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**The Arctic and Nordic
Countries in the World of Economy and Politics**

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THE ITALIANS AND THE ARCTIC

From the origin to Sebastiano Caboto

The Ancient World had a vague idea of the Arctic. The Romans did not have any direct experiences connected with it, and their knowledge came from the report written in the IV century B. C. by the Greek explorer from the Greek colony of Massilia (now Marseille), Pytheas. Pytheas, who was a sailor, sailed from the Mediterranean and travelled along the British Isles between 330 and 320 B. C., and, when he returned, he wrote a book called *Περὶ τοῦ Ὠκεανοῦ* (Around the Ocean). The book soon became controversial, because it was hard to understand, hard to explain, as it was even harder to believe, that the Ocean could be completely frozen.

Pytheas' travel was commented by a Greek geographer Strabo² in the I century B. C. He did not believe Pytheas, however when describing Thule, he had to use the expression of an iced zone³ and admitted, that the sun's strength was weak and animals and flora were scarce.

So, when the first Roman, who described the iced area – Tacitus⁴ – prepared his *De Germania*, he relied on Pytheas and Strabo's records. When describing Scandinavia, he depicted an island in the middle of the Ocean. Behind Scandinavia, as he wrote, there was a calm and almost still sea – “*mare, pigrum ac prope immotum*”, which locked the world⁵. He later presented his observations,

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² Born in Amaseia, now Amasya in Turkey, before 58 b. C. and died in 24 or 25 a. C.

³ Strabo, *Geographia*, book IV, 5.5.

⁴ Publius (Gaius, according to other sources) Cornelius Tacitus was born between 56 and 58 a. C., it is unclear whether in the Italian city of Terni, or in northern Italy, or from a Roman family in the Gallia Narbonensis, (southeastern France), and died in 120 a. C.

⁵ P.C. Tacitus, *De origine et situ Germanorum*, better known as *De Germania*, book XLIV, 6-7; book XLV, 1-2.

which made it clear, that the weather in Scandinavia was much colder than people living in the Mediterranean could expect or even imagine. He also described the ice stretching over vast areas and a lot thicker than in Southern Europe.

In V century A.D. Martianus Capella⁶, an African author writing in Latin, in the VI book of his *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* ("About the wedding of Philology and Mercurius")⁷ made a reference to the Arctic. In his sixth book, in the chapter entitled *Alia dimensio Europae a Septentrione* (other dimension of Northern Europe) he used the expression of *mar concretum* – a solid sea – which was located at a distance of one shipping day from the island of Thule⁸.

The German author of the late ancient period, like the Gothic Iordanis – or Jordanes⁹ – in his *De origine actibusque Getarum*, (the origin and the facts of the Goths) or the Longobard Paolo Diacono¹⁰, in his *Historia Langobardorum*, (History of the Longobards, that is to say the Lombards), spoke of the frozen sea in the northern lands, their ancestors came from.

As far as the Middle Ages are concerned the knowledge of Arctic regions was derived mainly from two sources i.e. the works of the classic authors and also facts and figures gathered by the then administration. Thus, in Italy, something more than just an idea of Arctic region has existed since at least the XI century. As a matter of fact, after the settlement of Erik Thorvaldsson, better known as Erik the Red, in Greenland in 988¹¹, and after the conversion of the Vikings of

⁶ Martianus Mineus Felix Capella, from Madaura (now in Algeria) was an attorney at law in Carthage, not so far from what is now Tunis, lived between the IV and the V century after Christ, and became a writer when old.

⁷ M. Capella, *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, VI, *Geometria*, 602.

⁸ There is still a discussion about which was the land Pytheas called Thule: Iceland, the Shetlands, or Saaremaa, or the Fær Øer, or a part of Norway. My opinion is that, given that Pytheas wrote it was a land of ice and fire, lying six shipping days from Britain, it must have been the territory of today's Iceland. Claudius Ptolemy, (100 a. C – 175 a. C.) the Greek geographer who used the latitude and the longitude, spoke of Thule and gave its latitude and longitude. Unfortunately, Ptolemy made two big errors. The first was that he underevaluated the dimensions of the earth. Erathostenes had supposed the earth to be divided in grades and that each grade was equal to 700 Egyptian stadia, whose length was a bit more than 157 meters. This gave as a result a global equatorial length of 39.375 km, whilst the actual one is 40.075. It was a more than acceptable mistake of 1,74%, but Ptolemy assumed that each grade was no longer than 500 stadia, and so the mistake increased. This rendered impossible to understand where exactly a land could be. It was not too a problem when speaking of a known one; it was a real problem when looking for an unknown one, as Thule was.

⁹ All it is known about him is that he was born around 550 in an Alan family, was a bureaucrat, converted to Catholicism probably from Arianism, and could have been a bishop, perhaps of Croton, in Southern Italy.

¹⁰ Born in Cividale del Friuli in 720 or in 730 as Paul Warnefried (Paul son of Warnefried), Paul the Deacon died in Montecassino between 796 and 799.

¹¹ Having been exiled from Iceland, Erik reached Greenland, or what he called Greenland, a first time in 985 a. C.. After three years, he came back to Iceland and convinced many Icelanders to migrate with him. They left Iceland with 24 ships, but only 14 arrived to their destination and established a colony there.

Greenland to Christianity around 1000, the pope Pasquale II¹² in 1112 appointed Erik – Henricus – Gnuþsson the first bishop of Greenland¹³ and of the place later called Terranova.

Unfortunately, the so called Little Ice Age started around the early XIV century. Further decrease in temperature caused a steady fall in the population of both Greenland and Iceland. It was not by chance that around 1390 the Venetian brothers Niccolò and Antonio Zeno (who died around 1402 and in 1403 respectively)¹⁴ explored the Arctic seas and the North Atlantic under the command of a prince named Zichmni, who was wrongly identified in 1780 with Henry I Sinclair, Earl of Orkney, Baron of Roslin, and Lord of Shetland¹⁵.

There is no clear evidence of the expedition of the two Zeno brothers. According to an Italian naval historian¹⁶, Niccolò Zeno's presence in Venice is clearly documented till the end of 1396, so, unless it was Antonio who went to the North and later was followed by his brother, or unless they both left Venice soon after 1396, their trip to Greenland may have never taken place¹⁷.

According to one of their descendants, whose name was also Niccolò Zeno, the Zeno brothers had left many letters, which were later used in his book, published in XVI century¹⁸. However, the language of the transcribed text is clearly that of XVI century, not the XIV century Italian, which questions the authenticity of the letters.

An undoubtedly real event took place in the last days of the year 1431, when the Venetian merchant galley *Quirina* sailing towards Flanders was hit by a storm. Strong winds accompanied by the Gulf Stream pushed the ship northeast. On January 14th, 1432, the galley wrecked near the Norwegian island of Sandøy in the Lofoten. The owner and captain, Pietro Querini, together with 16 survivors reached Sandøy, and after 11 days were rescued by the Norwegian fishermen from the island of Røst. The survivors spent the following four months on the island, until they were able to set off for Italy. On May 15th, 1432, Querini and most of his seamen left the Røst. The crew was supplied with stockfish, intended to cover the costs of travel. The expedition, which used the route via Trondheim and London, reached Venice on October 12th, 1432. On the successful return, Querini wrote a long and detailed report to the Venetian Senate, in which he described stockfish

¹² Rainiero Ranieri, born in Bleda, now Santa Sofia, not far from Bologna, in 1050, was elected pope in 1099 and died in 1118.

¹³ He was appointed bishop of Gardar, the main town of Greenland.

¹⁴ C. Clariond, *I fratelli Niccolò ed Antonio Zeno: una presenza nell'Artico tra storia e saga familiare*, „Il Polo” anno LVI, 2001, vol. 2/3/4.

¹⁵ For the discussion of this identification, see B. Smith, *Earl Henry Sinclair's Fictitious Trip to America*, „New Orkney Antiquarian Journal”, vol. 2, 2002.

¹⁶ A. Da Mosto, *I navigatori Niccolò e Antonio Zeno*, [in:] *Gli Archivi di Stato italiani - miscellanea di Studi storici*, vol. I, Firenze 1933, pp. 293-308.

¹⁷ See: G. Padoan, *Gli ulissidi dell'Atlantico*, „Veneti nel Mondo”, anno II, n. 10, Novembre 1998.

¹⁸ *De i commentarii del viaggio in Persia di M. Caterino Zeno il K. & delle guerre fatte nell'imperio persiano, dal tempo di Ussuncassano in quà libri due et dello scoprimento dell'Isole Frislanda, Eslanda, Engrouelanda, Estotilanda, & Icaria, fatto sotto il Polo Artico, da due fratelli Zeni, M. Nicolò il K. e M. Antonio libro uno: con un disegno particolare di tutte le dette parte di Tramontana da lor scoperte*, in Venezia, per Francesco Marcolini, 1558.

as a wonderful source of food, especially during long sea or land travels. Not surprisingly, the shipwreck marked the beginning of trade between northern Norway and Italy. Stockfish, which became a very popular fish dish, was one of the meals the Catholics were allowed to eat during 200-day penitential periods introduced by the Council of Trent during his last session on December 4th, 1563. As a consequence, both cod fishing and trade with Norway boomed.

In the XV century, when in 1492 the Genoese merchant, geographer and explorer Christopher Columbus sailed westward in order to reach Japan and China, he had a vague idea of some lands situated very far from Europe. Columbus, who had been a merchant, in February 1477 reached Iceland sailing from Bristol. Thus, it is likely, that when in Iceland he was notified about the existence of a land in the West – Greenland or whatever – or that the information and rumors he got in Iceland confirmed what he had already known: that there were lands in the North and in the West.

He did not exactly know what kind of lands they were, so, it came as no surprise for him to reach a coast in the West. It was only later, that Florentine geographer Amerigo Vespucci realized, that the land was not in fact India, but something different, a new land. The problem now was: how to reach the fabulous China and Japan if there was this new land? And was it connected to what was already known in the North? It was clear that the land stretched south, however there was no data about how far it stretched north. Was it possible that a northwestern passage to China existed? Actually, in 1476 the Portuguese explorer Joao Vaz Cortereal had unsuccessfully tried to find a passage somewhere in the North, and between 1492 and 1495 two other Portuguese explorers – Joao Fernandez, called “O Labrador” and Pedro Barcellos – explored the sea around the land, today known as Newfoundland, as well as the land of today’s Labrador and Greenland.

In the following year the Venetian Giovanni Caboto together with his son Sebastiano, and Joao Fernandez “O Labrador”, made his first travel to Northern America. In 1497 they discovered a new land, which was called Terra Nova (New Land) and, in English, Newfoundland, and in 1498 they arrived at a land, which was named “Labrador” in honour of their Portuguese comrade.

In 1509 Sebastiano Caboto alone made a third trip to the coast of Labrador and to the land situated west to the mouth of the today’s Hudson Strait, which he supposed was China.

For almost four following centuries no Italian had made any attempt to sail to the North, until two Royal Italian Navy officers decided to try.

Giacomo Bove joins Nordenskiöld and goes through the Northeastern Passage

In 1872 the Swedish baron Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld organized a polar expedition, which an officer of the Regia Marina¹⁹, the Italian Royal Navy,

¹⁹ See *Spedizione polare di Nordenskiöld*, „Rivista Marittima”, anno V, fascicolo IX, 1872.

lieutenant E. Parent, took part in. The officer published a report on the Regia Marina's journal, the *Rivista Marittima* in 1872 about the organization of the expedition²⁰, and, when back in 1873, a long report about its result²¹. Unfortunately, soon lieutenant Parent died. So, when in 1877 professor Nordenskiöld organized a new expedition, the president of the Italian Geographical Society, baron Cristoforo Negri, suggested another officer of the Italian Navy, to be chosen by the Navy itself. Nordenskiöld accepted, and the Navy chose lieutenant Giacomo Bove. Bove was an experienced geographer. He had travelled to Japan, China and India, and had explored Philipinnes and Borneo, however he had no experience in exploring the Arctic. Regardless to that fact, the Navy chose him and he was glad to accept.

Nordenskiöld, who had no interest in the Northwestern passage nor in reaching the Pole, was looking for a Northeastern passage – if any – to reach China and Japan from north. Between 1875-1876 he had reached the mouth of the river Yenisei, but the ice prevented him from continuing the journey.

On June 24th, 1878 Nordenskiöld's new expedition left Carlskrona and, along Norway, on July 16th entered the Arctic Sea. Nordenskiöld had chosen a former whaler, the *Vega*, and was supported by the three small steamships *Lena*, *Express*, and *Fraser*. Bove, who had been drawing up the report on the preparation to the expedition, sent the document to Italy just before the expedition's departure. All the reports were published²².

The expedition found the first area of frozen sea only in August, and, whilst exploring the area around Dikson²³, Bove, who was the hydrographer during the expedition, discovered a new archipelago that he called Vega, and some more islands, that he named, with Nordenskiöld's permission Island Re Umberto (after the king of Italy Humbert I); island Brin (after the minister of the Navy Benedetto Brin); island Negri (the president of the Geographical Society); island Bucchia (after the admiral Bucchia); island Correnti (after the then former president of the

²⁰ *Partenza d'un ufficiale di marina italiano per la spedizione polare di Nordenskiöld*, „*Rivista Marittima*”, anno V, fascicolo V, 1872; *Notizie sulla spedizione di Nordenskiöld, comunicate dal luogotenente di vascello E. Parent*, „*Rivista Marittima*”, anno V, fascicolo VIII, 1872; *Spedizione polare di Nordenskiöld*, „*Rivista Marittima*”, anno VI, fascicolo II, 1873, p. 341.

²¹ E. Parent, *Breve rapporto sui procedimenti della spedizione polare artica svedese dall'agosto 1872 (fino a tutto giugno 1873)*, „*Rivista Marittima*”, anno VI, fascicolo VIII, 1873.

²² G. Bove, *Appunti di viaggio*, „*Rivista Marittima*”, anno XII, fascicoli IX, X, XI, 1878; idem, *Il mare artico e la prossima spedizione svedese*, „*Rivista Marittima*”, anno XII, fascicolo III, 1878; idem, *Lettera alla Società Geografica Italiana sulla spedizione Nordenskiöld nell'artico*, „*Rivista Marittima*”, anno XII, fascicolo VIII, 1878, p. 282; idem, *Notizie della spedizione artica svedese – lettere del sottotenente di vascello G. Bove intorno alla partenza della Vega per i mari polari del nord*, „*Rivista Marittima*”, anno XII, fascicolo IX, 1878; idem, *Spedizione artica svedese – lettera a S.E. il ministro della Marina*, „*Rivista Marittima*”, anno XIII, fascicolo I, 1879. Being the *Rivista Marittima* a monthly journal, the letter, published in January 1879, had been reached long before.

²³ It lies on the coast of Kara Sea more or less at 73° 31' North and 80° 17' East. Now it is included in the Russia's Great Arctic National Reserve (*Большой Арктический государственный природный заповедник*) in Krasnojarsk Territory.

Italian Geographical Society); island Accinni (after the first commander he served with), whilst Correnti Point was called Cape Bove in his honour.

Express and *Fraser* steamers left for the Yenisei, whilst on August 10th *Vega* and *Lena* went ahead. On August 17th they explored the Straight of Taimir. Nordenskiöld left a letter with some record on the expedition under a pile of stones and sailed to Cape Celiuskin.

At the mouth of the Lena river, the steamer *Lena* got separated from the *Vega* to sail south. As the expedition was sailing ahead the ice was more and more compact. Eventually, when the sea froze completely, they decided, on September 28th, 1878 to stop in Pitlekai, in the land of the Chukchi. They remained there till July 1879 and spent time studying the local population, and doing hydrographical, meteorological, zoological and botanical researches.

On July 18th, 1879 the ice melted enough to allow their departure. Two days later they passed through the Straight of Bering, and, after a stop in Alaska and on the Saint Lawrence island, on September 2nd they arrived in Yokohama²⁴. The Northeastern passage was discovered, yet due to the thick ice cover it had not been used until 2010, when it was successfully shipped for the first time, thanks to significant changes in the weather, which eventually resulted in melting of the ice. Compared to the traditional route from Rotterdam to Yokohama via Suez, 11,200 mile in length, the Northeastern passage is only 6,500 miles long, that is 42% shorter. Needless to say, the possibility of using the route, which had been discovered so long ago, contributes to considerable cost and time savings.

Bove published a detailed account of his participation to Nordenskiöld expedition on the *Rivista Marittima* in 1880²⁵. Later, he organized an expedition to Antarctica, which lasted from 1881 till 1882, and in 1887 explored lower Congo, however, he returned from the expedition suffering from some serious illness and unfortunately died that year.

The Duke of the Abruzzi toward the North Pole

In 1899 Luigi Amedeo of Savoy, the Duke of the Abruzzi, at that time a lieutenant of the Italian Royal Navy, organized an expedition to the North Pole. In spring he arrived in Norway with 10 more Italians and bought the *Jason* a 570-tonned whaler, which was renamed *Stella Polare* (North Star). The Duke had some works and rearrangements made to the ship. On June 12th he sailed to Archangelsk, which he left on July 12th.

²⁴ From Yokohama they sailed across the Indian Ocean, passed through Suez and reached Naples on February 14th, 1880. News about the expedition had previously been published by the President of Geographical Society, baron Cristoforo Negri in his article *Spedizione artica svedese*, on „*Rivista Marittima*”, anno XIII, fascicolo II (February), 1879.

²⁵ G. Bove, *Procedimenti della spedizione artica svedese sotto il comando del Professor Nordenskiöld*, „*Rivista Marittima*”, anno XIV, fascicolo IV, 1880. Tome IV was issued in April 1880. The following parts, under the same title, appeared monthly on tomes V, VI, VII/VIII, IX, and X, the latter being published in October 1880.

The expedition was composed of twenty one men, including the Duke, the Norwegian seamen, frigate captain Umberto Cagni, vessel lieutenant Francesco Querini, the direct descendant of the Querini, who shipwrecked in the Lofoten in XV century, and medical doctor Achille Cavalli Molinelli.

The expedition sailed to Franz Joseph Land, set up a camp on the Rudolf Island to spend wintertime there, and planned to reach the Pole using three dogsled teams.

During winter, the Duke lost two fingers due to the cold, and this prevented him from continuing the journey towards the Pole. The command of the three teams²⁶ was taken by captain Cagni. They left on March 11th, 1900. Temperature reached - 53° Celsius, the march took longer and was harder than expected, which was the obvious result of the terrible weather conditions. As the expedition was extending, the supplies of food seemed insufficient. Two teams were sent back before, on April 24th 1900, Cagni hoisted the Italian tricolor at latitude 86° 34' North. In 1895 Nansen had reached 86°13,6' North. With scarce supplies of food Cagni managed to turn back to the camp. The trip was terrible, but ended successfully on June 23rd. On August 16th the *Stella Polare* left the Rudolf-Island heading south, and the expedition went back to Norway. During the expedition the northern coast of the Rudolf-Island and two other islands were explored and surveyed²⁷.

In 1909 Robert Peary claimed to have reached the North Pole, and Frederick Cook claimed to have done the same in 1908. In 1997 Robert Bryce analyzed Cook's and Peary's records and notes, which show that Cook in 1908 reached a bit further than 87°47' latitude, whereas Peary came back when he was still 5 miles away from the Pole. So, the glory of having been the first on the Pole is attributed to Amundsen, Nobile, Elmsworth and those who got there on the *Norge* in 1926.

The Spitsbergen Treaty of 1920²⁸

World War I had a great impact on the world and on the decisions related to the Arctic. Due to the international situation, on February 9th, 1920, the Treaty concerning Spitsbergen was signed. It declared the arctic archipelago of Spitsbergen (now called Svalbard) an overseas part of the Kingdom of Norway (article 1). However, as part of the compromise with the signatories, despite Norwegian sovereignty not all Norwegian law applies. All signatories were given

²⁶ They were all commanded by an officer, and carried as much food as possible. As soon as the food decreased, a first team had to go back; the same had to be done by the second patrol, in order to allow the third, composed of Cagni, guides Petigax, Fenoillet and seaman Canepa to reach the Pole. The first team sent back was composed of lieutenant Querini, guide Ollier, and the Norwegian engineer Stökker. The second was commanded by doctor Cavalli Molinelli, and included guide Savoie and seaman Cardenti. Cavalli's team arrived back later than expected, but safe, whilst Querini disappeared with his men in the Arctic.

²⁷ An island in Franz Joseph Land, Luigi Island (Остров Луиджи; Ostrov Luidzhi) was named after the Duke. Luigi Island has a surface of 371 km² and it is heavily frozen. Its highest point is 442 meters. The Island is part of the Zichy Land, a subgroup of the Franz Josef Archipelago. Narrow channels separate it from Salisbury Island in the northeast, and from Champ Island in southeast.

²⁸ See the text in http://www.polarnet.cnr.it/dmdocuments/documenti_ufficiali/The_Svalbard_Treaty.pdf, web. 21 January 2013

equal rights to engage in commercial activities (mainly coal mining) on the islands. The countries, which signed the treaty were: the United States of America; Great Britain, including Ireland; and the British Commonwealth, including India, South Africa, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand;²⁹ Denmark; France; Italy; Japan; Norway; the Netherlands; and Sweden. The possibility that the Soviet Union would join the Treaty had been left open until the Russian government was established.

The treaty recognized:

“the full and absolute sovereignty of Norway over the Archipelago of Spitsbergen, comprising, with Bear Island or Beeren-Eiland, all the islands situated between 10° and 35° longitude East of Greenwich and between 74° and 81° latitude North, especially West Spitsbergen, North-East Land, Barents Island, Edge Island, Wiche Islands, Hope Island or Hopen-Eiland, and Prince Charles Foreland, together with all islands great or small and rocks appertaining thereto”³⁰.

What was of basic importance had been included in Article 3, which guaranteed equal hunting and fishing rights to ships and all nationals of the High Contracting Parties within their territories and in their territorial waters. But it gave them also:

“equal liberty of access and entry for any reason or object whatever to the waters, fjords and ports of the territories specified in Article 1; subject to the observance of local laws and regulations, they may carry on there without impediment all maritime, industrial, mining and commercial operations on a footing of absolute equality. They shall be admitted under the same conditions of equality to the exercise and practice of all maritime, industrial, mining or commercial enterprises both on land and in the territorial waters, and no monopoly shall be established on any account or for any enterprise whatever”.

And

“their ships and goods shall not be subject to any charges or restrictions whatever which are not borne by the nationals, ships or goods which enjoy in Norway the treatment of the most favoured nation; Norwegian nationals, ships or goods being for this purpose assimilated to those of the other High Contracting Parties, and not related more favourably in any respect. No charge or restriction shall be imposed

²⁹ Actually, a part for Ireland, which at that time was part of Great Britain and hitherto was only mentioned but had no signature, all the members of the Commonwealth had their own representative, who signed separately for the member of Commonwealth he represented; so, the Earl of Derby signed for Great Britain; Sir George Halsey Perley signed for the Dominion of Canada; Hon. Andrew Fisher for the Commonwealth of Australia; Sir Thomas MacKenzie for the Dominion of New Zealand; Mr. Reginald Andrew Blankenberg signed for the Union of South Africa; then, the Earl of Derby signed again as the representative of India too.

³⁰ *Treaty between Norway, The United States of America, Denmark, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Great Britain and Ireland and the British overseas Dominions and Sweden concerning Spitsbergen signed in Paris 9th February 1920*, article 1; the full text in English and in French can be seen on the website http://www.polarnet.cnr.it/dmdocuments/documenti_ufficiali/The_Svalbard_Treaty.pdf, web. January 2013.

on the exportation of any goods to the territories of any of the Contracting Powers other or more onerous than on the exportation of similar goods to the territory of any other Contracting Power (including Norway) or to any other destination”³¹.

Commercial aspects were more clearly stated in Articles 7 and 8, which related mainly to the methods of acquisition, enjoyment and exercise of the right of ownership of property, including mineral rights. As expressed in Article 7, Norway granted all nationals of the High Contracting Parties treatment based on complete equality and in conformity with the stipulations of the Treaty, and expropriation may be resorted to only on grounds of public utility and on payment of proper compensation³².

Article 8 states that

“[...] mining regulations which, especially from the point of view of imposts, taxes or charges of any kind, and of general or particular labour conditions, shall exclude all privileges, monopolies or favours for the benefit of the State or of the nationals of any one of the High Contracting Parties, including Norway, and shall guarantee to the paid staff of all categories the remuneration and protection necessary for their physical, moral and intellectual welfare. [...] So far, particularly, as the exportation of minerals is concerned, the Norwegian Government shall have the right to levy an export duty which shall not exceed 1 % of the maximum value of the minerals exported up to 100.000 tons, and beyond that quantity the duty will be proportionately diminished. The value shall be fixed at the end of the navigation season by calculating the average free on board price obtained”³³.

So, all the High Contracting Parties, including Italy, were granted the right to carry all possible commercial activities, including mining. This right had become even more significant when crude oil and natural gas were discovered off the coast of Norway.

Amundsen, Nobile, and the airship *Norge* across the Arctic and on the Pole

In Spring 1924 Roald Amundsen, the conqueror of South Pole, decided to try to reach the North Pole by aircraft. The unsuccessful attempt in 1925 convinced him to try to accomplish his goal by airship. He came into contact with general Umberto Nobile, the chief of the Stabilimento Costruzioni Aeronautiche in Rome, and in 1926 an agreement was signed. The Norwegian Aero Club bought Italian Airship no. 1, which was named *Norge*. The expedition had Nobile as the pilot, and included some Norwegians, among them Amundsen, Italians, and the American businessman Ellsworth, who contributed financially to the expedition with a sum of 125,000 \$. The *Norge* left Rome on April 10th, 1926, passed

³¹ *Ibidem*, article 3.

³² *Ibidem*, article 7.

³³ *Ibidem*, article 8.

Pulham, and Oslo, and reached Leningrad on April 15th. After a 15-day stoppage, resulting from bad weather conditions, on May 5th *Norge* left Leningrad and on 7th arrived in King's Bay, in the Svalbard archipelago.

The objective of the trip was, according to Amundsen, to see whether there was any evidence of a continent, or, at least, of any land, in the still unknown Arctic area surrounding the Pole³⁴.

On May 11th, 1926, at 9.50 GMT, *Norge* left King's Bay to the North Pole. As it was said before, nobody had yet reached it³⁵. On May 12th, 1926, at 1.30 a.m. GMT, for the first time in history, the North Pole was reached – however, it was not materially touched. The flags of Norway, Italy and United States were dropped from the airship, and the *Norge* went westward, to Alaska, more or less along the 150° meridian. It reached the coast of Alaska on May 13th, 7.35 a.m., and, instead of arriving in Nome, bad weather conditions forced it to land, approximately 100 miles from Nome, on May 14th, 1926 at 7.30 a.m. GMT; May 13th, 1926, 8.30 p.m. of local time. The flight was over, and no evidence of any land around the pole had been seen: the Arctic was a frozen ocean³⁶.

Nobile, the Pole, and the crash of the airship *Italia*

In 1928 Nobile decided to make another polar flight. He again wanted to explore the Pole and his intention was also to demonstrate that airships could manage non-stop flights from Europe to Asia or to the American West Coast, from Scandinavia to Tokyo and San Francisco³⁷. Unfortunately, Amundsen had long before decided that the flight to the Pole had to be his final trip, and intended to keep his promise. Thus, Nobile presented his idea to Mussolini. Mussolini

³⁴ About the scientific results, see O. Ferrante, *L'apporto geografico e scientifico delle spedizioni polari di Umberto Nobile*, "Il Polo", anno LVII, 2002, vol. 3/4.

³⁵ A part for Peary in 1909, just two days before Amundsen, Nobile and Ellsworth left, on 9 May 1926, US Navy officer Richard Evelyn Byrd and pilot Floyd Bennet attempted a flight over the North Pole from Svalbard. When back to its King's Bay, Byrd claimed to have reached the Pole. Discussions whether or not Byrd actually reached the North Pole began as soon as that same year and lasted till when, in 1996, Byrd's diary was released. His diary's entry of the May 9th, 1926 flight revealed erased (but still legible) sextant sights that sharply differ with Byrd's later June 22nd typewritten official report to the National Geographic Society. Byrd took a sextant reading of the Sun at 7.07 and 10 seconds GCT. His erased diary record shows the apparent (observed) solar altitude to have been 19° 25' 30", while his later official typescript reports the same 7.07 and 10 seconds apparent solar altitude to have been 18° 18' 18". On the basis of this and other data in the diary, American astronomer and Science historian Dennis Rawlins concluded that Byrd steered accurately, and flew about 80% of the distance to the Pole before turning back because of an engine oil leak, but later falsified his official report to support his claim of reaching the pole. Some other sources claim that Floyd Bennett, and Byrd later revealed, in private conversations, that they did not reach the pole. Floyd Bennett admitted it whilst talking to another pilot, and, as soon as 1930 Byrd himself confessed his failure to reach the North Pole during a long walk with Dr. Isaiah Bowman.

³⁶ Basically, as Nobile later wrote, one could realize whether he was flying on iced sea or land because when on land the pack is flat, when on the sea is very rough, rocky and steep.

³⁷ As he later wrote in his U. Nobile, *La tenda rossa*, Milano, 1969, p. 129.

preferred a flight to Rio de Janeiro, but then he put aside the idea, and, when in 1927 Nobile met him and Balbo, the newly appointed undersecretary of the Air Force, he got the permission. The expedition was to be organized by the Italian Geographical Society and funds had to be raised among donors.

Nobile made meticulous preparations. He met Nansen in Berlin and got his advice on both the scientific tasks and organizational aspects. Nansen told him that after the *Norge*'s flight, the main issue was the exploration of the former Land of Nicholas II, now Land of the North. Thus, Nobile planned three different flights – one to that Land, next to Greenland and Canadian coasts, and finally a flight to the Pole and surrounding area. As far as the plans of the flight to the Pole are concerned, his intention was to do oceanographic and magnetic researches there, if the weather permitted. He was offered some advice by Otto Sverdrup, who had accompanied Nansen on *Fram*, and professor Adolf Hole, as well as Tryggve Gran, a survivor of Scott's expedition to South Pole.

Nobile used airship N. 4, named *Italia*, a twin airship of *Norge*. His original idea was to build an airship holding the capacity of 55,000 cubic meters, whilst *Norge* and *Italia* had the capacity of only 19,000 cubic meters, but the project – originally to be used for the trip to Rio – had been put aside and when he got the permission to fly again to the Pole, only the N type of airships was available.

Italia was transferred from Rome to Milan. It left Milan on April 15th, 1928, at 1.55 a.m. and via the town which at that time was called Stolp, and now is Słupsk, arrived in Ny-Ålesund on May 6th.

Bad weather conditions prevented flights in the following days. On May 15th the airship left toward the unexplored area of the Land of the North. After the airship passed the Land of Franz-Joseph, it did not manage to continue, owing to strong wind and bad weather, which eventually prevented it from reaching its destination. Nobile went back taking the route over the northwestern coast of Novaja Zemlja from Cape Vlissingen to Cape Nassau and then over the Land of North East. During his way back he noticed the absence of glaciers actually showed on maps. He also observed that many mountains were in fact higher than it was indicated by contour lines on maps. *Italia* was safely back in Ny-Ålesund after a 69 hours-long flight.

On May 23rd, 1928, at 4.28 a.m., *Italia* left Ny-Ålesund. It was expected that the flight would take about 40 hours. Due to opposing wind, the airship went west to Greenland, and, when over Cape Bridgman, it turned north. On May 24th, twenty minutes after midnight, *Italia* reached the Pole. The airship descended to only 120 meters above the ice pack, and two hours later it started the journey in the direction of Spitsbergen. On its way, *Italia* met with strong (50 km/h), headwinds and, although in normal conditions it could fly at a speed of 110 km/h, it could only reach the speed of 60 km/h, due to the winds. On May 25th, at 10.30 a.m., it started to descend, the pilot lost control and two minutes later the airship crashed on the pack. Everything happened in a fraction of time: the cabin with most of the crew remained on the pack, and the part of the airship, now considerably lightened, unfortunately with some crew members on board, was caught in a gust of wind and began to rise. A few minutes

later, the survivors saw a big and deep column of smoke about 30 kilometers away. One of them later wrote it was the same kind of smoke he had seen in the past, when airship N. 3 caught fire and eventually burnt as it was being deflated in Ciampino airfield near Rome³⁸.

The crash occurred not so far from Cape Platen, on the northern side of the Land of Northeast, exactly 30 miles north of the Charles XII island. Although, their radio's transmitter was working and was sending signals, they were never received by the Italian Navy's support ship *Città di Milano* at King's Bay³⁹. This fact is quite surprising as the support ship's radio receiver was in good, working condition, able to receive signals even from Rome.

It is a well known fact, that on June 3rd, a Russian radio-amateur received some signals from the survivors, and notified Russian authorities about that fact. Ships and aircraft immediately started searching operation, which successfully ended on July 12th, 1928, in the evening, when the survivors were rescued by the Soviet icebreaker *Krassin*⁴⁰.

The dramatic result of this last Nobile's polar flight, put an end to both the use of the airships and the activity of the Italian in the Arctic⁴¹. The airships were not in use any longer, but the Italian became again present in the Arctic long after World War II, both in scientific and in economical fields.

Italian economical Arctic activity: ENI, crude oil, and natural gas

The Italian oil and gas corporation ENI began operating in Norway in 1964, when its controlled oil company Agip signed a 20-year exploration, development

³⁸ F. Trojani, *L'ultimo volo*, Milano, 1978, p. 76.

³⁹ The *Città di Milano* was one of the ships normally used by the Royal Navy Hydrographical Institute. During the more than four months it spent at King's Bay, it made hydrographical researches along the western coast of the Svalbard, along the Land of North East, and in King's Bay itself, including a detailed map of London (in the Spitsbergen), and Ny-Ålesund. Due to detailed controls of the water and its temperature, the crew found that water 300 meters deep was hotter than on the surface, and it was identified as an eastern limit of the Gulf Stream. Tide-gauge registrations made clear that the Arctic Ocean had the typical day tides of a deep basin, with no wide low sea bottom, which was the contrary of the contemporary opinion. Many determination of relative gravity were made, and they were the first ever published about the Spitsbergen. Then, the ship measured the earth magnetism. It was interesting because 1928 was a year of top sun activity. Experiments made on July 7th and 8th proved a relationship between magnetic disturbances and shortwave broadcasting problems, as well as that some shortwave broadcasting problems occurred before a magnetic storm and were at their top when the magnetic storm decreased.

⁴⁰ In April 2006, Italian Air Force Brigadier (ret.) Raffaele Selvaggio organized and led an A.A.A. (Associazione Arma Aeronautica - Italian Air Force Veterans Association) travel to the North Pole. The group was composed of six people. They reached the North Pole on April 12th, 2006, and left there the Italian flag and a small statue of the Holy Virgin of Loreto – protector of the Italian airmen – in memory of the Italians who died during Nobile expedition and related search and rescue operations, as reported on the AAA Novara local section http://www.circolodel53.it/Pdf/Notiziario_20/Per_Pagina/Notiziario%2020_def_20.pdf, web. February 20 2013.

⁴¹ When back, in November 1928 Nobile faced an enquiry about the expedition. Cagni, now an admiral, was appointed as the president of the Commission; doctor Cavalli Molinelli, now a medical lieutenant general of the Navy, was among the members.

and production agreement in the North Sea. In 1965 Norsk Agip company was set up, which in 1977 got its first operatorship. (“operatorship” is the term used in oil industry meaning “operating as the leader-company of a group composed of different companies, doing researches and eventually exploitation of gas or oil resources found in a certain area with the formal permission of the Government owning that area”), and in the following year opened the first operational base in Sandness. In 1980 the Norwegian government offered the company exploration areas in the North Sea, north of the 62nd parallel. Between 1980 and 1985, Norsk Agip made a series of discoveries including the Midgard, Njord and Smorbukk South fields, while in 1992 the NOME field was discovered. In 2003 ENI Norge AS was founded as a result of the merger of Norsk Agip and Fortum Petroleum, and this new company has become involved in joint ventures to produce oil and natural gas in Norway.

ENI works within the Norwegian Arctic Circle in developing Marulke offshore crude oilfield (20%), and seven more offshore oilfields⁴², and exploring two different areas, one includes two research and production licenses more or less at 69° North and 12° East⁴³, the other includes eight production licenses, more or less at 71° North, and 19° East, just north of Cape North⁴⁴.

Italian Scientific arctic activity: Progetto Artico⁴⁵

Apart from a slight scientific activity⁴⁶, the Italian had not been present in the Arctic from the moment of the crash of *Italia* airship till the last quarter of the XX century.

After signing the Italian-Norwegian Scientific cooperation memorandum in 1997, in the same year the National Research Council of Italy (CNR) opened a research station in Ny-Ålesund (78°55' N, 11°56' E) in the Norwegian

⁴² They are in the Sea of Norway and they are: Asgaard (Eni's share 14.82%), which in 2010 provided 72% of the whole ENI production in Norway; Heidrun (Eni's share 5.12%); Mikkell (Eni's share 14.9%); Yttergryta (Eni's share 9.8%); NOME (Eni's share 6.9%); Urd (Eni's share 11.5%), and Morvin (Eni's share 30%).

Cfr. http://www.eni.com/en_IT/world-eni/index.shtml Norway. web. January 20 2013

⁴³ Fossekall in the PL 128 (Eni's share 11.5%) and Flyndretind in the PL 473 licence (Eni's share 29.4%).

⁴⁴ Prospecting License 201 (Eni's share 67%); 489 (Eni's share 40%); 229-229B-229C (Eni's share 65%); 529 (Eni's share 30%); 533 (Eni's share 40%); Licences 393 (Eni's share 30%), 226 (Eni's share 31%) and 532 (Eni's share 30%); Goliat (Eni's share 65%, operator); and Skrugard in the PL 532. web. January 20 2013.

⁴⁵ http://www.polarnet.cnr.it/index.php?option=com_content&task=category§ionid=6&id=35&Itemid=2 web. January 20 2013

⁴⁶ Professor Silvio Zavatti led an ethnological expedition in Rankin Inlet – Canadian Arctic – in August and September 1961; in July 1962 the Istituto Polare Italiano organized one more ethnological expedition to Lapland. In August and September 1963 the same Institute sent an ethnological expedition in eastern Greenland. The following was made in August and September 1967 in Rankin Inlet, in the Hudson Bay, and made researches in ethnology, human ecology, ethnography, and marine biology. In July and August 1969 professor Zavatti made an ethnological, and cartographical expedition in Repulse Bay.

Archipelago of Spitsbergen. It was named “Dirigibile Italia” in honour of Umberto Nobile’s airship expedition of 1928.

The station is a multidisciplinary research facility. Its activities are coordinated by the Polar Support Unit of the CNR Department of Earth and Environment called Polarnet.

Dirigibile Italia is an infrastructure with a total floor area of 330 square meters, including 170 square meters for laboratories and offices. The Station is operational year round, although it may not be manned in the case of no activity. It can accommodate up to 7 people. The main researches done in Dirigibile Italia concern: Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics, Marine and Bacterial Biology, Upper atmosphere physics, Technology, Oceanography/limnology, Environmental studies, and studies and researches on Human biology and medicine.

CNR is a part of the International User Group for the Ny-Ålesund Marine Laboratory, a facility opened in June 2005 in King’s Bay, providing support to marine ecology, physiology, and biochemistry research, as well as to physical sciences. The laboratory is an experiment station. It has a controlled system of the experimental parameters, and can carry out experiments in a real-world environment. A storage room is on the ground floor. Scientific equipments, laboratories, freezers, tanks for organisms and so on are at the first floor. Second floor includes a water treatment system, an office of the laboratory coordinator, and a lecture room for more than 20 persons.

Additional activities were carried out by the Polar Institute⁴⁷, and within the European Union, e. g. the European Project ERICON⁴⁸.

⁴⁷ See G. Frinchillucci, *La terza spedizione dell'Istituto geografico Polare “Silvio Zavatti” nel distretto di Ammassalik, nella Groenlandia Orientale (2005)*, „Il Polo”, anno LX, 2005, vol. 3, another expedition was made in the Spitsbergen in 2007, during the Polar Year 2007-2008, cfr. ” <http://www.museopolare.it/com.stampa.htm#2>; and a third was made in Greenland in Spring 2008, cfr. the *Results of the Spring 2008 Expedition*, <http://www.museopolare.it/Foto%20Spedizione%202008.htm> web. January 20 2013. In December 2008, after a Norwegian project, it was organized an Italian expedition, called “Oltre” (Beyond”) or “Artico 2008”. Its task was to find a land route usable by cars along the maritime Northeastern Passage. The Expedition was composed of 31 people, including 10 from the Italian Alpine troops, and had two trucks and six big vans. They left North Cape by truck in late December 2008, entered Russia and followed the Russian northern coast, but when east of Ina, on February 27th, 2009, due to extremely bad weather conditions, the expedition had to come back.

⁴⁸ The European Research Icebreaker Consortium (ERICON) managed by the European Science Foundation and Alfred Wegener Institute includes fifteen partners from ten European and associated Countries. It is a 800 million euro project, funded by the European Commission’s 7th Framework Program. It is aimed to an agreement for the shipbuilding and work of the special icebreaker *Aurora Borealis*. Italy is involved, and must define the scientific plan and the management structure of the icebreaker. *Aurora Borealis* is planned as mix of a heavy icebreaker, a deep sea drilling (up to 1,000 meters in a water depth of 5,000 meters), and a multipurpose (oceanography, biology, geology) research ship. *Aurora Borealis* will work in both the Polar areas (Arctic and Antarctic seas) during all the year, as well as in the blue oceanic waters. It will be the first ship available for year-round polar expeditions in the world. The shipbuilding began in 2012, and is supposed to be achieved within 2016, resulting in a 199 meters long, and 65,000 tons icebreaker, whose diesel electrical engines’ power is planned to be 81 Megawatt. This should

Lastly, the Italian think tank⁴⁹, and above all the Italian Armed Forces since at least 2006, have been showing a certain interest about what happens or may happen in the area, and have published some analysis, and are currently asking for some more⁵⁰.

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enable the ship to reach 98% of the Arctic area, hosting up to 120 men (researchers and crew), for a no-stop 90 days long activity.

⁴⁹ See: the most important Italian journal “Limes” on the geopolitical and strategic issues, volume 2/08, entitled *Partita al Polo*, issued on June 13th, 2008.

⁵⁰ See for instance R. Friolo, *La rotta marittima tesa verso il Polo Nord*, Roma 2006; A. Di Bello, *La Scacchiera artica*, Roma 2009. Or the CeMiSS (Centro Militare Studi Strategici) research project 2013 RELINT AG – R – 01, entitled *Mar Glaciale Artico: sviluppi ed impatti sul sistema strategico, politico ed economico internazionale*.

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Abstract

The paper presents the role and the contribution of the Italian to the studies on the Arctic and its region. It describes the first and subsequent expeditions made by the Italians, including such famous personalities as Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci, who can be described as pioneers in searching for new sea routes and discovering new lands. The article also recalls the event of the Spitsbergen Treaty, which took place after World War I. Finally, it describes the commercial and scientific activity of the Italians in the Arctic.

Włosi i Arktyka

Artykuł przedstawia rolę oraz wkład Włochów w badania nad Arktyką i jej regionem. Opisuje pierwsze i kolejne wyprawy w których uczestniczyli Włosi, w tym takie znane osobistości jak Krzysztof Kolumb i Amerigo Vespucci, będący pionierami w poszukiwaniu nowych szlaków morskich i odkrywaniu nowych lądów. Artykuł przypomina również Traktat Spitsbergeński, który miał miejsce po I wojnie światowej a dotyczył archipelagu Svalbard. Artykuł opisuje również działalność komercyjną i naukową Włochów w Arktyce w czasach współczesnych.

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