



NATIONAL MUSEUM
of NATURAL HISTORY
GOULANDRIS



Yannis Tzortzis

Greenland: Blue Ice

Foreword

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First of all, I will begin with the title of the exhibition, which is apt, since ice reflects light across all wavelengths. This is why compact ice appears white, while, as it melts, it starts to reflect blue (primarily from the sky) and thus takes on its characteristic blue hues. This journey toward the North Pole of the Earth has a long history, reaching, as far as we know, back to the voyage of Pytheas in the 4th century BCE. He sought to discover the northernmost point of the planet, as he narrates in his book *On the Ocean*, which was lost along with the Library of Alexandria. Pytheas was followed by various explorers, most notably the Vikings, and moving forward to the early 20th century, by the famous Norwegian explorer, Nansen.

From the surviving fragments of Pytheas' impressions, we stay on the explorer's arrival in a region devoid of light, in absolute darkness. He perceived it as the edge of the Ocean. However, Pytheas returned to give us everything we have found so far. Nansen described the aurora borealis, the only source of light in the darkness of the polar winter, as did his contemporary astro-meteorologist, Størmer, who interpreted the natural mechanisms that create it. Nansen was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1922 and played a significant humanitarian and mediating role in the process of exchanging Ottoman and Christian populations after the Asia Minor Catastrophe. His statue honors the small square bearing his name on Vasilissis Sofias Avenue today.

Introducing the photographs of a modern journey in the footsteps not only of Pytheas, but also Nansen and so many other explorers, we arrive at the first decade of the Cold



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War, when the West (that is, west of the so-called Iron Curtain at the time) needed to monitor intercontinental missile launches and trajectories in the event of a supposed conflict with the then Soviet Union. The US military establishes the Thule Research Center to gather information on changes not only in the lower atmosphere but also in its higher layers, obviously with a military interest. The site was named Thule, after Pytheas' vision that he had reached Thule, beyond which there was nothing.

At this site, when the station was founded in the 1950s, there was the Earth's north geomagnetic pole, a characteristic point that defines the magnetic fields surrounding our planet, which behaves not only as a body with mass but also as a body that is a magnet and has its south pole near the North Pole (Thule station) and its north pole near the south pole of its rotation axis.

The importance of these measurements, both from a scientific and a military perspective, was maximized with the beginning of precision measurements at the Spitsbergen site, which is located in the Svalbard archipelago, Norway. This site became a center for launching huge balloons in the 1980s, in order to study the then newly discovered ozone hole in the southern hemisphere, which, however, was later found to be forming in the northern hemisphere as well. In fact, the Laboratory of Atmospheric Physics at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki also participated in the polar measurements, which led to the revelation that the famous ozone thinning (hole) does not exist only in Antarctica, but also in the Arctic. Humanity united to close the ozone hole, taking strict measures and banning substances produced by man, which were dangerous for maintaining the protective ozone layer around the planet.

Today, this layer has been sufficiently protected by the Montreal Protocol. However, the ice has continued to melt. The formidable force of life shown in Yannis Tzortzis' photographs, through the whale leaping out of the ocean, demonstrates the magnitude of the power of life, even against gravity; it shows how many creatures are endangered by ice melting, which has reached extremely alarming levels. Its rate has led to the loss of over 40% of the ice cover at the North Pole, including, of course, Greenland. Gradually, the entire Arctic region, previously covered in ice, will be revealed, releasing huge concentrations of methane and other gases that accelerate the development of the greenhouse effect.

The green campaign led by Yannis Tzortzis and his collaborators, in an effort to awaken people to the dangers not only Greenland but also other regions of the planet is exposed to, constitutes yet another heroic attempt by humanity to resist its mistakes. In the photographs, the traces of the lack of adaptation to the culture of the few Inuit who live there, as evidenced by a garbage dump, perhaps the only one in Greenland, show, compared to the remote snowy slopes and the crystal clear ice waters, the contrast between a healthy environment and the environment of human waste.

These photographs remind us of the waste produced by man in the so-called Anthropocene era, during which we have done whatever we can to destroy and degrade not only the beauty of nature but also its own harmony and natural evolution from era to era and during its eternal journey through space. In these northern lands, the Polar Regions are only accompanied by the flashes of the northern lights. The aurora, first described by Aristotle in his first book on meteorology, "Meteorologica", which was written at the same time, when Pytheas was sailing the rough seas searching for his mythical Thule (for more, see <https://www.archaeopress.com/Archaeopress/download/9781789696370>).

The story continues with the appetites of today's "great" conquerors, who seek conquest where they are not supposed to be. Conquests, of course, do not stop at the planet's power-generating regions, but also extend to mythical places, incorporating even rare earths into their myth. The imagination and amorality of wealth are indeed the causes that pose our planet at risk. As Mahatma Gandhi emphasized, "the planet is not in danger due to its overpopulation, but because of the inability to satisfy the appetites of its inhabitants".

This exhibition is yet another example of the heroism and selflessness characterizing people like Yannis Tzortzis, as well as the entities that support them, such as the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain, etc. At this point, I should note that from the same Old Albion, a similar organization had originated, the Society of Dilettanti, which gave us remarkable descriptions of journeys from Europe to Cyprus and the Euphrates.

I am happy to foreword this exhibition with an introduction that constitutes a small tribute to the people who still care about our planet, to those who still gaze far into the future. Well done!

C. Z.

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