

Sir Francis Drake's attack on St. Augustine, 1586

Introduction

Five years after leading the first English circumnavigation of the globe in 1577–1580, Sir Francis Drake led a raid against Spanish settlements in the Caribbean including Santiago, Santo Domingo, and Cartagena, as well as St. Augustine (in present-day Florida). This engraving, by Baptista Boazio, was made to accompany a book describing Drake's 1586 expedition, *A Summarie and True Discourse of Sir Francis Drake's West Indian Voyage* (published in 1588–1589). The illustration depicts the attack of Drake's fleet of twenty-three ships on St. Augustine, which was captured and destroyed on May 28–30, 1586. Although Boazio was not on the voyage, he worked from firsthand accounts. The engraving is the earliest known surviving view of a New World city north of Mexico.

Drake operated as a privateer under a "letter of marque and reprisal" issued by Queen Elizabeth I. His operations were part of the long-standing and escalating tensions between Protestant England and Catholic Spain. The Boazio illustrations and *A Summarie and True Discourse of Sir Francis Drake's West Indian Voyage* were published following the English victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588.

Questions for Discussion

Read the introduction, view the three images, and review the sheet with notations lettered A–P. Then apply your knowledge of world and American history to answer the questions that follow.

NOTE: The definitions asked for in Question 1 may be obtained from a reputable history site on the Internet. In addition, access to a map of the southeastern region of the United States, the Caribbean, and the West Indies will be helpful in answering Question 2.

1. Sir Francis Drake is described as a "privateer" operating under a "letter of marque and reprisal." Research the meaning of these terms and then use the definitions to describe Sir Francis Drake's responsibilities and motives.
2. Locate St. Augustine in relation to North America, the Caribbean, and the West Indies. Use that knowledge to explain why Queen Elizabeth I ordered a raid upon that town. In addition to geographic consideration, what other reasons did England have for attacking Spanish territory?
3. According to the information provided in the notation sheet, how well prepared were the Spanish for a possible attack?
4. Carefully review the three maps. From the information they provide, put together your own description of how the English attacked St. Augustine.

Sir Francis Drake's attack on St. Augustine, 1586

Image



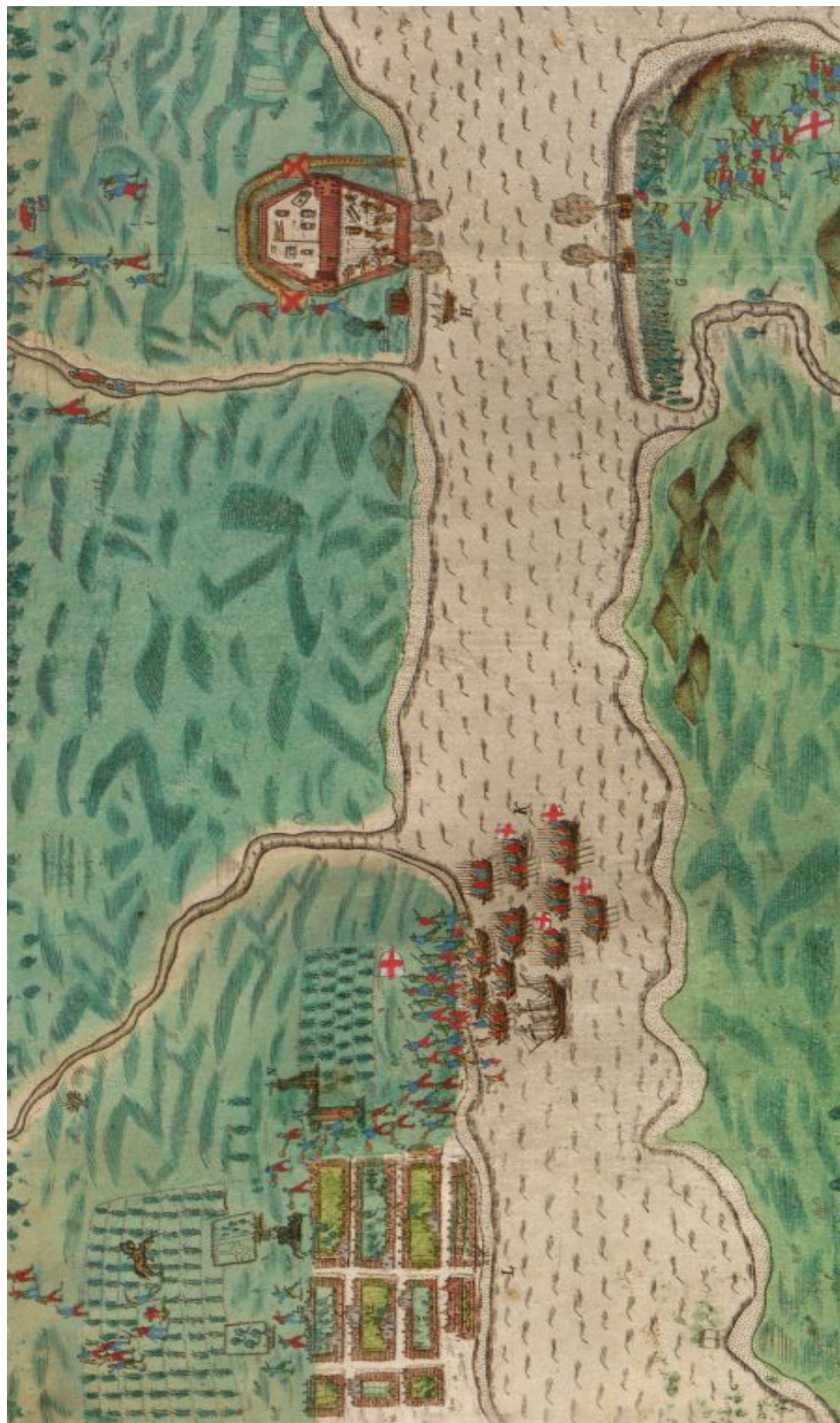
Baptista Boazio, St. Augustine, 1588–1589. (Rare Books and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress, G3291.S12 s000 .B6)

Sir Francis Drake's attack on St. Augustine, 1586



Detail of landing party and attack on the Spanish Fort

Sir Francis Drake's attack on St. Augustine, 1586



Detail of the attack on St. Augustine

Sir Francis Drake's attack on St. Augustine, 1586

Another version of the print in the State Archives of Florida contains the following legend:

- A. The place where the whole fleet came to anchor.
- B. The place where the Pinnaces* and Shipboats did set us on shore.
- C. A Beacon or high scaffold standing on the sand hills, wherein the Spaniards did use to discover the ships at sea.
- D. The way which our army marched along the sand by the sea side towards their fort.
- E. The Place where our Pinnaces put our ordinance on land.
- F. A low plain or meadow ground through the which our troupes passed to go towards the woods right over against the Spaniards fort.
- G. A wood growing hard by the river side, having between it and the river side a high bank of sand, in which wood our men encamped themselves, and in the said great bank of sand, being fitted for the purpose was placed also two pieces of ordinance to beat the Spanish fort, which was done with such expedition as they were planted and discharged twice or thrice the same day we landed, meaning the next day to have had more ordinance brought, and to have it planted on the same side of the river wherein the fort is, whither Master Carleill our Lieutenant general was minded the same night to transport himself & some part of the army, to lodge himself in some trenches close by the fort, but the Spaniards perceiving the approach abandoned the place before the day.
- H. A Pinnacle which the Spaniards had lying hard by their forte in the little river.
- I. The fort which the Spaniards had made of the bodies of Cedar trees, they placed therein some fourteen great and long pieces of artillery, which at our arrival there to the sand bank played upon us, the forte was called Saint John de Pinos which afterward we burned.
- K. Our Pinnaces as they rowed up the river being all full of men, who because the way was not passable were feign to embark them selves to take the town of Saint Augustine, which being won was at our departure burned to the ground.
- L. The town of Saint Augustine where dwelled a hundred and fifty Spanish soldiers.
- M. The town house.
- N. A high scaffold for a watchman.
- O. The Church.
- P. The lively portraiture of a fish called the Dolphin,** which is of three feuerall colours: the

Sir Francis Drake's attack on St. Augustine, 1586

top of his back and all his fins be blue, all his sides are of light green, the belly white, his head almost all blue, the tail one part blue, and the lower part green, he is very pleasant to behold in the sea by day light, and in the night he seemeth to be of the colour of gold, he takes pleasure as other fishes do in swimming by the ship, he is excellent sweet to be eaten, this fish lives most by chasing of the flying fish and other small fishes, they are caught most commonly by our mariners with harping irons or fishgigs.

* pinnaces—small boats, often used for communication between a ship and soldiers on land

** dolphin fish, or mahi mahi; this illustration was based on sketches by John White, later governor of Roanoke