

coffee-table book. The text relates history in an informative and entertaining fashion, supplemented by maps and portraits. The index aids helps you find what you think you remember and the bibliography is a guide to further reading. The scenic photos, both historic and contemporary, of land and sea are spectacular and set this tome apart from others. I was given *Island Passages* in preparation for a Jekyll Island vacation. What I read before the departure gave me ideas of what to look for, and post-trip, generated pleasant memories and answered lingering questions. Whether seeking a worthwhile read, or a treat for your guests, *Northern Mariner* readers will be pleased with *Island Passages*.

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Alfred de Quervain. *Across Greenland's Ice Cap: The Remarkable Swiss Scientific Expedition of 1912*. Montreal & Kingston, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, www.mqup.ca, 2022. xxxiv+148 pp., illustrations, index. CDN \$37.95, UK £26.99, cloth; ISBN 978-0-2280-1066-1.

When thinking about crossing Greenland's ice cap, the first name that comes to mind is most certainly Fridthjof Nansen's expedition in 1888. Alfred de Quervain's crossing of the ice cap in 1912 (or the Swiss Scientific Expedition of 1912), on the contrary, is probably known only to a small group of specialized polar historians – despite its equal importance for exploring the inland area of the world's largest island. This group also created an altitude profile along the route of the 640 km traverse of the Greenlandic ice cap from West to East.

For the first time, Martin Hood's new book makes the story of de Quervain's crossing available to an English-speaking readership and provides not only a summary of the events of 1912, but a translation of de Quervain's report on this remarkable Swiss scientific expedition that was critical to establishing Switzerland as a relevant nation for polar research.

While the report on the actual crossing of the ice cap is an informative and important source for all polar historians and historians of science, other historians might find de Quervain's descriptions of the preparation for the crossing and the time spent on Greenland prior to the beginning of the actual traverse of even greater interest. His account provides a unique, first-hand description of everyday life on Greenland at the beginning of the twentieth century, and especially the life of the small group of Danish administrators living on Greenland. Due to the Danish closed-country policy for Greenland, this group of colonial administrators were a closed sociotype. Yet, the existing historiography about Greenland includes very little information about the daily life of this group that was critical for the administration of Greenland

under colonial rule. Thanks to de Quervain, we now have a spotlight that helps to close this historical desideratum.

The description of the actual crossing, while fascinating to a very small group of readers, might be seen by most as yet another account of man versus nature in an extreme, hostile environment. Nevertheless, the highly detailed descriptions of the scientific measurements taken during the crossing, the arrangements of camps, and the experiences with handling Greenlandic sledge-dogs do provide a most valuable resource.

The real gems of the book are the high quality reproductions of the colour photographs taken during the expedition. In its early infancy in 1912, the colour photography provides extremely rare visuals of Greenland that definitely depict a realistic impression of the country and its people when most other photographs were still black and white.

As the book is mainly a translation of de Quervain's original report, there is obviously little to no historical argument in the book, nor does Martin Hood's introduction pose a real analytical argument. Fortunately, a brief chapter written by Andreas Vieli and Martin Lüthi titled: "Alfred de Quervain's Scientific Legacy: An Appraisal" puts the original report by de Quervain into historical context and argues successfully that the expedition was not only a scientific achievement in itself, but needs to be understood as the beginning of Swiss participation in polar research.

The combination of a most interesting historical report with a well written introduction to the subject and a brief, but convincing, historical analytical interpretation of the importance of the expedition for future polar research makes the book worthwhile.

The suggested retail price of CDN \$37.95 is affordable for a book targeting a relatively small readership and the publisher should be lauded for choosing such high quality binding and reproductions of the original colour photographs. Of course, any maritime historian would have hoped for "meatier" sections on the use of maritime transportation for traveling to and in Greenland, but given the fact that the ships were just a tool for de Quervain to reach his destination, a more in depth coverage could not be expected. Nevertheless, the brief sections on the journey to Greenland and the use of ships and boats while working in Greenland provide a relevant insight into the conditions of the only means of connection between Greenland and the rest of the world. De Quervain's work showcases how maritime transport to and in Greenland in the early years of the twentieth century was characterized by a unique combination of modern steam ships, traditional sailing vessels and typical Greenlandic vessels like the kayak, with the latter one often being the fastest means of communication between the different places along the Greenland coast.

The book can be easily recommended to readers with an interest in the

exploration of polar regions and also to everyone with an interest in the history of science around 1900. Maritime historians will appreciate the coexistence and relative value of modern and traditional maritime craft in remote locations like Greenland.

While this book is definitely not recommended to a very broad readership, its value as a source of historical analysis would make it a welcome addition on the bookshelves of the small target audience. For anybody else, it might be an enjoyable, even casual, read given the entertaining qualities of de Quervain's original report that has lost nothing in translation. An armchair traveler might enjoy going back a century or so to a place where only very few will have the chance to actually visit. Despite the dramatic changes going on with the polar ice-cap at large as a consequence of global climate change, the surface of the Greenlandic ice-cap itself has not changed that much since the Swiss expedition of 1912. In fact, this book might even increase our understanding of these global changes by offering modern-day readers a firsthand account of one of the places most affected by climate change.

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James Delgado. *The Curse of the Somers. The Secret History behind the U.S. Navy's Most Infamous Mutiny.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, www.oup.com, 2022. 178 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography. US \$24.95, cloth; ISBN 978-0-19-757522-2. (E-book available.)

One sentence in James Delgado's fresh telling of the 1842 mutiny on the brig *Somers* sets this gripping tragedy in perspective. "History would have been very different had [Matthew Calbraith] Perry transferred [Philip] Spencer to *Grampus*." Perry, in the family line of early American naval heroes, could have dispatched Midshipman Spencer, the always-difficult son of John Tyler's Secretary of War and later Treasury, to another ship.

Instead, Perry, commander of the New York Navy Yard, assigned young Spencer, whose head swam with fantasies of pirates that he was only too willing to share with one and all, to *Somers* on what was to be its first operational cruise – to the Africa Station.

To say the moving of Spencer was "political" would be understating the matter. Aboard *North Carolina*, Spencer, already showing open contempt for orders and rank, attacked a ranking officer in a drunken fury. But for his family's influence in Washington and inside the sea service, he could have been cashiered and should have been, rather than shuffled off to another assignment.

Somers also was different from other ships in the fleet. It was to be a "school ship," where the most junior acting midshipman would literally "learn