



I

JOHN DEE

*General and Rare Memorials pertayning
to the Perfect Arte of Navigation. . .*

1577

(McK. and F., no. 157)

The woodcut title-page is divided into two compartments; the upper one contains an oval frame enclosing the title which continues: *Annexed to the PARADOXAL Cumpas, in Playne:*/now first published: 24.yeres, after the first/Inuention thereof. Round the border of the frame, the motto, PLVRA : LATENT : QVAM : PATENT (More things are concealed than are revealed). At the top, the royal arms encircled by the Garter and surmounted by the crown. Secured by loops on either side of the outer frame, the Tudor rose. The border of the lower compartment is lettered ΙΕΡΟΓΛΥΦΙΚΟΝ . ΒΡΥΤΑΝΙΚΟΝ (the Hieroglyph of Britain). In the corners are circles each containing a Greek letter, top l., α with lower prime (the stroke), top r., φ, bottom l., ο, and bottom r. ς. the Greek symbol for 6; Greek letters have a numerical value and the three together with the symbol add up to the date when the book was completed, 1576. This was first pointed out by William Herbert, the eighteenth-century bibliographer.¹

The coastal scene which fills the lower compartment is lit by the Tetragrammaton whose rays extend across a cloudy sky in the centre of which shines the sun with human face. To the left, below the sun, is the descending figure of the Archangel Michael, whose name in Hebrew characters is inscribed on a fold of his robe. In his right hand

¹ William Herbert, *Typographical Antiquities . . .*, begun by Joseph Ames, 1785, pp. 66of.

he clenches a raised wavy sword, in his left, a shield blazoned with the cross. He has a fillet round his forehead. On the extreme left on the nightward side is the moon, also with a human face, showing one quarter, and ten stars. In the waters on the right is a great ship with the anchor drawn up. On the hull is the inscription ΕΥΡΩΠΗ (Europe) with the mythological figure of Europa on the bull swimming alongside. The χρ sign, the monogram of Christ, surmounts the two masts. Sitting on a high-backed and canopied throne on the poop deck is the Queen with ELIZABETH lettered on a scroll above. She is crowned and wears a richly patterned dress. She extends her right hand and holds a sceptre in her left. Three gentlemen, her counsellors, all cloaked and dressed alike, stand bareheaded on the deck amidships. Marked on the rudder is the royal coat of arms. A woman in classical dress kneels on the shore facing the ship, her arms outstretched in supplication to Her Majesty; she holds a long scroll lettered, Στολος εξοπλισμενος (a fully-equipped expeditionary force). On her left is a stalk of corn turned head down in the ground; on her right is a skull half cut off by the border. The estuary of a river divides the land on which she kneels. A walled town rises on the rocky headland in the centre. Two round castellated towers flank its great gate; within the ramparts is a church with a central tower and steeple; a scroll twists about the town with the legend, ΤΟ ΤΗΣ ασφαλειας φρουριον (sic) (the fortress of safety). Balanced on the pinnacle, one foot on a rock and the other on a pyramid, is the figure of Opportunity pointing up to her lock of hair with one hand, while with the other she extends a laurel wreath in the direction of the Queen. Near the mouth of the river a ship rides at anchor with three masts, six gunports visible and a flag with four bands flying from a flagpole at the poop. Further upstream is a dinghy tied to the bank with an oarsman sitting in it; in a clearing on the wooded right bank is a soldier, seemingly just landed from the dinghy, grasping a bag of money and conversing with a gentleman who holds out his hand in a gracious gesture; in a second clearing a similar pair, differently attired, walk towards the walled town which fills the bottom right-hand corner; they appear again within its walls. The buildings inside the town include a heavy round tower, two churches with spires, a cupola raised on columns and various other buildings; the wall facing the spectator is pierced by an arched gateway with moat, drawbridge and portcullis. On the left bank are four soldiers holding torches. All four wear morions, two shoulder arquebusses, two hold unsheathed swords. Another helmeted soldier on horseback in the foreground

carries a lance. Beyond these soldiers, out to sea, is a line of four ships riding at anchor; all three-masted, the first with six gunports in view, the furthest away with eight or nine; there is much activity on board. Men are on the look-out in the forecastles and others are carrying what appear to be lances on the decks.

A preliminary drawing ascribed to Dee exists among the papers of Elias Ashmole.¹ It precedes a copy of the manuscript which had been sent by the author to his cousin William Aubrey² and was returned to him at the end of July 1577. This was in time for a final drawing to be made from it for inclusion in the book which was published in September. It measures 19.3 × 18.2 cm. There are various discrepancies between the drawing and the cut; in the drawing there is no margin enclosing the roses and the oval at the top. The sky on the left is very dark and half obscures the stars; there is no one on the ships; the name 'Michael' is written on the sky alongside him and he has a straight sword; the gentleman engaged in a money transaction has his left hand extended; the Queen is shown as very much younger and so are her counsellors who are wearing ruffs, jerkins and doublets while one of them has a hat decorated with feathers; the figure of Opportunity is definitely looking at the Queen; the town, bottom right, has two gates. There are flagpoles instead of *flèches* on the twin towers.

General and Rare Memorials was written in four parts;³ the second part deals with navigation proper. The woodcut title-page is to the first part, the only one to be printed. Its running title is 'The Brytish Monarchie'. After the introductory matter, it consists of a plea by the author to Queen Elizabeth for the creation of a 'PETY-NAVY-ROYALL' distinct from the 'Grand-Nauy-Royall', numbering "Three score Tall Ships, (or more)"⁴ and smaller ones, whose duty would be to police the narrow seas, sweep away pirates both British and foreign, and stop foreigners from fishing in England's waters. A great deal of information is given about both the pirates and the foreign fishermen who came from Flanders, France, Portugal and Spain.

¹ Bodley, Ashmole MS. 1789. See Peter French, *John Dee*, 1972, plate 14.

² Bodley, Ashmole MS. 1789, ff.116-17v.

³ See E. G. R. Taylor, *Tudor Geography 1485-1583*, 1930, p. 181.

⁴ John Dee, *General and Rare Memorials . . .*, p. 53.

graven image' of God the Father. Here it lights the sky whose radiance is increased by the rays of the sun. 'The *Good Angell* to Garde us' with shield and sword is Michael, agent of God's command—he carries forward the divine influence, pushing back the darkness. He is 'the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people'.¹ Thus Britain is identified with Israel. Michael is often represented with the cross of Christ on his shield in works of the Renaissance and earlier.

'Res-publ[ica] Brytanica' is personified by the woman on her knees pleading with the Queen for 'a strong expeditionary force' which 'may helpe us' to be 'a fortress of security'. In the estuary is one of the 'Tall ships' of the new force for which she asks. The flag at the poop is the British ensign which at this date might show four, five or more bands² as distinct from the Dutch which had three bands only. She carries twelve guns; there would also have been mobile cannon so she is well armed and warlike, though at this period there was no difference between warship and merchant ship, except perhaps that the former were more strongly constructed. With her high poop she resembles a warship of 1570, perhaps the *Bull* or *Tiger*.³ The four ships off the coast are of the same build as the one in the estuary, therefore not fishermen. St Michael has raised his sword against them—they are the Queen's enemies—'the Pety forrein Offender'⁴ or 'Pyrats, our own Cuntrymen (and they to no small number) [who] wold be called, or constraigned to come home'⁵ by the 'Pety-Navy-Royall'. It is not possible to say whether they are preparing a raid under cover of darkness, which shields the evil-doer, or whether they have been captured and the armed men on the decks are members of boarding parties. As pointed out above, the darkness is more firmly indicated in the drawing.

There is more night activity on the left bank where soldiers are using their torches to keep watch on the shore. They too are members of the naval force whose scope was to extend to various duties on land, 'For, skilfull Sea Soldiers are, also, on land, far more traynable to all Martiall exployts executing'.⁶ One of the great troubles of the time was shortage of corn and other victuals brought about by hoarders, 'diuelish Greedy

¹ Daniel 12.1.

² See BL, Add. MS. 22047, The second Rolle declaring the Nombre of the Kynge's Maiestys own Galliases [1546], and Bodley, Rawlinson MS. A1 92, 20; both reproduced in Oppenheim, *op. cit.*, frontispiece and plate at p. 130.

³ Oppenheim, *op. cit.*, plate at p. 130.

⁴ Dec, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*

guts, ouer long keping back their Corn from the Common Market';¹ they 'Counterfet a Dearth: And all, for Priuate Lucre onely.'² In the picture hoarded corn is symbolised by the full grain of wheat turned downwards, and dearth or near dearth by the skull. Another of the tasks assigned to the soldiers of the Pety Navy was to commandeere corn and store it in the 'Publik . . . Store-Houses' located in the twenty Pety-Navy-Royall towns on which the force was to be based, whence it would be distributed in times of need.

The couple furthest away from us on the other bank may be an officer from the ship and a counsellor who has handed over the monies necessary for the ship's maintenance; alternatively, it is perhaps the officer who is about to hand over some of these 'liberall Presents and forreine Contributions' made by a foreign captain in gratitude for the succour and 'good and ready Pilotage'³ afforded him by the Pety-Navy-Royall.

Another counsellor accompanies the messenger who must render weekly, 'the Certificat, of the Affaires, and State, of the PETY-NAVY-ROYALL, . . . to our Gracious Soueraign, and her most Vigilant Priuy Cownsailors' and 'Attend and Receiue . . . their will and pleasure'⁴—they go into one of the appointed towns.

The mountainous headland which dominates the landscape is most unEnglish in character and is only summarily connected with the gentle valley below. It is surely intended as an allusion to the Peloponnese. On its steep slopes is set one of the walled places referred to by Gemistus, both a real fortress and to the latterday Englishman a symbol of the security he so urgently needed. In all contemporary maps of the Peloponnese the rocky ranges are shown dotted about with fortified towns and castles so that Dee's impressionistic sketch would have been easily understood; if the city is meant to be Mistra, the great portal with flanking towers would be the Nauplion Gate, of which Dee, who knew many geographers, might have had a description. If it is imaginary the individual features might have been taken from woodcuts such as those in Münster's *Cosmographia*.⁵ The flat domes with *flèches* give the towers a Byzantine flavour.

The pyramid perched on the highest rock of the headland, on

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

² *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁵ Sebastian Münster, *Cosmographia*, 1550, see woodcut at p. 1018.

which Opportunity stands, may according to a later source¹ signify prudence, 'post collectum robur' (after strength has been gathered); so the 'Little Lock of LADY OCCASION, Flickring in the Ayre, by our hands, to catch hold on':² must be seized now, when our 'Freends are become strong' and 'our Enemies, sufficiently weake'.³ The Queen shown severe and dignified in the engraving, is advised by her sober counsellors; she will respond to the gaze of Opportunity, set up the strong expeditionary force and so reap the laurel wreath of victory for which indeed she is holding out her right hand.

Elizabeth enthroned on the ship of Europe represents the sum of Dee's prophetic hopes. The Pety Navy Royall will 'waft and garde our own Marchants Fletes, as they shall pas, and repas betwene this Realm'; [also] 'forrein rich Laden Ships, passing within, or by any the Sea Limits, of her Maiesties Royallty'⁴ so that they would be, 'now, in most Security'; from which it would follow that she like King Edgar, will be 'the True and Souerayn Monarch, of all the Brytish Ocean, enuironing any way, his Impire of Albion, and Ireland'⁵ and as such, with the royally marked rudder under her hand, assume her place as the helmsman of Europe and therefore 'of the most part of Christendome'.

The motto 'Plura latent . . .' alludes to the complicated imagery of the frontispiece, only to be made plain by reading the book and particularly the passage containing the Hieroglyph. Dee thus anticipates the later form of iconographical title-page which was often followed by the Explanation.

¹ F. Picinelli, *Il mondo simbolico*, 1669, p. 661.

² Dee, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

³ See above, p. 53, on the hieroglyph.

⁴ Dee, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 160.