Basic Sources on Commodore Perry and the Opening of Japan followed by Staff, Credits, and Acknowledgements

Basic Primary Sources

Perry, Matthew Calbraith. *Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan, performed in the years 1852, 1853, and 1854, under the Command of Commodore M. C. Perry, United States Navy, by Order of the Government of the United States.* Compiled from the Original Notes and Journals of Commodore Perry and his Officers, at his request, and under his supervision, by Francis L. Hawks, D.D., L.L.D. (Washington, D.C.: Published by Order of the Congress of the United States, 1856–1858). Three quarto volumes.

This now rare publication is the lavish basic official account of the Perry mission. Volume 1, published in 1856 and of greatest general interest, is extensively illustrated with fine lithographs and woodcuts, many of which are reproduced in the Essay. Volume 2 contains the colored plates of birds and marine life that are reproduced here. Volume 3, of virtually no interest today, consists entirely of astronomical charts prepared during the voyages. An abridged one-volume commercial trade edition of the Narrative was also published in 1856. This includes many of the same graphics, but the quality of reproduction is inferior to the original.


Throughout his mission to Japan, Perry dictated his observations and thoughts to an aide who wrote them down. This voluminous account was a major source for the official Narrative written by Francis Hawks. This printed version of the Perry journal includes numerous illustrations in both color and black and white—including lithographs that did not appear in the official Narrative and a small selection of Japanese graphics.


This journalistic account of the mission coincided with the publication of the first volume of the official Narrative and took its text, and a few illustrations, from that source. It captures how the expedition was presented to the general public.

A sample of Preble’s lively first-hand observations appears in the text of the Essay, describing the inebriated exchanges that took place at the formal banquet Perry held for Japanese commissioners on his flagship *Powhatan.*


Williams, an American missionary based in China, accompanied Perry as “first interpreter of the expedition.” This lengthy published version of his journal was edited by his son.


Heine, in his mid-twenties and born and educated in Germany, was the major artist who accompanied the Perry expedition. Most of the illustrations in the official Narrative are based on his paintings and sketches.


Morrow accompanied the Perry expedition to collect, record, and illustrate botanical specimens. Unfortunately, his illustrations were never published and most of them have been lost.


A concise (184 pages), illustrated account of Japan, based on existing literature in English and published on the very eve of Perry’s arrival in Japan in 1853. This is an excellent primary source for pre-Perry European and American images of Japan and the Japanese.

This three-volume illustrated text is a translation from the German of the most famous Tokugawa-period foreign account of Japan, written by a German physician and scholar who resided in the Dutch enclave at Dejima from 1690 to 1692. It remained one of the best-known foreign sources about Japan into the 19th century.


This is a complete translation of Hyoson Kiryaku, the account told to Japanese officials by John Manjiro, a shipwrecked young man who was rescued by an American whaler and lived in the United States for many years before returning to Japan in 1851. Manjiro’s account, issued in a very few copies, included colored illustrations by himself and Kawada Shoryo, the scholar who transcribed Manjiro’s account for Japanese officials.


A rare view (in translation) of the Perry mission as seen by Japanese officials. The author of this account, which focuses on official interactions during the 1854 visit, is unidentified. Many exchanges between Perry and the Japanese side are given in the form of direct quotations.

**Basic Secondary Sources**


This basic biography of Perry, by one of America’s most distinguished naval historians, covers the Japan mission in detail and includes interesting illustrations from the Japanese side.


A solid account of the Perry expedition.


Chapters one through five present an unusually lively and engaging account of the Perry mission and its background.

A short, popular overview.


A useful, lengthy account of Japanese contacts with and views of the United States prior to the Perry expedition.

**Catalogs & Other Illustrated Sources**


Although included in a “junior library” series, this volume contains an unusually broad and interesting selection of illustrations from the Japanese as well as American side.


This little book offers a composite version of the “Black Ship Scroll” that is reconstructed in this unit. This scroll exists in several full or partial variations. The version reproduced in its entirety here is owned by the Honolulu Academy of Art. Statler’s book alternates scenes from this Honolulu scroll with almost identical scenes from an incomplete (and cut up) version in the possession of the Japan Society of San Francisco. The value of the book is enhanced by useful translations of the Japanese texts on the scroll by Richard Lane.


This small catalog (entirely in Japanese) reproduces some of the holdings of this important collection of “Black Ship” (kurofune) artwork held by the Ryosenji Temple in Shimoda. Shimoda was one of the two treaty ports...
opened to foreigners by Japan in 1854, and a famous lithograph depicts American troops on parade in front of Ryosenji Temple. Many of the Japanese graphics included in this unit were provided by this source.


This is the bilingual catalog of a joint U.S.-Japanese exhibition at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts. It includes several excellent artworks on the Perry mission from the Peabody-Essex collection—most of which have been included here.


This catalog contains many black-and-white photographs of gifts received from the Japanese by the Perry mission and now stored in the Smithsonian, along with itemized lists of gifts exchanged.


This catalog, published by the Historiographical Institute of the University of Tokyo, accompanied an exhibition held at the Tokyo National Museum in December 2001 and January 2002. Of particular interest is the eight-panel folding screen titled “Assembled Pictures of Commodore Perry’s Visit,” which is reproduced in great detail in the Essay. The catalog includes an appendix of English captions for all illustrations.


This rare, short, illustrated text (a copy is held at Harvard University’s Yenching Library) is largely in Japanese but includes a brief English introduction. It was issued by Hibata Sekko, the son of Hibata Ohsuke, who prepared detailed illustrations at the time of Perry’s 1854 visit. The black-and-white illustrations are fascinating, and many later emerged in colored versions by different Japanese artists—including some of the paintings pasted onto the outstanding “Assembled Pictures of Commodore Perry’s Visit” folding screen at the Historiographical Institute at Tokyo University.
Yokohama Kaiko Shiryokan [Yokohama Archives of History].

This Japanese archive holds many materials pertaining to the opening of treaty ports in the years following the Perry mission. Illustrated publications pertaining to Perry include Perry Raiko kankei Shiryo Zuroku [The Japan Expedition of Commodore Perry, 1982] and Shiryo ga Kataru Yokohama no Hyakunen [A Century of Yokohama As Told in Documentary Materials, 1991].

Perry-Related Websites


This is an exceptionally detailed website compiled by George C. Baxley, stamp and book seller, and constantly updated: "These web pages are devoted to books, literature and lithographs pertaining to the 1852 to 1854 US Expedition to Japan and the China Seas by Commodore Matthew C. Perry. Here you will find material on early Japan, Lew Chew (Okinawa), China, Hong Kong and Macau."

http://www.us-japan.org/jsnc/virtualjapan/BSS/bssmain.htm

This site features scenes from an incomplete variant version of the 1854 "Black Ship Scroll" painted in Shimoda that is reconstructed in full in "Black Ships & Samurai." UCLA Professor Fred G. Notehelfer provides an accompanying commentary for teachers and students.

http://dl.lib.brown.edu/japan/index.html

Under the title "Perry Visits Japan: a visual history," this site reproduces an unusual and little known Perry scroll in the collection of the John Hay Library at Brown University. The scroll is anonymous, and it is not clear when it was painted. It offers perspectives not seen in better known depictions of the mission.


Paul Mellon’s Personal Library at the University of Virginia includes five large-scale, colored illustrations by William Heine, including "Passing the Rubicon" and "Excercising the Troops" in Shimoda.
"Drifting Toward the Southeast: The Story of Five Japanese Castaways." This site is based on the 2003 translation of Hyoson Kiryaku, John Manjiro's account of his experiences in the United States as told to the officials of the Shogunate in 1852.

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"Black Ships & Samurai" was developed by Visualizing Cultures at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and presented on MIT OpenCourseWare.

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[Permissions are still being sought for graphics from the collections of Carl Boehringer, DeWolf Perry, and Paul Blum.]

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