

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WGM-7

Meddelelser om Grønland

Mr. Richard H. Nolte  
Executive Director  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
366 Madison Avenue  
New York 17, New York

Akandevej 7  
Lille Vaerløse  
Denmark  
8 December 1965

Dear Dick,

Ever since college days at Dartmouth I have been intrigued by a publication called Meddelelser om Grønland. I cannot really say that it was love-at-first-sight. It was probably more a fascination at the wealth of knowledge represented by the imposing rows of volumes. Moreover, this wealth of knowledge was about Greenland, a place which I considered dimmer than "darkest Africa" in man's experience.

I remember taking a volume of Meddelelser at random from the shelf deep in the stacks of Baker Library. The gnawing impatience and disappointment I felt at discovering that it was written in Danish is still a vivid memory. I had picked a volume in the early part of the series, the thickest I could find. I know to this day exactly which one it was: one of the two volumes commemorating the 200th anniversary of missionary Hans Egede's landing in Greenland in 1721. These two volumes (60 and 61) are indeed great classics of a publication series which itself is the world's most outstanding journal of arctic research.

My love affair with Meddelelser om Grønland (which means Reports about Greenland, and which herein I shall call Meddelelser or M.o.G. as the Danes themselves do) has not been dampened upon familiarity. My reasons for writing about M.o.G. in this letter are two: to describe this the greatest of all arctic publications and, through this description, to examine the past and present status of research in Greenland. Perhaps some will question the efficacy of using one publication series to show the status of research in Greenland. With the exceptions noted later, however, I believe that a pretty fair research picture does in fact emerge--a picture probably not unlike that existing today in other areas of the North.

To describe a publication series of 179 volumes containing over 80,000 pages, dating from 1879, is an imposing task which should properly fill many pages. I am choosing the rougher, and more dangerous, road of attempting to do this in a short newsletter.

Meddelelser began in 1878 when, at the suggestion of Professor J. F. Johnstrup, the Danish Government set up a permanent Commission for Geological Investigations in Greenland. The Commission's title was changed a year later to include geography. The Commission, financed by the State treasury, was to organize and send out research expeditions to Greenland and to publish the results. For years the Commission consisted of its prime mover Professor

Johnstrup (a geologist) and two other members. Early expeditions investigated parts of Greenland's west coast, mapping the topography and geological formations. Gradually other sciences became active in fieldwork so that, for a while, research in Greenland was not overwhelmingly geological. Even from Vol. 1, published in 1879, other sciences than geology made their impact. As early as Vol. 3, published from 1880 to 1893, botany was well represented in the massive "Conspectus Florae Groenlandicae".

About 70 expeditions were sent to Greenland by the Commission up until 1928. After this date, the Commission concentrated its energy in publishing Meddelelser, although the State still supported expeditions--with a healthy backing from private sources as well.

Although early research interest was concentrated in West Greenland, East Greenland began to attract expeditions shortly after the Commission's founding. Most of the work in East Greenland had to be done in larger expeditions, mainly because of difficulty of access which prevented small summer parties from operating as in West Greenland. As a result, East Greenland accounted for about one-half of the research expenditures in Greenland from 1870 until the outbreak of World War II.

In the late 1920's the desire grew for a more permanent basis of research which would include all the sciences active in Greenland. In April 1931, the original Commission was dissolved and the present one formed--Commission for Scientific Investigations in Greenland (Kommissionen for videnskabelige Undersøgelser i Grønland). The number of Commission members was expanded to include one or more leaders from the many disciplines represented.

With the new Commission, needed improvements were incorporated in publishing M.o.G. Before April 1931, a volume (which might consist of from one to ten or more papers) waited until all its parts were ready before being published. At times, more than ten years would pass after some papers were finished before the complete volume was ready for publication. Also, one had to buy the entire volume in order to get one paper in it.

After 1931 (and beginning with Volume 78), each paper was published independently and had its own pagination. Scientifically, the new system had obvious advantages, the greatest of which was timeliness. Having to wait up to ten years for research results to be published must have been a frustrating business.

Despite its early beginnings in 1879, Meddelelser has had only five editors to date: Professor Johnstrup until 1894, Admiral Wandel (1894-1930), Admiral Amdrup (1930-1947), geography Professor Niels Nielsen (1947-1959), and Dr. Helge Larsen (1959-to date). The title of editor is perhaps a bit misleading. Actually Larsen is Chairman of the Editorial Board of M.o.G., responsible to the Commission itself. His task is to establish editorial policy and to assume over-all responsibility for Meddelelser. The day-to-day editor's tasks have been carried out since 1961 by zoologist Torben Andersen, who doubles as a high school biology teacher.

Although Danish was the language first used (and which temporarily scared me away from M.o.G.), nothing in M.o.G. has been published in Danish since 1948. The proportion of Danish and other languages represented is listed below:

	<u>pages</u>	<u>%</u>
English	50,464	60.1
Danish	20,477	24.4
German	11,188	13.4
French	1,590	1.9
Swedish	232	less than .1
Latin (!)	38	less than .1
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Total	83,989	100.0

The above table covers Meddelelser from Vol. 1 in 1879 until 15 November 1965. Because many authors of papers in Meddelelser have been Danes not fluent in English, translators were employed extensively. Most of this English is readily understandable, but few of these past papers combine scientific reporting with literary ease. The situation has improved considerably today.

The increasing use of English and German is one of the enlightened qualities of M.o.G. and must be responsible, in part, for the publication's front-rank standing today.

In one of my adding machine forays, each volume of the series was individually examined (the bound volumes stretch more than 30 feet on a shelf!). I attempted to classify each paper in a general subject category and to determine the total number of pages devoted to each subject. This classification will undoubtedly be questioned by some, but I think the general pattern emerges: geology is the undisputed front runner of the disciplines present and the physical sciences overshadow to a remarkable degree all other fields combined. On page 4 is my list resulting from a few kilometers of adding machine tape.

Some geographers will be dismayed at placing geomorphology and glaciology under geology. This is an argument I shall not dwell upon, except to say that most work in geomorphology and glaciology in Greenland has been carried out by geologists. If geographers feel slighted at the taking away of their physical arm, they need only look through M.o.G. to see with bewilderment the truly sad state of geography's research participation in Greenland. With only several exceptions, there has been no research in geography in Greenland so far as this is represented in M.o.G. It is, in my opinion, a tragedy that Danish geographers have not worked in Greenland, but such is the state of things. Ironically, Professor of Geography Niels Nielsen was for 12 years Meddelelser's editor, with Niels Kingo Jakobsen, another geographer, as managing editor.

Meddelelser om Grønland  
(as of 15 November 1965)

<u>subject</u>	<u>pages</u>	<u>%</u>
Geology-Geomorphology-Glaciology	28,707	34.2
Zoology	14,423	17.2
Botany	11,796	14.1
Anthropology	11,747	14.0
Expeditions-General accounts	4,533	5.4
Colonization-history-trade	3,837	4.6
Miscellaneous	2,199	2.6
Geography-Topography	1,960	2.3
Meteorology	1,556	1.8
Medicine-Physiology	1,549	1.8
Geodesy	891	1.1
Hydrography	791	0.9
Total	83,989	100.0

After geology, with its whopping 35% representation, comes zoology and botany. Under these fields are included marine biology's zoo- and phytoplankton investigations, respectively. A strong case could be made for separating these from terrestrial zoology and botany but I had neither time nor inclination to do so. Also, in my list anthropology includes archaeology and ethnography.

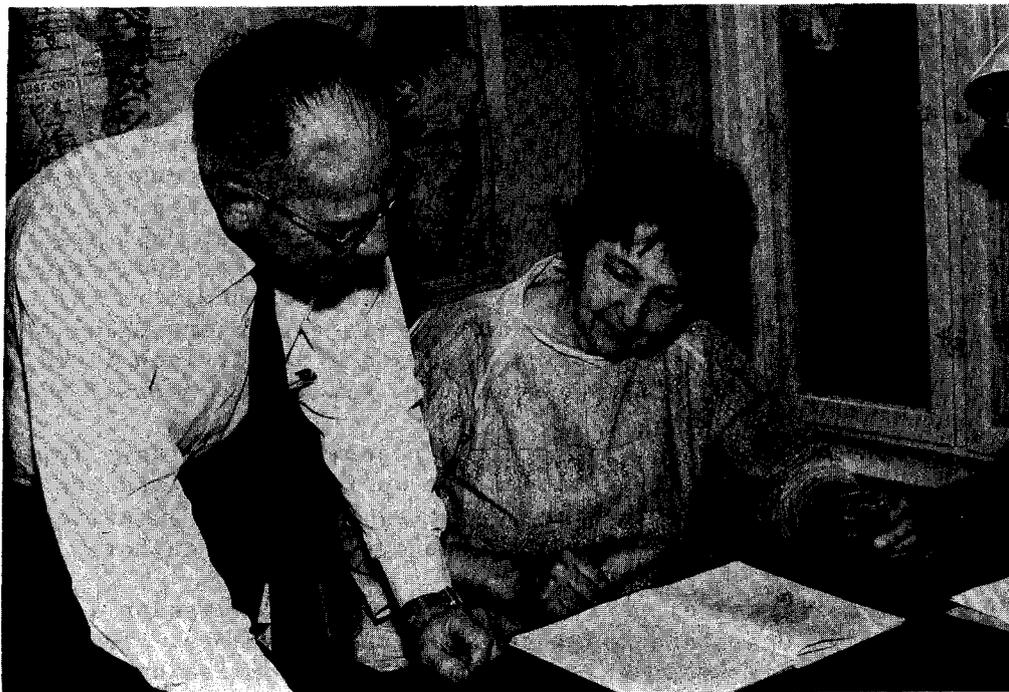
The remaining subject headings are self-explanatory. General accounts of expeditions often include sections on geology, zoology, et cetera. Where a separation is readily apparent in the table of contents, I have accordingly separated the subjects in the statistical breakdown as well.

Of surprise to me was the low total of works in meteorology and hydrography, as well as the almost complete absence of fisheries research represented in M.o.G. Fisheries research, under Dr. Paul M. Hansen, has a publication series of its own and has never appeared in M.o.G. Hydrography and meteorology also have their own data publications. These three fields, then, although not well represented in Meddelelser are well in hand today. Strictly speaking, therefore, describing research in Greenland is not possible through an analysis

of M.o.G. alone. Any distortion in the status of research, however, is at the expense of the already preponderant physical sciences.

When leafing through the author index to the 179 volumes of Meddelelser, one's eye is caught time and again by the name of the geologist Lauge Koch. The late Dr. Koch led, over a long period of years, the most extensive series of expeditions in Greenland's history. He was a genius at organization and administration and also saw to it that the results of work done under his leadership in Greenland were published, as far as possible, in M.o.G. The results of his expeditions should therefore show up strongly in M.o.G., but what a surprise to find out how strongly. Published papers resulting from expeditions to Greenland under Lauge Koch account for fully 21,700 (or 25%) of the 83,989 pages of M.o.G. Since Koch could not be responsible for publishing in Meddelelser from its beginning in 1879, I feel it is fairer to him to consider his contribution since he began publishing his Greenland work in 1926. A staggering 40% of the papers in M.o.G. since volume 70 (1926) resulted from Koch's expeditions, not a few of these papers having been written by Koch himself. Reasons for the geologically top-heavy character of M.o.G. are largely explained by this fact even though his expeditions produced papers in many other disciplines as well. And, although Koch died in 1964, papers continue to pour in from his expedition members. In addition, the Greenland Geological Survey is publishing an increasing number of papers in M.o.G., so that geologists will find continued rich reading.

At present, Meddelelser's editorial office at Arktisk Institut is busy on nine manuscripts while twelve others are waiting in various stages for completion of manuscripts, maps, or plates. In addition, five papers are in the press at Bianco Lunos Company which has printed M.o.G. since the first volume.



Yale University's Dr. A. L. Washburn (l.) checks over a manuscript with Meddelelser secretary Miss Ingrid Beck.

Yale's professor of northern geology A. L. Washburn paid a call recently to go over a paper on his East Greenland research. But most contacts with authors are by mail. Authors receive 250 kroner (\$35) for each 16 pages (1 ark) printed, plus 100 free copies of their papers.

Between 1200 and 2000 copies of each paper are usually printed, 100 copies going to the author, 800 to Meddelelser's office, and the remainder to the book dealer C. A. Reitzel Company which handles public sale of the journal. Of the 800 copies to M.o.G. offices, 300 are sent out on exchange agreements, the remainder are placed in safekeeping at three separate storage bunkers.

Complete sets of Meddelelser are but rarely seen for sale today. Most volumes before Vol. 70 are out of print, but if a complete set could be purchased at the original publication price (allowing for monetary devaluation) it would cost about 12,000 kroner (\$1740). Most Copenhagen book sellers would be able to sell a set, if they had one, for 20-25,000 kroner.

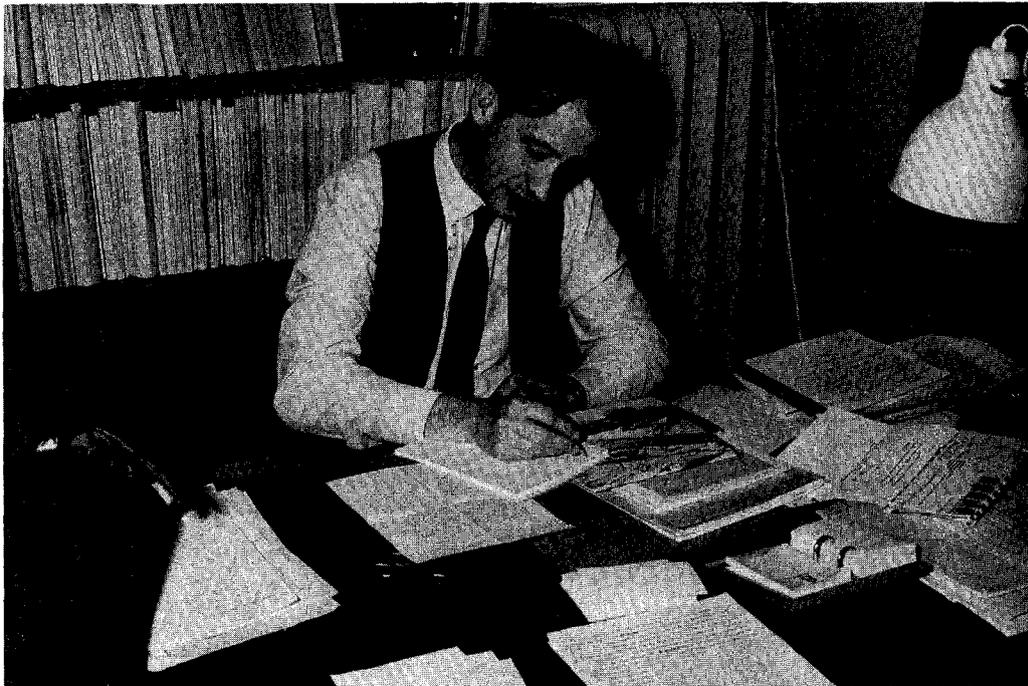
Publishing costs, including salaries, printer's costs, and authors' fees, average 350,000 kroner (\$50,000) a year, all paid for by the State through the Ministry for Greenland. M.o.G.'s only income, which goes towards operative costs and thus reduces necessary State support, is a two-third's share of profits from the public sale of their publication by Reitzel. In 1964, this share amounted to 53,000 kroner, while the State paid 536,000 kroner to balance the total publishing and operating costs of 589,000 kroner (\$85,360). Publishing costs for 1964 were swelled above the average 350,000 kroner by a special grant towards publishing some geological maps and reports from East Greenland-- again under Lauge Koch.

Although maps appear in many papers, M.o.G. still needs an up-to-date atlas. The first and only atlas appearing in Meddelelser accompanied the anniversary volumes 60 and 61 published in 1921.

Editor Torben Anderson recently explained to me the involved process (usually taking about a year) of getting a paper into print. In brief, a manuscript is first sent to be checked for correct place-name spellings by a special committee (Grønlands Stednavns Udvalg). This is a rigorous process aimed at keeping order in the geographical names lists. Not only are spellings all checked against the officially authorized ones, but indiscriminate naming of features is discouraged--at least names must be submitted for official approval. The manuscript is then sent to referees before being printed in first galley proofs. All maps and diagrams are usually submitted in finished form by the author, who is also responsible for the correction of proof copies.

For a top-rank journal, Meddelelser rejects surprisingly few manuscripts. Perhaps authors sense if their papers are up to M.o.G. standards before submitting them. Some manuscripts are rejected because of insufficient publishing funds. Danish scientists take precedence over foreign authors.

With its main task of publishing M.o.G., the Commission for Scientific Investigations in Greenland today consists of 19 members. Former Secretary of State for Greenland Eske Brun is Chairman of the Commission, while his successor in the Greenland Ministry Erik Hesselbjerg is Vice-chairman. There



Meddelelser om Grønland editor Torben Andersen at work.

are, in addition, two other government representatives, while the remaining 15 members are all scientists representing various fields: geology (4 members), anthropology (4), geodesy (2), with meteorology, marine biology, geography, ionospheric physics, and botany each having one representative. The Commission meets once yearly mainly to discuss foreign applications to do fieldwork in Greenland. A steering committee of four members (Brun, Noe-Nygaard, Larsen, and Helk) runs Commission affairs through more frequent meetings, with a small editorial board managing Meddelelser.

As a special item of interest to me, one M.o.G. paper now in press is by several Russian geologists, who were the first Russians to visit Greenland for research purposes. This unique visit to Greenland by Soviet scientists resulted in the discovery of several minerals new to science and several more new to Greenland. (I will report later upon this story and its promising implications for international cooperation in northern research.)

Meddelelser om Grønland is a poignant record of research in Greenland. With the exceptions noted, the research picture emerging is one which weighs heavily on the side of the physical sciences, due, in part, to the practical need for pushing geological research in Greenland to find minerals. Although

mineral production could help ease State financial support of Greenland, it will never solve other mounting problems there. Wider research in the social sciences could help attack these problems in Greenland, but not until more support is forthcoming.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bill Mattox".

W. G. Mattox

Received in New York December 13, 1965.