

THE MAGNETISM OF ANTARCTICA: THE ROSS EXPEDITION 1839–1843. By JOHN KNIGHT. Dunbeath: Whittles Publishing, 2023. ISBN 978-184995-501-0. 232 p., bib., colour illus. Softcover. UK£18.99.

From today's perspective, Sir John Franklin seems to tower above his fellow nineteenth-century polar explorers, mainly because of his disastrous 1845 Arctic expedition and the ensuing idealization of a lost British hero. Yet although Franklin was very well known to his contemporaries before 1845, Sir Edward Parry and Sir James Clark Ross were by far the most acclaimed polar figures. Both had the advantage over Franklin of being exceptionally handsome—Ross, indeed, was said to be the best-looking officer in the entire Royal Navy—but their celebrity rested on more solid foundations. Parry made his name in 1819–20 with the first voyage through the Canadian Arctic Archipelago, sailing from Baffin Bay as far as Melville Island. Ross served in the Arctic four times under Parry and under his own uncle, John Ross. During the latter's 1829–33 expedition, the younger Ross was the first European to reach the North Magnetic Pole, which was then located on the Boothia Peninsula. He went on to lead an extremely successful Antarctic expedition, breaking through the pack ice of what is now called the Ross Sea into the unknown and forging onward to a coast that he named Victoria Land.

As a result, Ross seemed to be the best possible commander for a new attempt to find the Northwest Passage. However, he had recently been married and his health had suffered as a result of his Antarctic work. He decided to leave the way open for Franklin. Ross eventually led one of the early Franklin searches, but the disappointing results evoked considerable public criticism. His status was on the wane even during his own lifetime, and although Ross is certainly not forgotten by polar historians, his Antarctic voyage has never received as much attention as many other, far less successful ventures.

In *The Magnetism of Antarctica*, John Knight sets out to redress this neglect. His approach to the task is decidedly old-school. In Knight's view, the main fact about the 1839–43 Ross expedition is that it carried out its geographical and scientific programmes with skill and efficiency. Therefore, it deserves to be not only remembered, but celebrated. He has no interest in questioning or analyzing the geopolitical aims that underlay British interest in the polar regions. Instead, Knight offers a straightforward, readable narrative account of the Ross expedition's origins and progress, supplemented by detailed biographical information on the participants from all ranks, not just the officers and scientists.

The biographical section, which occupies a significant part of the book, is obviously the result of very extensive archival and online searching. It represents a real contribution to polar scholarship. Very regrettably, however, the bibliography is mainly limited to published sources, with just a vague reference to naval records at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. There are only a

few footnotes, none of them providing source attributions. In both the narrative section and the biographies, it can be difficult for anyone but a specialist in Antarctic history to tell what has been taken from published primary accounts or from earlier secondary works and what is the result of fresh research, except when Knight comments on a source in the main text. The book also lacks an index. While general readers may enjoy *The Magnetism of Antarctica* as a rousing narrative of polar adventure and a trove of fascinating personal details about the expedition members, the lack of references unfortunately makes it far less useful to academic historians than it could otherwise have been. Knight's volume might have stood as a companion to the solid, informative books by Richard Cyriax on the last Franklin expedition and by Stuart Jenness on the Canadian Arctic Expedition of 1913–18 (Cyriax 1939; Jenness 2011) if he had emulated these authors' careful and detailed citations.

REFERENCES

- Cyriax, R.J. 1939. Sir John Franklin's last Arctic expedition: A chapter in the history of the Royal Navy. London: Methuen.
 Jenness, S.E. Stefansson. 2011. Dr. Anderson and the Canadian Arctic Expedition, 1913–1918: A story of exploration, science and sovereignty. Gatineau: Canadian Museum of Civilization.

Janice Cavell
 Carleton University
 1125 Colonel by Drive
 Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6, Canada
janice.cavell@carleton.ca