



The Navy, the Company, and Richard King: British Exploration in the Canadian Arctic, 1829- 1860

Hugh N. Wallace

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This book presents a fresh perspective on the epic drama of arctic exploration in the early and mid-nineteenth century, the period that witnessed the search first for a Northwest Passage to the Orient and then for the expedition led by Sir John Franklin which had been lost in that search. Drawing upon a wide range of scientific, technical, social, psychological, and medical data, Hugh N. Wallace surveys and evaluates the activities of the various expeditions organized by the Royal Navy and the Hudson's Bay Company. He views exploration in terms of a metropolitan country, Great Britain, discovering a hinterland region, Canada's Arctic. He is concerned with the problems of initial and follow-up discovery, the choice of entry routes and the techniques of travel along them, the impact of advancing technology upon ships and men, and he shows how these challenges were met with varying degrees of success by naval and civilian explorers. Much emphasis is placed upon the personalities and incentives of those who led the parties and those who sent them out. A central figure is Dr. Richard King, a London surgeon who made a journey to the region in 1833-35 and thereafter became one of the leading advocates of light, indigenous, and inland or coastal means of travel in the Arctic, as distinct from the heavily equipped, deep-sea approach of which Franklin's ill-fated expedition remains the classic example. Rebuffed by the Admiralty, King assumed the role of chorus in a developing Greek tragedy. Had his views been adopted, Professor Wallace contends, Boothia Peninsula might have been fully delineated and a Northwest Passage discovered by the early 1840s, and the Franklin disaster thereby averted; later, King's accurate predictions as to where the lost sailors might be found were similarly ignored. Instead, arctic exploration became an exercise in elaborate multiplicity which eventually led, at great cost and after long failure and frustration, to the discovery of one-half of the Canadian Arctic and three Northwest Passages, as well as the evidence of Franklin's fate.

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