

ROALD AMUNDSEN'S *BELGICA* DIARY. Hugo Declair (Editor). 1999. Norwich: Bluntisham Books and Erskine Press. v + 208 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 1-85297-058-8. £24.95.

Polar scholars usually split into two groups over Roald Amundsen's contribution to polar history: either they consider him a hero, the first to navigate the Northwest Passage, first to reach the South Pole, and first to fly across the North Pole in an airship, or they regard him as a villain, the explorer who embraced deception to challenge Robert Falcon Scott in Antarctica, and the man who befriended the notorious Frederick Cook. Fortunately his service on *Belgica* (1896–99) came early in his career and well before his better known polar exploits.

Amundsen, anxious to extend his polar experiences after two successful seasons in the Arctic, volunteered for the Antarctic aboard *Belgica* in 1896 and was appointed second officer by the Belgian commander, Adrien de Gerlache de Gomery. The expedition sailed for the Antarctic Peninsula, explored the South Shetland Islands, and was obliged to overwinter in pack ice just south of the seventieth parallel of latitude, becoming the first known ship to spend a winter so far south. This book is Amundsen's personal diary of that voyage. It has been edited by the Belgian glaciologist Hugo Declair, and is published here for the first time in English translation.

The diary has been divided into chapters charting the chronology of the voyage from the Atlantic crossing to Tierra del Fuego, thence to the Peninsula, and eventually to the escape from the imprisonment of ice and the return home. Each chapter is prefaced with a short editorial commentary and modern charts of relevant areas accompany the text.

The personal nature of the diary leads inevitably to a repetitive style with banal comments on daily weather and sea-ice changes (or the lack of them), rather than the excitement of new discoveries or the hardships of survival. The most absorbing chapters describe the period when *Belgica* was beset in the ice, the hunting of seals and penguins for meat, the routine in and about the ship, and its eventual release.

In the light of Amundsen's later life, his comments for Monday, 20 June 1898, are apposite: 'This is the life I have always wished for. It was not a childish whim which made me do it. It was a mature decision. I have no regrets and I hope to be able to retain my strength and health in order to complete the work I have started.'

Unfortunately for a book subtitled *The first scientific expedition to the Antarctic*, there is little detail on the practice of science by the expedition members. Interpersonal relationships between officers, crew, and scientists are touched on without analysing them in any depth, and the deaths of Wienke and Danco are only briefly recorded. It appears clear that Amundsen had the highest regard for the doctor, Frederick Cook, who did so much for the health and morale of the entire expedition, and that they formed a friendship due to survive the many vicissitudes ahead.

Amundsen remained in good health and apparently equable in temperament throughout the entire voyage, but he was roused to anger over the contract signed between de Gerlache and the main sponsor, the Belgian Geographical Society. This document was unknown only to Cook and Amundsen, amongst the officers, until it was discovered in November 1898, although it was signed in August 1897. It gave precedence of command in the case of the death of de Gerlache to the Belgian officers and ignored 'the foreigners.' Although de Gerlache disclaimed any responsibility for the failure to make the contract known earlier, Amundsen declared, 'I consider my position on this ship as no longer existing. For me this is no longer a Belgian Antarctic expedition. It is my duty to help the handful of people here on board. I will continue my work as if nothing has happened. I will do my duty as a human being.' None the less when the ship arrived back in Punta Arenas, Amundsen left the ship and returned to Norway on a passenger boat.

The diary is a valuable adjunct to the narrative accounts reprinted for the centenary of the *Belgica* expedition, such as *Fifteen months in the Antarctic* (Gerlache 1998) and *Through the first Antarctic night* (Cook 1998). It is accompanied by portrait photographs of the scientists, several original crude drawings by Amundsen, and a book jacket photograph of Amundsen himself, gloomy and careworn. (Peter Speak, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)

References

- Cook, F.A. 1998. *Through the first Antarctic night*. Pittsburgh: Polar Publishing Company.
Gerlache, A. de. 1998. *Fifteen months in the Antarctic*. Norwich: Erskine Press.

THE GEOLOGY OF SVALBARD. W. Brian Harland. 1998. London: The Geological Society (Memoir 17). xviii + 521 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 1-897799-93-4. £99.00; US\$165.00.

For those concerned with the geology of the high Arctic and the evolution of the Eurasian and Amerasian basins, Svalbard plays a key role. Located in the northwestern corner of the Barents Shelf, Svalbard's long record of geological history provides essential evidence for all theories of Arctic evolution. The rock successions span the Phanerozoic and extend well back into the Mesoproterozoic; fragments of Palaeoproterozoic and even Archaean 'basement' provide glimpses of an even older history.

For more than 50 years, the author of this outstanding book has been studying Svalbard's geology. No one has a more wide-ranging knowledge of the European high Arctic than Brian Harland. His book is a most welcome culmination of a lifetime's research.

The flavour of the book is, of course, dictated by the discipline of the pen. The author is essentially a stratigrapher with a consuming interest in the wider regional context,