

Charles W. Johnson. 2014. *Ice Ship: The Epic Voyages of the Polar Adventurer Fram*. Lebanon, NH: ForeEdge (imprint of University Press of New England). 318 pages. ISBN: 978-1-61168-396-7. Ebook ISBN: 978-1-61168-604-3.

Since the completion of its first voyage in 1896 and the publication of Fridtjof Nansen's *Fram* [*Farthest North*] the following year, the Norwegian polar ship *Fram*—which means forward or ahead—has played a prominent role in numerous expedition narratives and polar explorer biographies and autobiographies. While these narratives tend to focus on one of *Fram*'s three voyages, *Ice Ship* by Charles W. Johnson follows this ship from its conception and construction by Fridtjof Nansen and Colin Archer, through its three pioneering voyages, to its eventual disrepair, and finally renovation and relocation to the *Fram* museum on Bygdøy, where it is currently one of Oslo's most popular tourist attractions. Johnson draws on polar histories, biographies, diaries, and other first-hand expedition accounts, as well as reflective writing and historical fiction, and weaves the backgrounds, motivations, and personalities of both the expedition leaders—Fridtjof Nansen, Otto Sverdrup, and Roald Amundsen—and participants into the narrative. Written with a popular audience in mind, *Ice Ship* provides a detailed and captivating introduction to *Fram*'s role in shaping Norway's identity as a polar nation during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a period known as the golden age of polar exploration.

About a third of *Ice Ship* is devoted to each of *Fram*'s epic voyages, and Johnson highlights the multiple purposes and ground-breaking qualities of each of them. The sometimes overlooked second expedition, during which Otto Sverdrup and his crew carried out scientific work and mapped large portions of the eastern Canadian Arctic from 1898-1902, is given equal coverage with the better known first (1893-96) and third voyages (1910-12) during which the North and South Poles were the intended geographical goals. *Ice Ship* follows the various sub-groups of these expeditions, describing both the parties who remained on the *Fram* in the Arctic and Southern Oceans and those that traveled on foot, not privileging a particular group or voyage. Johnson analyzes ways in which other accounts have overlooked or whitewashed various events and personalities connected to the *Fram*, and his descriptions of the expedition leaders' strengths and weaknesses—including Nansen's mood swings and Amundsen's secretiveness—can be used as a springboard to discuss leadership styles. The post-expedition lives of a number of *Fram*'s crewmembers are well integrated into the text and highlight the challenges polar explorers faced upon re-entry into society.

Johnson provides engaging connections between the members and goals of *Fram*'s three expeditions, and this results in smooth transitions between the book's sections. Johnson also places *Fram*'s journeys and expedition members in

the contexts of assorted Swedish, American, and British polar journeys, including the Greely and Franklin expeditions. The descriptions of the encounters of the *Fram*'s crews with iconic figures such as balloonist Salomon Andrée, Robert Peary, and the crew of Scott's *Terra Nova* also serve as useful points of reference for the reader. The contributions of various Inuit communities to the expeditions are acknowledged as well. Four brief vignettes are interspersed throughout the text, three of which provide readers with basic information about polar ice, days, seasons, and regions. The fourth is more personal in nature and, with the reflective preface and postscript, functions to highlight Johnson's personal connections to and passion for the history of exploration as well as contemporary issues in the Polar Regions.

Though richly illustrated and with a useful index and list of references to sources in English and Norwegian, scholarly audiences may wish for more extensive notes and more direct references to the source material. General audiences and students alike, however, will appreciate Johnson's engaging and at times poetic and suspenseful descriptions of the *Fram*'s voyages and colourful cast of characters. With *Ice Ship*, Johnson has written, in essence, a biography of the *Fram*, and in doing so has made a highly accessible and welcome contribution to the ever-growing field of polar literature.

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