

# NOVA DANIA

## THE QUEST FOR THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE

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*With considerable envy, the seventeenth century King of Denmark, Christian IV, watched the scramble to discover the elusive passage over Polar regions to lay claim to the riches of Cathay. This article will follow the fate of Christian's early seventeenth century New World foothold, Nova Dania, through the cartographic record, speculating on what and when the Danes might have known about the then frozen northwest passage. An essential piece in this story is the amazing tale of Jens Munk, a merchant adventurer in the King's service.*

For the cyber traveler, opportunities have reached a new zenith with Google Earth (FIGURE 1). I find myself cruising at 35,000 feet over the Alps, the Arabian Desert, up the Amazon, and to one of my favorite armchair destinations, the Arctic. With your Google joy stick, you are able to glide with ease through the newly open waters of the Northwest Passage.

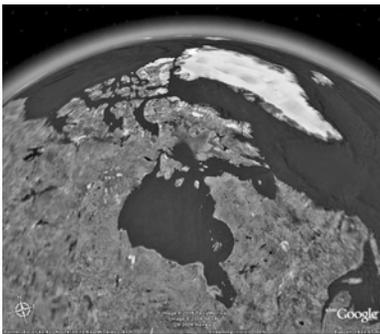


FIGURE 1. NORTHERN CANADA AND GREENLAND. GOOGLE EARTH, 2006

Before the days of satellite imaging, we were content with and fascinated by maps, maps of unknown exotic places, maps showing nations or would-be empires. For us today, old maps become way stations on voyages into the past.

Several years ago, Inger Johansson, a history teacher in Gothenburg, Sweden, e-mailed me some fuzzy images of a map that appeared to be from the seventeenth century. What had intrigued Inger—and was soon to intrigue me as well—was the anomalous place name of *Dania Nova*. She had never heard of such a place and asked had I. No, I hadn't, but there it was, barely legible, anchored to the west coast of Hudson Bay.

Thankfully, the image of the cartouche she had sent separately showed the map to be the product of the Dutch cartographer Justus Danckert, and was published in the 1680s (FIGURE 2). But from where did Danckert derive the name and location of *Dania Nova*? Was there such a place and, if so, was it mapped by others? Was its history recorded? Or was it a merely a flight of cartographic fancy? I decided to try to uncover the mystery and, in the process, embarked on a fascinating historical voyage into the past, using old maps as my way stations.



FIGURE 2. JUSTUS DANCKERT'S *TOTIUS AMERICAЕ DESCRIPTIO*, AMSTERDAM, CA. 1680. VESTERGOTLANDS MUSEET, GOTHENBURG, SWEDEN

### PART I - MAPPING NOVA DANIA

With addictive zeal I searched map after map until I finally spotted it again: this time with the name reversed into *Nova Dania* (New Denmark). And there was more. *Mer Cristian*, *Mare Christianum*, or *Christians Sea*, depending on the language appeared in what is now Fox Basin. Later, *Nova Dania* abandoned its Latin pretensions and became *Nouvelle Danmarque* and, as time went on, its location began to wander—north into Buttons Bay, west into the interior, and south—until it faded away as the *Riviere Danois ou Riviere Churchill* by 1778.

Curiously, *Nova Dania* made it onto British maps less often. Could this have been due to rival claims? Might New Denmark have had a legitimacy that the English preferred to ignore? The migrating names leave a slim paper trail with few clues to finding the custodians of *Nova Dania*: New Denmark.

In the flush of the early sixteenth century, as Spanish gold reached Europe, exploration focused on higher latitudes. Dreams of New World conquest sparked the willing bold and brave to take risks for great rewards. The mystical, misty Ultima Thule had tempted fortune hunters since the days of Pythias the Greek, and vague unconfirmed rumors told of a route over the polar ice that would lead the way to the East and the lure of her treasures.

In 1523, Giovanni Verrazzano, under the flag of France, sailed from Dieppe in search of the fabled Northwest Passage to Cathay. It appears that he explored the east coast of North

America from Florida to Newfoundland before supplies ran out and forced his return to France.

Willem Barents, the Dutch explorer, circled north, crossing the Arctic Circle three times between 1594 and 1597, in trying his luck at finding a Northeast Passage into the Pacific Ocean. But the wind-swept, silent, ice choked waters proved invincible and Barent himself was claimed by the angry sea. His crew survived the break-up of the ship and managed to return home to tell the story.

The eyes of Elizabethan England then turned west. Encouraged and supported by Sir Humphrey Gilbert, Martin Frobisher sought both a Northwest Passage and gold in the barren tundra in the years between 1576 and 1578. Long clouded in northern myth, the lure of a fabled passage through the Strait of Anian captured the dreams of the intrepid. Frobisher failed to find the way west, and his claims of rich sources of northern gold proved many years later to be mostly an investment scam. John Davis continued the search to no avail in 1587, unable to conquer the ice.

Henry Hudson had high hopes for reaching Cathay. His first effort in 1607 led him due north past Spitzbergen until he was defeated by the ice nearly six hundred miles from the North Pole. A second try in 1608 took him around North Cape where he was again confounded by the ice in the Barents Sea near the Russian archipelago of Novaya Zemlya. On a westward attempt in 1610 he succeeded in finding his way into the inland sea that bears his name, but his mutinous crew deprived him of any glory—or of ever finding Cathay—when they abandoned him to die on the polar ice.

Almost immediately thereafter, Dutch Cartographer Hessel Gerritszoon released *Tabula Nautica*, a map showing Hudson’s discoveries (FIGURE 3). That map shows a twin to today’s James Bay to the west, penetrated by an anomalous non-existent peninsula that persists for many later generations of maps.



FIGURE 3. HESSEL GERRITZSOON *TABULA NAUTICA*, AMSTERDAM 1611. [WWW.HENRYDAVIS.COM](http://WWW.HENRYDAVIS.COM)

A flurry of interest and investment followed Henry Hudson’s demise. In 1612, Thomas Button reached the west coast of Hudson Bay and, in the curiously contrived maps of the day, became a contender for prominence with Button’s Bay nudging Hudson Bay to the east. William Gibbons and Robert Bylot gave up on finding any entrance to the west and the Strait of Anian through Hudson Bay, but Bylot later joined William Baffin in trying to locate a more northerly route.

The outpouring of reports by Champlain were rendered into maps in 1616 and 1632, showing the same curious peninsula that Gerritszoon shows; we may presume Champlain used *Tabula Nautica* as his source for depicting the region. Note that Hudson Bay is simply noted as the *Baye ou ont hiverné les Anglais* (Bay where the English wintered) (FIGURE 4).

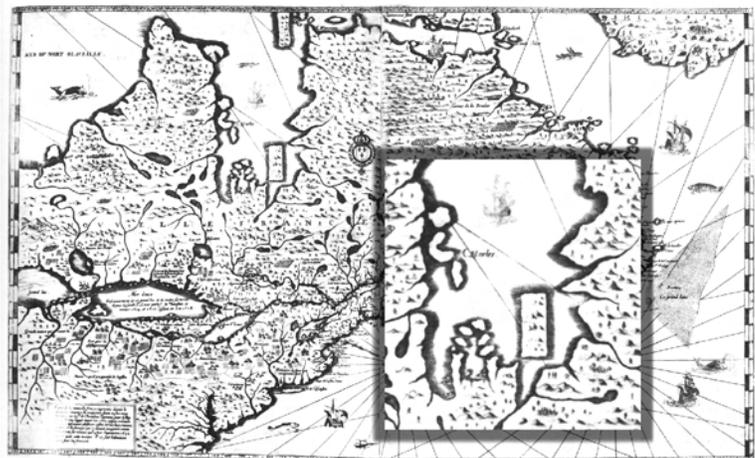


FIGURE 4. SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN, *CARTE DE NOUVELLE FRANCE*, 1632. [WWW.USM.MAINE.COM/EDU-MAPS](http://WWW.USM.MAINE.COM/EDU-MAPS)

The 1631–32 travels of Luke Foxe and Thomas James left us with little more than new names for already discovered places. While the English cartographers championed English discoveries, the French took a wider view, and here we begin to find evidence of Nova Dania.

Nicholas Sanson’s 1650 map *Amerique Septentrionale* (FIGURE 5) leads us through the *Detroit de Hudson* into a southerly portal into the *golfe du Hudson*. Continuing west, we cross *Mer de Cristiane ou Hudson* into Button Bay. Here we find *Nouveau Danmarque* on the far west, with *Port de Munck* the gateway to the interior which bleeds off into the nebulous *Mer Glacial*. Sanson’s 1656 release (FIGURE 6) is essentially the same map, but now *Mer Cristiane* stands alone and apart from Hudson Bay. Following Sanson’s lead, Duval, in 1653 – 1677, reissued updated versions of the 1632 Champlain map as part of a compendium of all of the latter’s work (FIGURE 7). But Duval surprises us with the unlikely addition of *Mer Cristian* along with Fox

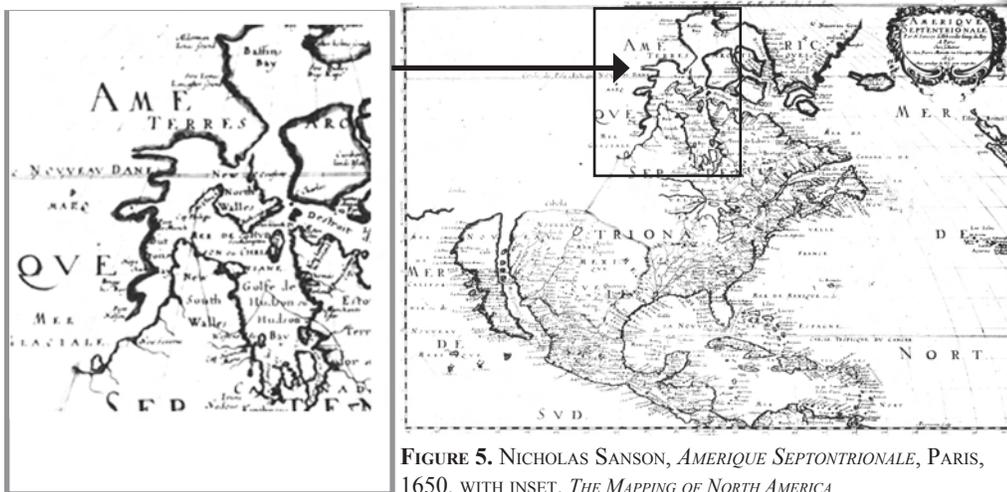


FIGURE 5. NICHOLAS SANSON, *AMERIQUE SEPTENTRIONALE*, PARIS, 1650, WITH INSET. *THE MAPPING OF NORTH AMERICA*

basin, *Nouvelle Danmarque*, and *Port de Munck*. By 1677 another added curiosity is a faint line with another enigmatic label snaking across the watery trail: *Tenu Route de l'an 1665 pour aller en Japon et la Chine* (the route taken in the year 1665 to go to Japan and China). Who or what might that have been? The plot thickens. Who is the Christian worthy of the name of a new found sea, and who or what is Munk's Port?



FIGURE 6. NICHOLAS SANSON, *LA CANADA ET NOUVELLE FRANCE*, PARIS, 1656. *THE MAPPING OF NORTH AMERICA*

While French and English strife escalated again, playing itself out in the New World between the 1660s and 1750s in the French and Indian Wars, the search for the Northwest Passage was temporarily forgotten. But the mapmaker's ateliers stayed busy.

By the time Guillaume Delisles (also spelled de'Lisle and Del Isles) published *Amerique Septentrionale* (FIGURE 8) in 1708, Hudson Bay is approaching the size and shape that we all recognize. The mysterious *Port de Munck* is still shown, but Christian's Sea and New Denmark are not to be found. Scherer's map from 1701 (See FIGURE 13, NEXT PAGE) boasts *Nova Dania*, *Mare Christianum* and *Muncks Port*, along with a bear hunt from reindeer drawn pulks.

As late as 1731, the map of Churchill's voyages, published in London, places *New Denmark* near *Munk's winter place* with *Cristians Sea* and *Cristians Strait* (FIGURE 9). Hudson Bay is simply shown as *New Sea*. A detail from Matthew Carey of 1809 shows an accurate Hudson Bay with *New Demark* dwarfed by *New North Wales*, while *Munk's first*

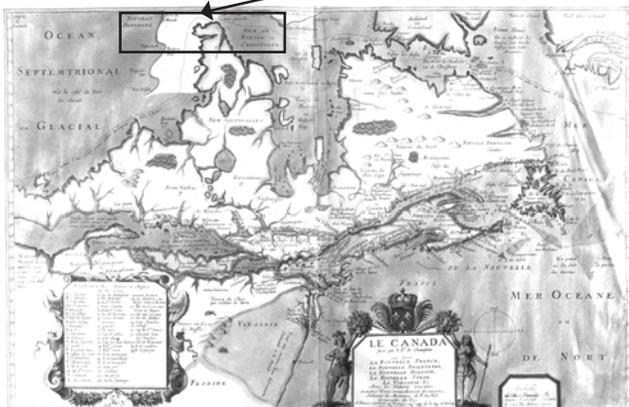
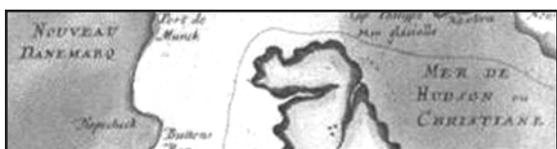


FIGURE 7. SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN, DUVAL ISSUE *CARTE DE NOUVELLE FRANCE*, 1677. *THE MAPPING OF NORTH AMERICA*

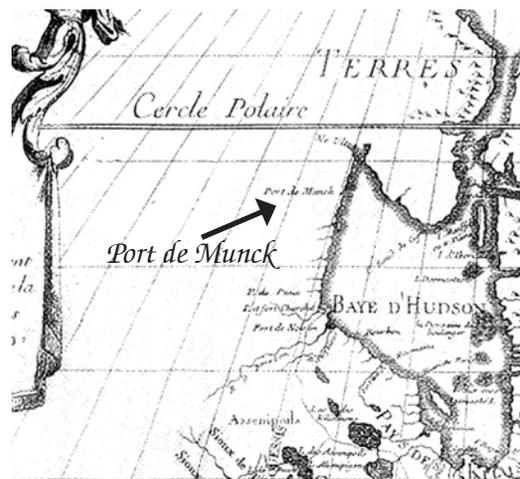


FIGURE 8. GUILLAUME DE LISLE (DEL ISLE) *CARTES DU CANADA OU DE LA NOUVELLE FRANCE E GROENLANDIA*, PARIS, 1708. SHOWS "NOUVEAU DANEMARQ", "MER CHRISTIANE". *THE MAPPING OF NORTH AMERICA*



FIGURE 9. CHURCHILL, MAP OF GREENLAND 1773 SHOWS “NEW DENMARK”, “CRISTIANS SEA” AND “WHERE MUNK WINTERED (JOURNAL OF JENS MUNK). SOURCE UNKNOWN

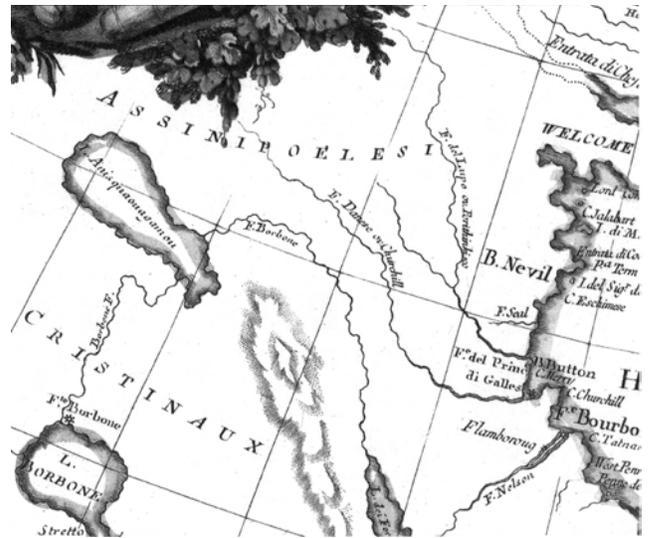


FIGURE 11. ANTONIO ZATTA, LA BAJA D'HUDSON, TERRA DI LABRADOR E GROENLANDIA, 1778, VENICE. WWW.DAVIDRUMSEY.COM



FIGURE 10. MATTHEW CAREY, 1809. WWW.DAVIDRUMSEY.COM

wintering place is barely legible (FIGURE 10). That same year, the Venetian Antonio Zatta, intrigues us with a cryptic *Assinipoelese Cristinaux* cleft by the *R. Danois ou R. Churchill* (FIGURE 11). Jaillot, in 1694, relocated *Nouveau Danemarca* to the *Mer Glaciale* (FIGURE 12).



FIGURE 12. A.H. JAILLOT, AMERIQUE SEPTENTRIONALE, PARIS, 1694. HTTP://ALABAMAMAPS.UA.EDU/HISTORICALMAPS/UNITEDSTATES/1700.HTML

The search for the Northwest Passage began anew in the early years of the nineteenth century, finally opening its doors and divulging its secret in the early twentieth. But our quest must now return to the search for *Nova Dania*. We begin by answering the question, “who was Munk?”



FIGURE 13. HEINRICH SCHERER, REGIONUM CIRCUM POLARIUM LAPPONIAE ET GROENLANDIAE NOVAE ET VETRI NOVA DESCRIPTIO GEOGRAPHICA, 1701. ARCTINVENTER.ULAPLAND.FI

## PART II - THE SAGA OF JENS ERIKSEN MUNK

Christian, son of Frederik II, King of Denmark and Norway, began his tumultuous reign in 1596 as Christian IV. Nineteen years old and puffed with the confidence of youth, the young king looked beyond the Kattegat and across the North Sea, dreaming the same dreams of a vast empire in the New World and the riches of Cathay that consumed Elizabethan England, the Holland of Rembrandt, and France's Henry IV. But by 1628 Christian IV—trapped in the throes of the Thirty Years War—was a defeated, humbled man, brought down by the curse of greed and arrogance that lust for power inevitably claims. Denmark was defeated in war, crippled with debt, and inundated by floods. The population was decimated by plague and starved by spiraling inflation.

By that same year, Jens, son of Erik Munk, was also defeated and humbled. Near death and old for his fifty years, this bastard son of a disgraced and ruined Danish nobleman had shared the aspirations of the age of exploration. He, too, had dreamt of wealth and fame, but most of all, of reclaiming his father's lost title and lands. Jens Munk's goal had been within his grasp so many times, only to be lost in each. His ambitions won him few friends and many enemies, not the least were the privileged young men of the Danish aristocracy. His fate was a death unnoticed in June of 1628, his fame having evaporated, surviving only as a name on a few obscure old maps: Munk Haven and the place of Munk's over-wintering.

An odd kind of legal Catch Twenty-Two led to Jens' father's fall. In haughty Denmark, to be of the peerage one had to be of the peerage born. If not, the right of inheriting title and fiefs was forfeited. Erik Munk had clawed his way into nobility by opening and securing Arctic fishing grounds and trade routes in the Barents and White Seas. But Erik was faced with a conundrum: Anna Bartholomeidatter, the mother of Munk's two sons, was a commoner. If he married her, his sons had no chance of inheriting his title (bastards enjoyed rights of inheriting titles in Denmark at that time, but not the children of commoners). If he did not marry, he would be seen as living in sin as an adulterer, with risk of harsh punishment. He chose the latter, and that proved to be the perfect excuse for his enemies to rid themselves of a threat to their power and a chance to confiscate his holdings for their own gain. In 1586, Erik Munk was thrown in prison, never to emerge alive.

While Anna struggled to make ends meet, her youngest son looked out toward the sea. He would one day, he knew, go the New World. His chance came in 1591 when eleven year old Jens signed on as cook's boy on a Dutch ship setting sail for Oporto in Portugal. Once in Portugal he signed off the ship and presented himself to Senhor Duart Duez, one of the

city's richest merchants. Quick to catch on, and using a newly acquired facility for speaking Portuguese, Jens soon moved from working in the warehouse to the office. But Munk had another goal, and with Senhor Duart's blessing and letter of recommendation to his brother Miguel in Bayos do Totos dos Santos, Brazil, he once more watched the land fade from the deck of a departing ship.

Jens Munk was on his way to the New World to seek out Senhor Miguel. Unfortunately, their ocean paths crossed; Don Miguel had returned to Portugal. A disappointed Jens reluctantly turned back. His fate worsened when on the east bound trip his ship was attacked and captured by the pirate Ribolde. In a surprise moment of compassion, the pirate allowed nine of the captives to be put ashore to die in

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the jungle, rather than being shot on deck. Munk and four others survived a jungle ordeal and found their way back to Bayos do Totos. This time he found work and spent six years honing his knowledge, skills, and powers of observation while preparing to become a merchant adventurer. At last he

was ready to return to Copenhagen and claim the title and lands he thought was his due.

On arriving in Denmark in 1598, he learned that his outcast father had hanged himself in Drugholm prison four years earlier, his body laying under the gallows like that of a common thief. Jens Munk collected a silver tankard and some discarded clothing that was his inheritance and began his life anew.

Meanwhile, in thinly veiled anonymity as Captain Christian Frederiksen, young King Christian IV tried his hand at exploration in Arctic waters, working his way to the top of Siberia. Sea adventures in that giddy age of privateering and piracy not only included fishing, trading, and exploring, but also capturing foreign vessels of any kind—legally or not—and winning the spoils. Captain Frederiksen was ready for any and all of those adventures.

In 1599, the King's Frigate *Victor* cleared Copenhagen into the Kattegat. Joined by seven more ships, they rounded North Cape and soon captured two English fishing vessels, but their victory was short lived. The *Victor* ran aground, and the English released the vessels in exchange for helping the *Victor* break free and for sharing their knowledge of arctic waters. Other than the capture of a Dutch ship and the venture's secret agenda of scouting the Barents Sea in searching for the Northeast Passage, this voyage amounted to little more than a drunken, rowdy treasure hunt. Although the expedition failed, Christian's dream of finding the arctic route to Cathay was not yet defeated.

So it was, that in these tumultuous times, Munk's fate and the promise of Denmark's glory lay to the north. Munk dared think of following the wake of his father's voyages into

the Arctic for fishing, trade, and the hope of discovering the Northeast Passage, but knew he would need to accumulate the resources to nourish his ambitions. Between 1601 and 1605 he made nine voyages coasting south doing other men's bidding. Finally he achieved his goal, becoming a ship's owner and captain. At first he engaged in the Icelandic cod trade, but soon sniffed greater rewards further north. In 1608, Munk formed a partnership with another adventurer, Jens Hvid. The next summer, their two ships, stocked with trade goods and whaling gear, set out for the Siberian islands of Novaya Zemlya in the Barents Sea. But the winter had been severe, and as they pressed eastward into the White Sea the expanding ice bore down on the ships. Fearful of possible danger ahead, Hvid dropped anchor at Archangel while Munk continued sailing toward Novaya Zemlya. Day after day, Munk's ship was shrouded in fog and was soon trapped in an endless desert of ice. The ship struggled against the onslaught until the rivets began to fail, one by one, and the hull broke apart. The ship was sinking. Skipper and crew crowded onto the ship's boat, with a jury-rigged sail and such supplies as they could save or carry. In gloomy silence they sailed, or mostly rowed for a full month of sunless days until they reached Archangel and Jens Hvid. The voyage home on the Hvid's vessel was uneventful, but the shipwreck and salvation of Munk and his crew was remembered in the Palace in Copenhagen.

Now destitute, luck courted Jens Munk in the form of a call from King Christian IV, who commissioned Munk to set sail again the next summer, this time headed for the island of Vaygach, a presumed gateway to the China Sea. With *Angelibrand* and *Rider* flying the royal standard, Munk's aspirations were again stymied by ice. The promised whales, seals, and native trade failed to materialize, and the coveted route east was blocked. The King's ships returned with their holds filled with stockfish.

The see-saw of Munk's fortunes tipped once more. The perpetual seething territorial tension between Denmark and Sweden had erupted again, and Christian IV was preparing for war. Soon after Jens Munk was commissioned as a Captain in the Royal Navy on March 1, 1612, the Kalmar War broke out in earnest. Munk served his King well, distinguishing himself as a brilliant commander at the siege and capture of the fortress of Elfsborg on the Swedish coast. Finally, it seemed, opportunity had come for reward—the long coveted privileges of nobility—but not for a commoner, and not for the bastard son of Erik Munk. The Danish aristocracy had a long memory and was prone to visit the sins of the father upon the son. Such was the lot of the Munks.

In 1614 and 1615 we again find Munk in Arctic waters, this time at the center of a washbuckling adventure, the capture of the ruthless pirate Juan Mendoza. The prize was the pirate's treasure. Munk's original mission was to secure the Barents Sea for Danish fishing and trading along the Siberian

coast. However, in a dare-devil move, he captured the pirate ship, crew, and Mendoza himself, and took the prize, which became the source of new wealth for Munk.

Jens Munk then turned his attention to maritime commerce as a partner and investor in whaling ventures. His management skills blossomed, and he excelled in his new position, made handsome profits, and gained respect at court. When Christian's attention turned toward the East Indies, the King chose Munk to command an expedition sponsored by the newly formed East India Company. After planning the voyage, preparing the ships, selecting the crew, and making ready in all other respects, Munk was by-passed again. He was inexplicably replaced by a young, inexperienced aristocrat.

The vision of finding a Polar passage was like a magnet that both drew and repulsed the King and the merchant-adventurer in their shared quest. They developed mutual respect in what was an otherwise strained relationship. Fate at last set them on the same course. Backed by his king, and supplied with the king's frigate *Unicorn* and sloop *Lamprey* and a crew of sixty-four including two physicians and a minister, Jens Munk departed Copenhagen May 19, 1619. Along with his blank log book, he no doubt had a copy of Gerritszoon's 1612 map of Hudson's ill fated venture in 1611, as well as all available lore surrounding the experiences of Thomas Button before him. After clearing the Kattegat into the North Sea and skirting the Shetlands and Faeroes, the tiny fleet raised the coast of Greenland on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June. Battered by fierce gales, foul weather, and mounting ice they rounded Cape Farewell and set the rudder for Davis Strait.

They inched their way westward dogged by fog, cold, and interminable ice: ice in the water, ice on the rigging, ice clinging to the men's beards. After two months, the pale Arctic sun appeared glistening on a vast expanse of open water. But it was not yet Hudson Bay, merely the small bay named for Frobisher at the southern end of what is now Baffin Island. Coursing into Hudson Strait, strong currents and "five fathom" tides were an added obstacle to the ice that relentlessly engulfed them. Munk's reputation as leader and sailor with an astute sense of "emergency management" is reflected in this journal dated July 13.

"...By late afternoon on the thirteenth our position became perilous when the ice pressed us hard on all sides, making it impossible for us to either advance or retreat. The officers agreed that the best thing to do under the circumstances was to fasten the two vessels together and let them drift with the ice and so, trusting God's merciful assistance, that was done. While we were drifting around in this manner, a great block of ice displaced the main knee of the *Unicorn*. This knee, which supports the beakhead of the vessel, was fastened with six large bolts. I immediately set all my carpenters to

straightening it, but because it was so large and heavy, and because it was set outside the hull, they were unable to do anything with it. I therefore had the ship turned so that the side of the bow to which the knee had been displaced drifted against the ice. I then worked the rudder so that the ice could shove the knee back into its original position. This was done as perfectly as if twenty carpenters had been engaged in refitting it; all that remained were to adjust the bolts that were bent.”

Their first and only encounter with the natives occurred a few days later (FIGURE 14). The meeting was friendly, and all were pleased with the exchange of gifts, iron goods from the Danes, and birds and seal meat from the natives. The next day *Unicorn* and *Lamprey* were once more choking in the ice. It was August before they broke free, only to be deluged by snow. Inching westward, they used the ice-bound time to hunt, and named their newfound landings Reindeer Sound, Rabbit Sound, and Auk’s Cape Island after their prey.

At last in early September they were coasting the far side of Hudson Bay searching for a protected harbor for rest and, given the approach of winter, most probably to prepare for wintering-over before continuing west. Anchored in a



FIGURE 14. MUNK’S CREW HUNTING AND MEETING NATIVES. *JOURNAL OF JENS MUNK*

cove some miles inland on what is now the Churchill River, and accompanied by fog, snow, hail, and high winds, the exhausted and ailing crew rested on September 7<sup>th</sup>. Warmed by the captain’s good wine, plenty of beer, roasted polar bear meat, cloudberries and gooseberries, they toasted Nova Dania, Munk Haven. By the end of September, the wintering-over site had been selected, and the ships secured and protected, but not without difficulty. Jens Munk records in his usual matter of fact way:

“[September 19]...During the night the newly formed ice cut into the hulls of the vessels, leaving

gashes that were almost two fingers deep.... At one point she [the *Unicorn*] was caught by the ice and driven on a rock, where she sprang such a leak that the carpenters barely had time to repair it before the next high tide.

“[September 27]...Although the ship was moored with four hawsers, the pressure of the ice was so great that they began to snap under the strain.... By the time the flood [tide] returned, the vessel had sprung a number of leaks and had taken on so much water that it took almost two thousand strokes to pump her dry.”

Nonetheless, all able bodied men were plying axes, building a dock and piers and breakers to thwart the ever encroaching ice. By October 1, “everything was completed... with both of the vessels protected against ice and storms.” Along with hunting excursions, the carpentry projects continued into November (FIGURE 15). As the winter light faded, hints of scurvy and other signs of malnutrition began to creep silently among the crew. The first sailor was buried at Munk’s Haven on November 21<sup>st</sup>.

On December 10<sup>th</sup>, Munk meticulously records his measurements and other data on an eclipse of the moon. This must have unnerved the men, for this was surely a sign of the God’s displeasure, or at least of bad luck to come. On the



FIGURE 15. IMAGINED CONSTRUCTION AT MUNK HAVEN. *JOURNAL OF JENS MUNK*

twelfth, *Lamprey’s* surgeon died. In all northern countries, the winter solstice and the promise of lengthening days ahead was celebrated at Christmas. The little colony at Munk Haven was equally anxious to welcome the New Year, and prepared with hope in their hearts for the Year of our Lord, Anno 1620.

“On Christmas Eve I gave the men some wine and strong beer, which they had to boil as it too was frozen. Although the men drank as much as they

could hold, which made them quite hilarious, no one was at all offensive.

We celebrated the Holy Christmas Day solemnly, as is a Christian's duty, with a good sermon and a mass. After the sermon we gave the priest an offertory, as is the ancient custom, each according to his means. There was not much money among the men, but they gave what they had. So many of them gave white fox skins that the priest had enough of them to line his coat. A life long enough to wear it was not granted him.... At the time the crew was in good health and brimming with merriment."

But the arrival of 1620 was anything but merciful to the colonists in Nova Dania. The already intolerable ice and cold bore down even more fiercely while the even more insidious enemy—dreaded scurvy—felled one man after another. Although hunting prey remained fairly abundant, all sources of life-giving vitamin C had vanished. With their mouths too swollen and teeth too loose, the dying men were only able to sip some broth. Progressively, as winter turned toward spring, Munk's journal becomes a catalogue of the dead and the ever more difficult burials. For April 3<sup>rd</sup> he enters, "...there was such a fearfully sharp frost that none of us could get out of bed; nor did I have any men left to command, for they were all laying under the hand of God....Next, the weather was so bitterly cold that it was impossible for anyone to dig a grave to bury the dead bodies that were still in the ship." By April 5<sup>th</sup>, "...the number of healthy men was so small that we could scarcely muster a burial party." And by May, the eleven men still alive were too weak to bury the dead.

On June 4 only four were left, two stranded on shore and the cook's boy who would soon lay dead on the floor beside Munk's berth. Munk had no hope now, but that God would end his misery as he wrote:

"Inasmuch as I have no more hope of life in this world, I request for the sake of God that if any Christian should happen to come this way, they bury my poor body in the earth, together with the others that are lying here. Their reward they may expect from God. I request further that this, my journal, may be sent to my most gracious Lord and King (for every word that is found herein is true) in order that my poor wife and children may obtain some benefits from my great distress and miserable death. Herewith, goodnight to all the world: and my soul into the hands of God.  
Jens Munk."

But such was not God's plan for Jens Munk. Four days later he crawled out of his berth onto the deck for it mattered not to him where he died. There, he saw the two shore-bound

men who to his amazement were still alive. Living by sucking the roots of any bit of green that sprouted in the approaching mid-summer sun, the three survivors gained strength and soon added birds and fish to their diet. They discovered that the sloop *Lamprey* too, had survived afloat and was apparently seaworthy.

On Sunday, the 16<sup>th</sup> of July, three battered and broken men set the sails of the *Lamprey* and coursed east. The home-bound voyage was no less arduous than the outbound had been. Still plagued by ice, fog, snow, and cold, Munk wrote fewer details in his journal. The three men seized from the jaws of death were leery, pensive, and careful as they retraced their route and cleared Davis Strait into the Atlantic. At long last, after surviving a September hurricane and with only half an anchor, they made landfall in Norway on September 20, 1620.

If God had spared Jens Munk's life, fate was not finished toying with it. Despite the safe arrival home of Munk and his two men, sixty-one Danish men—common sailors, surgeons, the priest, carpenters, cooks and cook's boys, and the only wellborn nobleman, Mauritz Stygge—were dead. The King's frigate *Unicorn* lay trapped in ice half way around the world. His sloop *Lamprey*, like the three survivors, sat battered and torn. The Northwest Passage remained illusive, masked in fog and ice, and the latest venture to find it had been a dismal failure.

Jens Munk's arrival in Bergen was not that of a hero. The Bailiff of Bergen, to Munk's dismay, was an enemy from earlier days. Based on a petty excuse and the scar of an old insult, Munk was thrown in jail. After having been confined for 67 days at sea, he was subjected to another several months' imprisonment before Christian IV demanded his return to Copenhagen. The King was not pleased with his subject, but the clouds of war were gathering over the north, and Christian was marching inevitably into the Thirty Years War that devastated much of Northern Europe. Munk proved to be a useful servant.

Bitter and disillusioned, Jens Munk obediently served his master as little more than an international errand boy, recruiting men and provisioning ships. Despite holding the title of Admiral in the Thirty Year War, Commoner Munk was yet again passed over when the rewards for service were bestowed on those of noble birth.

In 1623 he published his journal of the voyage to Nova Dania with the title *Navigation Septentrionalis*, but it received scant attention (FIGURE 16). As time wore on, Munk became enmeshed in a series of acrimonious lawsuits with old business adversaries and others, and memory of his exploits and achievements faded away. Even the exact date of his death is contested, and neither is a eulogy recorded, nor does a tombstone survive. So it was that Jens Munk died eight years



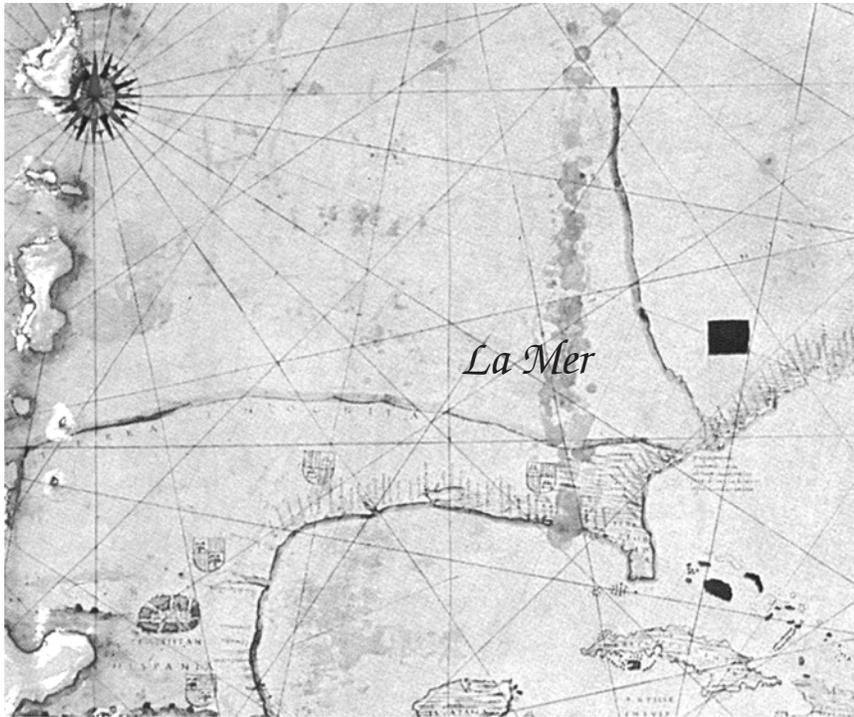


FIGURE 17. DETAIL SHOWING VERRAZZANO'S FALSE SEA GEROLOMO VERRAZZANO, 1529. *THE MAPPING OF NORTH AMERICA*

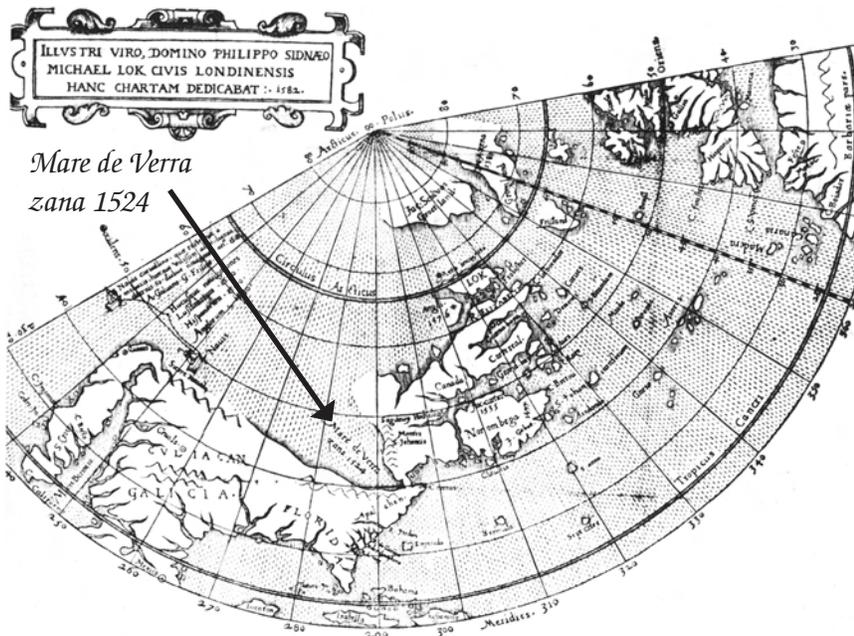


FIGURE 18. DETAIL SHOWING VERRAZZANO'S FALSE SEA FROM MICHAEL LOK'S *NORTH AMERICA*, 1528. *THE MAPPING OF NORTH AMERICA*

Irregularities in cartographic depictions of the Canadian arctic have been generally attributed to variations of Verrazzano's "false sea." Might there be other interpretations? Could carefully guarded trade secrets from ancient mariners, passed down from generation to generation over hundreds of years, harbor the memory of an open passage across the top of the world?

Mapmaking in the medieval European world was a symbolic effort—usually in religious terms—to explain the physical world. Directional, informational mapping awaited the explosion of trade and travel during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The rediscovery of Ptolemy led to renewed attempts at understanding and representing the known and often unknown world, both in three dimensional globes and two dimensional projections. These fits and starts toward accuracy contained curious bits of information. Early "modern" world maps hint at a Northeast Passage skirting Siberia. As we have seen, this was the first choice for Willem Barent, Christian IV, and Jens Munk. A separate New World did not appear map-wise until after the dawn of the age of exploration.

**Could carefully guarded trade secrets from ancient mariners, passed down from generation to generation over hundreds of years, harbor the memory of an open passage across the top of the world?**

However, archaeological evidence demonstrates that Norse contact or influence spread west across the Arctic from Viking times probably into the fourteenth century, when the little ice age descended and expanded the polar ice cap deep into the Canadian north.

In my quest for precursors of Nova Dania, I found tantalizing clues in a number of pre-1611 maps, the date we credit with the first discovery of the region. We begin by considering the 1508 map of Johannes Ruysch (FIGURE 21). This polar projection indicates a ring of islands and a large inland sea just above the Arctic Circle. One must imagine that Ruysch has a reason for this insertion.

Oronce Fineus in 1532 (FIGURE 22) still shows a single connected land mass encircling four polar islands. To my eye, the large bay running to the northwest (upper left) has a familiar configuration.

As the century wore on, the coasts of the New World became more clearly defined. Mapmakers were the ad men for attracting venture capitalists who were anxious to reap huge profits from across the ocean. John Dee, advisor to Queen

Elizabeth, produced his vision of the New World in 1582 (FIGURE 23), which included some curious bays and inlets. Cornelius de Jode's 1593 map (FIGURE 24) greatly distorted the Arctic, and splits the Polar land mass and Canada with a



FIGURE 19. SEBASTIAN MUSTER, 1538, *DIE NUW WELT*. [WWW.HENRYDAVIS.COM](http://WWW.HENRYDAVIS.COM)



FIGURE 20. FALSE SEA OR HUDSON BAY? SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN, DUVAL ISSUE *CARTE DE NOUVELLE FRANCE*, 1677. *THE MAPPING OF NORTH AMERICA*



FIGURE 21. JOHAN RUYSC *UNIVERSALIO COGNIT ORBUS TABULA* 1508. *THE MAPPING OF NORTH AMERICA*

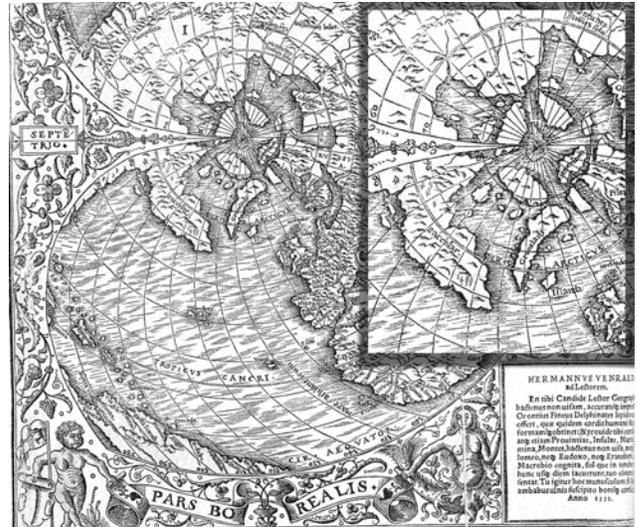


FIGURE 22. ORENCE FINEOUS, PLANOSPHERE, 1531. *MERCATOR'S WORLD Vol. 5 No. 2*

wide river-like sea, but teases us with one V shaped penetration toward the south.

C. Wyfliet's 1597 map *Conibus Region cum Vecinis Gentibus* (FIGURE 25) offers another remarkable rendering of an Arctic Bay or Inlet.

Of course, no study would be complete without looking at the maps of perhaps the world's best known cartographer, Gerard Mercator. All published in 1595, here are three details from various interpretations of *Terra Incognita* (FIGURE 26).

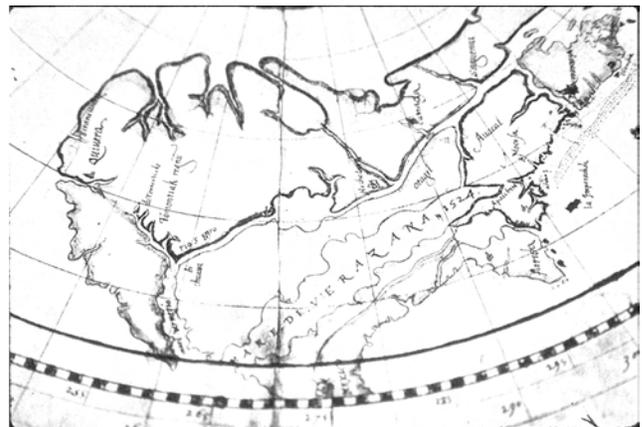


FIGURE 23. JOHN DEE, DETAIL FROM *A GENERAL MAP OF THE ARCTIC*, LONDON 1582. [WWW.HENRYDAVIS.COM](http://WWW.HENRYDAVIS.COM)

In his provocative book, *Erikson, Eskimos and Columbus, Medieval European Knowledge of America*, James Enterline makes a case for native American sources for cartographic information used by European mapmakers. The Inuits' perception of mapping is succinctly given by Enterline in a quote from intrepid modern explorer Edmund Carpenter:

"When a man travels by sled into an unfamiliar country, he continually looks back to see how



FIGURE 24. CORNELIUS DE JODE, *AMERICA PARS BOREALIS, FLORIDA, BACCALAO, CANADA, CORTEREA, LIS.* 1593. *THE MAPPING OF NORTH AMERICA*

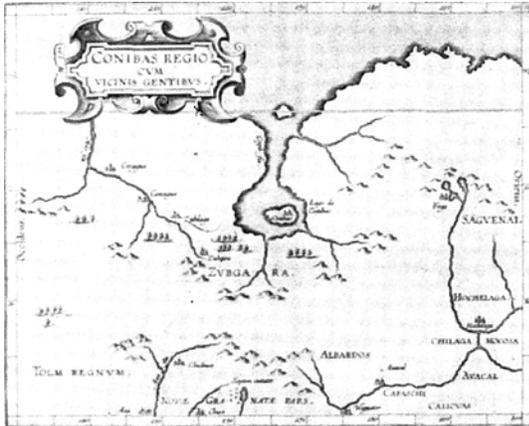


FIGURE 25. C. WYTLIET, *CORIBUS REGIO COM VICINIS GENTIUS*, 1597. *MARTAYANLAN.COM*

the country will appear on his return. These brief glimpses, vividly recorded and faithfully remembered, are enough so that he can find his way back with ease. An elderly hunter may efficiently guide a party through an area he has not seen since his youth and then only once.”



FIGURE 26. DETAIL OF THE ARCTIC FROM GERARD MERCATOR, 1595, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: *AMERICA INDIA NOVA* ([WWW.HENRYDAVIS.COM](http://WWW.HENRYDAVIS.COM)); *SEPTENTRIONALIUM* (ALSO SHOWS MARE DULCIUM) ([PRINCETONWEBLIB](http://PRINCETONWEBLIB)); *POLUS ARCTICUS SEPTENTRIONALIUM*.

But what evidence exists that this way-finding was converted to instructional maps? We again turn to Enterline:

“One of the early explorers in the Bering Strait area, Frederick Beechey, (circa, 1825) encountered a party of local Eskimos, who of course shared little if any language with him and must have communicated by gestures. They were in the act of drawing in the sand...”

“On the first visit to this party, they constructed a chart of the coast upon the sand, of which I took very little notice at the time. Today, however, they renewed their labor and performed their work upon the sandy beach in a very ingenious and intelligible manner. The coast line was first marked out with a stick, and the distances regulated by a day’s journey. The hills and ranges of mountains were next shown by elevations of sand or stone, and the islands represented by heaps of pebbles, their proportions being duly attended to.... When the mountains and islands were erected, the villages and fishing stations were marked by a number of sticks placed upright, in imitation of those which are put up on the coast wherever these people fix their abode. In time we had a complete topographical plan of the coast from Point Darby to Cape Kruesenstern....”

In his conclusion, Enterline sums up his view:

“—There in fact was a late medieval and Early Renaissance Greenlandic reencounter and exploration of America, separate from the Eriksonian discovery of Vinland.

—The Greenland Norse contacted the native peoples on a sometimes amicable basis. They engaged in cultural exchange in both directions and

moved physically within their lands.

—Most medieval and Early Renaissance geographical material regarding the Arctic and many regarding the Orient that have here-to-fore been considered fantasies are actually records of Norse contacts with America and/or with its people.

—Norse (or Norse transmitted) geographical data about America had a wide variety of profound effects upon European theoretical cosmology and geography.”

Nineteenth century antiquarian Garrick Mallory explores native map-making in depth in his two volume report—*Picture Writing of the American Indians*—to the Bureau of Ethnology in 1889. He uses the Passamaquoddy Indians of Maine and the Canadian Micmacs as prime examples of map making on birch bark, but he investigates a wide range of other tribes as well.

In an article published in cartography journal *Mercator's World*, Carl Shuster presented an intriguing analysis of ocean levels, and the hints provided in the cartographic record of a tradition passed down from remote antiquity. Given a rise in sea level of 300 meters in Hudson Bay over the last 10,000 years, he works backward, charting sea levels until, at 160 meters, he finds a strikingly accurate concurrence with the Ruyche and Garretzoon maps (SEE FIGURES 21 AND 3). He finds the coastal representation amazingly accurate with the exception of that strange peninsula jutting north and creating a second bay to the west of today's James Bay. He suggests that maps of different scales in the original were merged into one image. He asks us to “Compare this scale problem to a Rand McNally road atlas of the United States, presenting equally sized maps of Massachusetts and Boston. Boston, if patched directly into Massachusetts without an adjustment to scale, would create major geographical problems.” Although not offering a possible time period for this situation, it yields yet another mystery to ponder.

It is of interest to compare the Munster map of 1538 and Champlain's of 1636 (SEE FIGURES 19 AND 4) with Schuster's contemporary map of Hudson Bay showing the lower sea level (FIGURE 27), and to ponder the shifting coastline of Nova Dania over the ages.

On the wings of Google Earth we can set our altitude once more at 35,000 feet and fly over the barren shores of Nova Dania. The Little Ice Age has loosened its grip and the warming globe is claiming the Arctic ice. The Northwest Passage can be traced easily from above, and eco-tourists can follow its trail on luxury cruises. We will never know what Jens Munk may have expected or hoped for, but I hope the hazy evidence we have offered will spark more study of the origins and stubborn retention of long forgotten names and places.

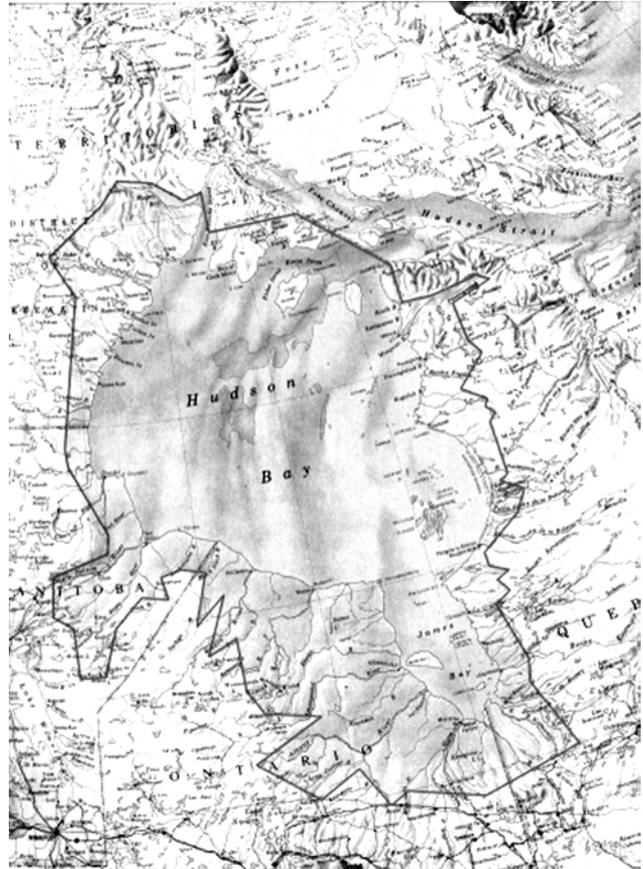


FIGURE 27. CARL SHUSTER, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC DETAIL OF HUDSON BAY. *MERCATOR'S WORLD* VOL. 1 NO. 6

Thus we conclude the tale of Nova Dania.

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