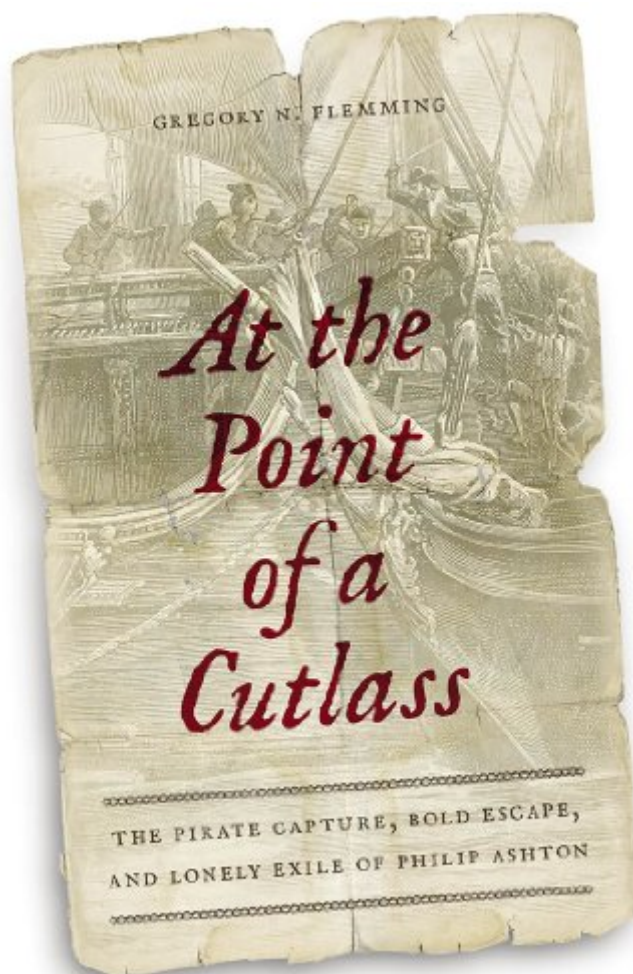


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At The Point Of A Cutlass: The Pirate Capture, Bold Escape, And Lonely Exile Of Philip Ashton



Synopsis

The astonishing true story of a young sailor's ordeal during the golden age of piracy

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Customer Reviews

3.5 of 5 stars "I'm a history fan, particularly the colonial and revolutionary period, as well as, since childhood, a fan of pirates; but I had not heard of this interesting story before. Just the story of Philip Ashton might be interesting, but Flemming takes it to the next level by putting it into context by with a broader history of pirating mainly during its heyday in the early 1700s. As such, it also is a story about pirates, primarily focusing on the hated captains Low and Spriggs and their crews. My early fascination was from romanticized stories of pirates, and I'd since grown to know it was otherwise. But this book soberly portrays that dirty cruel life, and I enjoyed learning more about it. I was aware of captives and forced service, but not the extent among pirates. I appreciated learning that Ashton was by far not the only one marooned and had to find his way back, his story was just one of the more improbable and definitely more publicized, as the book points out. And I had never heard of the thriving business of logwood (second only to tobacco). Flemming has done a wonderful job with the research that fills in the gaps of Ashton's story, and he informs us in an easy to read

manner. Even so, there are times when the timeline and story bounces around making things just a little unclear. Maybe it was to help with those transitions, but there seemed to be a lot of repeating of the same actions to show that pirates do indeed plunder and torture, as well as of other elements and using more words and details than needed for the story. Overall, I liked and learned from the interwoven historical stories of Ashton and pirates that took me back in time to an earlier Americas. (I'm excited to have won this as a Goodreads First Read so thanks!)

This is a good accumulation of anecdotes about pirates during the "golden era" of pirating, in the early 1720's. Mr. Flemming uses the somewhat sparse tale of Philip Ashton as a theme to tell the stories. He was a New England sailor who was forced to work a pirate ship by the mad pirate Low and who then marooned himself on a small island in the Caribbean. The stories are interesting and the book informative, just don't expect - as the subtitle might lead you to believe - that this is a real Robinson Crusoe tale. This is an account of pirates and their capture. I found one omission that bothered me throughout the book. Mr. Flemming describes how the pirates worked, shared their profits and gained their loot and booty. He never once described or accounted for how they disposed of the booty to make their profits. I kept wondering: "Who was the fence?" I doubt most will be bothered by that omission and will enjoy the very interesting and informative accounts of Low, Spriggs and others who were more vicious yet lesser known than Blackbeard and others.

At times, it reads like an adventure novel. The title suggests that it is focused on pirates, but it is more than that. It actually has three or four themes. The first is a riveting account of how a fisherman was kidnapped, forced to work for pirates, escaped, and then lived on a Caribbean island, absolutely alone, for two years. The book also describes the general lawlessness on the high seas in the 1720s and 1730s. These pirates were extremely nasty and violent people. Some of the accounts of how they treated their captives are quite shocking. There is a good description of the brutally efficient way in which New England justice system treated pirates. Finally, piracy was woven into the religious politics of the day. The waning Puritan movement, led by Cotton Mather, made use of piracy (public executions in particular) in order to reinforce their view of a strict social order. I felt that this was the most interesting part of the book. All in all, this is a great read whether you are a history buff or not.

Flemming is a good story teller and this book reflects his skill. He took the true story of a fisherman captured by pirates in the early 18th century and wove his narrative into the larger context of piracy

in that period, which is the book's greatest strength. He included a lot of fascinating character details, and one of those which stuck out was how the pirate captain Low would not take married men into his crew. Additionally, Flemming outlines the British harvest of logwood on coastal Honduras and how this was tangentially related to the pirate activities in the area. I also appreciated how he was able to show connections between Ashton's narrative and the possibility of Defoe reading this account, perchance influencing Robinson Crusoe. His research is solid, with an extensive bibliography and highly informative end notes. However, I was distracted by the abrupt transitions and the repetition of narrative details which had been covered in a previous chapter or paragraph. Also, his timeline sometimes went from a clear and easy to follow sequence to an abrupt change which interrupted the narrative flow. I also think that the book would have benefitted by including more context about the role and origins of piracy in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Flemming only tantalizes by brief mentions of William Kidd and Blackbeard. These negatives do not significantly detract from an overall fascinating and enjoyable reading experience.

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