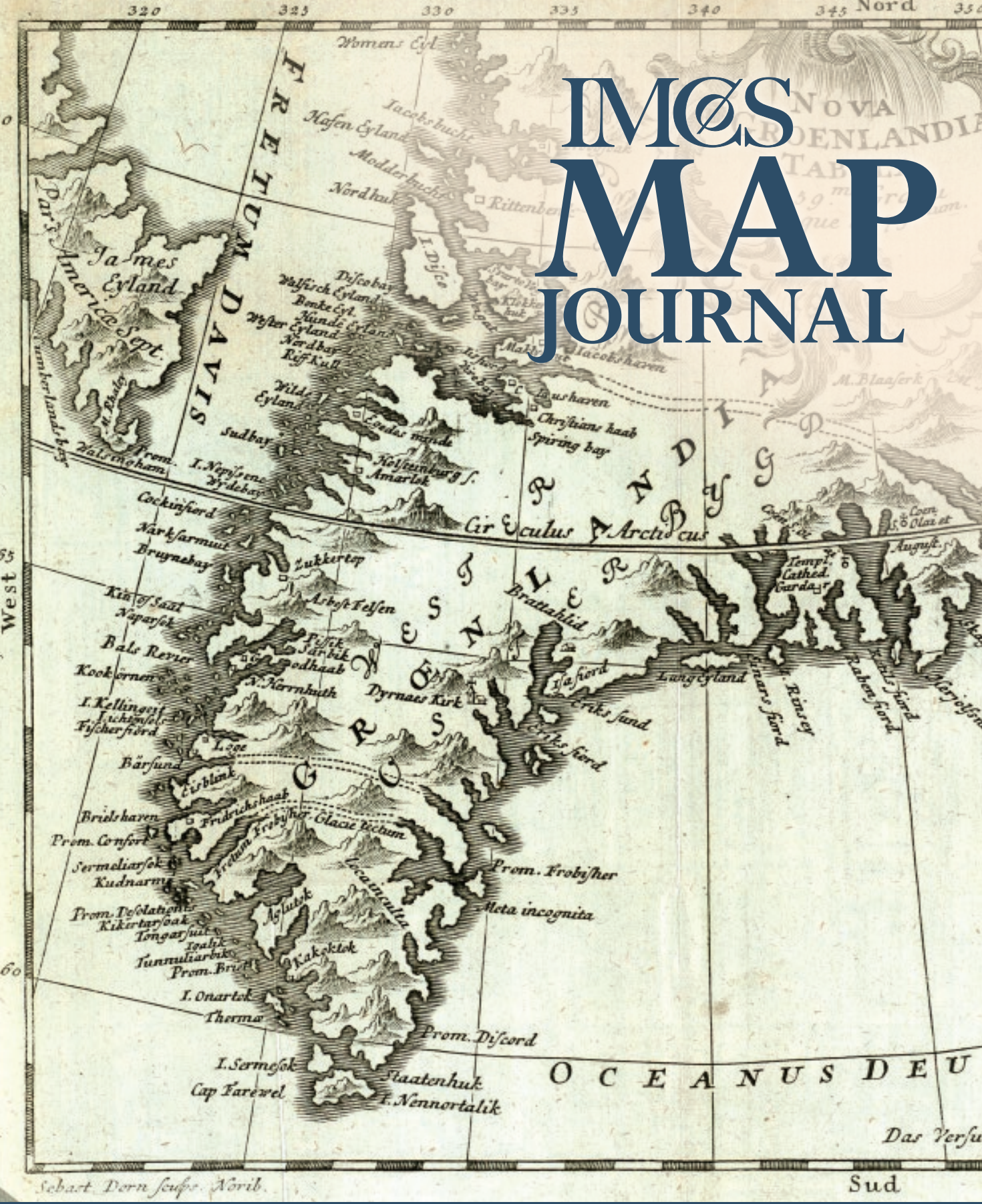

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ARTICLES

REGULAR ITEMS

Front cover Detail from 'Nova Groenlandia Tabula a 59. mo Gradu usque ad 73 mum' in David Crantz' *Historie von Grönland,* 1770. Copenhagen: Royal Library Map Collection, Shelf Mark KBK 8-677

MAPPING EAST GREENLAND'S COAST

A brief chronology 1427–1900

Henrik Dupont

East Greenland is the area between Kap Farvel (Cape Farwell; near the southernmost tip of Greenland) and Cape Nordostrundingen in the far northeast (**Fig. 1)**. Its coastline was not mapped until the early twentieth century due to its punishing climate and sparse population, but primarily because its coastline is icebound with only at a few areas with open water, called *polynyas,*[1] from where access to the shore is possible. Before the International Court in The Haag ruled in 1933 that Denmark had sovereignty of the whole island, mapping the east coast was undertaken by many different nations. Unlike the west coast, the east coast was not within the Danish monopoly zone which prevented foreigners from making maps of the area from the mid-eighteenth century to 1956. Before Danish colonisation began in 1721 little was known of the east coast's geography despite many earlier endeavours to access its shoreline.

The original people of Greenland were the Inuits and the Norsemen. They were able to survive in the harsh conditions. Neither group used maps in the sense of our understanding. Nonetheless both were geographically skilled and successfully sailed the island's challenging coastline. The Inuits are known to have travelled over the land mass but probably were unaware that Greenland was an island. The Norsemen lived along the southwest coast only and would have sailed along East Greenland's southern coast but did not establish settlements there.

The first cartographic acknowledgement of Greenland's east coast appeared on a map by Danish scholar Claudius Clavus (b. 1388). His 'Map of the North' also shows Iceland, Ireland, Scotland, northern England and western Norway. Clavus claimed to have travelled north along the coast of Greenland as far as 70 degrees. Later he settled in Rome to which he brought hitherto unknown information about the Norsemen on Greenland. Cardinal Guillaume Fillastre included Clavus's map in his manuscript version of Ptolemy's Geography (1427).

Other early European travellers appear to have sighted Greenland. Among them was Gaspar Corte-Real (1450–1501) who, in 1500–01, in his search for the Northwest Passage sighted 'Terra Verde' [Green Land] though it is more widely thought that Terra Verde refers to Newfoundland. It is marked on the Cantino maps of 1502. Martin Frobisher (1539–94) tried to access the southern coast in 1577 on his way to Baffin Island, John Davis (1550–1605), in the summer of 1586, explored a part of the southwestern coast, and a year later in his attempt to find the Northwest Passage reached 72° 12' North. Both English men made sketchy maps of the area.

In 1590 Sigurd Stefánsson, the grandson of Bishop Thord Thorlákssson, produced the first known Icelandic map of Greenland. It shows a sketchy peninsula attached to North America, probably based on fourteenth and fifteenth Icelandic sagas rather than on observation or measurement.

The polar map **(Fig. 2)** by Dutch cartographer and explorer Willem Barentsz (1550–97) was a milestone in the depiction of the far northern regions. As its long Latin title claims it is a 'Description of the three navigations made by the Dutch to the north of Norway, Muscovy… including parts of Greenland up to 80° … also the eastern part of America, by Willem Barents of Amsterdam, the famous pilot'. On his third expedition he discovered Svalbard, (on the map called 'Het nieuwe land') so it likely that he sailed along the east coast but it is unclear whether he mapped it. This area became an active whaling centre with ships from The Netherlands, France, Spain, Germany and Britain competing for catch. Subsequent east coast maps bear names of whalers and expeditions in the area.

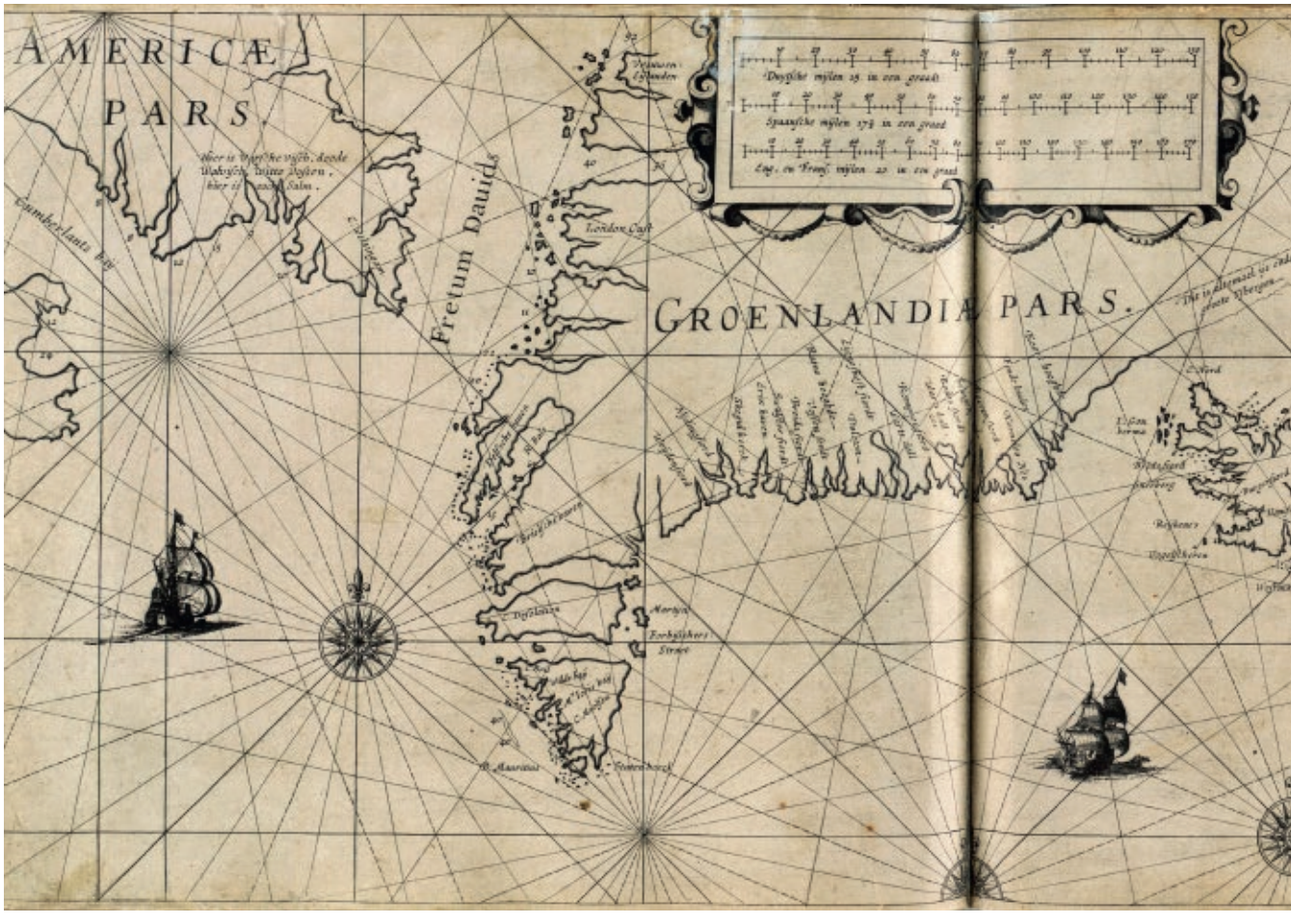
In 1605 the Danish king, Christian IV, who had been trying to establish a contact with the Norsemen, finally succeeded in reaching Greenland. Although the expedition failed to find any evidence of Norsemen it produced the first known map from

Fig. 2 Theodore de Bry and Gerrit de Veer, 'Deliniatio cartae trium navigationum per Batavos, ad Septentrionalem plagam, Norvegiae, Moscoviae, et novae Semblae, et perque fretum Weygatis Nassovicum dictum, ac juxta Groenlandiam, sub altitudine 80...', 1589. First map of Greenland showing the east coast. Engraved by De Bry from journals kept by De Veer who accompanied Willem Barentsz's on his Arctic journeys. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:1598_map_of_the_Polar_Regions_by_Willem_Barentsz.jpg

observations of the area around Sisimiut on the west coast. In 1626 he ordered Dutch explorer and cartographer Joris Carolus (*c.* 1566–*c.* 1636) to make a reliable map of Iceland, Greenland and northeastern America. Carolus completed 'Pascaarte van de Custen van Histlandt, Yslandt ende voort naer Oudt Groenlandt' in 1634 **(Fig. 3)**. Although not a surveyed map it was adopted by future cartographers, including Van Keulen, as a prototype to copy.

Danish General Customs Administrator Henrik Müller, who had royal privileges to sail his ships to Greenland, commissioned and financed David Urbanus Dannel (1608–61) in 1652–54 to explore the east coast for possible trade and fishing opportunities and search for the Eastern Settlement. Because of the name of the settlement it was, for centuries, thought to be the main settlement for most of Greenland's population and where the bishop resided. Dannel had failed on an earlier attempt to reach the east coast and for Müller's expedition chose to approach Greenland from the north of Iceland. Again he failed to make landfall, as happened on his two subsequent attempts, nevertheless his experiences and knowledge informed later Danish mapmakers and aboveall Johannes Mejer (1606–74) the Danish state cartographer.

In 1721 the Danish-Norwegian priest Hans Egede (1686–1758) established the first colony in Greenland on Håbets Ø (Hope Island) off the southwest coast. He had been educated in surveying methods before his departure from Bergen. In 1723 he travelled down the west coast in search of the Norsemen and the Eastern Settlement, but failed to reach his goal. His map 'Nova Delineatio Groenlandia Antiqva' (1737) used information from Icelandic sagas that contained place-names of the Eastern Settlement to indicate where he thought the Norsemen had lived **(Fig. 4)**. The map was intended as part of an application to the king for an expedition to the east coast in search of the Norsemen. It was not approved. His grandson Christian Thestrup Egede (1761–1803) participated in



a search for the east-coast Norsemen in 1786 which had been planned by 'Søkortarkivet' (Sea Chart Archive), a newly established organisation responsible for mapping in Greenland, which lasted for the next hundred years. The expedition set out from Iceland and despite several attempts it failed to reach the coast due to ice. Some sketch maps of the east coast as seen from the ships have survived.

David Crantz (1723–77) a missionary for the Moravian Church spent more than a year in Greenland where he collected material for his successful *Historie von Grönland* [*History of Greenland*], published in 1765. In it he detailed his observations of the country, its people and their way of life, including a history of the Moravian mission there. It was illustrated with Egede's map. The second edition, published in 1820, included a new map that incorporated the discoveries made by whaler and Arctic explorer William Scoresby junior (1789–1857) **(see front cover)**.

Scoresby published his maps in his book *Journal of a voyage to the Northern Whale-Fishery including Researches and discoveries on the eastern coast of West Greenland made in the summer of 1822* (Edinburgh 1823). In it he describes how he had measured the coast, found a big fjord complex (Scoresby Sund [Sound]), mapped the coast and produced a new map of Greenland. Scoresby was convinced that Scoresby Sound went through Greenland, this was based on both observations of currents and the fact he had seen the German geologist Carl Ludwig Giesecke's (1761–1833) manuscript map of the area around Disko Bugt and the big ice fjord on the west coast, precisely on the same latitude. Giesecke spent seven years in Greenland between 1807 and 1813, employed by the Danish authorities, to locate the rare mineral Cryolite on the southwest coast. Scoresby's map is the first based on actual surveys and heralds a beginning of the mapping of East Greenland based on facts **(Fig. 5)**.

The year after Scoresby's 1822 expedition another British expedition found its way to northeast Greenland, this time to determine the shape of the earth. Edward Sabine (1788–1883) was the expedition's scientist and Douglas Clavering (1794–1827) the ship's captain. Sabine had conducted experiments in north Norway, in Spitsbergen and now was searching for a suitable place in east Greenland. They made landfall at around 75° North, where Sabine made his observations, while Clavering surveyed the coast to the south and produced 'Chart of the East Coast of Greenland between Latitudes 72° and 76° from observations in *H.M. Ship Griper*' (1823). It included his discovery of several islands off the east coast. In recognition of their work Karl Koldewey (1837–1908) of the German Arctic Expedition of 1869–70 named the islands respectively 'Clavering' (74° 16' N), 'Sabine' (74° 36' N), and 'Little Pendulum' (74° 40' N), the last being where Sabine carried out his gravimetric experiments with a pendulum.

Worried about the predominance of British expeditions in the area and the lack of Danish interest, Frederick VI ordered Lieutenant Wilhelm August Graah (1793–1863) to explore the east coast from Kap Farvel to 69°North, Scoresby's final destination in 1822 and where he had made his observations and measurements. Graah relied on support from local

Fig. 3 Joris Carolus, 'Pascaarte van de Custen van Hitlandt Yslandt ende voort naer Oudt-Groenlandt...' ('Map of the coast of Shetland, Iceland and Old Greenland ...') 1634. 25 x 55 cm. Made for Christian IV to provide information on potential trade and fishing opportunities. Copenhagen: Royal Library Map Collection, Shelf Mark KBK 4-10, pl. 21.