

STEFANSSON, DR. ANDERSON AND THE CANADIAN ARCTIC EXPEDITION, 1913–1918: A STORY OF EXPLORATION, SCIENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY. Stuart E. Jenness. 2011. Gatineau, QC: Canadian Museum of Civilization. xxiv + 415 p., illustrated, maps. Soft cover. ISBN 978-0-660-19971-9. C\$39.95.

This book belongs to a rare category of polar literature. Unlike popular writing, its main purpose is not to tell a gripping story, and unlike academic works it is not primarily analytical. Instead, like Richard J. Cyriax's classic *Sir John Franklin's last Arctic expedition* (Cyriax 1939), it is the result of extensive research in primary sources, and presents the results of that research in a straightforward fashion. It is essentially a compendium of facts, and thus an invaluable resource for further work. It is unlikely that any commercial or university press would be willing to publish such a book under current economic conditions, and the Canadian Museum of Civilization is to be commended for having done so.

There are several reasons why the Canadian Arctic Expedition of 1913–1918 (CAE) is an ideal subject for such treatment. Its history is highly confusing to the typical reader, with different branches doing different types of exploratory and scientific work in locations extending from Wrangel Island off the coast of Siberia to the Mackenzie Delta to the northerly reaches of the Canadian archipelago. No fewer than seven ships were purchased at various times to carry these parties. Besides the scientists, sailors, and others who formed the original membership in 1913, the expedition's strength was augmented by whites, Inūpiat, and Inuvialuit hired in Alaska or on the northern coast of Canada. Some of these individuals remained for the duration of the CAE, while others were involved only intermittently or for a limited time. The expedition's history therefore has multiple strands that overlap at some points and diverge widely at others, making any simple linear narrative impossible.

There were numerous conflicts between Stefansson and his subordinates. These did not die down after the expedition was over, but instead sparked bitter controversies that lasted well into the 1920s and indeed endured for decades. Stefansson's narrative, *The friendly Arctic* (1921), was far from being an even-handed, factual account of the expedition's work and achievements. Instead, it was a highly polemical book, intended both to discredit Stefansson's second-in-command, scientist Rudolph Anderson, and to establish Stefansson himself as an unjustly maligned prophet of northern development. Anderson and his fellow scientists maintained that the book was filled with 'exaggerations, misrepresentations, suppression of the truth, distortion of the truth, even crude deliberate lying' (McKinlay undated). These falsehoods were intended to dupe the Canadian public and government into supporting yet more of Stefansson's northern enterprises.

Because many of the scientists were also civil servants, while others were understandably reluctant to be involved in public disputes with the media-savvy Stefansson, their efforts to counteract his influence were carried out mainly in private. Even after decades had passed, only William Laird McKinlay ventured into print with a narrative of his own. His *Karluk*:

the untold story of Arctic exploration (1976), a gripping and horrifying account of the hardships endured by the party that landed on Wrangel Island, certainly inspired a re-evaluation of Stefansson's leadership. Yet McKinlay's account was limited mainly to his personal experiences. In drafts of the book, he had attempted a broader exposé of Stefansson, but he gave up the task in despair. As McKinlay himself wrote, *The friendly Arctic* and Stefansson's other books wove truth and falsehood together so skilfully and convincingly that to pinpoint and refute every misleading statement 'would be an almost herculean task' (McKinlay undated).

Stuart Jenness, the son of CAE ethnologist Diamond Jenness, took up the task abandoned by McKinlay and has produced a comprehensive history of the CAE to replace *The friendly Arctic*. The resulting book is far less readable than Stefansson's narrative, McKinlay's *Karluk*, or Jennifer Niven's re-telling of the Wrangel Island story in *The ice master: the doomed 1913 voyage of the 'Karluk'* (2000). However, it is doubtful whether any method could be more successful in revising the history of the CAE as a whole than Jenness's exceptionally thorough, if by most standards plodding, approach. Jenness covers every incident of the expedition's five years in almost overwhelming detail and also describes some of the subsequent disputes. Although he draws to some extent on the Stefansson collection in the Dartmouth College Library, his main sources are the Anderson papers held at Library and Archives Canada and the Canadian Museum of Nature. More digging in Stefansson's personal papers and Canadian government files could have been done, but the two extensive Anderson collections provide ample proof that Stefansson did indeed falsify the expedition's history in *The friendly Arctic*. Yet Jenness is careful to give Stefansson the credit that is due to him for his daring journeys across the ice of the Beaufort Sea and his discovery of the last remaining unknown islands in the Canadian archipelago.

Occasionally, Jenness too has been fooled by Stefansson, and some of Stefansson's myths are repeated, which is hardly surprising when the convoluted, almost Byzantine nature of Stefansson's untruths is considered. For example, Jenness asserts that one of the CAE's original sponsors, the American Museum of Natural History, gave its support only on the explicit condition that Anderson should be in charge of the scientific work. Anderson himself believed this, because Stefansson had told him so when pleading with him to join the expedition. However, Stefansson had lied because he was so anxious to have the accomplished Anderson as head of his scientific staff. After the CAE was over, he learned that Anderson had repeated the story to his colleagues and others in Ottawa. In a Machiavellian twist, Stefansson then obtained a denial from Henry Fairfield Osborn, the president of the museum, and sent it to the Canadian government as proof of Stefansson's alleged untrustworthiness (Stefansson 1919).

Despite its criticism of Stefansson, Jenness's book is essentially positive rather than negative in nature. His true aim is to highlight the outstanding scientific work done by Anderson and his staff. As Jenness writes, these men were 'idealistic, dedicated and adventurous', and their part of the CAE was a remarkable achievement that set a new standard for Canada's engagement with the people, land, and wildlife of its far north. While Stefansson's journeys offer more in the way of colour and drama, the scientific work arguably

had the most enduring significance. Jenness's labours have created an excellent foundation for further, more analytical work on the subject. The value of the book as a reference work is augmented by numerous photographs and maps (Janice Cavell, Historical Section, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada (janice.cavell@international.gc.ca)).

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