

prejudices – but his exploits were fodder for pamphleteers with an eye for a profit, who were on the lookout for a unifying figure.

Drake, who had risen to a knight-hood by beating the Spanish and stealing their gold, may have irked the political elites with his social mobility, but his exploits in the New World provided tales of English glory at the expense of Spanish pride. This was a useful narrative for the political elites to propagate at a time when Catholic

The use of a celebrity to incite action from a fractured population is not confined to our own age

Spain was the most present danger to fledgling English Protestantism, encouraging support for the upcoming war by appealing to an already embedded prejudice towards the Spaniards.

Drake's voyage of 1585-86 was similar in intent to his previous venture to Nombre de Dios, with one significant difference: this time he was successful. Thomas Greepe's 1587 pamphlet, *The true and perfecte newes of the woorthy and valiaunt exploit, performed and doone by that valiant knight Syr Frauncis Drake*, describes successful raids upon the Spanish-held Caribbean towns of Santo Domingo and Cartagena. Written in verse for easier comprehension and thus better sales, it begins with the treatment of the natives of the Americas by the Spaniards, as recounted in *The Spanish Colonie*, stating that, by his sword 'many Captiues did [Drake] sette free, Which earst were long in misery'. It paints a vivid picture of how Drake and his men:

*all at once ranne valiantlie,
Their shot discharged, with
weapons then,
They lay one loade on either side:
Though fiew to one, yet durst not bide.*

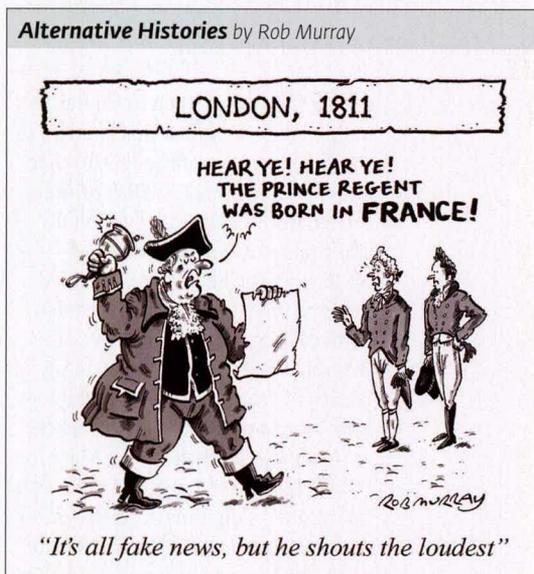
The Spanish gunner, upon seeing Drake's men 'running in a rage', abandoned his weapon and fled, as did the rest of the men defending the town. To add insult to injury, Drake and his men enjoyed the basted chickens and roast meat from the tables laid and left in haste by the fleeing Spaniards.

This extract is typical of pamphlets written about Drake and others who faced the Spaniards in this period. Yet the rhetoric and the use of motifs relating specifically to Drake ensured that the themes of anti-Spanish prejudice and the greatness of the English reached the largest audience possible thanks to the charismatic nature of this 'living legend'.

Drake's popularity is evidenced by another pamphlet about the same voyage to the New World: *A Summarie and True Account of Sir Francis Drakes West Indian Voyage* (1589). Not only was this twice as long as its predecessor, it was also interspersed with maps to be sold separately for those who wanted to follow Drake, both figuratively and literally. His popularity must have been such that people were willing to spend the extra money on these. This pamphlet ran to at least seven editions by 1589, where similar pamphlets may have achieved two or three print runs at most. By appealing to both the prejudice against the Spaniards' 'brutal' nature and the desires of the English to overcome this new threat to their emerging Protestant identity, the rhetoric surrounding Drake and his celebrity status both reflected and hardened deepening Hispanophobia. While one should be cautious about drawing direct parallels to the past, the use of celebrity to incite action from a fractured and fearful population is not confined to our own age.

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Alternative Histories by Rob Murray



Henry IV of Germany: a 'Bad King'?

Looking beyond the usual rogues' gallery of historical figures can help us to better understand the past.

Levi Roach

ALMOST two years ago, a group of students and scholars assembled in London to consider the context and legacy of Magna Carta, that most lauded of medieval British documents. Inevitably, the spectre of King John hung over much of the proceedings and comparisons were frequently drawn with John's French counterparts. By contrast, Germany was scarcely mentioned at all. This absence is all too typical in English-language historical writing: we look to France, but rarely further afield. This is a pity, not only because regions such as Germany were often in close contact with the British Isles, but also because they offer rich and largely untapped comparative material for the British historian.

The reign of King John is a case in point. John stands out among the Norman and early Plantagenet rulers: his predecessors had sometimes been accused of acquisitiveness (and even godlessness), but were not generally considered vindictive – and certainly not incompetent. One does not fare much better with France: the Capetian rulers of the central Middle Ages made their mistakes, but none can match John in contemporary or posthumous reputation. In contrast, Henry IV of Germany (r.1053-1106) offers a number of interesting points of comparison.

Though well known within the German-speaking world, Henry is something of an unknown quantity elsewhere. Born on November 11th, 1050, he came to the throne at the tender age of three upon the sudden death of his father. The ensuing years saw much instability, as leading magnates jostled for control of the informal



regency that ruled the realm on Henry's behalf. These conflicts reached a high point when the king was abducted by ship on the Rhine in early 1062. The terrified 11-year-old reportedly plunged into the water in an attempt to escape, only to be saved from drowning by the swift intervention of one of his captors.

The uncertainties of these years left the 17-year-old Henry known for keeping his own counsel

Bad reputation: woodcut of Henry IV from the Nuremberg Chronicle, 1493.

While John has gone down as one of England's archetypal 'bad kings', Henry has not faced the same fate

(rather than seeking the advice of others) and few true 'friends' of his can be identified. He is said to have preferred the company of low-born men, from whom he could expect unwavering loyalty. Such behaviour smacks of distrust and insecurity. Not surprisingly it ruffled feathers and Henry often found himself at odds with his magnates. One of the first great show-

downs came in 1070, when the king accused Otto of Norheim, the Duke of Bavaria and a leading Saxon nobleman, of treason. Otto was found guilty and he and Magnus Billung, another Saxon magnate, were imprisoned. Imprisonment was normally a symbolic gesture, the expectation being that pardon would soon follow. For Otto, this was indeed the case; Magnus, however, was kept under lock and key for years, not even being released upon the death of his father, the Duke of Saxony, in 1072. This was but one of many cases in which Henry broke the rules of chivalry and it is hardly surprising that he soon faced a concerted uprising among the Saxon nobles.

On and off, the resulting 'Saxon Wars' would occupy the rest of Henry's reign. Though he enjoyed a number of breakthroughs, his obstinate refusal to find common ground meant that peace was only ever shortlived. The situation was exacerbated by the so-called 'Investiture Contest'. Beginning in the mid-1070s, this pitted Henry's claims to control the Church against those of the pope. The king's opponents were quick to exploit the resulting divisions and rebellion soon spread beyond Saxony. Matters came to a head in 1076, when Henry, recently excommunicated, was set an ultimatum by his magnates: either submit to Pope Gregory VII and have his excommunication lifted within the year, or be deprived of his realm. In response, the king undertook his 'trek to Canossa' (*Gang nach Canossa*). Crossing the Alps in the dead of winter, Henry hurried to meet the pope at the castle of Canossa in northern Italy. There he dramatically prostrated himself in the snow outside the castle walls for three days before being absolved of his sins. Such contrition – if ever sincerely intended – had little long-term effect, however: by the end of the year Henry was calling for Gregory's abdication.

It is not hard to see parallels with John, who frequently broke with convention and proved similarly fickle when it came to keeping his promises. Yet, while John has gone down as one of England's archetypal 'bad kings', Henry has not faced the same fate. The grounds for this are historiographical. In the latter half of the 19th century, when

professional history developed as a field, Henry found favour within Prussian (and thus Protestant) corridors of power in a newly united Germany. He was seen as an ill-starred ruler, a far-sighted monarch whose road to greatness was only blocked by the expansionist ambitions of the papacy. Canossa itself became a symbol of papal domination. In 1872 Otto von Bismarck invoked this image in his speech before the Reichstag: 'Fret not, we shall not go to Canossa – either in body or in spirit!' The message was clear: unlike Henry,

Whether he was as 'bad' as John is hard to say – and ultimately beside the point

the Iron Chancellor would not go cap in hand to the pope.

Of course, there were mitigating circumstances in Henry's reign. He could not have foreseen the fierce opposition from Pope Gregory, nor was he responsible for various long-standing structural problems within the realm. Nevertheless, shorn of the nationalist sentiments so prominent in the 19th and 20th century, modern scholarship has come to see that Henry does indeed deserve a share of the blame. Whether he was as 'bad' as John is hard to say and ultimately beside the point. What is clear is that both broke the 'rules of play' of their day, and both faced concerted opposition as a consequence. While in Germany this did not result in a document such as Magna Carta, it did contribute to the evolution of a unique brand of elective monarchy, in which leading magnates (the princes) chose their own ruler. In this sense, the dramatic scene before the castle of Canossa is not so different from the negotiations at Runnymede. While both John's and Henry's reigns were clearly failures, they are all the more important for this fact; by viewing them together, our appreciation of both becomes all the richer.

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