The vast empty spaces of the Poles were the last frontier to be assailed by explorers intent on achieving a geographical goal—the North Pole was finally reached in 1909. But long before that men sailed the seas searching for an easier and shorter path to the riches of the orient, and the mapmakers of the day translated sparse information, turning it into often stunningly beautiful maps. The fact that most of the information required to make such a map was missing or erroneous mattered little; the maps live on as testimony to hopes and dreams. The idea that the Arctic Ocean was an open sea, unable to freeze due to movement and size, drove early mariners to attempt to sail across the top of the world to reach the spices of the east. In so doing, maps were made showing the routes men thought they could take, and the routes they actually took, which were usually vastly different. Almost 200 historical maps, many never before reproduced, from collections around the world, illustrate all the significant Arctic explorations from the sixteenth century until well into the twentieth. Readable yet scholarly text informs the maps, as each double-page spread tells a story in itself.

My Personal Review: The historical maps are fantastic. I appreciated Hayes' non-Eurocentric attempt to paint the history of the Arctic. I hope to take part in an Arctic adventure(…) during the Summer of 2010 which will attempt to tie together beer, history, and motorcycles. The beer that was commissioned by Queen Victoria in 1852 and was on-board the John Franklin Expedition. Allsopp's Arctic Ale, will be recreated in Canada using historic methods (over a wood fire). This book has helped us in the planning and research stages of our adventure.