
Though it is in no sense autobiographical, this little book will inevitably be read with the life of George Deacon in mind; it came into his hands from the press only days before his death and reflects his passion for a lonely, dangerous, and beautiful part of the ocean. George Deacon, this book makes clear, was much more than just a first-rate physical oceanographer: his knowledge of everything to do with the Antarctic and the ocean surrounding it was encyclopedic and right up to date, covering regional history, politics, exploitation, and all the natural sciences.

In fact, this is a curious little volume in the format of what one might call a "mini" coffee-table book; it is copiously illustrated (in black and white) with photographs of great interest, many taken by George Deacon and other Antarctic oceanographers, and the text is unreferenced. It is the first of what the Cambridge University Press plans as their Studies in Polar Research—reviewing the state of knowledge in a particular discipline or region: it is to be followed by Roberts on Antarctic ornithology and Chernov on tundra biology.

Deacon's canvas is wide, and his brush broad, though accurate. He writes clearly, as direct as ever, and with great assurance, whether describing the physical circulation of the polar ocean, the life of krill within it, or the risky penetrations into the pack-ice of the early explorers. His text will serve as an excellent background for the study of knowledge in a particular discipline or region: it is to be followed by Roberts on Antarctic ornithology and Chernov on tundra biology.

Deacon's text deals extensively with the exploration of the Antarctic Ocean, initially in search of the populated southern continent believed to exist to balance the northern landmasses, a speculation fueled as late as the 1770s by totally spurious reports of the kindly climate, rich soil, and abundant minerals of Kerguelen by its discoverer, a Breton nobleman. Curiously, though many small craft ventured far to the south from the time of Halley in 1700 to the Challenger expedition almost 200 years later, Deacon records no lost ships, no unplanned over-winterings in the ice, and no rescue expeditions: apparently, it remained for Scott and Shackleton to get into the kinds of difficulty encountered centuries earlier by the explorers of the Northwest Passage.

One is surprised at how rapidly the sealers and whalers followed on the heels of Cook and the early explorers, and how early a need was seen to control their exploitation: Already in 1823, Weddell was advocating control of the seal hunt in very modern terms. Deacon describes, in sufficient detail to make very useful background reading, the tragedy of the collapse of the great whale stocks through industrial-scale hunting during the present century; it now seems remarkable that the Discovery investigations should have been mounted at the height of the Great Depression, and carried through with a long term thoroughness for which would be hard to find a parallel today among our oceanographic programs.

The second part of the book concerns the oceanography of the Southern Ocean and is a clear geographical account of the water masses, their interaction and formation, and the movement of ice. As usual, the biology of krill, and the sea mammals and birds which depend on it, forms the backbone of the biological section. As an introduction to the natural environment, this is more for the interested layman (or, one hopes, the interested bureaucrat) than the oceanographer, but is none the worse for that. The threads of exploration, exploitation, and science from which this little book is woven accurately reflect the sociology of the Antarctic and its attractions for those of us who just like to know it is there.

One of the merits of this book, reflecting the way in which George Deacon remained on top of current affairs all his life, is that one can see modern expeditions, such as those of the Eltanin and the BIOMASS program in their historical perspective in a way few others could have shown us. I suspect that Deacon's clear explanation of the physics, chemistry, and biology of the Southern Ocean will often be used as background material in planning future work down south: if this is the case, George Deacon would have considered that his labor of love would have been doubly worthwhile. If you have any reason to want to know more (or even just something) about the Southern Ocean, then this little book might well be your starting point.

Alan R. Longhurst

Department of Fisheries and Oceans
Bedford Institute of Oceanography
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia B2Y 4A2