

Coursework: Trade and Exploration

Describe and account for the attitude of those seamen who embarked on voyages of maritime exploration in the sixteenth century.

The seamen who embarked on voyages of maritime exploration in the sixteenth century can be split into two main groups. These groups are the ordinary seamen, whose main motivation would have been financial. They were being paid to go or they simply had no better alternative but to go on a voyage. The second group are the captains and the officers, generally better educated their motivation for embarking on a voyage of maritime exploration would probably have been purely financial. The officers and captain were sailing to make a profit or secure an investment. Attitudes of the seamen may also have varied due to when in the sixteenth century they were going and also to where they were going and if they even knew. If, for example you were John Cabot at the beginning of the sixteenth century you would not know what to expect. However if you were Sebastian Cabot later on in the sixteenth century you would have a better idea what you were looking for and what to expect. This would be even more so if you were Sir Francis Drake at the end of the sixteenth century. You would have a better idea what was at the end of your expedition and therefore your attitude would be different.

The foremost attitude and driving force behind many expeditions was supplied by the desire to make money. The ordinary seamen were part of the crew because it was their job, they were being paid to be there and do their job. Whereas the officers were part of the crew to look after or secure an investment. They had seen Spain and Portugal through explorers such as Cortez and Pizarro make vast sums of money and become rich and they desired to join them. Later on in the sixteenth century adventures would have seen such explorers as Drake make vast sums of money from their explorations and would also desire to make money as they had done. English seamen may also have been fearful of Spanish reprisals. While the average seamen may have been blasé to the threat of Spanish reprisals the educated officers would certainly have been more concerned. Especially after the massacre at San Juan D'Ullua and the threat posed by the treaty of Tordesillas.

There may also have been the attitude of apprehension. Provided by the average seamen would be apprehension sparked by old legends and perhaps the fear of going over the edge of the world. The more educated officers on the other hand may have had previous information and therefore may have been apprehensive of the threat from ice and of unknown territories and people. Such information may have been supplied by explorers such as Sebastian Cabot, John Dee, Sir Hugh Willoughby and Richard Chancellor.

When setting out individuals may have been sailing for prestige and honour they may have seen themselves as sailing for England and the monarch. Such explorers may have seen Drake, Raleigh and Hawkins praised by Elizabeth I and may have been setting out to try and gain prestige and honour.

Many seamen set out on voyages of discovery backed by joint-stock companies. These companies such as the Muscovy Company were set up for a quick profit rather than a long-term solid investment. This attitude may well have led to greed being rife in seamen setting out on voyages of discovery in the sixteenth century. They would

certainly have been envious of other more prosperous countries as trade was drying up in the London Antwerp funnel.

State the case, which might have been made in the late sixteenth century for establishing a settlement in North America.

The types of people who were prepared to set up the first colonies and become colonists in the first instance in the late sixteenth century can be split into two main groups. The gentlemen colonists whose job it was to put up the money to found the colony and get it up and running, and servants who were to work in the colony. The gentleman colonists were in a minority and instead of being surrounded by people committed to making a go of the colony they were surrounded by servants who had no real incentive to make the colony work. This was mainly due to the fact that given no money and no personal stake in the land. They were merely supplied with food and water. However, at the second attempt all the people who went to found the colony had an incentive to go. The colony may have worked although in 1591 there was no colonists left. The third attempt was a success, James town was founded as all the colonists had an incentive to make it work. For all this effort to found a colony in the late sixteenth century there must be many reasons why a colony was so important.

The underlying factor for going anywhere in the sixteenth century was money and to make a profit. There was an initial excitement over the prospect of Gold and therefore a colony was necessary to mine and process the Gold. In North America new crops such as potatoes and tobacco were discovered and were soon being traded. In the Hudson Bay area a colony was necessary from which to fish cod and then to process it.

A colony was essential to trade in the New World. Hawkins started the slave trade between Africa, Brazil and Seville for which to be a success, colonies for supplies and repairs were essential. This trade was seized and stopped in 1566 by Philip II of Spain although the colonies continued.

Colonies were also set up as places to form convoys before crossing the Atlantic with trade and bullion. It was safer to cross the ocean as a fleet rather than individually especially in times of the Anglo-Spanish war.

Such colonies were also established as safe havens from storms and to repair ships damaged by storms or by Spanish boats during the Anglo-Spanish war. San Juan D'Ulua was such a colony visited by Hawkins and Drake after a storm at sea in 1567, famous for the massacre of their ships and men by a Spanish treasure fleet. Such bloodthirsty attacks were not however only carried out by the Spanish. The English also established colonies as bases from which to attack Spanish ships and bullion fleets, such as the attack on Nombre de Dios in 1571.

Richard Hakluyt an early propagandist began to become well respected. He thought that North America should provide “plenty of good land and fine conditions for European settlement. Hakluyt along with others saw England as overpopulated. It was thought England could no longer feed or employ such numbers of people. Along with growing poverty and vagrancy, plague and bad harvests colonies were seen as the answer. It was also thought that precious metals would be found and such colonies would therefore act as more than just operating to “draw the surplus”.

In an age of rampant nationalism colonies were seen as fighting back against Spain to prevent her from taking all the profit. Certain individuals may also have seen the setting up of colonies as a way of spreading Christianity to the natives.

In the circumstances of the late-sixteenth century would contemporaries have been justified in supporting efforts to expand and develop overseas trade?

The circumstances of the late-sixteenth century may be described as bad. The war with Spain from 1564 when Mendoza left till 1604 drained the Elizabethan economy through the war effort and the lack of trade. There was little money for exploration as ships and money were needed for defence. The decayed trade with the Netherlands, once so strong had dried up in the London Antwerp funnel and generally all over continental Europe as Spain tightened her grip. Years of bad weather, high food prices and inflation led to unemployment, which led to poverty and vagrancy. There was growing violence and a general feeling the government couldn't cope. The conditions of the 1590's led to the Elizabethan poor laws of 1598 and 1601 aimed to combat poverty and vagrancy.

Judging by these conditions contemporaries may well have been justified in supporting efforts to expand and develop overseas trade as all the problems of Elizabethan England were directly related to a lack of steady trade and a far from buoyant economy. Such contemporaries would have been anyone who would have invested in a joint-stock company such as merchants, Speculators, gentry, individuals at court, ship builders, craftsmen and sea captains.

In the circumstance of the war with Spain during the period 1584 to 1604 contemporaries may not have been justified in supporting efforts of overseas trade. Ships were in demand; they were needed by Hawkins, Drake and Raleigh for privateering, attacking bullion fleets and “singeing the king of Spain's beard”. Ships were used at Cadiz twice to try and prevent an Armada, they were also used directly against the Spanish Armadas. Government money was needed for defence, the treasury had no money for the support of colonies or exploration. Contemporaries may also have been unwise in supporting efforts to develop overseas trade as big names such as Hawkins, Drake and Raleigh were engaged in defence. However contemporaries may have been justified as England still needed supplies especially

for ship building and repairs a big company in this field was the Eastland Company. Colonies were still very useful as places to gather and repair fleets. Contemporaries may also have been justified, as money to finance the war was needed. The Spanish had Gold from the New World that the English also wanted to exploit. Therefore support of a gold mining expedition may have been justified.

Another factor which may have led contemporaries to support efforts to develop overseas trade may have been the collapse of trade with the Netherlands. The civil war in the Netherlands, which led to the Dutch revolt and the sack of Antwerp in 1576, helped to destroy trade in the London Antwerp funnel. The London Antwerp funnel had been the main supplier of trade to England, therefore when it was eroded the English economy was set for decline. Contemporaries would therefore be justified in supporting efforts to expand trade overseas, as the economy needed trade to come in from somewhere. To get to and exploit the trade joint stock companies such as the Levant Company, the Muscovy Company and the Eastland Company were established. However, support of such Companies may not have been justified as such Companies were not making profits and had no long-term economic policy.

However, investment in other exploration projects such as Drakes circumnavigation of the globe may well have been justified as he returned a 4,700 % profit. This may have justified investments to contemporaries in and around 1577 to 1580. However, in the longer term such investments may not have been justified as failures such as the colonies in New Found Land and Virginia failed. Contemporaries may however have justified their investments through the fact that there was little other alternative but to find new markets and trade routes. It is possible to say that such voyages of discovery were gathering experience and information that would make future explorations a success. This optimism may have been well founded as ship building and design took off which led to more financial backing and investment. In 1606 the Virginia Company was founded, a sign of growing optimism in the New World. In 1607 James town was founded and in 1609 exploration got royal backing and funding, a sign of optimism. Therefore contemporaries may well have been justified in supporting efforts to expand and develop overseas trade.

There may also have been an incentive to try and develop colonies for the unemployed. Poverty and Vagrancy were at a high and such investment by contemporaries may well have been justified as it looked like the setting up of colonies might get government support. This is especially true, as after 1604 there were a great number of indentured servants prepared to go to the New World. Therefore any investment in a colony may have been realised.

It would appear that for the short term any investment by contemporaries might not have been justified, as there was limited profit to be had. However, in the long term there was massive profit, return and interest in colonies so that a wise contemporary may have been justified in making an investment.