



Pierre-Esprit Radisson: The Collected Writings, Volume 1: The Voyages

Germaine Warkentin

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Pierre-Esprit Radisson (1636?-1710) was many men. He was a teenager captured, tortured, and adopted by the Mohawk, and a youth relishing the freedom of the wilderness. He was the French-born servant of an ambitious English trading company and a hapless petitioner at the court of Louis XIV. He was a central figure in the tug-of-war between France and England over Hudson Bay and a pretender to aristocratic status who had to defend his actions before James II. Finally, he was a retired "sea captain" trying to provide for his children, and despite the pension he had fought for, the "decay'd Gentleman" described in his burial record. Radisson's writings, characterized by hubris and contradiction, provoke many questions. Was he a semi-literate woodsman? Are his accounts of Native life ethnographically reliable? Can he be trusted to tell the truth about himself? How important were his explorations? In this first volume of Radisson's complete writings, Germaine Warkentin introduces the life, travels, motivations, and work of this compelling and complicated figure while providing a comprehensive and authoritative edition of his masterpiece - The Voyages. In the four accounts of his travels to the far interior of the Great Lakes and James Bay, Radisson vibrantly depicts his life among the Mohawk, his encounters and relationships with Native peoples, Jesuits, English, French, and Dutch colonists and traders, as well as the hazards of the capricious politics of the New World and the thrilling surprise of discoveries. Striking a superb balance between accessible writing and comprehensive scholarship, this new edition of Radisson's Voyages is indispensable, definitive, and reasserts the important roles that Radisson played in seventeenth-century North American rivalries.

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