Robin Whittaker[1]
reads
Anian Straits
(Lulu Publishing, 2018)
by Van Fox Lloyd

VAN FOX LLOYD'S *ANIAN STRAITS* IS A CURIOUS WORK. Named after the semi-mythical passage believed to run between Asia and North America to the Arctic Ocean (now referred to as the Bering Strait), *Anian Straits* is essentially a modernized retelling of the stories contained in two ships' logs available as edited texts already in the Hakluyt Society series (and available both online and as Routledge reprints on demand).[2] The author herself says her work is a 'faithful, modern rendition of two seventeenth-century accounts from voyages . . . as recorded in the 1894 Hakluyt Society publication by Miller Christy'. In addition to modernising spelling throughout, Fox Lloyd has added an introduction with some light annotations, biographies, and bibliographical information to enhance the fuller portrait of seventeenth-century Arctic exploration.

The greater potential interest to Coleridgeans is that Fox Lloyd also claims that these voyages inspired the writing of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. The author does not really argue this case, however, other than to include a pamphlet published originally in 1890 by Ivor James, *The Source of the Ancient Mariner* (Cardiff, 1890). James's argument was rehearsed many years ago, and Livingston Lowes addresses the issues squarely in his *Road to Xanadu* (Boston, 1927). In many places in the text (10 index entries), Lowes acknowledges that Coleridge would in all likelihood have read the published version of Thomas James's Log, which was first published in 1633, but is more likely to have found the same information in Churchill's *A Collection of Voyages and Travels . . . in Six Volumes* (1744–46) or John Harris's *Navigantium atque Itinerantium Bibliotheca or a Complete Collection of Voyages and Travels* (1744). An article in the *Athenaeum* in 1890 established that both of these were in the Bristol Library at the time STC was using it.

Lowes and other scholars have offered helpful background. Lowes claims, 'The little book (now very rare) of Mr. Ivor James referred to above is an attempt to show that Captain James's *Voyage* is the chief (indeed almost the only) source of "The Ancient Mariner".' It is an extremely interesting performance, but fails completely to makes its case—as, indeed, any simple explanation of highly complex phenomena is doomed to do. That was recognised at once by the reviewer in the *Athenaeum* . . . But Mr. James has shown conclusively that Coleridge drew certain details from his ancient

---

[1] Robin Whittaker is a retired professional archivist, formerly Archives Manager and Diocesan Archivist for Worcestershire. He is a long-time member of the Friends of Coleridge, and currently its Membership Secretary.

[2] The volumes in question are numbers 88 and 89 of the Hakluyt Society, First Series, *The Voyages of Captain Luke Foxe of Hull and Captain Thomas James of Bristol in search of the North West Passage in 1631–32*, ed. Miller Christy (London, 1894).

townsman's narrative, and some of the passages which I have just quoted in the text are among them' (496–97). Notably, James Dykes Campbell also refers to the possibility of STC's indebtedness to James in the notes in his edition of *The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1893). In the 'Collected Coleridge' edition of the poems, J. C. C. Mays says, 'The poem incorporates and reflects the very wide range of C's reading, as described by John Livingston Lowes and others. The fact is of great importance, but it should be kept in perspective, and thus no attempt is made here to record the parallels and possible sources in Aeschylus, Boehme, Chaucer, Dante, Bryan Edwards, Falconer, Gower, Herodotus, Iamblichus, Captain James—and so on through the alphabet to Virgil and Gilbert White. . . . there are debts of every kind and degree of significance, many of them unconscious' (*PW* 1.1.367).

Indeed, this is a very old argument that I don't think needs revisiting, as nothing substantially new is said to interpret these works or add to the ways that previous scholars have indicated their possible influence on Coleridge's great poem. The main residual interest is that this may be one further way that readers can access Ivor James' book, alongside some other relevant literature, without searching for such volumes separately online. Yet the publication of this work is a reminder that Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner' continues to draw interest in his sources, including those books of travel associated with polar exploration.