of Edge's expedition, Ivan IV was long

¹⁵⁶ Griffiths, *A License to Trade*, 285.

¹⁵⁷ Taylor, *Late Tudor and Early Stuart*, 140.

¹⁵⁸ Anderson, *Britain's Discovery of Russia*, 212.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 214.

dead and his tsardom had fallen into disarray due to internal power struggles and attacks from neighboring powers in Asia. In the intervening decades, the various Russian peoples – even in lands as far removed from Moscow as the coast of Kara – had felt the brunt of rapid decentralization coupled with foreign interference. Edge, like his countrymen, were not aware of the dire political situation in Russia. Upon his return to friendlier shores, he reported the events that had transpired in Russia since the turn of the century to his superiors in the Muscovy Company.¹⁶⁰ Although Edge's cultural discoveries were wholly different from those of the adventurers who searched for the Northeast Passage before him, they nevertheless played a significant role in expanding English perception of the wider world.

As with the Northwest Passage, the Tudors and their contemporaries never saw the Northeast Passage successfully traversed. While there is evidence of indigenous Russian peoples fishing the waterway as early as the eleventh century, the cooling and subsequent increase in heavy fields of ice during the Little Ice Age made such usage impossible by the mid-sixteenth century.¹⁶¹ As seafaring knowledge and technologies increased throughout the sixteenth century and with the help of local Russian and indigenous peoples, England was able to push further east as time passed.¹⁶² By the third

¹⁶⁰ Godfrey Davies, *The Early Stuarts, 1603–1660* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1964), 172.

¹⁶¹ Evans, *Tudor Adventurers*, 304.

¹⁶² Anderson, *Britain's Discovery of Russia*, 202.

decade of the seventeenth century, the new House of Romanov feared foreign influence and closed their seaways to exploration by the English and other Northern sea powers.¹⁶³

As the Russian navy developed over the coming centuries, they sent out a large number of adventurers in hopes of charting the Northeast Passage. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Russian explorers had proven traversal of the entirety of the Northeast Passage to be possible by making use of nascent ice breaking technology.¹⁶⁴ In the late 1870's, Finnish explorer Adolf Nordenskiöld – sailing under the flag of Sweden – made the first verifiable traversal of the entire Northeast Passage.¹⁶⁵ Russia and Northern European nations quickly set out to capitalize on any potential economic boon linked to the Northeast Passage. These nations quickly discovered, however, that the route was not as economically viable as had been hoped for over three centuries.¹⁶⁶ Following 1917's revolution in Russia, the new Soviet government set in motion plans to make the Northeast Passage more viable through the usage of new technologies including more advanced ice breakers, radio, and coal-fired steamships. This initiative saw success, allowing the Soviets to internally transport goods by sea.¹⁶⁷

In 1965, USCGC *Northwind* became the first Western exploratory vessel to attempt to chart the Northeast Passage in over three hundred years. Due to extreme

¹⁶³ Ibid., 217.

¹⁶⁴ Lloyd, *The British Seaman*, 282.

¹⁶⁵ Alexander Leslie, *The Arctic Voyages of Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld, 1858–1879* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 329.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 342.

¹⁶⁷ Lawson W. Brigham, *The Soviet Maritime Arctic* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1991), 97.

diplomatic tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War, this mission failed.¹⁶⁸ Following the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, economic activity through the Northeast Passage sharply declined. By the late 1990s, though, Western interest in the Northeast Passage once again increased and several successful voyages were made (particularly by the navies of Scandinavia).¹⁶⁹ With rising global temperatures and the resulting shrinkage of polar ice, the Northeast Passage so long sought after by the Tudors became more passable with every passing year. As of the 2020s, nearly one-hundred ships regularly travel through the Northeast Passage and current scientific research shows that, by the 2040s, the Passage will be passable without the aid of icebreaking ships.¹⁷⁰

Relative to exploration of the Northeast Passage, the Tudor explorers correctly surmised that the western terminus of the waterway lies through the Kara Strait. Although the findings of these intrepid adventurers never led to China, their ventures did lead to an economic boon and greatly increased knowledge in England. The trade agreements between the Tudor monarchs and Russia's Ivan IV were mutually beneficial, providing new goods and markets to the English and giving Russia its first regular contact with a Western European power.¹⁷¹ Due to concerted efforts made by Chancellor and other explorers to the northeast of the British Isles, knowledge of foreign cultures – the various

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 148.

¹⁶⁹ Jens Petter Nielsen and Edwin Okhuizen, eds., *From Northeast Passage to Northern Sea Route: A History of the Waterway North of Eurasia* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 2022), 438.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 503.

¹⁷¹ John R. Dasent, *Acts of the Privy Council of England, 1556–1558* (London, England: Stationary Office, 1890), 380; Evans, *Tudor Adventurers*, 326.

indigenous peoples of the region such as the Sami along with the various cultural groups that has coalesced into Russia – dramatically increased in England. From religious practices and languages to diet and traditional stories, the influx of social and cultural information allowed the English to better understand similarities and difference of widely-ranging people groups – both between those groups and between the English themselves. The many geographic discoveries made by Tudor adventurers searching for the Northeast Passage greatly helped the English better understand their place in the wider world as well.¹⁷² It was on this new understanding, and through a desire to further increase England’s stake in the burgeoning global world, on which the foundation of the British Empire was built.

¹⁷² Lloyd, *The British Seaman*, 299.

CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSION

Following the Wars of the Roses, England engaged in a period of exploration, expansion, and colonization that lasted for centuries. The Tudor dynasty oversaw this widespread shift for almost twelve decades, during which time England's worldview expanded and evolved significantly. From Henry VII's commissioning of John Cabot in 1497 to search for the elusive Northwest Passage, to Hugh Willoughby's quest for the Northeast Passage at the end of Edward VI's reign in 1553, and Robert Bylot's Arctic expeditions in the early seventeenth century, the Tudor era adventurers played a crucial role in shaping England's destiny abroad and brought new insights to the people of England.

During the Tudor era, English explorers encountered a diverse range of cultures from the Russian peoples near the Barents and Kara Seas to the indigenous communities in the Northeast of what is now the United States and Canada's Arctic. These cultures differed significantly from the explorers and their fellow Europeans in many ways, from their clothing and languages to their social interactions and emotional and artistic expressions. The Tudor explorers diligently observed and documented these cultural differences, gathering details such as religious practices, language snippets, and dietary habits. The knowledge gained from diverse cultures was passed down through court reports and dictated accounts to authors such as Richard Hakluyt. This enriched the Tudor understanding of the world's cultures.

The explorers' observations of cultural traits were recorded throughout their interactions with various societies. These records captured the reactions of these societies

to people who were different from themselves, including the explorers. Some records described the initial contact between the explorers and a new people group, while others detailed the establishment of trade with a newly encountered culture. Still, others recounted instances of trepidation and fear witnessed by members of the exploratory ventures. In the realm of societal norms, the explorers searching for the Northeast Passage often found some degree of common ground among the Germanic and Russian peoples they encountered. However, the Inuit and other indigenous peoples encountered by those searching for North America's Northwest Passage were far more foreign to the Tudor explorers. Nonetheless, both of these groups allowed the English to better understand their place in the world by revealing similarities and differences with other societies.

Even though the Tudor adventurers did not discover a more direct route to East Asia, their explorations yielded significant new geographical information. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they discovered and nearly fully charted vast features such as Hudson Bay and Baffin Island in the Canadian Arctic. They also mapped numerous other landmasses and waterways, including some small islands that could barely hold a landing party and inlets that were easier to map by land than to navigate with ships. In their search for the Northeast Passage, the English explored and mapped previously unknown features such as the White Sea and Severny Island with the help of the Russian peoples. This new geographical knowledge helped England understand its place in the nascent global community and establish sea-based trade routes with the

people groups they encountered. As with the cultural and social insights, the Tudor explorers' findings enriched England's understanding of the world and its place within it.

The traditional historical narrative of the Tudor era has focused on only a handful of adventurers, such as William Baffin and Henry Hudson, while neglecting the contributions of many others. Dozens of Englishmen embarked on expeditions in search of the Northeast and Northwest Passages during this time, and though not all of them have geographical features named after them, their contributions to the overall knowledge of the era are significant. Rather than relegating them to mere mentions in Richard Hakluyt's works from over four centuries ago, it is important to highlight and include them in historiographical conversations surrounding Tudor adventuring. Each of these adventurers deserves recognition for their role in shaping the understanding of Tudor exploration and the influx of cultural, political, and geographic knowledge that happened as a result of their journeys. Having provided insights into a wider array of Tudor explorers, it is hoped that future investigations might tell us more about those who crewed these vessels.

This study's scope is limited by the availability of primary source documents in digital form or those, like Hakluyt's, that are commonly cited in related studies. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of Tudor exploration, further research could be conducted in locations that house documents from the era. The United Kingdom's National Archives, located in Surrey, England, would be a prime destination for locating primary documents and accounts relating to Tudor exploration. Additionally, the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in Halifax, Nova Scotia, holds valuable records that

could be used for further investigation. Such archives would provide a wealth of information that could enhance the study's depth by examining the effect of Tudor adventurers on English and British policy in subsequent centuries.

Although neither the Northwest Passage nor the Northeast Passage was successfully discovered and charted during the Early Modern period, the contributions of these explorers, both well-known and obscure, cannot be overstated in historiographical conversations. These early expeditions contributed greatly to the cultural, social, and geographic knowledge of Tudor England.

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