Wherof are now First Publish'd from His Own Manuscripts

by James Harrington

James Harrington (1611-1677) was a political theorist in the seventeenth century. Although he left Trinity College in Oxford without a degree, Harrington was an accomplished private scholar.\[1\] *Commonwealth of Oceana*, written in 1656 and included in this compilation, presented an image of an idealized world in which the British gentry social class had absolute power.\[2\] Harrington’s portrayal was powerful; he notably attacked Hobbes\[3\] for what he saw as an ineffectual distinction between authority and power.\[3\] Harrington was a wealthy man with much to gain from social connections, but he still argued for what he called a return to “ancient prudence.”\[4\] By this, Harrington meant that the government should not be composed of men, but of legal doctrines and rules.\[5\] His theories on equality were reflected in both the American and French revolutions.\[6\]


Evidence for Inclusion in Wythe’s Library

A version of Harrington’s *Oceana* is included in both Dean’s Memo\[7\] and Brown’s Bibliography\[8\] based on a reference in William Clarkin’s biography of Wythe. In discussing Thomas Jefferson’s education under Wythe, Clarkin states “[w]e do know that Jefferson studied ... Harrington’s *Oceana,*” but Clarkin provides no source of corroborating evidence.\[8\] Brown suggests the first (1656) edition, *Commonwealth of Oceana* based on the copy Jefferson sold to the Library of Congress.\[10\] The Wolf Law Library followed the recommendation of Dean’s Memo and purchased the first (1700) edition of collected works, *The Oceana of James Harrington, and His Other Works*.

Description of the Wolf Law Library’s copy

Bound in contemporary blind calf, reback in period style. Purchased from Rulon-Miller Books.

Images of the library’s copy of this book are available on Flickr. View the record for this book in William & Mary’s online catalog.

See also
Frontispiece.

References

3. Ṫ. Höpfl, "Harrington, James."
4. Ṫ. Ibid.
5. Ṫ. Ibid.
6. Ṫ. The Columbia Encyclopedia, s.v. "Harrington, James."
7. Ṫ. Memorandum from Barbara C. Dean, Colonial Williamsburg Found., to Mrs. Stiverson, Colonial Williamsburg Found. (June 16, 1975), 11 (on file at Wolf Law Library, College of William & Mary).

External Links

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