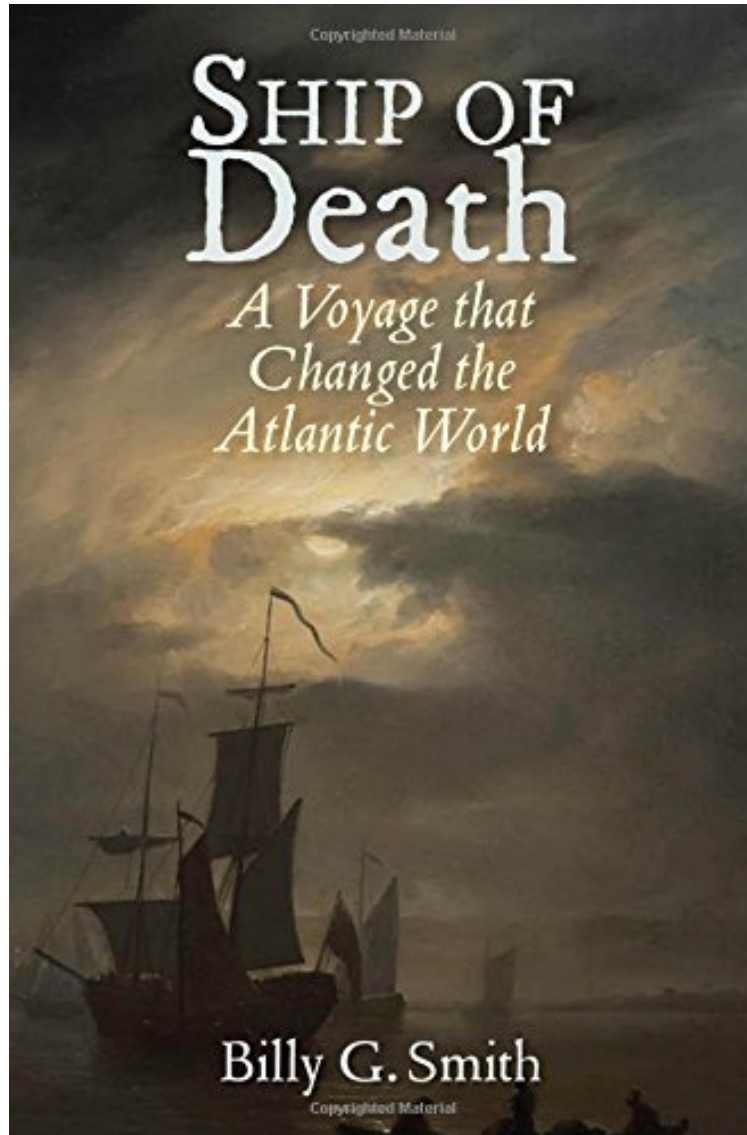


[Free] Ship of Death: A Voyage That Changed the Atlantic World

Ship of Death: A Voyage That Changed the Atlantic World

Billy G. Smith

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#1295669 in Books 2013-11-19 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.25 x 1.12 x 6.12l, 1.39 #File Name: 0300194528328 pages | File size: 73.Mb

Billy G. Smith : Ship of Death: A Voyage That Changed the Atlantic World before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ship of Death: A Voyage That Changed the Atlantic World:

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. How one disease and one ship changed the course of history By Paul Mastin Montana State University professor Billy G. Smith travelled the world and dug into far-flung archives chasing down the forgotten story of a failed colony on the western coast of Africa, a ship called Hankey, and the viral outbreak the Hankey carried from Africa to ports of call around the Atlantic. The story of Hankey's yellow fever outbreak had

been forgotten, but at the time, at the end of the 18th century, Hankey's reputation struck fear into sailors and residents of port communities on both sides of the Atlantic. In *Ship of Death: A Voyage That Changed the Atlantic World*, Smith tells the story of the colony, the Hankey, and their time. The British colonists who set out to establish a settlement on the island of Bolama had high ideals. They wanted to demonstrate that they could thrive in Africa by hiring and cooperating with the native people of Africa rather than enslave them. The problem is that they were ill-informed and ill-prepared. Early on, while en route, problems arose with "the expedition leaders' belated realization that they knew neither the exact location of Bolama nor how to get there." When they finally found Bolama, cultural misunderstandings, weather, predators (of the four-legged and two-legged variety), lack of materials and skills requisite for starting a new colony, and lots of bad luck combined to make life difficult, to say the least. But more than all of that was the prevalence of yellow fever, which killed off colonists indiscriminately. The colony finally folded, having been reduced from 275 people to a small handful, due to desertion and death. The Hankey left Bolama with some of the survivors and some unexpected passengers: mosquitoes, living and laying eggs in the water kegs and animal troughs aboard ship. As they stopped in ports on the west side of the Atlantic, "through terrible timing coupled with the worst of toxic luck, the Hankey created the first major pandemic of yellow fever in the Western Hemisphere." In the West Indies, "fully one-half of the white population of Grenada died within six months of the arrival of the Hankey. . . . The onslaught of disease would not halt for the next dozen years." The disease killed off thousands of British troops in the West Indies, and aided the Haitian slave rebellion by killing off European troops. As the Hankey fled to Philadelphia, starting an infection that would claim thousands, the epidemic there helped to "finalize the decision that made Washington rather than Philadelphia the political center of the country." And in France, Napoleon decided that, due to his disease-weakened troop presence in the Caribbean, he would sell off the Louisiana Territory at a bargain-basement price to the United States. Smith writes as an academic historian, yet he writes *Ship of Death* in a readable, engaging style. As the narrative unfolds, Smith sheds light on the harsh realities of colonial life and life at sea, and deftly places the trials and tribulations of the Hankey and the Bolama colonists into the context of their time. In the latter chapters, the tight strand of the story that he had been spinning for the first portion of the book begins to unwind, but I think that may be most reflective of the widening spread of the yellow fever, brought over from Africa by the Hankey and liberally spread through the new world in ever-expanding networks. *Ship of Death* is interesting and readable, and highly relevant. The challenges and dangers of globalization are even more of a reality today, in our time of constant international travel, than in the days of weeks-long crossings of the Atlantic. The experiences of the Hankey and the destruction it left in its path serve as a reminder of the difference one small event, oversight, or action can make in changing the course of history. Thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for the complimentary electronic review copy!

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. *Ship of Death* By Erin Davies It is impossible to truly appreciate historic fiction without a basic understanding of the facts which is what led me to Billy G. Smith's *Ship of Death*. I'm not well-versed in nautical history and began reading this piece in the hopes of expanding my basic knowledge of the subject. If anything, I intended it to be background reading and was caught off guard when I found myself utterly immersed in an all but forgotten chapter of maritime culture. Smith's account of the Hankey and her movements in the late 1700s is nothing short of fascinating. There is an obvious emphasis on the epidemics sparked by the contagion onboard, but the way Smith linked the ship and its pernicious cargo to early British abolitionists, the colonization of Africa, the Haitian Revolution and the early history of America offered real perspective on the interrelated heritage of the world at large. Maybe it's just me, but I found Smith's approach both captivating and provocative which leads me to my second point. As wonderful as the content is, subject matter alone did not make this book. Smith traveled the world scouring specialized archives in his effort to piece together the history of the Hankey, but the resulting publication is entirely straightforward and unpretentious. Perhaps it's because Smith is professor at the University of Montana in Bozeman and built a career instructing others, but I found his work as engaging as it was informative and that's not quality I usually associate with authors of nonfiction. Meticulously researched and masterfully written, *Ship of Death* is a brilliant chronicle of a single English vessel and the horrendous legacy she left within her wake. Highly recommended to any reader of history, but definitely something for those who enjoyed *Over the Edge of the World* and *In the Heart of the Sea*.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Noble idea of abolitionists thwarted by a mysterious plague of yellow fever. Fascinating yet a comedy of errors as well. By Craig Rowland *Ship of Death: A Voyage That Changed the Atlantic World* by Billy G. Smith tells the story of the Hankey, a British ship that circled the Atlantic in the late 1700's. It gained notoriety as the ship of death when it brought mosquitoes--transmitters of yellow fever--from west Africa to the Caribbean and mainland USA. Smith told the history about an idealistic group of 118 Britons who in 1792 sailed to the island of Bolama, off the coast of what we now call Guinea-Bissau, to establish a community of liberated slaves where black and white would live and work together as equals. Their constitution was noble yet their plans were lacking, even woefully so, for in their haste they neglected to pack construction materials with which to build such a community. If it wasn't for the fact that an overwhelming majority of the settlers died from yellow fever, one could look upon them and their scheme as an eighteenth-century comedy of errors. Without tools or even official permission to settle on the island, they were doomed. The local population, who did not live on Bolama, regarded the island as their own, and viewed the settlers

suspiciously at first. After a cautious scouting of the settlers, the native population attacked them, murdering several. The idealism of setting up a free society vanished instantly for some of the abolitionists, with them clamouring for a return to England as soon as possible. What made *Ship of Death* such a suspenseful read was knowing the path of destruction that yellow fever would wreak--from Guinea-Bissau to the Caribbean to Philadelphia and back to England--with the passengers having no idea what was killing them off in massive fatalities. Overnight entire families would perish, and as long as they stayed on board the ship, it was only a matter of time before they themselves got infected by an infected mosquito bite. When the settlers abandoned their plans of establishing a free society on Bolama after two hard years, they travelled across the Atlantic to the Caribbean on a long convoluted route back home. The infectious mosquitoes hitched a ride from Africa and lived and bred among the barrels of fresh water stored on board. Since yellow fever was not contagious, passengers were perplexed. What was killing them off so suddenly? Was it the state of sanitation? Were noxious miasmas circulating on deck? In the late eighteenth century, science was still years away--a century, in fact--from discovering the cause of yellow fever transmission. Doctors could not agree on the cause of yellow fever, or "yellow jack", so named because ships carrying infected passengers had to fly a yellow flag: "The sheer lack of knowledge about the causes, spread, and treatment of yellow jack also created extreme unease. Was it contagious, spreading from neighbor to neighbor? Did the miasma, the foul air, in Philadelphia account for the blossoming of the disease? Was it an entirely new disease, imported on ships from the Caribbean or Europe or Africa? Medical men couldn't answer the questions definitively, so rumors and folk cures ran rampant among ordinary people." and, after yellow fever plagued Philadelphia: "That same day, at the mayor's request, the College of Physicians met to analyze the crisis and suggest an appropriate response. This group of prestigious Fellows disagreed from the outset, mostly because their explanations of the causes (or even existence) of the disease differed so fundamentally." While the slave trade had brought outbreaks of yellow fever to the Caribbean and several American cities in the past, no outbreak killed as many people and instilled as much fear as the plague aboard the *Hankey*. The ship was shunned, and its passengers quarantined during its ports of call. Smith to his credit spent minimal time discussing the etiology and transmission of the disease. For a while I wondered why the book was even given the Dewey classification assigning it to yellow fever, as *Ship of Death* seemed more about British abolitionist history (itself one of the book's Dewey subcategories).

It is no exaggeration to say that the *Hankey*, a small British ship that circled the Atlantic in 1792 and 1793, transformed the history of the Atlantic world. This extraordinary book uncovers the long-forgotten story of the *Hankey*, from its altruistic beginnings to its disastrous end, and describes the ship's fateful impact upon people from West Africa to Philadelphia, Haiti to London.

"This stunning book should catapult to the top of the must-read list for Atlantic basin studies. In this gripping, grisly story of slavery, rebellion and yellow fever holocaust ricocheting around the Atlantic rim, Smith brilliantly shows how stowaway mosquitoes on a single ship reconfigured the societies of Africa, Europe, the West Indies, and North America as well as the armies and navies of Great Britain and other maritime nations."—Gary B. Nash, UCLA