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Salt peter: The Mother of Gunpowder

By David Cressy

Oxford University Press. Hardback. Book Condition: new. BRAND NEW, Salt peter: The Mother of Gunpowder, David Cressy, This is the story of salt peter, the vital but mysterious substance craved by governments from the Tudors to the Victorians as an 'inestimable treasure.' National security depended on control of this organic material - that had both mystical and mineral properties. Derived from soil enriched with dung and urine, it provided the heart or 'mother' of gunpowder, without which no musket or cannon could be fired. Its acquisition involved alchemical knowledge, exotic technology, intrusions into people's lives, and eventual dominance of the world's oceans. The quest for salt peter caused widespread 'vexation' in Tudor and Stuart England, as crown agents dug in homes and barns and even churches. Governments hungry for it purchased supplies from overseas merchants, transferred skills from foreign experts, and extended patronage to ingenious schemers, while the hated 'salt petermen' intruded on private ground. Eventually, huge salt peter imports from India relieved this social pressure, and by the eighteenth century positioned Britain as a global imperial power; the governments of revolutionary America and ancien regime France, on the other hand, were forced to find alternative sources of this treasured substance. In the end, it...



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