

*Four Antarctic Years in the South Orkney Islands*. José Manuel Moneta (author) and Robert Keith Headland (editor). 2017. London: Bernard Quaritch Ltd. 440 p, softcover. ISBN 978-0-9955192-0-6. GBP 50.

The Argentine research station 'Base Orcadas' at the South Orkney Islands is not only the oldest permanently operated research station in the Antarctic region, but one of the few active research stations that are visited more or less regularly by the passengers of expedition cruise ships during every Antarctic season. Originally established in 1903 by the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition under the leadership of William Speirs Bruce, the station on Laurie Island was handed over to Argentine researchers in 1904. Consequently the history of 'Base Orcadas' is of relevance not only for Antarctic history at large, but in particular for the early engagement of Argentina in Antarctica.

Although José Manuel Moneta's book on his four years in the South Orkney Islands and more particularly his time at Orcadas was originally published in Spanish in 1939 and saw at least 12 editions in the period up to 1963, it remained largely unknown to an international readership.

Bernard Quaritch Ltd has now published a first translation of the book into English, accompanied by a trove of additional materials compiled by R.K. Headland and, most importantly for any academic use, an index.

In 1923 Moneta travelled for the first time to Orcadas as a Meteorological Assistant, in 1925 he was Assistant Leader, and in 1927 and 1929 Leader of the Expedition.

The four expeditions covered by Moneta's autobiographical book were at the end of the heroic age of Antarctic exploration and thus at a time when Antarctic research started transitioning from pure exploration to systematic scientific research. Moneta devotes most of the book to the description of everyday life at such an extreme remote research station, including the use of modern technology such as radio communication, providing detailed information on food supplies and festivities as well as the daily routine and the scientific programmes. In addition, he provides details about the trips to and from Orcadas, with interesting snippets about the whaling industry and South Georgia. With a total of 115 [sic] chapters, each is brief and focused on a singular aspect of the spectrum mentioned afore.

Besides providing a rare insight into everyday life and work at an Antarctic research station at the time, after the expeditions of the heroic age itself and before the post-World War II period of modern and highly technologised scientific research, Moneta's book provides an Argentine perspective. This perspective becomes most obvious when Moneta discusses his third expedition to South Orkney as the first entirely Argentine expedition (p. 285). With most other publications on everyday life in Antarctica focusing on European perspectives, and given the importance of South American activities on the frozen continent, the book, now available in an English edition, helps to balance the historic account of Antarctic research.

Anyhow, the book clearly showcases that the experience of living in a region like the South Orkney Islands was basically the same for researchers of all nations.

Of course, given that the first Spanish edition of the book was published in 1939, the first English edition of the book does not provide any new research results or insights, but this is not the aim of the book. What it does is make an important source for the history of Antarctica that was previously limited to a Spanish reading audience available for a global readership. Most definitely it will help Antarctic historians to gain a better understanding of a period of critical importance for Antarctic history.

Headland must be commended not only for making this source available to non-Spanish speaking Antarctic historians but also for his careful annotations and selected supplemental materials that will help the non-specialist on Antarctic history to gain a better understanding of a complex topic.

The translation of Moneta's text into English was done by Kathleen Stilton and Kenn Back, who managed successfully not only to provide a proper translation of the text itself but also to keep its ductus.

Maps and plans of the South Orkney Islands and Base Orcadas as well as black-and-white photographs were included in all previous (Spanish) editions, but the editor and the publisher managed to reproduce them for this edition in a quality unprecedented in previous editions. It may be interesting to note that the cover of the 2017 edition is nearly 100% identical to the cover of the original 1939 edition. The covers of the later editions are provided as colour reproductions on the frontispiece, providing an interesting vignette on designs related to Antarctica.

A retail price of GBP 50 (USD 66, EUR 37) may seem high for a softcover, but given the quality of the content and the edition it seems to be worth every penny, particularly taking into account the effort that was required for the careful translation of a manuscript of this length.

Altogether the book can be highly recommended to anyone interested in Antarctic history, regardless of whether they are a professional Antarctic historian looking for a source that was not available to him or her in an accessible language, an Antarctic scientist interested in past conditions of his or her

own work, a legal scholar or politician interested in gaining a better understanding of the national perspectives on Antarctica as a background for the ongoing tensions among nations in Antarctica, or even a tourist going to Antarctica and probably 'Base Orcadas' itself or the South Orkney Islands just to get a sense of the place and its history. (Ingo Heidbrink, Dept. of History, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA 23529, USA ([iheidbri@odu.edu](mailto:iheidbri@odu.edu)))

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