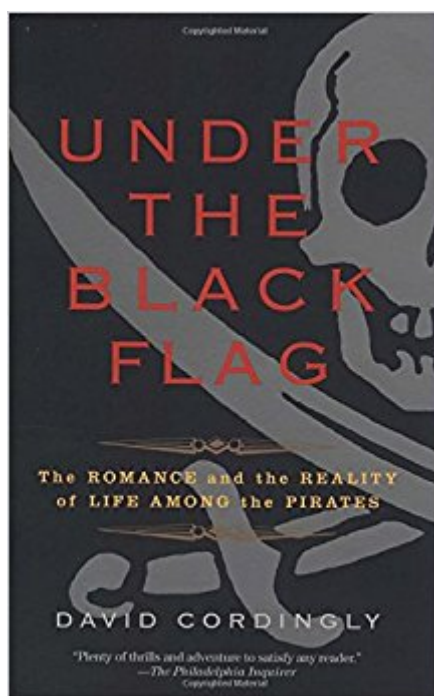


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Under The Black Flag: The Romance And The Reality Of Life Among The Pirates



Synopsis

For this rousing, revisionist history, the former head of exhibitions at England's National Maritime Museum has combed original documents and records to produce a most authoritative and 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 and often bloodier. 16 pp. of photos. Maps. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Though literature, films, and folklore have romanticized pirates as gallant seaman who hunted for treasure in exotic locales, David Cordingly, a former curator at the National Maritime Museum in England, reveals the facts behind the legends of such outlaws as Captain Kidd, Blackbeard, and Calico Jack. Even stories about buried treasure are fictitious, he says, yet still the myth remains. Though pirate captains were often sadistic villains and crews endured barbarous tortures, were constantly threatened with the possibility of death by hanging, drowning in a storm, or surviving a shipwreck on a hostile coast, pirates are still idealized. Cordingly examines why the myth of the romance of piratehood endures and why so few lived out their days in luxury on the riches they had plundered. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Widespread piracy began in the Western world in 1650 and ended abruptly around 1725. Cordingly, formerly on the staff of the National Maritime Museum in England, describes who became pirates (mainly volunteers who joined up when their ships were captured); what they wore (scarves or

handkerchiefs around their head, just like in the movies); and how they were armed (literally, to the teeth). Pirates, says the author, were "attracted by the lure of plunder and the desire for an easy life." They were not the clean-cut heroes of the Errol Flynn films either, but cutthroat murderers. Some of the famous pirates are portrayed: Sir Francis Drake made his name by plundering silver on the Spanish Main; Sir Harry Morgan is famous for his ransom of Portobello to the President of Panama for 250,000 pesos; and Captain Kidd remains mysterious because of his buried gold and silver on Gardiners Island, near New York City. Fictitious pirates are also surveyed, such as Long John Silver and Captain Hook, and the allure they still have over us is explored. Even if you don't know a corsair (a Mediterranean-based pirate) from a buccaneer (a Caribbean pirate), this book will delight and inform. Photos not seen by PW. Author tour. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

As a fan of nautical fiction (Master and Commander (Vol. Book 1) (Aubrey/Maturin Novels)), and having read Cordingly's *Women Sailors and Sailors' Women*, *Under the Black Flag* was a natural choice for a summer read. Cordingly does a magnificent job of providing details of pirate life: who these men (and women) were, why they became outlaws on the sea and what their lives were like. For me, these were the most fascinating parts of the book. Brief biographies of the better-known pirates (Cpt. Kidd, Blackbeard, Henry Morgan, Anne Bonny, Grace O'Malley) are provided, as well as some pirates I was previously unfamiliar with (Alwilda, Mrs. Cheng, Calico Jack). The stories of plunder, pieces of eight and treasure appealed to the boy in me as well. His iconoclasm was interesting, dispelling the myths that have arisen around pirates (pitched battles of ships exchanging broadsides, for example - most pirates were reluctant to do so for fear of damaging or sinking their prize, most merchant ships simply heaving to once the pirates made themselves known). Cordingly goes so far as to provide explanations for many of these misconceptions - burying treasure (most of it was spent once ships returned to port), walking the plank and marooning (much easier to simply throw folks overboard), wooden legs. The seeds of truth that began these misconceptions and the way in which fictional pirates borrowed from one another (Defoe, Byron, Barrie, Stevenson) was fascinating, and gave me a new appreciation of Cpt. Hook and Long John Silver. His criticism and evaluation of pirate portrayals in film was also excellent. In his conclusion, Cordingly explains the cognitive dissonance between who pirates were and how we imagine them today, writing "The passing of time has mellowed the harsh picture which is revealed in the depositions of seamen who were attacked by pirates ... the films of the thirties and forties took the pirate stories of fact and fiction and added glamour. ... The fact is that we want to

believe in the world of the pirates as it has been portrayed in the adventure stories, the plays and the films over the years." While the truth is much more brutal and for many of the time, unpleasant, pulling the curtain aside makes for rich, fascinating reading. Highly recommended.

Under The Black Flag is an easy to read book with smooth transitions between chapters. Each chapter is dedicated to a specific pirate topic that is explained in an easy to understand way, without boring the reader with unnecessary details. Mr. Cordingly does a wonderful job at transporting the reader back to the gold age of piracy. The author explains the life of these characters by exploring with historic events all the way from how a person decided to become a pirate to how piracy was brought to an end. This book covers famous pirates such Kidd and Blackbeard, but only enough to provide a general understanding of these characters and this is great for a reader like me - who is new to the topic. I was pleasantly surprised to learn certain details about pirates that I thought had been made up by Hollywood, but now I feel I can enjoy pirate movies and shows better. Under the Black Flag answered a lot of questions I had about pirates and their lifestyle and now I am more fascinated by them than before reading the book. I strongly recommend this book if you have any interest whatsoever in the topic.

I was hoping this would be more factual (I got it to help with research with a period piece I'm writing). The first chapter is more about the media written pirate and contrasting it to the reality. But it fails to give much of any real information. I'm about halfway done and the chapters carry more as you go on. If you're looking for a wide view history then this book is good. If you're looking for just facts you should make this one your second choice. His writing though is fast paced and intriguing. Definitely a good read no matter what.

David Cordingly is an internationally-recognized expert in piracy and this work is generally quite informative, but it has a major failing. He is very critical of romanticizing pirates and instead focuses on their violence and atrocities, but he only references one book by Marcus Rediker, the originator of a revisionist view that pirates were a democratic, anti-slavery revolt against the imperial systems of the time. Rediker has advanced his thesis in a journal article and three books, all of which were written well before Cordingly wrote this book, but Cordingly only used one book (written in the late 1980s) as a source. It's like either Cordingly isn't aware of Rediker's more recent scholarship (which is pretty significant in the field of pirates, the Atlantic world, etc.) or has simply chosen to ignore it. That doesn't really reflect well on the scholarship Cordingly put into the book.

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