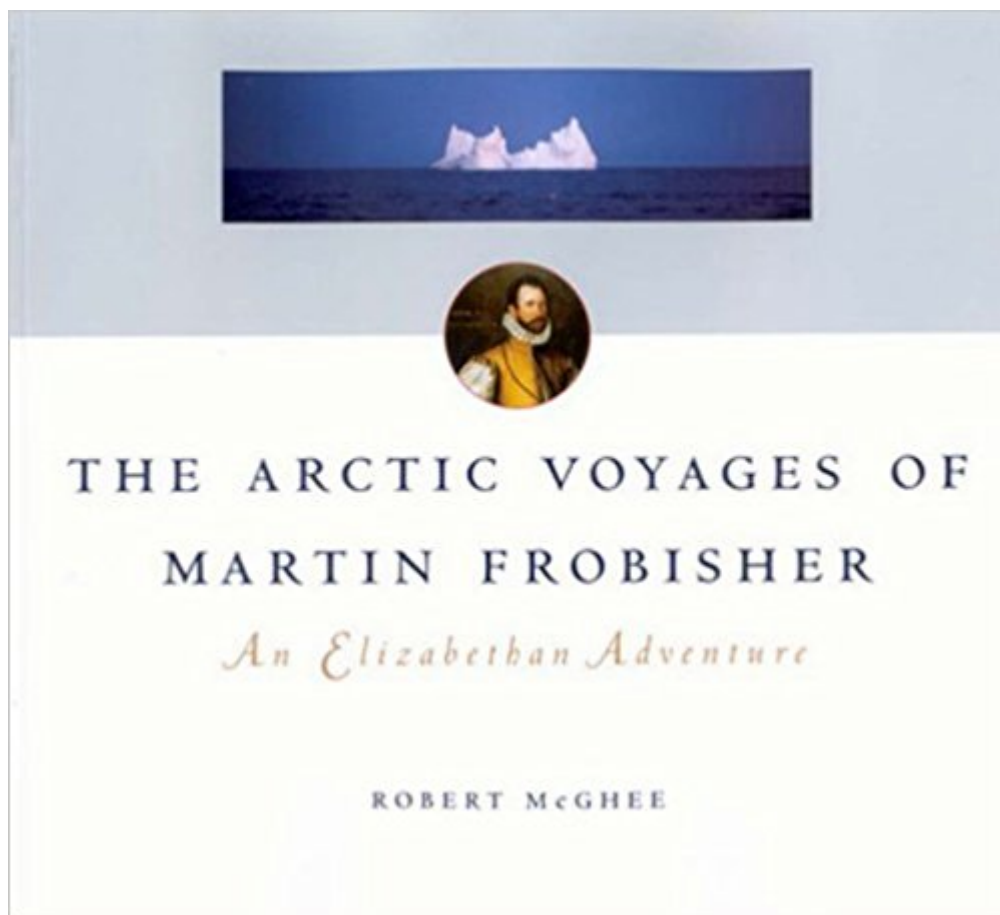


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The Arctic Voyages Of Martin Frobisher: An Elizabethan Adventure (McGill-Queen's Native And Northern Series)



Synopsis

From the book: "They were five weeks out of England, driving through a storm on the icy edge of the world, when a sudden blast knocked Gabriel on her side. The helmsman tried frantically to turn the tiny ship into the wind that pinned it down, but the rudder had lifted clear of the surface and took no purchase. Water poured over the side, roaring into hatches as the wind drove the vessel across the waves and the crew clung frozen in despair. Only the captain acted, scrambling along the almost-horizontal upper sides, casting off lines to spill wind from the sails, forcing the crew into action to cut away the mizzenmast and the broken foreyard, then preventing them from doing the same to the mainmast. Finally Gabriel rose sluggishly, heavy with seawater but steering slowly off the wind. A tangle of broken rigging and sodden sails, she wallowed before the storm through the remainder of the day and all of the following night, while the captain restored order and set men to pumping the ship dry." Under orders from Queen Elizabeth I, Gabriel's captain B privateer and adventurer Martin Frobisher B took up the search for a northwestern route to Asia. A few days after enduring the storm of 14 July 1576, Frobisher sighted the most easterly outlier of Arctic North America and for the first time England became aware of this vast northern region. Over the next three summers it would be the scene of an adventure involving the fruitless search for a northwest passage, the first attempt by the British to establish a settlement in the New World, and the first major gold-mining fraud in North American history. Over 1,200 tons of rock were mined from Baffin Island and shipped to England, where they were found to contain not an ounce of gold. Yet Frobisher's claim of possession established British interest in northern North America and was the first step in the eventual establishment of British sovereignty over the northern half of the American continent. Using reports from the men who participated in the venture, details preserved in the oral histories of the Inuit, and archaeological information recovered from the sites of Elizabethan activities on Baffin Island, Robert McGhee describes Frobisher's expeditions and offers new insights into this audacious venture. The story ends on an ironic note B the capital of the new Territory of Nunavut, which restores to the Inuit a measure of the sovereignty claimed for England by Frobisher, lies at the head of the bay named after him, where over four centuries ago the English first ventured into Arctic America.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This starkly written and fast-moving book by McGhee, curator of Arctic archaeology at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, compares favorably with two recent publications, James McDermott's *Martin Frobisher: Elizabethan Privateer* and Robert Ruby's *Unknown Shore: The Lost History of England's Arctic Colony*. Despite his having started out on the land-locked dales of Yorkshire, Frobisher spent much of his life at sea. His Arctic expeditions were bracketed by a stint as a privateer a pirate for the Crown and a knighthood after battling the Spanish Armada. Commissioned in 1576 to find the Northwest Passage to China, Frobisher returned to London claiming to have found not only the way to the East but a treasure trove of valuable minerals on what is now Baffin Island. Neither turned out to be true. After three voyages, numerous travails, and skirmishes with Inuit, the ore was retrieved but turned out to be without value, and Frobisher was disgraced. Elizabethan financier Michael Lok and the court "wizard" John Dee also play major roles in and add vibrant color to McGhee's story. McGhee finishes by drawing parallels to the Bre-X gold scandal of the 1990s; these contemporary similarities show how Frobisher illustrates a type driven by ambition, greed, and a love of adventure. Recommended for all libraries. Gail Benjafield, St. Catharines P.L., Ont. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Robert McGhee's *The Arctic Voyages of Martin Frobisher* conclusively demonstrates that human venality and cupidity four centuries ago was well up to modern standards. McGhee casts new light upon one of the most controversial of all arctic ventures - a colossal mining scam perpetrated by Martin Frobisher and his associates in the late sixteenth century - which McGhee tellingly likens to the infamous Bre-X fraud of our own times." Farley Mowat

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