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Mapping Empires

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### Bias in Chorography and Historical Documents

Colonization is the process of taking control of territories to expand an empire, in colonization a country has to be ruthless and unforgiving to the people of the territories that they take control of. In expanding the English Empire to Ireland and the New World, the chorographers of the English Empire each demonstrated their biases against native peoples in their writings and map making. This is demonstrated in the depiction of Ireland by Fynes Moryson and John Norden, who believed Irish people to be lesser than the English and changed historic Irish territories without shame in their documentations. Even the colonizers of The New World, Sir Humphrey Gilbert and Captain John Smith, who had little experience with Native Americans before their expeditions, had biases against Native Americans that were documented in the creation of their maps and journals.

Fynes Moryson was a writer hired by the English Empire and Queen Elizabeth I, who was prejudiced against Irish people. Moryson's bias against Irish people was extremely present in his writings, because he continuously noted negative traits in his descriptions of the manners and customs of Irish people and this continued into his description of Ireland, which also featured his disregard for Irish ownership of land. In his description of manners and customs, Fynes Moryson described the Irish as extremely lazy people, prone to poverty and poor at

fighting.<sup>1</sup> He even described the English-Irish, who were commonly believed to still be Englishmen, as less-and-less English with every generation, because he believed Irish genes to be overpowering to the superior genes of the English.<sup>2</sup> Moryson did not accept the Irish to be equal to Englishmen, he believed them to be lesser people who deserved to have their land taken and controlled by the English Empire.

Moryson's disrespect of the Irish is exemplified in his description of Irish land, where he disregarded Irish history and land ownership. In his description of Ireland, Fynes Moryson described the five regions (old kingdoms) of Ireland by counties, geography, and population. In his translation of the Irish language to English, Moryson struggled with inventing phonetic English spellings of words that matched Irish pronunciation. This is exemplified by Moryson's documentation of "Weshford, Weisford, or Wexford," where he wrote three different spellings for the name of one city.<sup>3</sup> If Moryson had a better knowledge of the Irish language or even consulted with someone who spoke both Irish and English, he may have been able to create spellings that were definitive. Additionally, he omitted the counties of Ophaly, Leax, Longford, Ferns, and Wicklow due to them not being "memorable".<sup>4</sup> Though he noted the existence of these counties, Moryson's disregard showed the ideals of imperialism and colonization. Moryson did not believe Irish history and land ownership to be important enough to document as accurately as possible, even when he had the knowledge to.

Even in his documentation of Irish agriculture and resources, Fynes Moryson did not note good things about Ireland without also noting bad things in the same paragraph. In his

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<sup>1</sup> Fynes Moryson, "The Manners and Customs of Ireland" in *CELT: Corpus of Electronic Texts*, trans. Charles Hughes. (Cork, Ireland: University College, 2010) 312, 314. Accessed December 12, 2022. <https://celt.ucc.ie/published/T100073.html>

<sup>2</sup> Moryson, "The Manners and Customs of Ireland" 310.

<sup>3</sup> Fynes Moryson, "The Description of Ireland" in *CELT: Corpus of Electronic Texts*, trans. Charles Hughes. (Cork, Ireland: University College, 2014) 217. Accessed December 12, 2022. <https://celt.ucc.ie/published/T100071.html>

<sup>4</sup> Moryson, "The Description of Ireland", 217.

documentation of Irish lands, Moryson noted that they were very suitable for the growth of corn and for cattle to graze upon, but in comparison to England the “best sorts of fruits and flowers [were] much rarer.”<sup>5</sup> Objectively, there was no reason for Moryson to make note of that because it negatively portrayed Ireland but did not specify which fruits or flowers were actually present in Ireland. Additionally, Moryson noted that the seas of Ireland were plentiful in fresh water fish but the Irish were too lazy to actually go fishing.<sup>6</sup> Moryson’s comment that the Irish were lazy did give an idea of Irish culture but it did not provide any chorographical knowledge, which was the main intention of his description of Ireland, and the comment was an unneeded quip that showed his negative opinion of the Irish.

After Fynes Moryson’s biased descriptions of Ireland, came John Norden who was hired to create a map of Ireland for the English Empire to use for policy creation.<sup>7</sup> John Norden was an accomplished cartographer, with a lifetime so full of productivity that it was unlikely he ever had the time to leave England. In his writings, Norden expressly admitted his ignorance of Ireland and that he had never been to Ireland himself.<sup>8</sup> Norden was hired by Robert Cecil, the lord high treasurer of England, who possessed a collection of preexisting maps and writings about Ireland for Norden to take knowledge from.<sup>9</sup>

The main issue that came from Norden’s lack of knowledge about Ireland was that inconsistencies between his sources caused Norden to make small mistakes that were left unfixed in his final product. Norden’s finalized map included details for instance “Waterforde towre” a non-existent tower in Waterford Harbor, Ireland.<sup>10</sup> If Norden had first-hand experience of the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 221.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 224.

<sup>7</sup> J. H. Andrews, “John Norden’s Maps of Ireland” in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* 100C, no. 5 (Royal Irish Academy, 2000): 159–206.

<sup>8</sup> Andrews, “John Norden’s Maps of Ireland” 168.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 203.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 168.

land, he would have known this tower and other similar details did not exist, but because worked from others' sources he could only cross-reference to check specific details. Norden did not have first-hand bias against Irish people in the same way that Moryson did because he never actually went to Ireland, but his maps suffered due to his lack of knowledge of the land outside of maps and others' writings.

Similar to Moryson's lack of knowledge of the Irish, Sir Humphrey Gilbert had little knowledge of Native Americans before his voyage to claim part of The New World. Sir Humphrey Gilbert gained a patent to set up a colony in 1578, and had a failed voyage shortly after.<sup>11</sup> Gilbert's voyage failed due to a Spanish spy that infiltrated his crew and conveyed his intentions to Philip II of Spain, who drove Gilbert away.<sup>12</sup> After his failed voyage, Gilbert worked off his personal debt and in 1580 he started planning another voyage and hired cartographer John Dee to help him create promotional maps<sup>13</sup>

Sir Humphrey Gilbert and John Dee used the ideals of colonization in the creation of their maps and the promotion of their voyage. Gilbert and Dee's promotional maps were made with Portuguese, Spanish, and French sources to most accurately depict the known land of North America, and to create the North-Eastern territory of Norumbega, which would be the first area of colonization for the English Empire.<sup>14</sup> While they did not have firsthand experience with Native Americans, Dee's and Gilbert's maps were inherently biased against them because they claimed land that was occupied by native populations to be colonized by the English Empire.

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<sup>11</sup> Edward Haies. "Sir Humphrey Gilbert's Voyage To Newfoundland," Internet history sourcebooks. Fordham University. Accessed December 12, 2022. <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1585haies-gilbert.asp>.

<sup>12</sup> Nate Probasco, "Cartography as a Tool of Colonization: Sir Humphrey Gilbert's 1583 Voyage to North America.," *Renaissance Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (2014): 445.

<sup>13</sup> Probasco, "Cartography as a Tool of Colonization," 426-427.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 429.

Dee acknowledged that the Spanish and French were encroaching upon valuable territory for the English Empire and showed his patrons his plan to set up colonies in Norumbega.<sup>15</sup>

In the creation of his preliminary maps, John Dee marked the unexplored Western interior of North America as an area of *terra nullius*, land belonging to no Christian man.<sup>16</sup> The depiction of unexplored land was Dee's way to show patrons that in the future the land could be colonized, and that while they may be unexplored they do exist. In their maps, Dee and Gilbert depicted Norumbega and England next to each other to promote ideals of expansion, and to make the viewers of their maps believe Norumbega to be an ideal territory for the ever-growing English population.<sup>17</sup>

The promotion of colonization and promises of land to his sponsors worked to gain Sir Humphrey Gilbert enough sponsorship to voyage to North America in 1583, where the final part of his career began. The vast majority of the documentation and production of Gilbert's expedition was lost, due to only one of the five fleets of his expedition returning to England, with the other four sinking or leaving the expedition due to unforeseen circumstances.<sup>18</sup> One of the surviving primary sources of the expedition was that of Edward Haies, captain of the Golden Hind, who kept a journal during the expedition. Haies' journal shows that in Gilbert's expedition his crew had little previous knowledge of native populations.

Upon their exploration of the lands of North America, Gilbert's crew did not encounter many Native Americans, because they had already been driven away by other colonizers. When Gilbert's expedition encountered Native Americans they were noted to be "altogether harmless" and Gilbert's crew was able to conduct a trade session.<sup>19</sup> Potential trade was a good sign for

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 435.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 433.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 433.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Haies. "Sir Humphrey Gilbert's Voyage To Newfoundland," Internet history sourcebooks. Fordham University. Accessed December 12, 2022. <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1585haies-gilbert.asp>.

<sup>19</sup> Haies, "Sir Humphrey Gilbert's Voyage To Newfoundland."

colonization, since industry could be set up for future colonization and settlers would not have to fight with Native populations. Overall, the depiction of Native Americans in Gilbert's expeditions and preliminary maps was nonexistent, because Gilbert had no firsthand knowledge or experience with Native Americans and his maps were made to promote colonization of North America by the English Empire. It is unknown how Gilbert would have (or did) depict Native Americans in his maps and writings due to his untimely death and loss of work when his return ship, the *Squirrel*, sank.<sup>20</sup>

Sir Humphrey Gilbert's expedition was one of the first colonization of the New World expeditions for the state of England, but it was far from the last. In May of 1606, a group of settlers that included Captain John Smith arrived in Virginia and began establishing the colony of Jamestown. John Smith was a fast learner of the Native American Algonquian language, and over that summer he was elected to conduct negotiations with native peoples.<sup>21</sup> From 1606 to 1607 Smith and the Jamestown colony had some bad interactions with Native Americans, but Smith was able to create a firm and repetitive business trade relationship that also denied friendship with the natives.<sup>22</sup>

Throughout his life and documentation of his work for the Jamestown colony, Captain John Smith made it clear that while it was useful to have relationships with Native Americans he believed Native Americans to be savages who primarily existed in relation to himself. A prime example of John Smith's views on Native Americans is his story of how Pocahontas saved his life when he was kidnapped. In December of 1607, Smith was captured by the Powhatan tribe while on an expedition of the Chickahominy River with two other men and a Native American

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> John Smith, *The Journals of Captain John Smith* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2007), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, *The Journals of Captain John Smith*, 1-3.

guide, who were slain by the tribe rather than captured.<sup>23</sup> Smith was able to establish good relations with his captors with a demonstration of his compass, and tales of the English technology of guns and mines, which the Jamestown colony possessed.<sup>24</sup> During his capture, when Smith met Chief Powhatan he was able to gain valuable information about nearby tribes and geography through conversation, and even lied to the Chief and said that Spaniards also terrorized the Jamestown colony.<sup>25</sup> After his meeting with Chief Powhatan, Smith was set to be executed but miraculously was set free by Powhattan and was told that Jamestown and the tribe could now be friends.<sup>26</sup>

In his original documentation of the event Smith did not mention Pochahontas, and his encounter with Pochahontas was not published until 1624, years after she had died.<sup>27</sup> In Smith's recounting of his encounter with Pochahontas, she took his head into her arms right before the chief's men were about to bash his head in.<sup>28</sup> Smith's tale gives the impression that Pochahontas was romantically interested in him, and romanticizes the idea of a Native Woman leaving her tribe for a white man. It is unknown whether Smith actually encountered Pochahontas during his time captured, or if he made the tale up in reply to Pochahontas's relationship with Jamestown settler John Rolfe. Whether it is a real or fictional tale, Smith's story of Pochahontas gained him fame and a reputation that has lasted into the twenty-first century.

After his return to Jamestown and a few months of recovery, in the summer of 1608 John Smith set off on two expeditions where he encountered and wrote more about his relationships with Native American people. In his journals Smith wrote of how he was easily able to scare Native American attackers by shooting bullets into the water of the rivers he traveled, and after

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 15-17.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 17-21.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 25-26.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 26.

that he was able to establish relationships with different tribes by giving them English knickknacks such as compasses or by exchanging hostages.<sup>29</sup> Smith and other colonizers believed that their superior technology to be a way to show Native Americans that they were able to overpower their bows and melee weapons. Overall, while Smith did note that he and his men were often attacked by Native Americans, he seemingly always found a way out of the situation that made him seem superior to his attackers.

John Smith's relationships with Native Americans allowed him to create maps far more accurate than colonizers who did not use indigenous knowledge. In his 1612 map of the Chesapeake, John Smith depicted both the land owned by English colonists and the land occupied by different Native American tribes. In the top left and right (respectively) corners of Smith's map there are illustrations of a Susquehannock Chief and Chief Powhattan, who held Smith prisoner temporarily, and in the center of the map Queen Elizabeth's arms is featured.<sup>30</sup> Smith's map was one of the most accurate maps of America at that time due to his usage of Indigenous knowledge and his inclusion of Native American tribes on his map. Smith's accurate inclusion of Native Americans on his map served settlers because it showed where Native Americans were in relation to their colonies. Smith's map(s) and writings are also surviving pre-US historical first-hand accounts that show where tribes existed in Virginia and the relationships tribes had between each other and with Jamestown colony settlers.

In mapping new territories of the English Empire, chorographers unknowingly placed their biases against native populations into the final product of their maps and writings. Colonization required the English Empire to ruthlessly take land from Ireland, the New World, and many other territories without having sympathy for the people who already inhabited those

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 45, 57.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, John. Virginia [London, 1624] Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/99446115/>.



lands. When making maps and historical documentations chorographers had to make decisions on how to portray native populations and the historical regions of those people, and if they were even going to portray those populations at all. Writer Fynes Moryson outwardly documented his dislike of native Irish people by documenting negative traits of the Irish in his description of manners and customs, and his repeated disregard of historical Irish ownership of land for his own convenience. The disrespect of Ireland was continued by John Norden, who completely lacked first-hand experience of Ireland, and used existing documents to create his own maps of Ireland when hired to do so. After the successful colonization of Ireland, English cartographers such as Sir Humphrey Gilbert created maps of the New World that ignored the existence of Native Americans in the New World, and instead focused on promoting colonization in competition with other European colonizers. Once England successfully set up colonies in the New World, such as Jamestown, cartographer John Smith was able to create maps of the area that accurately portrayed land and ownership of land by the English and by Native American tribes.

As time went on from the colonization of Ireland in the early sixteenth century to the colonization of the New World in the seventeenth century chorographers continuously changed their styles of map-making and documentation, inconsistently incorporating native populations based on the chorographer's own biases. Cartographers Fynes Moryson and John Smith most accurately depicted the native populations they interacted with, because they interacted with them first-hand and made extensive note of their experiences. In comparison, John Norden and Sir Humphrey Gilbert used other's work to create their maps, and that led to little reference to native populations in their final products. When creating historical documents each of these chorographers placed their own biases into their works, which created vastly different end products despite their similar goals.

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