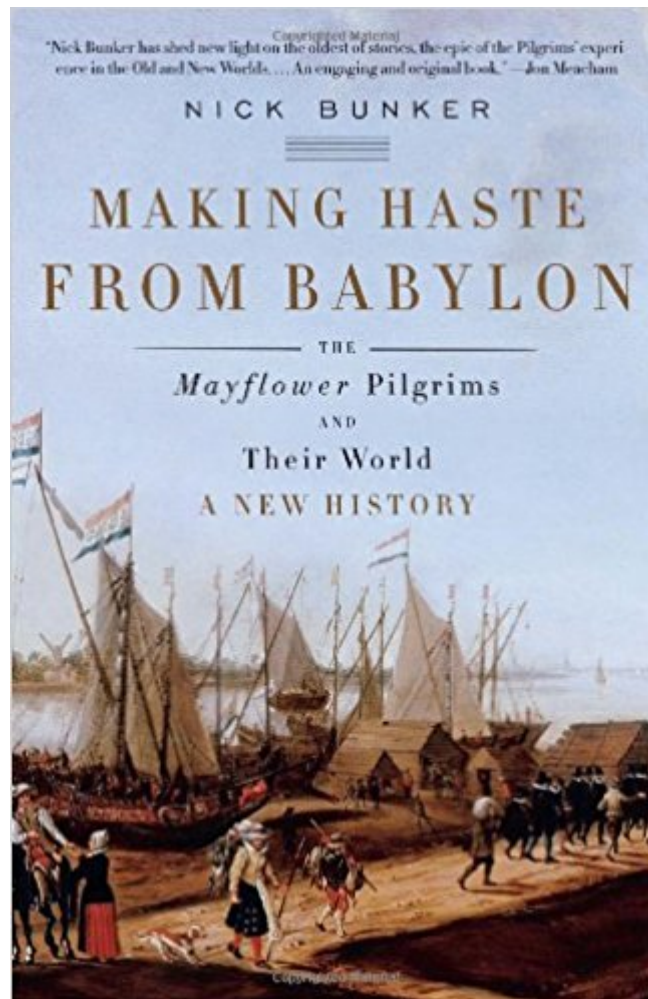


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Making Haste From Babylon: The Mayflower Pilgrims And Their World: A New History



Synopsis

At the end of 1618, a blazing green star soared across the night sky over the northern hemisphere. From the Philippines to the Arctic, the comet became a sensation and a symbol, a warning of doom or a promise of salvation. Two years later, as the Pilgrims prepared to sail across the Atlantic on board the Mayflower, the atmosphere remained charged with fear and expectation. Men and women readied themselves for war, pestilence, or divine retribution. Against this background, and amid deep economic depression, the Pilgrims conceived their enterprise of exile. Within a decade, despite crisis and catastrophe, they built a thriving settlement at New Plymouth, based on beaver fur, corn, and cattle. In doing so, they laid the foundations for Massachusetts, New England, and a new nation. Using a wealth of new evidence from landscape, archaeology, and hundreds of overlooked or neglected documents, Nick Bunker gives a vivid and strikingly original account of the Mayflower project and the first decade of the Plymouth Colony. From mercantile London and the rural England of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I to the mountains and rivers of Maine, he weaves a rich narrative that combines religion, politics, money, science, and the sea. The Pilgrims were entrepreneurs as well as evangelicals, political radicals as well as Christian idealists. *Making Haste from Babylon* tells their story in unrivaled depth, from their roots in religious conflict and village strife at home to their final creation of a permanent foothold in America.

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Customer Reviews

An excellent book. Nick Bunker's "*Making Haste from Babylon: The Mayflower Pilgrims and Their World: A New History*" offers a truly different look at one of American history's best-known and

least-understood groups - the Pilgrims of Plymouth Plantation. Usually, upon hearing "Pilgrims" the first thought is of a bunch of tediously pious guys in funny hats eating turkeys and pumpkin pies with Indians. And even when rescued from such mythology, the Pilgrims are usually presented in books as somehow being quite apart from everything and everyone else, religious refugees with a hazy background, suddenly cast ashore in an isolated, distant wilderness. What Bunker does, based upon deep and meticulous research in primary sources seldom utilized before, is to thoroughly connect the Pilgrims with a vastly complex net of Jacobean religion, politics, commerce, and social customs. He explores who the Pilgrims were and how they arose and how they fit into the larger picture of the Puritan movement in England. For those who want a narrow, tightly focused, comprehensive study of the voyage of the Mayflower and the first years of the Pilgrims in the New World, this is not the book. But those who want to see the Pilgrims in a new light and appreciate the complexity of their experience, "Making Haste from Babylon" is perfect. I have seen one review that criticized Bunker for being too digressive, but I would say that the reviewer missed the point - this study is about the world that produced the Pilgrims and the English politicians and businessmen who supported their venture in the New World, the same people who in succeeding years supported the larger Puritan emigration that transformed New England into a solid, dynamic extension of British presence. Bunker pays particular attention to the interplay between the Pilgrims and the native peoples of eastern New England. He cites two elements of this interaction which perhaps had the most profound consequences: beavers and cattle. Beaver skins obtained through trade with the Indians eventually provided a strong economic incentive for continued (and expanded) English mercantile support of the Pilgrims (and their Puritan successors). Cattle provided "engines" for plowing and fertilizer for improved agricultural yields, but also required radically different land use that put Pilgrims and Indians on a collision course. Nick Bunker never loses sight of the importance of the physical world in shaping the Pilgrim experience. Over several years, the author visited almost every remaining site relevant to the Pilgrims, both in England and in America, exploring not only like these places were like four hundred years ago and are like today, sometimes buried under later development, sometimes almost untouched. If allowed a rating of six stars, I would give this book a six.

History, we know, is not an isolated story. It's affected by an amalgam of social, economic, political, and religious events even the smallest of which can change the world. Take the Stewart kings of England and their love of fashionable beaver hats. Who would think a couple foppish rakes could change the history of the world? But indeed they did with the help of a couple of wars that

eliminated trading sources and a small group of religious idealists seeking freedom. *Making Haste From Babylon* by Nick Bunker is so very much more than a history of those Pilgrims. It transports you to the 16th century England that created them. The accession of James I and his intolerance for the Puritan Separatists drove them to escape to Holland. Curiously, the punishment for Separatism was banishment, but it was illegal to leave the country. Robert Cecil, Secretary of State, sensed trouble looming regarding the jurisdiction of the Church over civil matters so it was easier to just let them go. Henrys II & VIII had quite enough of that, thank you very much. The Separatists settled in Leiden and found themselves tied to an urban economy which gave them no social freedom, no education for their children and fears of civil unrest. They worked endlessly in poor conditions with little to eat and exposure to industrial disease. The return of Holland's war with Papist Spain threatened even the religious freedom they sought. While they worshiped freely in Holland, they had to go into exile beyond the Atlantic to establish their ideal community of economic liberty, social equality, self governance and just a little bit of England. Nick Bunker's use of primary resources and his expanded scrutiny of secondary sources make this a truly scholarly work. In turn, his journalistic style makes it so very easy to read. He delivers a meticulous exploration of the lives of the Pilgrims before they ever set sail. The author investigated and explored all the English locations associated with the Pilgrims on foot or on a bike--at least twice! He delved through archives and church records that make your eyes water just thinking of the 400 years of dust he stirred up. Exploration of U.S. locations, Holland, La Rochelle & Ulster exhibit a thoroughness bordering on obsession. It's not until the last quarter of this book that we see the life of the Pilgrims in New England. Even then, we pass over the trials and tribulations and focus how they persevered to establish a community capable of producing the return on investment that their investors sought. The Pilgrims in their Calvinist zeal invented the model environment that nurtured the new markets which opened up a mere eight years after they arrived and ensured the survival of those who followed them to America. If you want something to pick up where Mr. Bunker leaves off, I highly recommend Nathaniel Philbrick's *Mayflower*. But read this first, it's a comprehensive work of genius and a delight to read.

This should not be the first book one reads about the Plimouth Plantation. It should be the second book you read. That's because this book does not tell you very much that tells the story of the colonists. In fact, it is almost as if the author went out of his way to avoid writing very much that tells the story. He assumes that you know it well. However, in this book you will find a great deal of background that answers the critical question of WHY things happened. This is rarely seen material on this side of the Atlantic. For example, there was mob violence in Leiden close to where Bradford

and other Separatists lived in 1617 - and that would help contribute to their desire to leave Europe altogether. Some have criticized this book because of its many threads - I rejoice in the threads because they provide the background I need to understand why things happened the way they did.

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