



Under the Black Flag: The Romance and the Reality of Life Among the Pirates

David Cordingly

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For this rousing, revisionist history, the former head of exhibitions at England's National Maritime Museum has combed original documents & records to produce a most authoritative & definitive account of piracy's Golden Age. As he explodes many accepted myths (i.e. walking the plank is pure fiction), Cordingly replaces them with a truth that is more complex & often bloodier. 16 pages of photos. Maps.

Under the Black Flag: The Romance and the Reality of Life Among the Pirates Details

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Anna says

If you're interested in the difference between corsairs (Mediterranean pirates) and buccaneers (Caribbean pirates), or stealth gaming 17th century style, then this is definitely the book for you.

It's a dry read, but filled with valuable, concisely written information that disproves most of the beliefs one might have regarding a swashbuckling, romantic life on the seas.

"Pirates of the Caribbean" only existed in the movies :)

Melissa McShane says

Engagingly written, thoroughly researched and with plenty of endnotes, this turned out to be exactly what I was looking for in an overview of piracy in the 17th and 18th centuries. It's organized both chronologically and topically and has a lot of interesting stories. Cordingly's bibliography led me to such works as Captain Charles Johnson's extremely influential (and contemporary) account *A General History of the Pyrates*, the works of Peter Earle, and Nicholas Rodger's writings about the Royal Navy, so I'm indebted to him for that. Cordingly compares the pirates of fiction with the pirates of reality, and this is the weakest part of the book, particularly where he attempts rather awkwardly to explain why we're all so fascinated with the romance of piracy. Since he mostly confines this to the introduction and afterward, it was easy to ignore. It's a fast read, and fun as well as informative.

Jeff says

I'm reading a lot of reviews that claim this is more scholarly than entertaining. Rubbish. Only if you have the attention span of a goldfish will you not enjoy this captivating account of the golden age of piracy. Not only does the author stay true to history, but he covers the origins of romanticized pirate life and how much of it is actually reflected by reality. This is a most amazing work by a most amazing expert on pirates.

Jonathan Ashleigh says

Like a lot of nonfiction, this book tried to cover a lot of material while also attempting to keep the reader engaged. It held my attention most of the time and it did allow me to realize there are pirate books I need to read, *Treasure Island* being the most notable.

paola says

La figura del pirata è una di quelle più chiaramente impresse nell'immaginario collettivo: pappagalli, gambe di legno, tesori nascosti, uncini e Jolly Roger che sventolano, uomini bruti che incarnano - loro malgrado - un ideale di libertà.

Ecco, partendo proprio dalla figura "letteraria" del pirata, Cordingly sfata alcuni miti e racconta quella che è stata l'età d'oro della pirateria e lo fa usando tantissime fonti: dall'imprevedibile General history of the Pirates del capitano Johnson (che non è certo sia stato uno pseudonimo di Defoe) alle trascrizioni dei processi, dei diari di bordo, degli articoli di giornale, dei resoconti dei confessori che accompagnarono i pirati al patibolo.

Con una bibliografia ricchissima, Cordingly ha realizzato un testo perfettamente divulgativo in cui grande accuratezza storica ricostruisce un'epoca (con approfondimenti su tutti gli aspetti della vita dei pirati) e racconta le vite dei suoi più celebri protagonisti in maniera appassionante.

Insomma decisamente consigliato a chiunque fosse curioso di saper qualcosa di più sull'argomento.

Ora posso tornare a soffrire in pace per l'ultimo episodio di Black Sails e a sperare che un giorno Cordingly e Alberto Angela si incontrino e realizzino uno speciale di Ulisse sulla pirateria.

Donna says

I liked this. It is the 2nd nonfiction pirate book I've read within a few days of each other. I found most of this fascinating. The history of pirating was well researched and presented in an interesting way. There was some repetition, but that didn't bug me so much because I was enjoying most of it.

The West Indies was the place not to be if you wanted to avoid pirates. I also like how the author included modern day pirates into this book.

I did the audio and I thought the narrator did a great job. That always helps when tons of new info is part of the book.

Lindsay says

For centuries, people have been drawn to stories of adventure on the high seas and peg-legged pirates in search of buried treasure. In his comprehensive pirate book (focused mainly on 18th century piracy in the Americas and the Caribbean), Cordingly covers everything from women pirates to pirate ships and weapons. Not for the faint of heart, this text exposes some of the hard truths behind piracy: consequences for captives, punishments for arrested pirates, the hardships of life at sea.

This book's revelations may surprise you; Cordingly frequently analyzes the books, movies, and plays that helped shape our romantic ideas of piracy. These portions are probably the most interesting sections of the book because at some point in every chapter the reader is nearly drown in a tsunami of facts and dates, making it periodically read more like a text book. While some may be riveted by endless discussion of ship types and repetitive trial transcripts, I appreciated the research, but found it to become rather repetitive.

Still, I learned a lot while reading this book and would recommend it to the avid pirate fan. However, if you are looking for an exciting tale of piracy and are not overly hung up on getting every detail historically accurate, you may be better off picking up a copy of "Treasure Island" or "Robinson Crusoe" instead - you

will find that sometimes the romance is even more entertaining than the reality.

=====D says

nothing but nonsense and mundane trivia here: the thesis of this book seems to be that, get this, pirates were not the cool characters they have been portrayed as by literature, art, and media. No shit! Not discussed is much of anything of actual interest about the pirates lifestyles, motives, social organization, etc., which, when contextualized by the parallel institutions in society at large, is nothing short of fascinating. Perhaps try the new book about how pirates were both mere merchants, as well as forerunners of democracies to come in their means of organizing the ships' chain of command... i don't have the title at hand but it should be easy to find, the review seemed promising.

Francesco Scarlata says

Volume molto interessante. E' diviso in tematiche e ripercorre l'età dell'oro della pirateria per argomenti. Il fatto che non illustri la storia in maniera tradizionale può all'apparenza creare confusione, ma lo stile narrativo rende la lettura decisamente piacevole.

Ava Strange says

Not that Under The Black Flag is really a bad book, I still hated it. I know that many readers will love it, but there were certain elements here that really annoyed me, and distracted from the fact that it's detailed and well-researched.

For the most part I just plain found it very boring. This is for a few reasons, but the largest one is that it fails to really immerse you. It's honest, well-rounded and as I said detailed, however there's a lack of heart in there that withholds the opportunity to make you feel strongly about the pirates or really anyone else. By the end of it I didn't find myself really liking pirates, being outraged by them, or anything. I didn't find them particularly interesting in any way. They just were. Even the brutalities of their actions and demises read so matter-of-factly that I couldn't get very absorbed. Not that I ever really welcome a bias, I do highly appreciate it when books really incorporate the author's personality, and I'm left wondering if the author himself even really cares. It was like an otherwise skillfully prepared meal lacking in flavor. For such an exciting subject, this is especially disappointing.

I think the author really was trying to keep things as exciting as they should be, but given the lack of enthusiasm it falls flat. ("It's not that I'm lazy, it's that I just don't care," comes to mind.) One other particular annoyance contributing to this for me was his assumption that the reader will have a somewhat intimate knowledge of 18th century boats. There is a chapter covering this, but it really didn't have enough detail to sustain me through the rest of the book with a firm enough understanding to appreciate many of its passages, and as it was he didn't make me at all interested. To include even more detail would have been incredibly tedious. This ends up creating a lose-lose situation.

Another thing I noticed was that the book tends to be disjointed and repetitive in places, even to the point where it feels like you must have read this section already. It's really confusing the first time you encounter

it, and you have to check the page again to make sure you haven't accidentally gone back. The author tends to break off in the middle of a story only to finish it in another chapter, and this adds to the sense of tedium that I felt. I hate to admit that I ended up skimming pretty quickly over these parts. Battles sometimes return to the foreground a time or two, and you really don't need to learn all over again what happened. And you don't much feel like finishing something you already left 50 pages ago, especially since it was so lacking in energy the first time around. It creates a real sense of disorganization, and I just can't see a method to the madness.

The detail works against the book here, and instead of being remotely insightful it ends up being just too confused and drawn out. The knowledge gained here thus feels completely pointless, not very new or sensational, and though no time learning is wasted, this came about as close as you can get.

Becky says

A must read for any initiate to maritime or pirate history. Cordingly is an eminent authority in pirates and buccaneers, but his pedagogue does not prevent him from creating a precise, fun, and understandable book to the beginner. Even those who've already enjoyed numerous works would still find some new information, or new sources, in this work.

If you've ever wondered whether pirates really had a parrot keening for doubloons on their shoulder, or what the difference between corsairs, privateers, pirates, and buccaneers is, then this is the book for you. It will answer all your questions and more. It's very rarely dry and always informative.

This book is appropriate for ages 13 and up. I will say that the romance of pirates will fade away, and the true brutality of the outlaws may be a bit much for more sensitive younger readers. Still I would recommend this for middle-schoolers that show interest in the subject, as well as all adults.

Johan says

I feel slightly bad about giving it only two stars, I liked it fine, it had some good stuff in it, but it's something irritating about a book that is fluffed up to be a book when it just should have been a good long article. There are repetitions, stretchings and digressions...I guess the author was under editorial pressure to fill pages. Kind of a shame. Totally decent writing, interesting subject, just too fluffed up.

Corrielle says

I am a Pirates of the Caribbean fan. An obsessive fan, even. And so, because every obsession of mine eventually reaches a point where I feel compelled to do research, my Pirates fascination led me to this book.

This is a fine resource for anyone interested in the history of piracy. I enjoyed the book immensely. It has information on the Golden Age of piracy, famous pirates, and a comparison of fictional pirates with real ones. The author also explores the origins of various pirate movie standbys and other little details that made the period come alive.

Vaishali says

Dr. Cordingly is one of the world's most recognized authorities on historic piracy... so, great book!

Some interesting factoids:

- * Captain Morgan sued publishers of a tell-all book, written by a former buccaneer portraying him as a bloodthirsty murderer.
- * Ching Shih, China's female pirate, commandeered a confederation of 50,000 ships - larger than most countries' navies.
- * Black Beard raided Charlestown, and had it under siege for 5 days. He then marooned his own men on an island to keep the booty himself.
- * Two men were rich, well-educated noblemen who turned to piracy : Sir Francis Varney and Henry Mainwaring
- * Captain Kidd is responsible for the "buried treasure" myths associated with pirates. Incredulously, he never even intended to become one.
- * Pirate Will Duell was hanged in 1740, but the autopsy surgeon discovered him still breathing. In 2 hours he was sitting upright... and freed by authorities.
- * Piracy was the direct result of conquistador plundering. Between 1596-1600 alone, Spain shipped in \$774 million of indigenous gold
- * Panama was a pirate haven in the 1600's, inhabited mostly by black slaves
- * About 4% of pirates were married, and many brought significant others aboard.
- * Laws aboard pirate ships were democratic. Captains were elected by their crew.
- * On-board robbery was punished by slicing off ears/nose, or desertion on an island to starve
- * London's execution dock near the Tower saw pirate hangings for 400 years
- * Speeches of convicted pirates were printed, published and sold very well days after the execution
- * Many pirates were defiant as they were hanged. "Better to die free on the seas than be chained by the state" was the pirate creed.
- * Non-violent ship seizure was preferred. If a merchant ship surrendered to pirates peacefully, the latter would stave off all violence and even reward the crew.

- * Ship carpenters were forced to join pirate brigades, as all ships faced rotting and worm infestation.
- * Pirates reached their peak in 1720, with 2000 roaming the seas. Three years later, that number was halved.
- * King George I pardoned all pirates in 1717 with a proclamation so successful, 300 pirates voluntarily surrendered in Jamaica alone.
- * British navy squadrons converted many defeated pirate vessels into warships
- * "The horrors of the slave trade are well-known, but what is not so well-known is that white seamen died in the same proportion as black slaves. One white in three died in his first 4 months in Africa."
- * Pirates were captured via word of mouth. With thousands of inlets along American, African, and Caribbean coasts, news of hide-outs would spread amongst ships or small craft plying trade. A colony governor or East India/Royal African Company agent reported this to the crown, and a warship was dispatched.

Elisa says

Lettura molto interessante e particolarmente scorrevole per chi, come me, è quasi completamente a digiuno di pirateria (va be' a parte Black Sails). Cordingly offre una panoramica generale della storia della pirateria e delle sue pratiche più comuni procendendo per macrotemi. L'unico problema secondo me è che il tema è davvero troppo ampio per essere affrontato esaurientemente in un saggio così breve, penso che l'autore avrebbe dovuto restringere il campo della sua trattazione almeno cronologicamente e/o geograficamente, infatti spesso vengono inseriti episodi riguardanti la pirateria dell'estremo oriente o scandinava che però non sono particolarmente contestualizzati in quanto il libro si concentra prevalentemente su quella esistente nelle Americhe intorno al XVIII secolo. Inoltre questo procedere per ordine tematico fa sì che le vicende di molti dei pirati citati vengano spezzate e riprese in capitoli differenti senza che però, per un lettore inesperto, sia molto agevole ricordarsi nomi, date e fatti (infatti a fine lettura posso dire di ricordarmi solo delle figure apparse in Black Sails - Vane, Barbanera, Calico Jack, etc. - e dei nomi già noti come il capitano Kidd o Morgan).

Sicuramente approfondirò l'argomento perché mi sto appassionando.
