

ers have been presented with a valuable reference work which can be used for all kinds of future study involving older Nordic texts.

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Peter R. Dawes, *Expedition Relics from High Arctic Greenland. Eight Decades of Exploration History Told through 102 Objects*, [Chicago]: Museum Tusulanum Press/University of Chicago Press, [2022], ISBN 9788763546867, 509 pp.

When I agreed to review this book, I had not read the publication details very closely and expected a book that makes an accessible and “light” read for a general audience on the exploration history of Greenland, along the lines of other “history through objects” books that have become quite popular lately. The book that I received was something quite different and having read it, I am not entirely sure what to make of it.

The history of Greenland and its western explorations is certainly a fascinating topic. This book focuses specifically on the very northernmost part of Greenland, a strip of land from northern Baffin Bay to Peary Land. A plethora of photographs and other illustrations throughout the book are nothing short of marvelous and highly evocative of a far northern land with icy landscapes, explorers venturing into remote lands and the local indigenous people. The book is divided into four chapters: 1) “Introduction, geopolitics and scope,” 2) “Prehistoric and historic sites, and their artefacts,” 3) “Nineteen expeditions and the artefact collects,” and 4) “A tribute to the Inuit and their dog sledges.”

The author is an emeritus geology researcher with a keen interest in Greenland’s exploration history who has worked in Greenland for decades. In Chapter 1, he provides an extensive account of how and why he embarked on the present project. At the heart of *Expedition Relics* is a collection of 102 objects associated with nineteen expeditions operating in northernmost Greenland between 1853 and 1934. These objects were randomly and casually collected between 1965 and 2001 by scientists working in northernmost Greenland. In effect, Dawes sets out to document, contextualize and provide a background to this collection ahead of its planned deposition in the Greenland National Museum and Archives.

The book is large-sized and heavy in weight, and it is also heavy in content, but not necessarily in a good sense. I genuinely appreciate the effort and passion that the author has put into this project, and I can see that the book is a useful resource for some purposes and that there are readers who will undoubtedly take delight in its rich content. However, I was struggling with *Expedition Relics* for several reasons. My main problem was that while there is a *lot* of text in this book, I did not find the text very engaging at all. It is certainly informative as far as the histories of Greenland expeditions and the sites associated with them go, and, indeed, the descriptions of

the relevant sites and their histories in Chapter 2 are my favourite part of the book. In general, however, the main body of the text is quite descriptive, basically just a collation of historical information presented in a very straightforward and conventional historicizing manner, in the form of lists of events, people, dates etc. In effect, much of the text comes across as simple “fact collecting” (as a colleague of mine likes to put it), which is an approach often taken by hobbyist historians.

I have no doubt that there are readers who like history books written in this manner, but I find such treatises difficult to read and rather uninteresting, even though, once again, *Expedition Relics* engages with its exciting subject matter, and it certainly also has many curious and intriguing bits to it. Overall, however, I did not find this book to be a history of Greenland exploration through objects—this goes for Chapters 3 and 4 in which these objects are primarily treated of—but more of a highly descriptive catalogue of finds associated with this or that particular expedition out the nineteen dealt with in the book. The objects themselves encompass a range of “western,” “indigenous” and “hybrid” artefacts, some mundane (e.g., iron nails) and others more specialized (e.g., a cinematograph) or unexpected (e.g., an automobile wheel). The 102 objects certainly comprise a kind of cabinet of curiosities well worth documenting and a standardized template or structure is employed object by object in about two-thirds of the book.

Browsing through the various items in this “cabinet of curiosities” was quite interesting, but there is really no narrative told about or through them. Dawes has done valuable work in documenting and contextualizing the collection with some reflections on why it is important, and also in providing the reader with his personal background, motivation and reasons for engaging in this endeavour, but I cannot help wondering what audiences this book is intended for. *Expedition Relics* is not exactly a book with a narrative and/or specific arguments, but neither is it a mere catalogue. It is a heavy read if approached as an “ordinary” book, and it also does not lend itself easily to casual browsing the way “coffee table” books do, despite the truly captivating nature of the illustrations. In many ways, *Expedition Relics* feels more like an extensive descriptive document than a book, which I feel will make it appeal primarily to a niche group of Arctic expedition enthusiasts rather than a broader and more general readership.

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