

THE ITALIANS IN THE ARCTIC EXPLORATIONS: A CRITIQUE OF THE REINTERPRETATION OF NATIONALISM. Giuseppe Nencioni. 2010. Umeå: Umeå University/ Royal Skyttean Society. 131p, illustrated, paperback. ISBN 978-91-88466-76-1.

This small and modestly presented book has the ambitious aim of countering a major trend in current historical assessments of polar exploration during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As the author observes, numerous historians have linked Arctic and Antarctic expeditions with nationalism, which, by the late nineteenth century, was increasingly characterised by intolerance, aggressiveness, and violence. Nencioni does not deny the connection, but he argues that nationalism, and especially the Italian nationalism inspired by Giuseppe Mazzini, also fostered higher ideals such as the 'brotherhood of man' and international cooperation.

To prove this contention, Nencioni examines the interactions of different nationalities on seven expeditions in which Italians were involved between the years 1872 and 1928. All had the North Pole as their aim. Whether Italians were the leaders (as on the *Stella Polare* and *Italia* expeditions) or were represented by a single individual (as on the *Vega* expedition), Nencioni is able to demonstrate that for the most part they enjoyed excellent relations with their foreign colleagues. The sole exception is provided by Umberto Nobile, whose conflicts with Roald Amundsen following the *Norge* flight are well known. However, Nencioni argues that the problem was caused by Nobile's difficult personality rather than by his Italian patriotism.

Nencioni considers the possibility that the records testifying to international good will in the polar race were merely rhetoric that masked nationalist drives. Nevertheless, he concludes that the sentiments expressed by Italian explorers were not only genuine, but inspired by the liberal nationalist tradition in which they had been raised. Others might wish to probe more deeply into the discourses of international cooperation for the good of science, following the example of scholars such as James Spiller (Spiller 2004). But even the most cynical reader will have to admit that Nencioni has done excellent work in combing through a large number of expedition diaries, in which he unearthed an array of intriguing facts about how different national groups interacted during their polar quests.

The book, the second in the Northern Studies series from Umeå University, is very nicely produced, with numerous illustrations. That English is not the author's first language is apparent at many points (for example, he refers to *Stella Polare* as a 'whaleboat'), but in general the writing is clear and accessible. The arguments would have benefited from being more carefully placed in relation to the extensive scholarly literature on nationalism; still, it is a thought-provoking treatment of a very worthwhile topic, and one that will no doubt become the focus of greater scholarly attention as calls for international cooperation in the Arctic increase. (Janice Cavell, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada/Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada.)

Reference

- Spiller, J. 2004. Re-imagining United States Antarctic research as a defining endeavor of a deserving world leader: 1957–1991. *Public Understanding of Science* 13(31): 31–53.