

## ENGLAND AND THE SPANISH ARMADA

**DOYLE, J. and MOORE, B. (ed.): *England and the Spanish Armada. Papers arising from the 1988 Conference, University of New South Wales, Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra, Australia, 1990. 196 pp.***

The year 1588 saw the English anxiously awaiting the fleet sent by Philip II of Spain to invade their country. The Spanish Armada, or *Armada Invencible*, was unexpectedly defeated, and the English celebrated their victory as a triumph of Protestantism and a sign that God was on their side. The Armada's defeat foreshadowed Spain's decline and marked a change in the balance of power between England and Spain. Two hundred years later, in 1788, Captain Arthur Phillips, in command of the First Fleet, aboard which were about 730 English convicts, arrived at Port Jackson and began to settle in the land of Australian aborigines. And whereas at the time of the Spanish Armada many European fleets went to the New World where they began to build major colonial empires, the arrival of the First Fleet marked the beginning of European settlement in Australia.

In 1988, this curious coincidence in dates, the Quartercentenary of the Spanish Armada, and the Australian Bicentenary, inspired Bruce Moore at the University of New South Wales to convene a conference on the Spanish Armada. The organizers wished to explore various aspects of the event, and to relate it to wider issues, such as the construction and destruction of myths, or the reasons for celebrating anniversaries. The opening address was given by Rear Admiral Peter Sinclair and a variety of papers were delivered by scholars from different fields: Judith Richards (History Department, La Trobe University), Marion Campbell (English Department, Melbourne University), Jeff Doyle (English Department, University College), Ron Keightley (Professor of Spanish, Department of Romance Languages, Monash University), and Peter Looker (English Department). Three additional papers, by Sybil Jack (History Department, University of Sydney), David Cressy (Department of History, California State University), and Susana Onega (Department of English and Germanic Philology, University of Zaragoza) were offered and published with the proceedings, co-edited by Bruce Moore and Jeff Doyle.

What else can be said about the Spanish Armada, about which there are countless historical works, and which has inspired the works of many writers and artists? Much of what has been said, however, are misconceptions which probably derive from British propaganda after the Spanish defeat. "Could it be the case that the Armada has been kept alive in a way that provokes our commemoration, not so much because of the event itself, but because of the success of the English propaganda that immediately followed it, turning the victory into an icon of providential favour?"

wonders Peter Looker. With the years, however, the events, their significance and consequences can be seen in perspective and with a much greater detachment and objectivity. The contributors to this volume, specialists in various disciplines, focus on different aspects of the Spanish Armada, but they share their desire to destroy the myths that have developed around it.

Judith Richards, one of the two historical voices, shows that the English were not really united in the face of danger, that there was little sense of national identity and that it was only after the English triumph that a sense of unity began to arise. In the same way, Sybil Jack also provides evidence against the myth "portraying an England fervent with nationalism and patriotism, united against a common enemy", and the preparations for resistance took place, we are told, in a context of economic, social and constitutional conflict. Peter Sinclair, the military expert, presents an accurate account of the ships, tactics, commanders, the battle and its aftermath, attempting to destroy the myths surrounding the battle that are still generally accepted.

David Cressy explores the transformation undergone by England after its victory and the manipulation of this triumph, which was interpreted as a proof that God endorsed the Elizabethan regime and English Protestantism. However, whereas most Englishmen gave their victory a symbolic significance, Samuel Pepys, discussed by Peter Looker, rejected English propaganda and showed a pragmatic and critical attitude in his *Naval Minutes*.

Other papers deal with the way the Armada's defeat and the English feeling of triumph over Catholicism were reflected in literature: Marion Campbell, taking as a starting point canto viii of Book V of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, which allegorically encodes the defeat of the Spanish Armada, discusses the complex relationships between events - history - and their representation in literature. Susana Onega presents a brief survey of the impact of Anglo-Spanish political affairs on Elizabethan literature and shows how Spain's decline is reflected in the way Spanish characters are portrayed in English literary works. Jeff Doyle discusses the factional use of the iconography of the Spanish Armada in English art and literature.

All the preceding papers, except that of Marion Campbell, which briefly discusses the killing of thousands of Spaniards shipwrecked on the coast of Ireland and sees it as an extension of English policy in Ireland, focus on the English point of view. There is one paper, however, that of hispanist Ron Keightley, which analyzes the Spanish reaction to the Armada and the Spanish view of the English as shown in the works of great mid-sixteenth-century Spanish writers, especially in Lope de Vega's *La Dragontea*.

These different voices complement each other. There are papers on the English preparations for resistance to the arrival of the Armada, the Armada's defeat, the English feeling of victory, the propaganda that followed it, Samuel Pepy's pragmatic and objective attitude contrasting with that of most English people, the reflection of the Spanish Armada in literature, and the Spanish reaction to defeat. Even if this is not the order in which they were delivered and are presented in the book, it allows us to realize that the wide range of aspects covered give the reader a comprehensive view of the Armada and the myths surrounding it. These in-depth studies form an elaborate tapestry which shed new light on issues directly or indirectly related to the Armada, its

consequences and its commemoration. The illustrations from Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotlande and Irelande* throughout the volume and from *Emblemata* and *Quintus Horatius Flaccus Emblemata* in Jeff Doyle's paper contribute to giving this publication an even greater interest and round its choice quality.

I. V.