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Elizabeth I, and two explorers

BYLINE: By John M. Taylor and Priscilla S. Taylor, SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON TIMES

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Elizabeth I, who ruled Great Britain from 1558 to 1603, continues to fascinate. Never a constitutional monarch, she had very real power, which she employed with relish. The daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, she inherited much of her father's guile without his conspicuous cruelty. But she faced formidable challenges: Religious divisions and political rivals at home and powerful enemies abroad. How did the queen deal with these challenges and transform her puny, debt-ridden kingdom into a major power?

Historian Susan Ronald, a long-time resident of England, attempts to answer this and other questions in her fine book *The Pirate Queen: Queen Elizabeth I, Her Pirate Adventurers, and the Dawn of Empire* (HarperCollins, \$26.95, 471 pages, illus.).

Elizabeth inherited her father's ability. She learned the importance of appointing able advisers and of gaining support from the people. She learned not to allow her emotions to overcome her discretion. Although a staunch Protestant, she sought to steer a course between the extremes of her two predecessors, the Protestant Edward VI and the Catholic "Bloody Mary."

The queen had no grand plan beyond securing her realm. In Ms. Ronald's assessment, although the queen had no money, "she had the courage, conviction, advisors, and 'stomach of a king' to help her with the task ahead."

None of this would have made Britain a great power, Ms. Ronald contends, except for the sea dogs who robbed Spain of its gold and made stolen treasure the basis of the English economy. Spain depended for its power on gold shipped in galleons from Central and South America, and Philip II sought to ban all trade with the New World other than in Spanish vessels.

With Elizabeth's tacit blessing, which took the form of letters of marque, adventurers such as John Hawkins and Walter Raleigh targeted Spanish ships, nominally in reprisal for Spain's seizure of English-owned goods. Under the usual distribution of spoils, the British Treasury was entitled to one-third of all booty taken.

But there were side deals and arrangements; Ms. Ronald writes, "The Admiralty . . . turned plunder into quite a business. Not only did it receive 10 percent on all registered prizes - and it is estimated that only 10 percent of prizes were registered - but the High Court of the Admiralty sold reprisal letters to adventurers . . . sold

plundered goods in order to make 'cash restitutions,' and levied and collected customs."

The queen was not merely a spectator to government-sponsored piracy. She personally approved an attack on Spain's gold fleet in 1568. In Ms. Ronald's words, "The obvious favor that Elizabeth extended to all her adventurers . . . was a clear indication to the Spanish king of the queen's hostile intentions."

Not that Spain was guiltless. Philip II had invited retribution at the hands of the British by supporting numerous conspiracies against Elizabeth.

The conflict between Spain and Britain came to a climax with the dispatch of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Aboard Philip II's 130 ships were some 22,000 soldiers, part of an invasion force against England. Badly damaged in a running fight with Elizabeth's sea dogs, the Armada was dispersed by a great gale that ended Spain's hopes of conquering England.

Queen Elizabeth and her "pirates" had provoked Philip II into a blunder that provided Elizabeth with the security she had long sought. And men like Hawkins and Raleigh had proved that Spain could not defend the sealanes on which it was dependent.

Clare Pettitt's *Dr. Livingstone, I Presume? Missionaries, Journalists, Explorers, and Empire* (\$22.95, 244 pages, illus.) is the latest in Harvard University Press' "Profiles in History" series, which explores "iconic events and relationships of history," starting with what happened and then focusing on the "fascinating and often surprising afterlife of the story concerned."

In the case of journalist Henry Stanley's encounter with missionary-explorer David Livingstone in 1871 at Ujiji on Lake Tanganyika, Ms. Pettitt has a great time recounting every tangential mention of the meeting in song and story while eventually fleshing out minibiographies of both participants.

She basically doesn't think much of either man. She faults Livingstone primarily because he became obsessed with finding the source of the Nile and "put duty before family far too often and for too long," exposing his wife and numerous children to incredible risks. In addition, his scientific and geographical work was "never taken entirely seriously" by the Royal Geographic Society.

And his missionary activities were a flop: "[H]e made only one convert in Africa, who subsequently lapsed. The two missions he led to Africa were misconceived and badly planned, and resulted in the miserable deaths of more than half of the missionaries and their families."

He was more successful as an explorer, but in the end misidentified the source of the Nile. His main contribution, she says, was to record and publicize the massacre in 1871 of hundreds of African inhabitants of Nyangwe by Arab slave traders who had previously supplied Livingstone with vital supplies.

As for Stanley, finding Livingstone, traveling with him in Africa and writing about him made Stanley famous throughout the world. The boy who had started life in Wales as a fatherless waif named John Rowlands, emigrated to America, changed his name and reinvented himself as an enterprising American journalist ended up as a British member of Parliament and friend of Mark Twain.

Ms. Pettitt covers Stanley's checkered career as an explorer who traveled more than 7,000 miles in Africa and became the first European to track the course of the Congo River to its source.

She notes that Stanley's reputation is tarred by his association with King Leopold II's ruthless exploitation of the Congo but suggests that Stanley originally may have persuaded himself "that Leopold's work in Africa was altruistic and formed a fitting sequel to Livingstone's heroic attempts to bring Commerce, Christianity and Civilisation into Africa." She cites recent scholarship showing that Stanley "refused to sign over African land for almost nothing to Leopold's private ownership," arguing that the chiefs owned the soil.

Ms. Pettitt makes much of the historical significance of that storied meeting in Ujiji, claiming that because the encounter took place shortly after the laying of the transatlantic cable, it was the first sensational media event on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition, the handshake "was a fitting symbol of a thaw in Anglo-American relations after all the bitter feeling over the American Civil War."

Stanley's report of Livingstone's "fierce anti-slavery agenda would . . . help to wipe out memories of Britain's support for the South in the Civil War, re-establishing an Anglo-American alliance based on the 'new' values of the American Union - values of democracy and freedom."

The book is an entertaining, yet thoughtful, survey of Victorian adventures in Africa.

John M. Taylor and Priscilla S. Taylor are writers in McLean, Va.