

## EPILOGUE: REFLECTIONS ON THE FIFTH THULE CENTENNIAL

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As a distracted Dartmouth College undergraduate in the early 1960s, I was introduced to the Fifth Thule Expedition (FTE) by Professor Elmer Harp in his class on Arctic peoples. At the time I absorbed little from the thick gray FTE *Report* volumes other than their photographs. Later, I came to see these volumes as foundation blocks for modern Arctic anthropology. Today, they seem more like a scientific veneer—important but obscuring a deeper reality. Little attention has been paid to the inside story of the expedition: the personalities, events, aspirations, adversities, and decision-making that determined its course and the profoundly significant interactions that took place between its personnel and Inuit peoples of the Central and Western Arctic.

This centennial compilation expands our appreciation for what Knud Rasmussen and his Danish and Greenlandic colleagues accomplished, allowing us to see their work more fully as revealed through archival studies of expedition records, photographs, films, and family histories. The authors in this issue consider many new themes: Rasmussen's continuing search for Siberian connections after his FTE fieldwork, the character of his Alaskan encounters and value of the ethnographic data he recorded there, insights into Alaska Native cultures at the beginning of the twentieth century, new information about the Greenlandic Inuit team, and a host of other original topics, all providing fresh perspectives on the results and conduct of the FTE and its relevance today.

Centennials like the anniversary of the FTE (1921–1924) are occasions to assess major contributions and take stock of where a field has been and where it is headed. The Jesup North Pacific Expedition (1897–1902) centennial some twenty years ago inspired the Smithsonian exhibition *Crossroads of Continents: Cultures of Siberia and Alaska*, and was commemorated by research, publications, and public programs (Chaussonnet and Fitzhugh 1994;

Fitzhugh and Crowell 1988; Kendall and Krupnik 2003; Kendall et al. 1997; Krupnik and Fitzhugh 2001). The century mark of the FTE is shaping up as a similar milestone for anthropology, history, and cultural studies in the Arctic, with engagement of a new cohort of international and Indigenous scholars, new access to collections, and the involvement of Inuit communities in the recovery of cultural knowledge recorded by the expedition five generations ago. The FTE was—and remains—one of the most important and innovative anthropological research enterprises ever undertaken in Arctic North America, and the studies presented here demonstrate that it contains riches still to be mined. In a time of rapid environmental change and cultural, social, and political awakening, we may reflect on what the future may bring and anticipate some of the answers from these essays.

### PATHWAYS TO THE FIFTH THULE CENTENNIAL

Inuit are no strangers to scientific scrutiny; in fact, they may be one of the most-studied Indigenous populations in the world. Their adaptation to an environment seen as hostile by outsiders and sometimes by the Inuit themselves (e.g., statements by Nattilingmiut about the precarity of their existence in Rasmussen 1931:134–139); their relative isolation from the transformations wrought elsewhere in the world by agriculture, industrialization, and empire; and their “discovery” by Europeans during the Age of Exploration all stimulated inquiry into their culture, lifeways, and history. Fundamental questions such as, Who are the Inuit? Where did they come from? How ancient is their culture? were asked as early as the 1570s by Martin Frobisher (Stefansson and McCaskill 1938). Little by little, answers began to emerge as information accumulated from explorers and missionaries, and, after the 1850s,

through purpose-driven investigations by naturalists, ethnographers, archaeologists, and linguists.

None were more influential in shaping this research tradition than the Danes, starting with their colonization of Greenland in 1721 and early descriptive works by missionary Hans Egede ([1818] 1973) and his sons and continuing through the FTE, which codified what became known as “Eskimology” and later as “Inuit studies” (Krupnik 2016). Scholarly investigation of Inuit origins and cultural history began with Danish studies in Greenland by Rink (1873, 1875; see Marquardt 2016) and Thalbitzer (1914), concurrently advanced in Alaska by Smithsonian naturalists (Murdoch 1892; Nelson 1899) and in Canada by Turner (1894) and Boas (1888) (Fitzhugh 2009; Krupnik 2016). This explosion of ethnography provided John Murdoch (1892) with data for the first comparative analysis of Inuit artifact types, demonstrating widespread cultural connections across the North American Arctic.

These studies raised the question of how to account for the many common features of Inuit cultures from Alaska to Greenland, including language, domestic architecture, watercraft, hunting equipment and practices, and mythology. Rasmussen was intrigued by Rink’s (1886) hypothesis that Inuit culture originally developed in the subarctic interior and spread across the Arctic from Alaska to Greenland, modified by later views that this expansion essentially occurred twice, the first via an interior route by the so-called Paleoeskimos and the second along the coast from Bering Strait to Greenland by the maritime-adapted Neoeskimo culture (Gulløv 2016; Steensby 1905, 1916). It was this hypothetical second wave that explained the cultural continuities that Rasmussen expected to find and sought to prove with the FTE, shaping his grand multidisciplinary survey of living Arctic peoples and, through archaeology, their ancestry.

Inuit research blossomed in the decades after the FTE, including archaeological excavations by Diamond Jenness (1928) at Wales and Little Diomedé, Alaska, and Henry Collins (1937) on St. Lawrence Island that verified the Bering Strait origin of the Thule/Neoeskimo, and studies by Jenness (1925) and Collins (1956) that built a new understanding of older pre-Thule (Paleoeskimo) cultures in Canada known as the Pre-Dorset and Dorset. Ethnographic, archaeological, and linguistic investigations of the Arctic appeared in *Meddelelser om Grønland*, while in Canada and the United States a wide variety of anthropological studies were initiated (see Damas 1984; Krupnik 2016; Krupnik, *this issue*).

## KNUD RASMUSSEN: AVOCATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGIST AND NATIONAL HERO

One major contribution of this collection of papers is a more complete introduction to Rasmussen and the FTE for North Americans. In these essays we learn much about his life, his quest, and his style of personal leadership. Although Rasmussen has been long revered by Danes as a cultural hero and visionary (Hastrup 2016), he is not well known in North America outside of anthropological circles. By the 1920s he was a part of Danish national identity, personifying a huge wild place and unbound people, compared to small, civilized, bucolic Denmark. Rasmussen skillfully exploited his exoticism through popular media to become, at a very young age, a cherished figure in Danish society. His intellect and drive, project management, communication, and political skills and his empathy for Indigenous people made him a model explorer-anthropologist far ahead of his time. Building on the vision of Rink and Steensby, he conceived of a unified Inuit culture and history and undertook the fieldwork necessary to test this grand idea (see Michelsen, *this issue*).

## INTELLECTUAL CULTURE

Rasmussen’s focus on “intellectual culture” is considered in several contributions in this collection (see Crowell, Griebel et al., and Sonne, *this issue*). His documentation of shamanic practices and the poetics of Iglulingmiut and Nattilingmiut ritual was a momentous step forward in understanding not only the worldviews of traditional Central Canadian Inuit cultures but the belief systems of northern hunting peoples in general (cf. Shirokogoroff 1935). Yet Rasmussen’s preoccupations during the FTE were not unique, either personally or scientifically. His earlier Thule expeditions had been devoted to Inughuit and Ammassalimmiut myth and oral literature, and this approach had a long Danish tradition via Rink, Kleinschmidt, and others, including the Danish Literary Expedition of 1902–1904.

This type of work, however, had never been conducted in a dedicated manner in Canada, although Boas briefly summarized Baffin Island Inuit myths and rituals and Jenness acquired limited information on these matters among the Inuvialuit. Rasmussen’s knowledge of Inuit languages allowed him to record and report with great nuance; it also gave him unprecedented appreciation for the

Inuit spirit world as seen through their eyes. This type of insightful study did not reemerge until the 1960s to 1980s with Saladin d'Anglure's (2006) work on Iglulingmiut mythology and Jean Briggs's (1970) psychological studies.

## ARCHIVES AND MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

For too long, anthropologists have seen the value of the FTE primarily through the medium of its published volumes, while the extensive museum and archival collections it produced have largely been neglected (however, see Houmard and Grønnow 2017). I recall a similar situation with respect to the Smithsonian's nineteenth- and early twentieth-century collections from the Arctic. When I arrived at the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) in 1970 as a new curator, I discovered no record of academic researchers or Alaska Natives ever having visited to study important ethnographic collections from Alaska made by Edward Nelson, John Murdoch, William Dall, Lucien Turner, and others, which together number over 13,000 items at the NMNH alone.

The present volume demonstrates the value of making better use of FTE museum collections and archival records, which are extensive and distributed among a number of institutions in Denmark (Nielsen, *this issue*). We can learn much by dissecting even a single photograph, let alone the plethora of still and moving images from FTE, about the daily lives of Danish and Inuit team members and their relationships with local Inuit people. An exemplary use of FTE photographs and archival records is being made by the Pitquhirnikkut Ilihautiniq/Kitikmeot Heritage Society to build its online atlas of Inuinnaït (Copper Inuit) knowledge (Griebel et al., *this issue*).

In the realm of museum studies, Bronshtein's presentation of Rasmussen's engraved Chukchi tusks (*this issue*) and Engelstad's essay on Central Arctic Inuit clothing (*this issue*) clearly demonstrate the value of museum collections. Yet such studies have only begun (see Griebel et al., *this issue*), and the greater part of the FTE collections, including Kaj Birket-Smith's and Therkel Mathiasen's ethnographic and archaeological collections, have unrealized potential for research on culture change, trade, art, ritual, and many other subjects. Neglect of large, old collections, so carefully curated and preserved in museums, was a glaring omission of late-twentieth-century scholarship and has contributed to the alienation experienced by Indigenous people toward anthropological studies in general.

The Smithsonian began addressing the issue of "forgotten" collections in the 1980s by bringing its spectacular nineteenth-century Alaskan material to prominence in the exhibition *Inua: Spirit World of the Bering Sea Eskimo* (Fitzhugh and Kaplan 1982), followed by *Crossroads of Continents: Cultures of Siberia and Alaska* (Fitzhugh and Crowell 1988). Both were presented in Alaskan, national, and international venues, accompanied by illustrated catalogs, popular media, and educational materials. The approach of "reaching out with collections" continues through the Arctic Studies Center's (ASC) active engagement with community artisans, Indigenous scholars, and students across the circumpolar world from Hokkaido to Greenland (Hennessy et al. 2013; Krupnik and Kaneshiro 2011; Loring 2009; Lyons et al. 2012), while in Alaska ASC's Anchorage office has, since 1994, undertaken collaborative exhibitions, heritage workshops, and media programs (Crowell 2020; Crowell et al. 2001; Crowell et al. 2010). Similar engagement is seen in the return of Danish ethnological and archaeological collections to Greenland under Home Rule and in the repatriation of human remains and sacred objects to northern communities by American and Canadian museums (Bray and Killion 1994).

Today, access to collections is a central part of the new terms of engagement between Indigenous peoples and museums, engendering new forms of discourse and representation (Clifford 2004; Crowell 2004; Mossolova and Knecht 2018; Phillips-Chan 2013). During the past three decades museums have begun to "turn fieldwork on its head," to borrow a phrase from Ann Fienup-Riordan's (2005) description of collaborative research on Yup'ik collections in Germany. Accessibility is enhanced by digital technology, and researchers and Indigenous groups are partnering with museums and archives to find new ways to use collections for cultural recovery and decolonization. No longer are researchers traveling their own paths, gathering data and publishing it only for "the increase of knowledge," isolated from the current conditions and interests of Arctic communities whose cultures and languages have been eroded by Western society.

This FTE compilation reflects many of these trends, not only in the continuing work of traditional scholarship, using new research tools and heightened understanding of anthropological and historical science, but also in collaborative projects initiated by Indigenous communities. Heritage programs and the digital Fifth Thule Atlas created

by the Pitquhirnikkut Ilihautiniq/Kitikmeot Heritage Society of Cambridge Bay are described by Griebel et al. (*this issue*), who conclude:

Over the last five years, PI/KHS has delivered multiple programs to assist Inuinait with the access and recovery of Inuit knowledge so carefully documented by Rasmussen. By merging this documentation with the experiences of contemporary Elders, language experts, and younger generations, we have provided an avenue for critical Inuit knowledge to reawaken and activate within the minds, teachings, and practices of Inuinait communities. The value of Rasmussen's work for Inuinait, in accordance with his original goals of cultural preservation, ultimately lies in this ability to reunite Inuinait with themselves.

After 100 years of solitude, FTE artifacts and archival collections are finding new voices and new paths in the twenty-first century as Inuit discover the value of the past for their future. The FTE centennial thus serves as a call for new opportunities at a crucial time, as the Arctic itself awakens to the dawn of the new globalized world and its changing climate. Rasmussen would be pleased to know that the FTE, the crowning achievement of his life, was not merely a way station in the advance of knowledge but a foundation that stimulated the furtherance of Inuit culture, language, knowledge, and leadership “across Arctic America.”

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