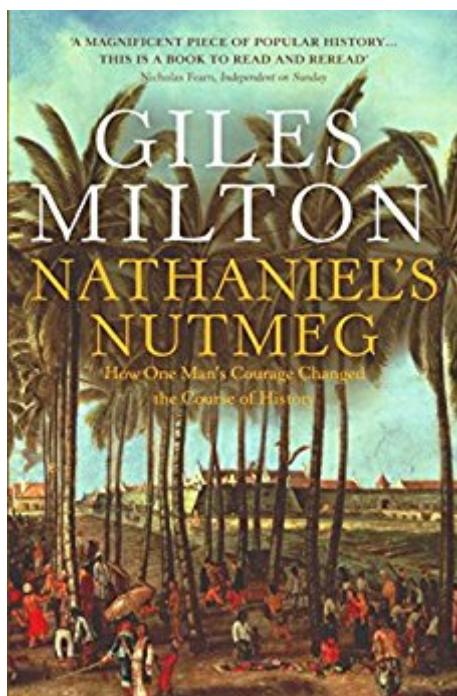


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Nathaniel's Nutmeg: How One Man's Courage Changed The Course Of History



Synopsis

In 1616, an English adventurer, Nathaniel Courthope, stepped ashore on a remote island in the East Indies on a secret mission - to persuade the islanders of Run to grant a monopoly to England over their nutmeg, a fabulously valuable spice in Europe. This infuriated the Dutch, who were determined to control the world's nutmeg supply. For five years Courthope and his band of thirty men were besieged by a force one hundred times greater - and his heroism set in motion the events that led to the founding of the greatest city on earth. A beautifully told adventure story and a fascinating depiction of exploration in the seventeenth century, NATHANIEL'S NUTMEG sheds a remarkable light on history

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Customer Reviews

History - The beginning of the spice trade and the demand for spices in England and Europe. Absolutely fascinating account of the voyage from England to the Spice Islands searching for nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon, pepper. It reads more like a sensational adventure thriller than history; the perilous sea journey to the Banda Islands and Indonesia, the native islanders fending off savage

Europeans in their destructive quest to dominate the lucrative spice trade. Sailors could smell the islands before they came into view. I will never look at my spice cabinet the same. I got out sticks of cinnamon and nutmeg cloves to smell while I was reading. The things we take for granted were more precious than gold in the 17th century. A sailor could retire in comfort if he could bring back one clove of nutmeg

Yes, as an example of historical writing the book has problems. One could argue that it is over-detailed; it was tedious in places. But I wouldn't want too many details to be missing, because early 17th century values and practices are fascinating in their own right, and actions of the early explorers would have been incomprehensible without them. And yes, Milton often circles back in his chronology, goes back and forth in time so that it's sometimes hard to follow. But that is a problem endemic to historical accounts in which several narratives are advancing simultaneously on several different fronts. Better to put up with the reading difficulty than to have the account falsely simplified. And though I did have to mark the map pages and keep referring back to them, there could have been no alternative other than a companion atlas (certainly at additional cost). But the virtues of this book far outweigh its faults and earn it five stars in my estimation. For one who rarely reads history, this account was fascinating on many levels. Milton has organized innumerable first-person accounts, by tradesmen and ship captains and others not given to long descriptives, into this tapestry. Many conclusions Milton allows to emerge for themselves. Life was dirt cheap in the plague-ridden seventeenth century. Crews were nevertheless insanely brave to sail halfway around the world in boats no bigger than yachts. And so many other human traits were in evidence here besides the lust for wealth: curiosity, competitiveness, adventurousness. The means of written expression of even the meanest of sailors are artfully elegant and understated by our standards, interesting in themselves. Milton's cause-effect historical ironies, coming only in the final chapter, made sticking with this account unusually rewarding. I was reminded of an old BBC program "Connections," which specialized in the unintended consequences of discoveries and inventions. History is cool.

Outstanding, for those interested in an adventure story, one of the courage of the individual as well as the power of business and government in the 18th and 19th centuries. Interesting story about the history of the U.S. and of what is now Indonesia, including two islands at almost opposite ends of the globe: one that everyone on the planet knows of now, but which was quite unknown hundreds of years ago, and one that everyone knew about hundreds of years ago but that now no one knows of.

History coming vividly alive as flawed unpredictable and surreal as real life! Painstakingly pasted together from various archiver and records Milton succeeds to render a flowing account of the very complex fluxes and flows of the spice race. Riviting.

An example of how food, fate, and just about everything else can, together, make history fascinating. History teachers, take note: find books like this, and incorporate them into your syllabus to make the subject matter you're teaching come alive for your students.

A very readable narrative of the early quest for the spices in the East by the Portugese, English and the Dutch. Fascinating on 17th politics in England and Netherlands and the different approaches of these countries to control the spice trade. Ironic to read that the Dutch traded Run for New Amsterdam (Manhattan).

While I thoroughly enjoyed the book, I found the title totally misleading. There were many people who played a part in establishing the spice trade of which "Nathaniel" was only one. Even the book only touched on him briefly.

History is strange, really strange, cruel, driven by strange motives, often profit, but also entertaining and so surprising: who would have believed that a couple of square miles of volcanic island in the middle of the Indonesian archipelago would supersede the value of Manhattan (New Amsterdam)? It did!!!

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