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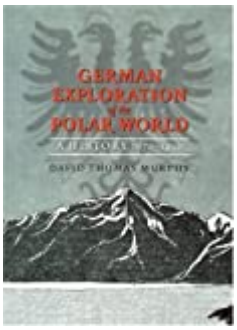

David Thomas Murphy. *German Exploration of the Polar World: A History, 1870-1940.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. 273 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8032-3205-1.

Reviewed by H. Glenn Penny (Department of History, University of Iowa)

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David Murphy has written a delightful book. Organized around a series of adventures, filled with human drama, and driven by intriguing individuals in search of knowledge, heroism, prestige and fame, *German Exploration of the Polar World* is sure to capture a wide audience. Although his tales about German explorers have gone largely untold, much of Murphy's story is familiar to anyone who has read the many accounts of Ernest Shackleton or other polar explorers: daring men combating the elements, frost-bitten toes that suffer amputation, national rivalries, international scientific cooperation, encounters with Eskimo, funding squabbles, shipwreck and isolation, snow blindness and madness, death and depression, polar bears, emperor penguins, and a range of new machines that help Europeans get an edge over the elements; this book has them all.

Indeed, one of the great strengths of this volume is Murphy's ability to provide a deeply textured narrative of Germans' polar adventures that often reads like an Andrea Barrett novel. In addition to introducing a range of characters such as August Petermann, the founder of *Petermanns geographische Mittheilungen* and a critical player in the initial German forays into the arctic, Murphy provides his readers with detailed discussions of the different ships his explorers enlisted, their innovative designs, and the various technological devices they brought with them. He also includes revealing accounts of their (surprisingly) luxurious diets and comfortable accommodations. The difficulties of organizing and directing these expeditions, and the human dramas that took place on the ice, play critical roles in the book as well. His rendition of the deaths of Alfred Wegener and Rasmus Villumsen in 1931, for example, is particularly moving. We also learn much about the ironies of scientific exploration and adventure in the modern world: the great Zeppelin exploration directed by Hugo Eckener in 1931, for instance, was limited to 82 degrees North by insurance agreements rather than scientific, political, or human considerations; nonetheless that trip was still a success. Indeed, although German efforts to explore the poles have been largely eclipsed by the more sensational excursions by Robert F. Scott and others, Murphy stresses the many small achievements that accompanied each German expedition, and argues that historical evaluations have been largely unfair: in most cases, German expeditions to the poles resulted in significant scientific contributions and they should not be forgotten.

If Murphy's focus on German explorers helps fill a neglected gap in the history of polar exploration, his dependence on German nationalism and the German state is the book's chief limitation. Murphy claims that his narrative is framed by the period when German polar explo-

ration was at its peak (1870-1940), and he argues that his book both "explores exploration itself" and seeks to discover what polar exploration might reveal about German society during these years. He concludes that there was a "steadily expanding link between science and the state and the gradual absorption of scientific exploration in the political aims of the state," and he contends that German nationalism played a critical role in his explorers' efforts (p. ix). Unfortunately, historians of science will find this revelation about the growing link between the state and science of little surprise, and most scholars familiar with German history will detect little here that is new about the character of Germans and the various manifestations of their nation state from 1870-1940.

For a book that is meant to remind us of the many scientific successes enjoyed by German expeditions to the poles, there is little discussion of German science. German expeditions into equatorial Africa and the Amazon were as popular and well supported as those to the poles, earning as much if not more attention in *Petermanns Mittheilungen* and similar periodicals. The book includes very little discussion of travelers like Alexander von Humboldt who captured German imaginations in the nineteenth century and set the stage for the full-scale scientific expeditions during the Imperial period. And reference to the imperialist contexts in which all of these explorers operated is scarce. But it is not simply the work on expeditions that goes neglected. Murphy's discussion of polar exploration under National Socialism, for example, fails to consider the vast amount of work focused on scientists who were supported by the Nazis. Indeed, Murphy's bibliography is rather thin. Scholars have given a good deal of attention to the German sciences and Germans' participation in a range of national and international expeditions, and their work could have helped Murphy better contextualize his discussion of funding drives, scientific organizations, internal and external rivalries, and the links between the sciences and the succession of national governments in Germany.

Had Murphy placed his expeditions into these broader contexts, he might have been less surprised about the Imperial government's unwillingness to fund some of the expeditions discussed here, the success the fundraisers had attracting international support and donations, and the actions by individuals such as Prince Regent Luitpold of Bavaria (well known for his support of the sciences) who came through for polar explorers in 1910 when the Kaiser let them down. Murphy might also have approached the nationalist proclamations in Petermann's fundraising efforts with a more critical eye and been more reluctant to characterize funding drives that elicit monies from Napoleon III and the Royal Italian Navy as a "pan-German" effort if he had considered similar actions by natural scientists with a different geographic focus. Such international support was typical for the time.

Placing his material into these broader contexts might also have spurred Murphy to organize his book differently. His fifth chapter, which begins three-fourths of the way through the book, introduces his readers to "the German image of the polar world" in a way that left this reviewer wondering why that material had not been included earlier. In this chapter, the reader belatedly learns that Germans were not only attracted to nationalist endeavors that promised adventure and fame, they were intrigued as well by the sublime landscape of the poles, with their strange shapes and unearthly hues. They were delighted by the awesome splendor of the auroras, unsettled by their remoteness, and fascinated with the Eskimo who had adapted to their harsh environments so well. These impulses are largely absent from the motivations Murphy presents in the first 154 pages as the driving forces behind German polar expeditions; and here too, when he finally addresses them in his fifth chapter, he fails to place them into the broader contexts of German connections with the wider world. He might have been less struck by German respect for the Eskimo, for example, had he considered the German scientists in many other lands (such as Karl von den Steinen during his 1887 XingÃº expedition in Brazil) who also recorded discovering a virtual paradise on earth.

For readers who are unfamiliar with German science and exploration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, Murphy provides a wonderful introduction. His book will certainly appeal to a popular audience interested in polar exploration, and it remains a lot of fun to read.

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