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Alfred de Quervain’s account of his crossing of Greenland in 1912, now been published in English for the first time, offers a fascinating depiction of both expedition life and society in Greenland in the early twentieth century. The text is a translation from German made by de Quervain’s daughter, Elisabeth de Quervain Schriever, after her family had immigrated to Canada, designed for her own children to read in English about their grandfather’s expedition. In this volume, the text, with a handful of explanatory footnotes, is preceded by a series of essays on the significance of the expedition. Two short accounts by other expedition members are included as an appendix and the volume also contains sixty-five color plates of photographs taken on the 1912 expedition, as well as a previous one in 1909.

The introductory material frames de Quervain’s account as having ongoing relevance for scientific research in the Arctic. Martin Hood’s preface and introduction summarize the expedition and its significance and reproduce three useful maps from the original edition of the text. Hood describes the expedition as a “remarkable adventure in science,” noting that 1912 was also the year of the culmination of Robert Falcon Scott and Roald Amundsen’s race to the South Pole (p. x). De Quervain’s account is placed alongside these, but “its very success” led to it being less well known—successful and smoothly run expeditions holding less interest for the public (p. ix). De Quervain himself noted in the text that being sensational was “not to the credit of a serious undertaking” (p. 6). Hood adds useful context on the scientific milieu which de Quervain and the other expedition members came from, points to their previous 1909 expedition to the west coast of Greenland, and includes information on the later lives of the members.

Hood’s introductory material is followed by an appraisal of the scientific legacy of the expedition by Andreas Vieli and Martin Lüthi, two glaciologists from the University of Zurich. Vieli and Lüthi emphasize the scientific focus of the expedition and the value of the members’ observations. As they note, “these early observations serve as a
historical reference for assessing today's rapid retreat and mass loss of the Greenland ice sheet” (p. xxix). Vieli and Lüthi also regard de Quervain as beginning the Swiss tradition of polar science to which they belong. Perhaps most interesting are Vieli and Lüthi's notes on the methodological innovations of de Quervain's team, particularly their use of weather balloons to take meteorological observations. De Quervain's cross-section of the ice sheet is also particularly valuable for scientists working on it today.

De Quervain's account itself forms the majority of the text and covers the organization of the expedition, the journey to Greenland, and the crossing of the ice cap from west to east. While the introductory material frames the expedition in terms of its significance for scientists today, several themes come through in de Quervain's text that will be of particular interest to historians. When a supposedly scientific account opens with the line “Greenland evokes nostalgia,” we can clearly see the influence and presence of notable discourses about the Arctic (p. 7). For example, de Quervain's description of a glacier that had withdrawn “as if it were unhappy with these harsh modern times” is a striking phrasing to an Anthropocene audience but is also revealing of his understanding of Greenland as a place (p. 25). As with many travelers to the Arctic in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, de Quervain saw the region as a place where he could escape from modernity, even as its traces were apparent. An extension of this is his description of the “dreadful monotony” of the landscape of the ice cap (p. 74). De Quervain noted that their business meant they were never depressed, and the “barren waste” also contained a certain grandeur. However, as these brief quotes demonstrate, this is a rich text for thinking about representations of the Arctic beyond scientific measurements, as well as from an alternative perspective. While de Quervain's account aligns with many similar Euro-American ones, it is interesting and useful to have a Swiss perspective on the Arctic and scientific practice there. Alpine references are frequent as are descriptions of Arctic yodeling and expedition members discussing their ideas about Swiss national identity.

Perhaps the most useful content in de Quervain's account for historians is his depiction and discussion of society in Greenland. The expedition was heavily dependent on support from both Danish colonial administrators and Kalaallit labor and knowledge. De Quervain reflected on Danish colonial influence as a positive thing, despite the fear that Inuit culture would be lost. He also praised the skill of Kalaallit, including the vital training the Swiss expedition members received in dog sledding. However, his overall approach to the society and people of Greenland was one that rendered them a “fascinating object of study” and his ethnographic observations were perhaps more valuable for their insight into European attitudes toward Greenland at the time (p. 23). However, the text does reveal the workings of Danish colonial administration, especially how it supported—or failed to support—travel and research in Greenland.

The main text concludes with two short accounts of the expedition from members who stayed on the west coast, rather than crossing the ice cap with de Quervain. Paul-Louis Mercanton's account covers the summer, while August Stolberg's describes overwintering until the spring of 1913. Stolberg depicted a Greenland Christmas and his account can usefully be compared to Isobel Wylie Hutchison's account of a winter on the east coast of Greenland, On Greenland's Closed Shore: The Fairyland of the Arctic (1930).

The volume also contains sixty-five color plates, which are reproduced in high quality and elevate the volume beyond a simple travel narrative. The images depict landscapes, expedition life, and life in Greenland more generally, including several portraits of locals. These are also a rich source for historians of the Arctic and offer a fascinating perspective on the expedition. While the reproduction is high quality, the additional mater-
ial relating to the photographs is somewhat slim. The short essay on the plates in the introductory material notes that they were colored on return from the expedition but fails to critically engage with what this means for them as representations of the Arctic. There is also limited information on the publication and archival history of the images. Historians may be left frustrated by the degree to which the photographs are simply illustrative.

Overall, this is an interesting text for historians of the Arctic, science, and exploration, which offers the unusual perspective of a central European Arctic expedition. As the introductory material suggests, this is an expedition that collected data which laid the groundwork for modern scientific research in Greenland and therefore has resonance in our age of climate emergency. Historians may wish for a more critical reading of the text as a source for Arctic history, and recent literature on the colonial history of Switzerland by Patricia Purtschert and Harald Fischer-Tiné, among others, could have informed a critical reading of the text.[1] When an account of an expedition describes the measuring of Inuit skulls as part of their scientific research, it is important to not simply present the expedition as the pioneering part of a lineage of polar science. A critical perspective from a historian of science would have made a valuable contribution to the introductory materials. However, historians in a range of fields will find this volume useful for thinking about the history of the Arctic.

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