

# FROM GREENLAND TO THE PACIFIC: INTRODUCTION TO THE CENTENNIAL OF THE FIFTH THULE EXPEDITION, 1921–1924

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## ABSTRACT

This paper introduces a new international initiative dedicated to the centennial anniversary of the Fifth Thule Expedition, 1921–1924, across the North American Arctic, under the leadership of Knud Rasmussen. The expedition, its field data, collections, and scholarly publications created a long-lasting legacy, particularly related to the Inuit groups of the Canadian Central Arctic. Far less known is the record left by the expedition in Alaska and the nearby Chukotka Peninsula, Russia. Around 2015–2017, several groups started planning for the expedition's centennial in 2021. The first step in these emerging efforts was a special session at the 46th annual meeting of the Alaska Anthropological Association in Nome in February 2019, which resulted in a series of papers presented in this issue. Initiatives taken since then to commemorate the Fifth Thule Expedition are also summarized.

## INTRODUCTION

This special issue of the *Alaska Journal of Anthropology* celebrates the centennial of one of the key milestones in the history of Arctic anthropology, the Fifth Thule Expedition of 1921–1924 (hereafter FTE, also known as “The Danish Expedition to Arctic North America” (Fig. 1). It was undertaken by a small team led by Danish explorer, writer, and self-taught ethnologist Knud Rasmussen (1879–1933) and his partners, including Danish, Greenlandic (Kalaallit), and Polar Inuit (Inughuit) participants. Yet the glory of the FTE was built on the contributions of hundreds of people whom they met and worked with on surveys from their base camp and during a prolonged trek across the Inuit people's homeland, from North Greenland to Nome, Alaska, and to Chukotka, Russia.

According to historian Terrence Cole (1999:xi–xiii), the FTE under Rasmussen set a new standard of achievement by which all later contributions to Arctic ethnology and archaeology would be measured. Rasmussen and his companions covered more than 18,000 km traveling

by dog teams, small boats, and sailing ships, crossing the boundaries of four countries: Greenland/Denmark, Canada, the United States (Alaska), and Russia (then the Soviet Union). In over three years of fieldwork, the FTE members collected more than 20,000 ethnographic, archaeological, and natural history specimens and compiled thousands of pages of diaries, notebooks, word lists, and manuscripts, with detailed descriptions of contemporary culture, language, folklore, and activities of the polar people they visited as well as the natural environment and prehistory of the areas they covered (see Mathiassen 1945:108–111).

The FTE publication record was massive, notably the 10 volumes in 34 individual issues of the renowned *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition* (1927–1952, plus one in 1988), some published long after the completion of the fieldwork,<sup>1</sup> but also numerous scholarly papers and popular accounts. Rasmussen was the first to popularize his incredible journey in Danish, in the two-volume *Fra Grønland*

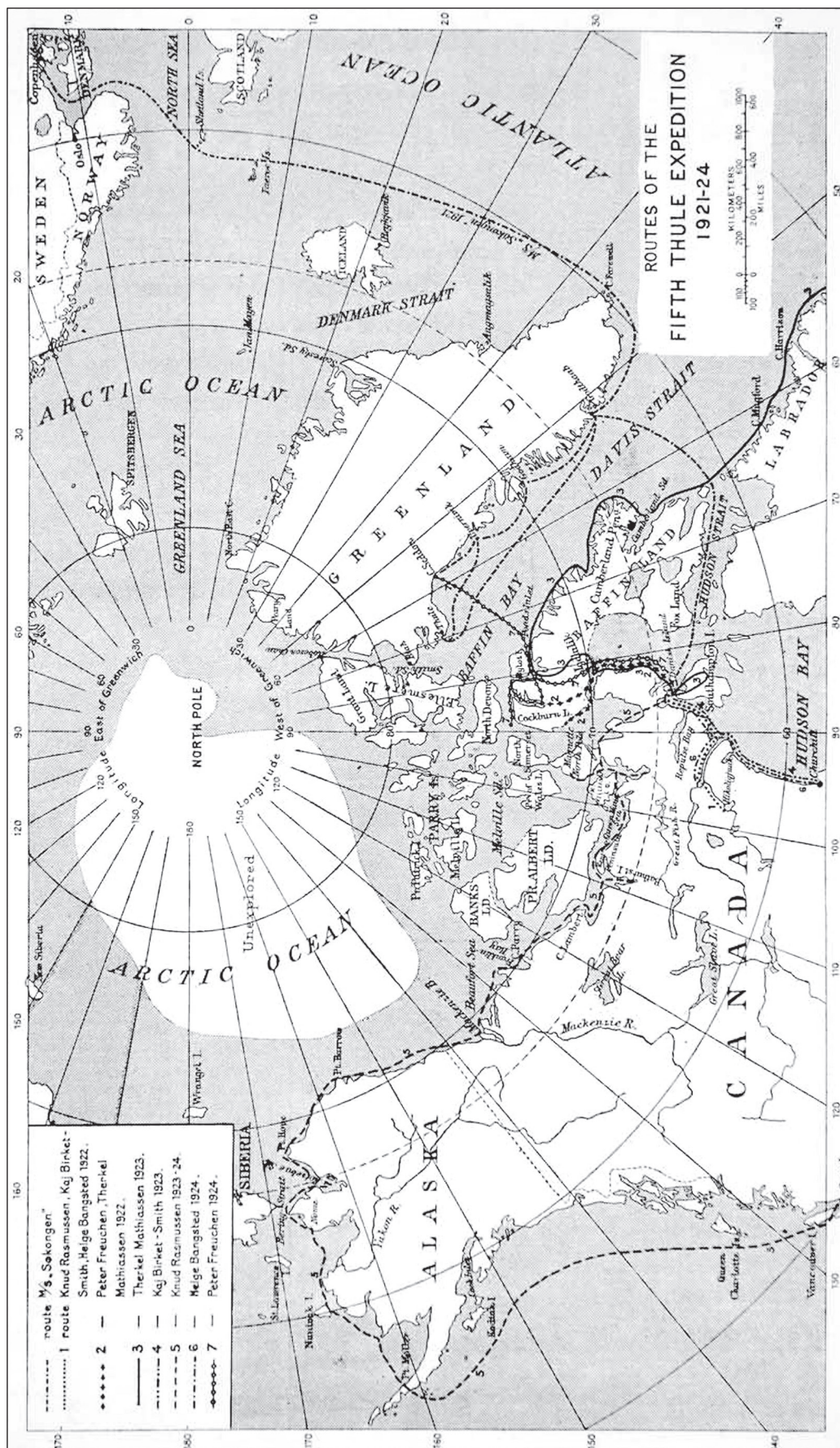


Figure 1: "Routes of Dr. Rasmussen's Fifth Thule Expedition, 1921-1924." Royal Geographical Society, London, 1926 (Rasmussen 1926: following p. 138).



*til Stillehavet* (Rasmussen 1925–1926), whose abbreviated English version, *Across Arctic America: Narrative of the Fifth Thule Expedition* (Rasmussen 1927), made him internationally famous; it was followed by a slim Danish popular version, *Den store Slæderejse* (Rasmussen 1932a). Jacob Olsen published an account of his experiences in Greenlandic (Olsen 1927; see Kleist, *this issue*), and Helge Bangsted (1926) and Therkel Mathiassen (1926) each produced popular books in Danish.

The FTE reports have been reviewed numerous times since their publication (see Kleivan et al. 1988) and their monumental scholarly value has been widely acknowledged. Nevertheless, the first *international* effort to assess the FTE's legacy did not come until 1988, in the form of a special issue of the journal *Études/Inuit/Studies*, on the occasion of the 55th anniversary of Rasmussen's passing in 1933 (Kleivan and Burch 1988). Though officially dedicated to Rasmussen's life and career, most of the papers deal with the legacy of the FTE, particularly in Canada. Although praiseworthy and respectful of Rasmussen's achievements, certain papers were critical of his omissions, unfounded generalizations, and even his style of fieldwork (e.g., Burch 1988a, 1988b; Remie 1988; Saladin d'Anglure 1988). In the tradition of the era, the collection offered a strictly *academic* perspective on Rasmussen's work and legacy and did not touch on its relevance to today's descendants of the people studied by Rasmussen and his colleagues.

Yet Rasmussen's multifaceted persona and his heroic Arctic ventures continued to serve as magnets to scholars, publishers, and popular writers. The following decades witnessed a bestseller reprint of his main popular account of the FTE, *Across Arctic America* (Rasmussen [1927] 1999), with a new expanded introduction (Cole 1999); a series of Rasmussen biographies, both scholarly and popular (Bown 2015; Hastrup 2010; Michelsen 2011, 2014, 2018); and several research papers (Gulløv 2016; Hastrup 2016; Nielsen 2007). They all illustrated how much new information could be collected today about Rasmussen's scientific ventures, writings, scholarly and political views, and, particularly, about his vision of the great connectedness of the Inuit/Eskimo people. They also revealed the remaining gaps in our knowledge about the FTE and its outcomes, including the current status of its ethnographic, archaeological, and photographic collections; the online accessibility of materials created by the FTE and their use for contemporary heritage and language/knowledge preservation work across its study area; and the outcomes of

Rasmussen's research and collection work in Alaska and in Russian Chukotka.

In an almost natural flow, these many lines of individual inquiries were eventually destined to come together, as awareness developed of the approaching centennial anniversary of the FTE by 2015–2017 (see below).<sup>2</sup> Of course, Rasmussen's towering figure continued to loom large over any efforts to revisit the FTE's legacy.

## “IT IS THE ESKIMOS THAT OWN MY HEART”

Knud Rasmussen, leader of the Fifth Thule Expedition, was born in 1879 in Ilulissat (then Jakobshavn), a Danish colonial hub in Disko Bay, West Greenland. His father was a priest, his mother a housewife of part-Inuit ancestry. He grew up among the Inuit, listening to their stories; speaking their language, Kalaallisut; and learning their travel methods, particularly travel by dogsled. He first drove a dog team at the age of eight. At the age of 12 he was sent to Denmark to further his education (see Michelsen, *this issue*).

As a young man Rasmussen returned to Greenland in 1902, joining the Danish Literary Expedition (1902–1904), where he met the Inughuit—the people known to scientists and explorers as the “Polar Eskimos” (later, “Polar Inuit”). These were the once isolated and mysterious Inuit of the far north, of whom he had heard so much in his boyhood. On his second expedition to northern Greenland in 1909, he assisted the Greenland Church Society in founding the North Star Mission (Gilberg 1984) and met Hans Peder Steensby, a geographer and ethnologist with an interest in determining the origins of Eskimo culture (see Michelsen; Krupnik, *this issue*).

Coincidentally, 1909 was the year in which veteran American explorer Robert Peary, who had provided the Inughuit with trade goods including guns and ammunition for almost two decades, announced the achievement of his life's goal, the attainment of the North Pole. With Peary's announcement, Rasmussen realized that the Inughuit would face hard times with little access to such goods, yet the Danish government was not interested in having a presence in the region. Rasmussen decided to fill that void, and in 1910 he founded the world's northernmost trading post, naming it Thule, a Greek word used classically to refer to the extreme north (Mathiassen 1934; Sand 1935). The Inughuit had their own name for the place and called it Uummannaq, “the one shaped like a heart.”

It was a trading post unlike any other. Rasmussen would use it as a base for a series of expeditions to explore the region, complete its mapping, and collect the traditional knowledge of the Inughuit. Four so-called Thule expeditions followed in the next decade (Cole 1999:xix–xx). The first (1912) was led by Rasmussen, accompanied by cartographer Peter Freuchen and two Inughuit dog drivers, Ulloriaq and Inukitsoq. The team traveled from the Thule station over the inland ice to northeastern Greenland and proved the nonexistence of Peary Channel; the results were published as *Grønland langs Polhavet* (Rasmussen 1919) and *Greenland by the Polar Sea* (Rasmussen 1921b). The Second Thule Expedition (1916–1918), primarily cartographic, was also led by Rasmussen, accompanied by Danish geologist and cartographer Lauge Koch, Swedish botanist Thorild Wulff, three Inughuit (Aajaku, Nasaatsorluarsuk, and Inukitsoq), and one West Greenlander (Hendrik Olsen). Although Rasmussen planned the Third Thule Expedition (1919), which laid out depots for a polar drift planned by Roald Amundsen, he did not participate in it. The Fourth Thule Expedition (also in 1919) was a trip by Rasmussen to Ammassalik on Greenland's east coast, from there to Thule and then to Egedesminde (now Aasiaat) in Disko Bay. Rasmussen studied folklore and collected myths and legends that appeared in a three-volume set, *Myter og Sagn fra Grønland* (Rasmussen 1921–1925), and partly in English as *Eskimo Folk-tales* (Rasmussen 1921a).

In addition to publishing the results of his adventures and ethnographic researches in both English and Danish, Rasmussen was keen to spread his message in the way his childhood peers would appreciate. His first major book, *Nye Mennesker*, a record of his experiences on the Literary Expedition, was published in Danish (Rasmussen 1905), then in English as *The People of the Polar North* (Rasmussen 1908), and the following year in Kalaallisut as *Avángarnisalerssárutit* (Rasmussen 1909b)—ensuring that his reputation as explorer and author would be known in his homeland as well as in Denmark and internationally. Indeed, during this same period he helped to establish an association, Grønlands Litteraturselskab (the Greenlandic Literary Society), that resulted in several books being published in Kalaallisut. He was the author and translator of some of them (Thisted 2002).

Finally, in 1921 Rasmussen was ready to realize his ambitious dream, the Fifth Thule Expedition. He expressed its lofty purpose in simple terms—to investigate “the great primary problem of the origin of the Eskimo

race” (Rasmussen 1927:vii; see Michelsen, *this issue*). In the process, Rasmussen would investigate and document the folklore and religion of the Inuit encountered—what he called their “intellectual culture.”

This was a scientific expedition, in which four Danes, in addition to Rasmussen, participated: Peter Freuchen (1886–1957) acted as surveyor and naturalist; Therkel Mathiasen (1892–1967) was the archaeologist; Kaj Birket-Smith (1893–1977) served as ethnologist; and Helge Bangsted (1898–1974) was Birket-Smith's scientific assistant. Another Dane, the photographer Leo Hansen (1888–1962), joined Rasmussen in the central Canadian Arctic for the expedition's final phase. Rasmussen himself was the leader and folklorist. A Kalaaleq (West Greenlander), Jacob Olsen (1890–1936), was secretary and interpreter to those Danes who could not speak an Inuit dialect (Fig. 2). Six Inughuit also participated, acting as hunters, sled drivers, seamstresses, and general assistants: Aaqqioq (ca. 1891–ca. 1931) and his wife Arnannnguaq (ca. 1896–1955); Nasaatsorluarsuk, also known as Bo'sun or Poorsimaat (ca. 1897–1975), and his wife Aqattaq (ca. 1905–?); a young man, Qaavigarsuaq, also known as Miteq, (ca. 1901–1978); and a young widow, Arnarulunnguaq (ca. 1895–1933). Three other Inughuit who had been expected to participate died before the expedition left Greenland (Frederiksen 1996; Gilberg 1994; Møller 2015; Kleist, *this issue*).

They established their headquarters—Blæsebælgen or “the bellows”—on a small, windy island in Foxe Basin that they named Danskeøen (Danish Island). From that base, the expedition teams traveled north, south, and west to document the land, its wildlife, and, most of all, its people. Inuit love to name strangers in their midst—sometimes because they find it difficult to pronounce their real names, and sometimes just for fun. Very early in the FTE, all the Danes and the one West Greenlander had been given Inuktitut names. Rasmussen, known in West Greenland as Kununnguaq and in the Thule District as Kunupaluk, became known to Canadian Inuit as Kunu, Kunut, or Kunuuti. Peter Freuchen, whom the people of northern Greenland knew as Piitarsuaq (big Peter), kept that name but was also sometimes simply called Piita. The Inuit also called Jacob Olsen by his first name, modifying it to Jaakku. Kaj Birket-Smith was Qakulluk, the Inuktitut word for fulmar, said to be because of his bird-like appearance. Helge Bangsted was called Sikkisaq and Ikkisaanngi, for reasons unknown. Therkel Mathiasen was known as Tikili or Tikilik, an attempt to pronounce



*Figure 2: Danish members of the FTE and Greenlandic Jacob Olsen prior to their departure from Nuuk, August 1921. Left to right: (front row) Captain Peder Pedersen, Knud Rasmussen, Peter Freuchen, Jacob Olsen; (back row) Kaj Birket-Smith, Therkel Mathiassen, and Helge Bangsted. At the time the photo was taken the Inughuit members of the expedition were at the hospital in Nuuk (then Godthab). Smithsonian Institution Archives, Records Unit 7091, Box 409, Folder 2, Photo 2005-8627.*

his first name (Copland 1979; Laugrand and Oosten 2009; People of Baker Lake 1979).

In February 1922, Birket-Smith and Bangsted traveled to Baker Lake, where Rasmussen and Qaavigarsuaq joined them three months later. This journey was critical to the research that Rasmussen, focusing on the intellectual culture, and Birket-Smith, interested in the material culture, were carrying out to test Steensby's theory (Steensby 1917). The FTE members were to meet the inland Inuit, whom Rasmussen dubbed the "Caribou Eskimos." He and Birket-Smith believed that their work had documented the culture of the original Eskimos. Unfortunately, both men succumbed to the temptation to use their data to prove Steensby's theory and to ignore those aspects that did not fit (Burch 1978, 1988a), rather than approaching the subject like an open book and letting the data they accumulated lead to a theory. It was their FTE partner Mathiassen who challenged Rasmussen's and Birket-Smith's theories on the basis of his archaeological digs and claimed that the early Eskimo culture had its origins

in Alaska, from where it spread eastward across Canada and to Greenland. All subsequent research has borne out that conclusion (Burch 1988a).

It is ironic, then, that although Rasmussen's conclusions on the subject of Eskimo origins, which has been described as "his most cherished research" (Burch 1988a:96), were wrong, 100 years later we are enormously indebted to him and his colleagues for our knowledge of the traditional (pre-Christian) customs and beliefs of Inuit in Canada. The results of their endeavors appeared in several volumes of the *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition*: Birket-Smith's two-part work, *The Caribou Eskimos* (1929), and Rasmussen's *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos* (1929), *Observations on the Intellectual Culture of the Caribou Eskimos* (1930a), *Iglulik and Caribou Eskimo Texts* (1930b), *The Netsilik Eskimos* (1931), and *Intellectual Culture of the Copper Eskimos* (1932b). Two more of Rasmussen's studies, *The Mackenzie Eskimos* (Ostermann 1942) and *The Alaskan Eskimos* (Ostermann and Holtved 1952), were compiled from his field notes and published



posthumously. Mathiassen (1927, 1930) also published the results of his archaeological work and his analysis of Rasmussen's collections from the western Arctic. These and the other issues of the FTE reports constitute a series of incomparable works comprising approximately 5,500 pages.

Before the FTE, there was no reliable information on the beliefs and culture of the societies of Inuit living inland from Hudson Bay ("Caribou Inuit"). Without Birket-Smith's studies, we would know almost nothing of the material culture of these people; without Rasmussen's work, we would know little of their religion nor of the beliefs of other Inuit of the northern Hudson Bay coast—the Aivilingmiut and their subgroup the Iglulingmiut—and the groups farther west on the central Arctic coast, to the Mackenzie Delta, and, to a lesser extent, northern Alaska. Even if Rasmussen described himself in the list of expedition personnel as a "folklorist," he had the soul of a poet, and he reveled in collecting the life stories and legends of the Inuit. He was at his best when recording religious beliefs and the practices of shamans.

The FTE was also extremely productive in the field of archaeology. Mathiassen, the expedition's sole archaeologist, accompanied by Jacob Olsen, spent the summer of 1922 excavating at Repulse Bay, then continued his work on Southampton Island. In 1923, he traveled with Canadian Inuit to Pond Inlet on northeastern Baffin Island, where he excavated throughout the summer, departing in the fall to Denmark. His work proved the existence of an ancient culture, subsequently named the Thule Culture, which was the precursor to modern Inuit culture (see Crowell, *this issue*). His massive volume *Archaeology of the Central Eskimos* (Mathiassen 1927) served as his doctoral dissertation at the University of Copenhagen; it laid the groundwork for future Arctic archaeology (Gulløv 2016).

### **"TO THE LAST ESKIMO TRIBE": INTO ALASKA AND SIBERIA**

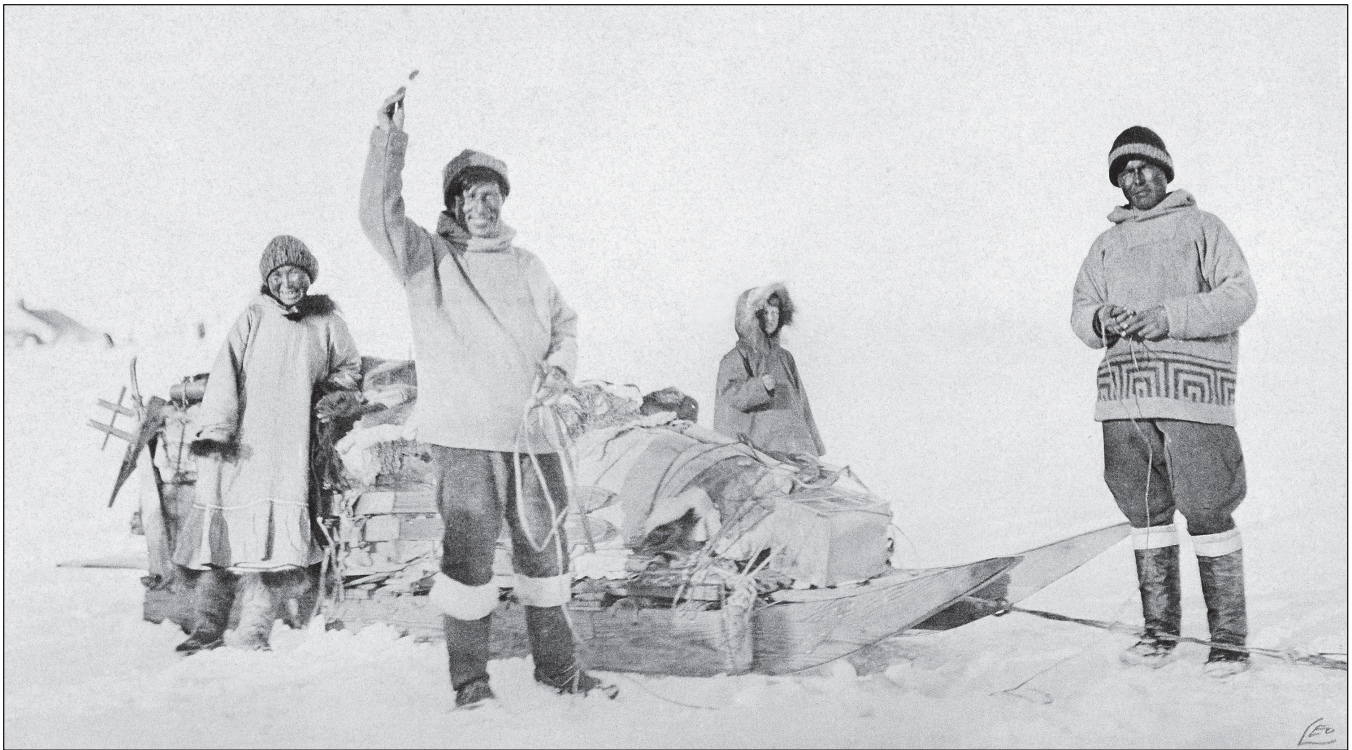
On March 11, 1923, Rasmussen started on his great sled journey westward accompanied by just two Inughuit—Qaavigarsuaq and Arnarulunguaq, the widow of Iggianguaq, who had died of influenza before the expedition left Greenland. The purpose of this grand undertaking was his long-held plan to visit the rest of the Inuit of the far northern reaches of Canada, including all those

along the Arctic coast and the Mackenzie Delta, and continue onward along the north coast of Alaska to the Bering Strait (Michelsen, *this issue*).

The party spent the first summer among the Nattilingmiut (Netsilingmiut), at that time a very isolated group, the least influenced by white contact of any group that Rasmussen encountered. He interrupted his time among the Nattilingmiut for a brief visit to the Ukkusiksalingmiut at the mouth of the Back River. He and his party traveled light, carrying only emergency rations and a supply of trade goods to use in acquiring ethnographical specimens from the Inuit. By November 1923, Rasmussen and his small party were at Kent Peninsula in the territory of the Copper Inuit (today called the Inuinnaït), where they were joined by Leo Hansen, a Danish photographer who had arrived from Alaska and would travel with them all the way to Barrow (today's Utqiagvik), then rejoin them later in Nome. They remained among the Umingmaktuurmiut ("People of the Muskox") at Kent Peninsula until January 1924. From there it was on to the old American whaling center of Herschel Island, before they crossed into Alaska on May 5, 1924 (Mathiassen 1945).

Their trip through Alaska was fast, with a few notable stopovers. On May 23, 1924, Rasmussen's party arrived in Barrow, where they spent 10 days before continuing south (Fig. 3), leaving Leo Hansen behind to film the Iñupiat summer whaling festival (see MacKenzie and Stenport, *this issue*). Shortly after, they arrived at Icy Cape, where a whale had just been caught and where the FTE party participated in the whaling festival and Rasmussen recorded songs and stories (Mathiassen 1945:100; Ostermann and Holtved 1952; Crowell, *this issue*). Here the great sled journey of about 6,000 km from its start at Hudson Bay came to an end. The sleds and most of the dogs were left behind, and all subsequent traveling was done by skin boats and schooners. On July 16 they reached Point Hope, and after two weeks they moved south via Cape Thompson and Kotzebue, until they finally reached Nome on August 31 (Burch 1988b; Mathiassen 1945:100–105).

Nome, the westernmost community in North America and still one of its busiest frontier towns, was a crossroads for different groups—Iñupiat, Yup'ik, and Siberian and St. Lawrence Island Yupik—from western Alaska and the adjacent parts of Russia. Here, Rasmussen was able to collect invaluable ethnographic and folklore data (see Sonne; Pratt, *this issue*) and even launched a short trip to the Russian Chukotka region across the Bering Strait (see



*Figure 3: Rasmussen (second from left) on his departure from Barrow (Utqiagvik), Alaska, June 1924. Smithsonian Institution Archives. Records Unit 7091, Box 409, Folder 2, Photo 2005-8635.*

Schwalbe et al.; Shokarev; Bronshtein, *this issue*). Upon his return from the abortive trip to Russia, he spent another month in Nome, interviewing people, recording stories, and purchasing ethnographic and archaeological specimens, before leaving with his two Inughuit companions on a steamer for Seattle, then by train to New York, with a short side trip to Washington, DC (see below), and then by transatlantic liner to Copenhagen. With that, the FTE was concluded.

Or at least the physical part was over, but much remained to be done. As Rasmussen himself once said, “One can never finish exploring a people” (Rasmussen 1927:xiii). As noted earlier, FTE participants authored most of the 10 volumes of the expedition’s published reports. These are a treasure trove of information on the material culture, daily customs, myths, legends, beliefs, and life stories of the people they encountered. Rasmussen was the last of the old-style dogsled explorers. He once stated, “from my heart I bless the fate that allowed me to be born at a time when Arctic exploration by dog sledge was not yet a thing of the past” (Rasmussen 1927:v; see Krupnik, *this issue*). In elaborating on that theme, he said:

It was my privilege, as one born in Greenland, and speaking the Eskimo language as my native tongue,

to know these people in an intimate way....From the very nature of things, I was endowed with attributes for Polar work which outlanders have to acquire through painful experience....[F]rom the earliest boyhood I played and worked with the hunters, so that even the hardships of the most strenuous sledge-trips became pleasant routine for me. (Rasmussen 1927:vi)

Rasmussen knew that the FTE was his crowning achievement—he called it “a great and rich experience for me”—but felt that he still had more to contribute. His work would remain focused on the Arctic, he said, “for it is the Eskimos that own my heart” (Hansen 1953:177; see also Bown 2015:263). After the FTE, two more Thule expeditions followed. On the last, to Ammassalik and Scoresbysund in East Greenland in the summer of 1933, Rasmussen took ill and was evacuated to Denmark, where he died on December 21 of that year, at the age of 54.

### **THE FTE CENTENNIAL: BUILDING A COALITION**

By all accounts, Rasmussen started planning his great sled journey across the North American Arctic in 1909, if not a few years prior (see above; Rasmussen 1909a; Michelsen,



*this issue*). A century later, it took us at least five to six years to lay the groundwork for a celebration of its legacy, of which this collection is a small part. The idea to use the approaching centennial of the expedition to reevaluate its importance and impacts was reportedly advanced in 2014 (see Griebel et al., *this issue*). That year, the staff of the Pitquhirnikkut Ilihautiniq/Kitikmeot Heritage Society (PI/KHS), an Inuit-directed community and research center in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, considered exploring the FTE's Inuinnait ethnographic collections stored at the National Museum of Denmark. The PI/KHS vision was, and remains, that the centennial should bring international attention to the FTE work for preserving and renewing Inuinnait knowledge, language, and culture, and for the broader benefit of all Inuit.

In spring 2016, the message about the PI/KHS effort reached the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center (ASC) in Washington, DC, via our Danish colleagues, Daria Morgounova Schwalbe and Bent Nielsen (both contributors to this issue). They reported briefly about working with the team from the PI/KHS, its Canadian research partners, and curators at the Danish National Museum to secure funding for a prototype of the Fifth Thule Expedition Atlas. The message also included the first link to the atlas site barely two weeks after it went online.<sup>3</sup>

A brief chance to discuss the atlas and opportunities to combine resources for a prospective FTE centennial in 2021 emerged in October 2016, at the 20th Inuit Studies Conference in St. John's, Newfoundland. The conference program included a paper titled "Fifth Thule Expedition Atlas and the Digital Return of Inuit Knowledge," coauthored by Brendan Griebel, Pamela Gross, and Darren Keith. In between the sessions, Darren Keith from the PI/KHS and Amos Hayes from the Geomatics and Cartographic Research Centre at Carleton University, Ottawa, demonstrated a working prototype of the online atlas produced by the Geomatics and Cartographic team, which covered the Inuinnait territory between Coronation Gulf and King William Island (see Griebel et al., *this issue*).

These first talks and the follow-up correspondence addressed the possibility of a larger program to eventually involve other partners from Canada, Greenland, Alaska/U.S., Denmark, and perhaps Russia, and feature the entire area explored by the FTE, "from Greenland to the Pacific." In early 2017, the ASC published a major international volume, *Early Inuit Studies: Themes and Transitions, 1850s–1980s* (Krupnik 2016), with two chapters covering aspects of the FTE legacy (Gulløv 2016; Hastrup 2016).

The ASC has considerable experience in organizing international "centennial" programs, like the earlier celebration of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition (the Jesup-2 program<sup>4</sup>) and the Fourth International Polar Year (2007–2008) (Krupnik et al. 2009). The ASC also has a direct link to Rasmussen and the FTE legacy, though admittedly not at the level of the Danish institutions that house the bulk of the FTE collections and related archival documents (see Appelt et al.; Nielsen; Schwalbe et al., *this issue*). In November 1924, on the final leg of their return trip from Alaska to Denmark via New York, Rasmussen, photographer Leo Hansen, and Inughuit collaborators Arnarulunnguaq and Qaavigarsuaq made a short stop-over in Washington, DC. Their primary goal was to visit the Science Service news organization established in 1921 for the popularization of science (Fitzhugh and Rusk 2005; Krupnik 2018). Rasmussen left the Science Service a small collection of documents, newspaper clips, and copies of some expedition photographs that were eventually transferred to the Smithsonian archives and are used as illustrations to this special collection. The file included several photos of Rasmussen and his companions in Washington taken by Watson Davis of the Science Service (Figs. 4 and 5).

In January 2018, the ASC hosted a high-level Greenlandic delegation led by the then Minister of Independence, Foreign Affairs, and Agriculture Suka K. Frederiksen (Krupnik 2018; Fig. 6). Our guests were excited about a prospective international program with an active Greenlandic component. The emerging consensus within the ASC team was that we should use our international networks to encourage future centennial partners to engage in knowledge and data sharing, research, and public programs, and particularly in assisting Arctic Indigenous communities in the areas visited by FTE to reconnect with the records of their cultures and heritage created by the expedition members. This journal volume is a true reflection of those goals.

In March 2018, on visits to Moscow and Copenhagen, we continued brainstorming the FTE centennial with partners on earlier ASC ventures. In Moscow, the response was unanimously enthusiastic, as the area around Cape Dezhnev (East Cape) that Rasmussen visited in Chukotka in September 1924 (see Bronshtein; Schwalbe et al.; Shokarev, *this issue*) is currently the top priority of Russian-led efforts in Arctic heritage documentation. In Copenhagen, the response was equally wholehearted. In meetings at the Danish National Museum and the





*Figure 4: Knud Rasmussen (left) and his Inughuit companions Arnarulunnguaq (center) and Qaavigarsuaq (right) in Washington, DC, November 1924. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Records Unit 7091, Box 409, Folder 2, Photo 2005-8654.*



*Figure 5: Members of the Fifth Thule Expedition prepare to board the train in Washington, DC. Left to right: Arnarulunnguaq (in Alaska Native outer cloth parka), Knud Rasmussen, Leo Hansen (expedition photographer), and Qaavigarsuaq. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Records Unit 7091, Box 409, Folder 2, Photo 2005-8645.*





*Figure 6: Greenlandic delegation at the Arctic Studies Center, January 2018. Left to right: Deputy Minister Kenneth Høegh, Head of Department Jacob Isbosethsen, Rebecca Lynge, and Foreign Minister Suka K. Frederiksen. Photo by Igor Krupnik.*

Danish Arctic Institute, we agreed to share plans and join forces. Danish colleagues also offered help in connecting to their partners in Greenland to build a larger international coalition.

### WHY NOME? FTE AND THE ALASKA ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, 2019

Shortly afterwards, in spring 2018, the Alaska Anthropological Association (AkAA) announced that its 46th annual meeting would be held in Nome in February 2019 and invited proposals for thematic sessions. Nome (population 3,800, 55% Alaska Native in 2020) would be an ideal place for a meeting to celebrate the FTE centennial. It was the last stop in Arctic North America for Rasmussen and his small team, who spent two months there in September–October 1924. The official theme of the AkAA meeting, “Alaska Anthropology in the Age of Engagement: Communities, Collections and Collaboration,” was also a perfect match to our program.

In June 2018, Aron Crowell and Igor Krupnik submitted a proposal for a full-day session titled “The Centennial of the Fifth Thule Expedition, 1921–1924: Arctic/Alaskan/Bering Strait Connections.” We envisioned a scholarly symposium with papers, a follow-up book (or a special

journal issue), and associated public programs to feature scholars, filmmakers, museum specialists, and Indigenous cultural experts—Iñupiat, Canadian and Greenlandic Inuit, Russian Yupik and Chukchi—from U.S./Alaska, Canada, Denmark, Greenland, and Russia. Such public events, including a film festival, would help introduce the FTE and its pioneering role in forging trans-Inuit connections, both to the Nome community and to the descendants of people who interacted with Rasmussen and his companions almost 100 years ago.

In October 2018, our session was accepted, and the AkAA board offered its financial support for Indigenous participants from Canada. Special efforts were taken to expand the usual crowd of curators, anthropologists, historians, and ASC-affiliated researchers. The AkAA grant provided travel funds for two Inuit participants from Canada—Pamela Hakongak Gross, executive director of the PI/KHS in Cambridge Bay, and Bernadette Miqquusaaq Dean, educator and heritage worker from Rankin Inlet, both in Nunavut. The U.S. Arctic Research Commission supported travel for Eileen Norbert, Nome-born Inuit educator and cultural worker (see Norbert, *this issue*), the author of a recently published book on historical photography by her grandfather Charles Menadelook (1892–1933) (Norbert 2016). Thanks to the efforts of



the Greenland Representation at the Danish Embassy in Washington and the Greenlandic National Museum and Archives (Nunatta Katersugaasivia Allagaateqarfialu), the Greenlandic Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided funds to support the attendance of Dr. Mari Kleist, a Greenlandic archaeologist (see Kleist, *this issue*). Another enthusiastic partner was Danish film director Lene Borch Hansen at Nordisk Film Production and the lead force behind the newly released film, *Knud Rasmussen: The Great Enchanter* (Lowzow et al. 2017).

Nothing went smoothly, even though our troubles in 2018–early 2019 paled in comparison with what Rasmussen and his partners experienced almost 100 years earlier. In January 2019, the Smithsonian Institution was closed due to the U.S. government shutdown; it blocked the very ability for Smithsonian speakers to travel. When the shutdown ended, the threat of another closure loomed

until mid-February, leaving our plans up in the air. Of course, one should never discount Mother Nature, particularly in Alaska. On the night before the session, a powerful snowstorm prevented the Anchorage-to-Nome flight (with several speakers on board) from landing, leaving those of us already in town scrambling to make emergency plans for a reorganized session. Against all odds, we were lucky to have all speakers in Nome for the session on February 28, 2019.

The full-day session with 15 papers took place in a packed classroom at the University of Alaska Northwest Campus in Nome (Fig. 7). The papers were organized in clusters to cover three major session themes: (1) the intellectual history of the FTE; (2) its work in Alaska and specifically in the Bering Strait–Seward Peninsula area, including Russian Chukotka; and (3) the legacy of the FTE, including the role of its museum, archival, photo-



*Figure 7: Participants in the FTE session at the 2019 Alaska Anthropological Association meeting in Nome, Alaska. Left to right, front row: Bernadette Driscoll Engelstad, Daria Schwalbe, Pamela Hagongak Gross, Lene Borch Hansen, Eileen Norbert, and Birgitte Sonne. Left to right, back row: Igor Krupnik, Bent Nielsen, Aron Crowell, Stephen Loring, Kenneth Pratt, Matt Ganley, Mari Kleist, and Knud Michelsen.*

graphic, and other resources in contemporary scholarship and museum work, and its value to the people living in the areas and communities visited by the FTE. This structure is preserved in the current volume (see below).

On the last day of the AkAA conference, the group held a four-hour public session at the Carrie McLain Memorial Museum for conference participants and Nome residents. It featured a presentation by Pamela Gross and Bernadette Dean about the ways Canadian Inuit communities support their language, subsistence tradition, and cultural heritage; a popular lecture by Knud Michelsen featuring the life of Rasmussen and his many travels; and the official North American premiere of the 55-minute film *Knud Rasmussen: The Great Enchanter*, introduced by its director, Lene Borch Hansen. The audience welcomed this public “return” of Rasmussen and the FTE appropriately taking place in Nome, the last North American stop on the expedition’s 18,000 km route.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THIS COLLECTION

Papers in this centennial volume generally repeat the organization of the Nome AkAA session, even if some contributions replaced a few missing original talks. The first section, “Intellectual History,” follows a short foreword by Bernadette Miqqusaq Dean (also delivered in Nome), volume preface (by Aron Crowell), and this introduction. The opening paper in the first section, authored by Knud Michelsen, reviews the many plans—seven altogether—that Rasmussen developed between the early 1900s and 1921 for the FTE’s goals and areas of operation. It is remarkable how persistent Rasmussen was in pursuing his youthful dream of a sled journey across the entire Inuit area, which he finally accomplished at the age of 45. Mari Kleist shifts the focus to the Indigenous partners of the FTE and their roles in its success, long overshadowed by the attention given to the Danish scientists. Speaking on behalf of the PI/KHS, Brendan Griebel, Darren Keith, and Pamela Gross introduce the story of its multiyear effort to retrieve FTE cultural materials in support of Inuinnait cultural heritage, language, and community resilience, and the development of the digital Fifth Thule Expedition Atlas—a joint venture of the PI/KHS, the Geomatics and Cartographic Research Centre at Carleton University, and the National Museum of Denmark. Bernadette Driscoll Engelstad dwells on the richness of the early Inuit ethnographic collections from the Central Canadian Arctic assembled by Rasmussen’s predecessors,

George Comer, Roald Amundsen, Vilhjálmur Stefansson, Rudolf Anderson, and others in the years preceding the FTE. Igor Krupnik’s paper offers another historical perspective by placing Rasmussen’s approach in the broader context of the scholarly vision and field methods of his peers in the same age group born in the 1870s and 1880s, and of the preceding “great generation,” in their research in the Arctic.

The six papers in the following section, “Alaska–Chukotka Crossroads,” address Rasmussen’s work in Alaska and nearby Chukotka (Chukchi Peninsula) on the FTE’s westernmost leg in summer–fall 1924. Aron Crowell evaluates Rasmussen’s observations on Inupiaq whaling, whaling ceremonies, and mythology in Alaska and compares this complex to practices and beliefs that the expedition recorded among the Central Inuit. Kenneth Pratt explores the story of a Nunivak Island shaman named Nayagnir (“Najagneq”) who was put on trial in Nome in 1924, thus fortuitously offering Rasmussen a chance to document Nuniwarmiut (the people of Nunivak Island) beliefs and stories from him and others from his homeland brought to Nome to testify in the trial. Birgitte Sonne compares beliefs of the Nuniwarmiut to the general spiritual culture of the Inuit world, relying on Nunivak masks and drawings from the FTE collected and commissioned by Rasmussen. Scott MacKenzie and Anna Westerstahl Stenport introduce the “lost” films produced by the FTE cameraman, Leo Hansen, specifically his little-known footage from Utqiagvik and Nome. Daria Schwalbe, Anne Lisbeth Schmidt, and Kristoffer Schmidt give an overview of diverse museum collections (ethnographic, archaeological, and photographic) that originated from Rasmussen’s short trip to Chukotka, including a major collection of Native Siberian clothing that he purchased a few years later and donated to the National Museum of Denmark. Lastly, historian Sergei Shokarev illuminates the story of the small community of Kengiskun (Dezhnevo) in Chukotka, where Rasmussen landed on his aborted trip to meet the Yupik people at East Cape.

The last section, “Fifth Thule Expedition Resources Today,” considers the diverse legacy resources of the FTE and their value to today’s Arctic communities. Martin Appelt, Bjarne Grønnow, and Anne Mette Randrup Jørgensen tell the story of over 200 Nattilingmiut (Netsilingmiut) Inuit pencil drawings produced during the FTE fieldwork and recently rediscovered at the National Museum of Denmark. Bent Nielsen overviews major depositories of the archival and photographic materials



produced by the FTE at several Danish institutions and, more specifically, the FTE photo collection at the Danish Arctic Institute in Copenhagen. Eileen Norbert presents rare photographs taken by (Charles) Menadelook, Inupiaq teacher and self-made photographer, whose lively pictures from the same era differed in many aspects from the staged and landscape photography by the FTE members. The final paper by art curator Michael Bronshtein offers the first-ever assessment of five walrus tusks engraved by local Chukchi and Yupik carvers that Rasmussen reportedly brought back from Chukotka. A short epilogue by William Fitzhugh summarizes the key outcomes of this centennial reappraisal of the FTE and Rasmussen's monumental contributions to the study of the Inuit people and the richness of their cultures.

## THE EMERGING CENTENNIAL LANDSCAPE

As these papers illustrate, in terms of public knowledge the impact of the FTE is still underestimated in Alaska, in spite of the publication of *Agayut* (Sonne 1988), a description and interpretation of masks and drawings from Nunivak. It is hard to trace the FTE's impact in Russia, even though Rasmussen's name is well-known in the country, thanks to the Russian translation of *Den store Slaederejse* (Rasmussen 1958). Even less known is the fate of the Native communities that Rasmussen visited in Chukotka—Dezhnevo (closed in 1952) and Uelen, as well as his unrealized “promised land,” the Yupik community of Nuvuqaq (Naukan), also closed in 1958. The Yupik and Chukchi people know that Rasmussen was once in their homeland, but few know when and where, and what he did there.

In Canada, as discussed earlier, the PI/KHS got an early start (by a number of years) on initiatives that will serve to celebrate the FTE centennial; of particular interest is the Fifth Thule Expedition Atlas (see Griebel et al., *this issue*). Under the mandate of PI/KHS, the project has focused on documenting the expedition's activities within Inuinnaït territory; its coverage begins when Rasmussen entered that region from the east and ends when he departed from it to the west. The FTE touched only lightly on the Qikiqtaaluk (formerly Baffin) region in Nunavut, with some ethnographic work in Igloodik and cartographic and archaeological work taking place on northern Baffin Island. The bulk of the expedition's ethnographic and archaeological work took place in the Kivalliq (formerly Keewatin) region. Yet the Inuit Heritage Trust, a Nunavut-

wide organization established under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, and the Government of Nunavut's Department of Culture and Heritage so far have not planned any role in the FTE centennial activities.

Unfortunately, many plans for 2020 were postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nordic Bridges, a yearlong cultural initiative between the Nordic countries and Canada, to be coordinated by the Harbourfront Centre in Toronto, has been moved to 2022. Part of its planning originally included an FTE component as an initiative of the Winnipeg Art Gallery and the National Museum of Denmark, with possible participation from the Nuuk Art Gallery. The Embassy of Denmark in Canada is supportive of Nordic Bridges and other Canadian initiatives to celebrate the FTE.<sup>5</sup> The Inuksiutiit Katimajit Association, a nonprofit group based at Université Laval in Québec, Canada—which is behind the Inuit Studies conferences and *Études/Inuit/Studies* journal—intends to conduct its next conference in Winnipeg in late 2021. Organizers have expressed great interest in having the FTE centennial as a significant component of the conference program, particularly since many strong family memories about interaction with Rasmussen and the FTE team remain in the region (see Bernadette Miquusaaq Dean, *this issue*). Various other plans have been put in place by our Danish and Greenlandic colleagues to celebrate the FTE centennial.

Readers should be aware that this collection, per its very origin, explores primarily the Alaska/Bering Strait components of the FTE legacy. We anticipate it will serve as a forerunner to other centennial publications expressing perspectives by our Canadian, Danish, Greenlandic, and other colleagues on Rasmussen and the glory of the Fifth Thule Expedition.

## NOTES

1. Volume 1 of the FTE *Report* provided a general summary of the expedition, as well as its research in topography and geology, volume 2 covered botany and zoology, volume 3 dealt with physical anthropology and linguistics, and volume 4 summarized results of archaeology. The next five volumes were dedicated to ethnological studies of the central Canadian Inuit (Eskimo): the inland Inuit living west of Hudson Bay (vol. 5, Caribou Inuit), Iglulingmiut (vols. 6–7, Iglulik), Nattilingmiut (vol. 8, Netsilik), and Inuinnaït (vol. 9, Copper Inuit). Finally, volume 10, published

after Rasmussen's death, covered his research in the Mackenzie Delta and Alaska. Its last component, dedicated to masks of the Nuniwarmiut (Nunivak Island Eskimo) commissioned by Rasmussen in Nome in 1924 (Sonne 1988), was published 55 years after Rasmussen's passing and was named part 4 of the volume.

2. The idea of retracing Rasmussen's route across the North American Arctic by dogsled or by air has been entertained by journalists, filmmakers, professional dog mushers, and tour operators (Hafey 2018; Matthews n.d.), a tradition that goes back to at least the 1970s (e.g., Fleischer 1993; Flowers 2011; Lauritzen 1979, 1983).
3. Elyse Skura and Jennifer Geens, "New Online Atlas Connects Inuit with Lost History of Knud Rasmussen Expedition," *CBC News*, April 23, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/knud-rasmussen-fifth-thule-expedition-atlas-1.3547847>.
4. In 1992–2002, the ASC organized the international Jesup-2 program celebrating the centennial of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition (1897–1902), directed by Franz Boas. It engaged numerous partners from the U.S., Canada, Russia, Germany, and Japan, including many Indigenous knowledge holders. It included Jesup-2 international sessions and three volumes of scholarly papers (Kendall and Krupnik 2003; Krupnik and Fitzhugh 2001; Tanimoto and Inoue 2009), and initiated exhibits, collection tours, and international research exchanges. A special component was virtual sharing of the Jesup Expedition museum objects with their home communities in the North Pacific region, using the technologies of the era—CD-ROMs, photo prints, small traveling exhibits, and nascent collection websites.
5. In 2019, Kenn Harper presented an illustrated lecture, "Knud Rasmussen: A Canadian Perspective on a Danish-Greenlandic Explorer," to a meeting of the Canadian Nordic Society and contributed a chapter on the FTE to the annual publication of the Danish Associations in Canada (Harper 2020). He is also working on a series of articles on the FTE in his history column, "Taissumani," in the northern newspaper *Nunatsiaq News*.

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