



Walter Raleigh's "History of the World" and the Historical Culture of the Late Renaissance

Nicholas Popper

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Imprisoned in the Tower of London after the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, Sir Walter Raleigh spent seven years producing his massive *History of the World*. Created with the aid of a library of more than five hundred books that he was allowed to keep in his quarters, this incredible work of English vernacular would become a best seller, with nearly twenty editions, abridgments, and continuations issued in the years that followed.

Nicholas Popper uses Raleigh's *History* as a touchstone in this lively exploration of the culture of history writing and historical thinking in the late Renaissance. From Popper we learn why early modern Europeans ascribed heightened value to the study of the past and how scholars and statesmen began to see historical expertise as not just a foundation for political practice and theory, but as a means of advancing their power in the courts and councils of contemporary Europe. The rise of historical scholarship during this period encouraged the circulation of its methods to other disciplines, transforming Europe's intellectual—and political—regimes. More than a mere study of Raleigh's *History of the World*, Popper's book reveals how the methods that historians devised to illuminate the past structured the dynamics of early modernity in Europe and England.



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