Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-07168-0 - In Northern Mists: Arctic Exploration in Early Times: Volume 1
Fridtjof Nansen Translated by Arthur G. Chater
Frontmatter
More information

Polar Exploration
This series includes accounts, by eye-witnesses and contemporaries, of early expeditions to the Arctic and the Antarctic. Huge resources were invested in such endeavours, particularly the search for the North-West Passage, which, if successful, promised enormous strategic and commercial rewards. Cartographers and scientists travelled with many of the expeditions, and their work made important contributions to earth sciences, climatology, botany and zoology. They also brought back anthropological information about the indigenous peoples of the Arctic region and the southern fringes of the American continent. The series further includes dramatic and poignant accounts of the harsh realities of working in extreme conditions and utter isolation in bygone centuries.

In Northern Mists
Accounts of the earliest exploration of the Arctic are scattered through many literatures. In writing this work, reissued here in the two-volume English translation of 1911, the celebrated Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen (1861–1930) returned to many of the original sources. Calling on others to help him interpret texts in several languages, Nansen begins his account with the first mentions of the Arctic in Greek literature and ends with voyages of the sixteenth century. He notably questions some of the traditional history based on Norse sagas. Each volume contains lengthy quotations from little-known documents, making much valuable information accessible to non-specialists. Volume 1 begins in antiquity and, after presenting maps and legends of the Middle Ages, turns to the voyages of the Norsemen to Iceland and Greenland. The final part deals with the possible discovery of North America or Vinland.
Cambridge University Press has long been a pioneer in the reissuing of out-of-print titles from its own backlist, producing digital reprints of books that are still sought after by scholars and students but could not be reprinted economically using traditional technology. The Cambridge Library Collection extends this activity to a wider range of books which are still of importance to researchers and professionals, either for the source material they contain, or as landmarks in the history of their academic discipline.

Drawing from the world-renowned collections in the Cambridge University Library and other partner libraries, and guided by the advice of experts in each subject area, Cambridge University Press is using state-of-the-art scanning machines in its own Printing House to capture the content of each book selected for inclusion. The files are processed to give a consistently clear, crisp image, and the books finished to the high quality standard for which the Press is recognised around the world. The latest print-on-demand technology ensures that the books will remain available indefinitely, and that orders for single or multiple copies can quickly be supplied.

The Cambridge Library Collection brings back to life books of enduring scholarly value (including out-of-copyright works originally issued by other publishers) across a wide range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and in science and technology.
In Northern Mists

Arctic Exploration in Early Times

Volume 1

Fridtjof Nansen
Translated by Arthur G. Chater
This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect the beliefs, practices and terminology of their time, and have not been updated.

Cambridge University Press wishes to make clear that the book, unless originally published by Cambridge, is not being republished by, in association or collaboration with, or with the endorsement or approval of, the original publisher or its successors in title.

The original edition of this book contains a number of colour plates, which have been reproduced in black and white. Colour versions of these images can be found online at www.cambridge.org/978108071680
IN NORTHERN MISTS
“THE GOLDEN CLOUDS CURTAINED THE DEEP WHERE IT LAY,
AND IT LOOKED LIKE AN EDEN AWAY, FAR AWAY”
IN NORTHERN MISTS
ARCTIC EXPLORATION IN EARLY TIMES
BY FRIDTJOF NANSEN
G.C.V.O., D.Sc., D.C.L., Ph.D., PROFESSOR OF OCEANOGRAPHY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CHRISTIANIA, ETC.
TRANSLATED BY ARTHUR G. CHATER
ILLUSTRATED

VOLUME ONE

LONDON : WILLIAM HEINEMANN : MCMXI
PREFACE

THIS book owes its existence in the first instance to a rash promise made some years ago to my friend Dr. J. Scott Keltie, of London, that I would try, when time permitted, to contribute a volume on the history of arctic voyages to his series of books on geographical exploration. The subject was an attractive one; I thought I was fairly familiar with it, and did not expect the book to take a very long time when once I made a start with it. On account of other studies it was a long while before I could do this; but when at last I seriously took the work in hand, the subject in return monopolised my whole powers.

It appeared to me that the natural foundation for a history of arctic voyages was in the first place to make clear the main features in the development of knowledge of the North in early times. By tracing how ideas of the Northern World, appearing first in a dim twilight, change from age to age, how the old myths and creations of the imagination are constantly recurring, sometimes in new shapes, and how new ones are added to them, we have a curious insight into the working of the human mind in its endeavour to subject to itself the world and the universe.

But as I went deeper into the subject I became aware that the task was far greater than I had supposed: I found that much that had previously been written about it was not to be depended upon; that frequently one author had copied another, and that errors and opinions which had once gained admission remained embedded in the literary tradition. What had to be done was to confine one’s self to the actual sources, and as far as possible to build up independently the best possible structure from the very foundation. But the more
PREFACE

extensive my studies became, the more riddles I perceived—
riddle after riddle led to new riddles, and this drew me on
farther and farther.

On many points I arrived at views which to some extent
conflicted with those previously held. This made it necessary
to give, not merely the bare results, but also a great part of the
investigations themselves. I have followed the words of
Niebuhr, which P. A. Munch took as a motto for “Det norske
Folks Historie”:

“Ich werde suchen die Kritik der Geschichte nicht nach
dunkeln Gefühlen, sondern forschend, auszuführen, nicht ihre
Resultate, welche nur blinde Meinungen stiften, sondern die
Untersuchungen selbst in ihrem ganzen Umfange vortragen.”

But in this way my book has become something quite
different from what was intended, and far larger. I have not
reached the history of arctic voyages proper.

Many may think that too much has been included here,
yet what it has been possible to mention here is but an
infinitesimal part of the mighty labour in vanished times
that makes up our knowledge of the North. The majority of
the voyages, and those the most important, on which the first
knowledge was based, have left no certain record; the greatest
steps have been taken by unknown pioneers, and if a halo has
settled upon a name here and there, it is the halo of legend.

My investigations have made it necessary to go through a
great mass of literature, for which I lacked, in part, the linguist-
ic qualifications. For the study of classical, and of mediaeval
Latin literature, I found in Mr. Amund Sommerfeldt a most
able assistant, and most of the translations of Greek and Latin
authors are due to him. By his sound and sober criticism of
the often difficult original texts he was of great help to me.

In the study of Arabic literature Professor Alexander Seippel
has afforded me excellent help, combined with interest in the
subject, and he has translated for me the statements of Arab
authors about the North.

In the preparation of this work, as so often before, I owe a
PREFACE

deep debt of gratitude to my old friend, Professor Moltke Moe. He has followed my studies from the very beginning with an interest that was highly stimulating; with his extensive knowledge in many fields bordering on those studies he has helped me by word and deed, even more often than appears in the course of the book. His intimate acquaintance with the whole world of myth has been of great importance to the work in many ways; I will mention in particular his large share in the attempt at unravelling the difficult question of Wineland and the Wineland voyages. Here his concurrence was the more valuable to me since at first he disagreed with the conclusions and views at which I had arrived; but the constantly increasing mass of evidence, which he himself helped in great measure to collect, convinced him of their justice, and I have the hope that the inquiry, particularly as regards this subject, will prove to be of value to future historical research.

With his masterly knowledge and insight Professor Alf Torp has given me sound support and advice, especially in difficult linguistic and etymological questions. Many others, whose names are mentioned in the course of the book, have also given me valuable assistance.

I owe special thanks to Dr. Axel Anthon Björnbo, Librarian of the Royal Library of Copenhagen, for his willing collaboration, which has been of great value to me. While these investigations of mine were in progress, he has been occupied in the preparation of his exhaustive and excellent work on the older cartography of Greenland. At his suggestion we have exchanged our manuscripts, and have mutually criticised each other's views according to our best ability; the book will show that this has been productive in many ways. Dr. Björnbo has also assisted me in another way: I have, for instance, obtained copies of several old maps through him. He has, besides, sent me photographs of vignettes and marginal drawings from ancient Icelandic and Norwegian MSS. in the Library of Copenhagen.

Mr. K. Eriksen has drawn the greater part of the reproduc-
PREFACE

...tions of the vignettes and the old maps; other illustrations are drawn by me. In the reproduction of the maps it has been sought rather to bring before the reader in a clear form the results to which my studies have led than to produce detailed facsimiles of the originals.

In conclusion I wish to thank Mr. Arthur G. Chater for the careful and intelligent way in which he has executed the English translation. In reading the English proofs I have taken the opportunity of making a number of corrections and additions to the original text.

FRIDTJOF NANSEN

Lysaker, August 1911
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAP.</th>
<th>INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>ANTIQUITY, BEFORE PYTHEAS TO THULE</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>ANTIQUITY, AFTER PYTHEAS</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>THE AWAKENING OF MEDIEVAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE NORTH</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI.</td>
<td>FINNS, SKRIDFINNS [LAPPS], AND THE FIRST SETTLEMENT OF SCANDINAVIA</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII.</td>
<td>THE VOYAGES OF THE NORSENMEN: DISCOVERY OF ICELAND AND GREENLAND</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII.</td>
<td>VOYAGES TO THE UNINHABITED PARTS OF GREENLAND IN THE MIDDLE AGES</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX.</td>
<td>WINELAND THE GOOD, THE FORTUNATE ISLES, AND THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                     |                                       | 312  |

xi