

Moravian Missions in the European Arctic during the Enlightenment: collecting, classifying and communicating knowledge (Greenland, Iceland and Lapland)

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Abstract

This article focuses on the missions and exploratory journeys of Moravian missionaries (renewed Church of the United Brethren of Herrnhut, Saxony, Germany) in the European Arctic during the Enlightenment. Their activities of observing the environment and indigenous societies, as well as collecting and classifying natural specimen and artefacts, are discussed in relation to their communication strategies about Arctic knowledge gathered during their work on stations or expeditions. Analysing mostly unpublished, hand-written sources in German from the Moravian archives in Germany, I argue that the Moravians contributed considerably to the enhancement of what the Republic of Letters knew about the Far North, its people, environment and climate, in the 18th century.

Keywords

Arctic, climate, Enlightenment, Greenland, Inuit, knowledge, Lapland, Island, missionaries, Moravians, Sami

Introduction

Even though Europeans have been interested in the Arctic since Antiquity, more regular first-hand knowledge about the region only started to reach the Old Continent thanks to Renaissance and early modern exploration, mostly communicated through travel accounts of expeditions and the log books and journals of whalers, collected also in volumes like Hakluyt's and Purchas' famous anthologies. Such narratives were primarily meant to transmit useful knowledge as far as navigation and survival strategies in the Far North are concerned, while demonstrating the power of the aristocracy

and the merchants and serving as a medium for the construction of heroic tales glorifying the endurance of exceptional characters and their capacity to tame wild nature. At the same time, these accounts contained descriptions of those regions, including their inhabitants, belief systems and culture, as well as remarks about natural phenomena regarding notably the weather. During the Enlightenment, such observations fed speculation about the indigenous people of the North in relation to the philosophy of history, during an age when the collecting of specimen, objects and scholarly measures and observations became systematic in view of an encyclopedic ordering of natural history. Thus, new actors appeared on the scholarly scene with new knowledge about the Arctic, which they rendered available in new media of scholarly communication. This concerns notably the German missionaries of the Moravian Brotherhood in Herrnhut, Saxony, who engaged in missions of evangelization among the indigenous societies of the European Far North from 1733 on, contributing thereby, as we will see, to the effort of collecting and disseminating knowledge about the Arctic mentioned above. These men, later also their wives, were originally Protestant dissenters from Moravia in the Hapsburg Empire, who had not been ordained by any of German Lutheran Bishop, nor trained in any of their faculties or seminars of theology. They were laymen and craftsmen, determined to cross the Arctic Circle to spread the word of God in Greenland, Lapland and Iceland in the first half of the eighteenth century, extending their enterprise to Labrador in the 1760s and even Alaska in the late 19th century. Acting in a religious context, their scholarly contribution to the Age of Reason will be our main focus here to discuss its function in relation to their own missionary enterprise and debates in the Republic of Letters.

The European Arctic and the missionary strategy of the Moravians

The European Arctic played a central role in the missionary strategy of the Moravians thanks to the opportunities of development offered by the Danish Crown within its empire, permitting the former to establish stations in Greenland, after the foundation of their first missions on St. Thomas and St. Croix, two Danish islands in the Caribbean. Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1701-60), founder of the renewed Moravian Brotherhood who had welcomed Moravian exiles on his estate at Berthelsdorf, near Herrnhut, in Saxony, close to the Czech border, much to the anger of the Saxon

Electoral Prince and the Hapsburg Emperor, ordained Bishop of the Lutheran Church later to render some theological legitimacy to his movement of awakening, drew on the privileges of his aristocratic status and family ties with the Queen of Denmark, Sophie Magdalene von Brandenburg-Kulmbach (1700-70), tried to obtain the leadership of Danish missions in Greenland and Lapland. He also intended to found a University for Missionaries in then Danish Flensburg (Bøytler, 2000). Nothing came of this latter project, but the difficulties encountered by the Danish Mission in Greenland, established by the Norwegian Lutheran Reverend Hans Egede (1686-1758) in 1721, favoured Zinzendorf's endeavour. King Christian VI. (1699-1746) authorized him to send three missionaries – Christian David (1692-1751), Matthäus Stach (1711-87) and his cousin Christian Stach (d. 1783) – to Greenland in order to support the Danish mission in the region of today's capital Nuuk. Another reason for the spreading of Moravian missions across the world, was the religious, political and social situation in Saxony, the continuously growing Moravian congregation coming under heavy fire from the Pietists in Halle. David and the two Stachs built the first Moravian station in Greenland called Neu-Herrnhut, close to Egede's post Godthaab (both located today in the capital Nuuk), in 1733. The second station, Lichtenfels (Akunnat), was established some 100 miles south of Neu-Herrnhut, in 1758, the third, Lichtenau (Alluitsoq), towards the South-Western tip of Greenland, in 1774 (Israel 1969, Olsthorn 2013). The Moravians stayed in Greenland until the end of the 19th century, handing over their stations to the Danish Lutheran Church in 1900.

In 1734, the year after the founding of the mission in Greenland, the first of five attempts to create Moravian stations among the Sami (Rydving, 1993) and Samoyeds (Bartens, 2001) was launched. Since Zinzendorf's efforts were heavily resented by representatives of the Halle Pietists up to the point of making him lose the support of the Danish Kings, three Moravians – Andreas Grasmann (1704-83), Johann Nitschmann (1712-83) and Daniel Schneider – were sent to Finnmarken, then a part of Swedish Lapland now located in Finland, instead of the Norwegian Far North under Danish control. During their two years' stay, moving from Oulu to Tornio, Kuusamo and back, their enterprise met with increasing criticism from the Lutheran church, up to the point of the missionaries deciding to return to Germany before they would be expelled. Just after, in 1736, Grasmann and Schneider, accompanied by Michael Miksch (1710-92), tried to reach the Samoyeds via Moscow, Wolodga and Archangelsk. Their

itinerary of some two years did not allow for any sustained missionary effort. Once they had reached their final destination in order to meet Samoyeds, they were accused of being spies since their claim to be missionaries was not sustained by their passports indicating that they were craftsmen. They were suspected of trying to cause the heathen to rebel against Russian authority and to seek a passage to Asia south of Nowaja Semlja, promptly arrested and transferred to Saint-Petersburg. Some 30 years later, in 1768, at a time when German settlers were welcome in some parts of Russia thanks to an ukaz by Catherine II., the Moravian Neubauer reached Arkhangelsk after a sea passage of 10 weeks. There, he enquired into the possibilities of evangelizing among the Samoyeds, visiting some of them, but these efforts did not lead to the establishment of a permanent station. Another attempt to reach the Sami was made by Ulrich Bähr and the Swedish Moravian Elias Östergreen (1707-97). They got as far north as Tornio. From there, they went over into Sweden after a two-year stay to no avail. Östergreen went once more to Tornio in 1748 and stayed until 1752, trying several times to reach the Sami in the Russian part of Lapland. During his stay, Östergreen spent time visiting people he had met during his previous travels, such as Pastor Krankes in Kuusamo, from whom he gained information about the Sami living in the area. Though no Moravian station was ever founded in Lapland, traces of their work in the diaspora can still be seen in Sweden today as a small Moravian community subsists in Stockholm.

The failure of the first missionary attempts in Lapland led the Moravians to try out Iceland. In 1739, the Dane Dionysius Piper (1706-51), a writer and soldier, according to his Moravian life story, was sent to Iceland for four years on a ship of the Icelandic Trade Company to enquire about the possibilities of establishing a community there. The aim did not consist in evangelizing among the Icelandic Lutherans but to take care of the Moravian diaspora in Iceland. Piper considered the conditions ideal to found a Moravian settlement in Iceland as far as place and provisions are concerned, but the attempt failed because of the Icelanders' "blindness" and "conviction of their own justification" according to his life story¹. In 1758,

¹ Live story from Dionysius Piper, manuscript in Moravian Archives in Herrnhut (MAH), R.22.01.b.121. (I have translated all quotes from unpublished German sources in the Moravian archives in Herrnhut into English.)

Zinzendorf appealed once again to the Danish King for the right to send Moravians to Iceland but his request was refused².

During all of these attempts, knowledge about the Arctic – be it about nature or indigenous societies – was collected and then communicated to Moravians orally, in writing and in visual form, notably through excerpts taken from the stations' diaries included in travel accounts, correspondence and the originally manuscript periodical *Gemeinenachrichten* (Mettele, 2009), or in commissioned publications and work such as David Cranz's *Historie von Grönland* (1765), the meteorological observations from Greenland and Labrador by Christian Brasen (1738-74) or Piper's description of Iceland in manuscript. To speak with Foucault, the order of things transmitted by these texts was determined by the religious discourse and the rhetorics of the textual forms and genres used by the Moravians whose missiological principles structured their daily life and evangelization efforts in an indigenous environment (Zinzendorf, 1979). The Moravian travels to Lapland caused Zinzendorf to write his first set of rules for missionary work. His instructions sent to Brothers Grasmann, Schneider and Miksch in Moscow on their way to the Samoyeds in 1736 concern first and foremost relations with indigenous societies and non-coercive methods of conversion (*ibidem*). Though the collecting of specimen and the observation of the environment and its inhabitants are neither mentioned directly in this text, nor in the general instructions for Moravian missionaries of 1738 (*ibidem*), Zinzendorf does exhort missionaries: "Look at the way things are" (*ibidem*), clearly in reference to the religious and political context of the mission as well as the spiritual condition of those to be converted. The three missionaries also received a text entitled "News from the Samoyeds", the errors of which they were told to lay open and correct. It is understood that the gathering of knowledge was a means to a missiological end. Zinzendorf was wary of scholarship considering it to be conducive to pride (Hahn & Reichel, 1977), but this view does not contradict his call to be aware of one's surroundings quoted above. However, the missionaries did not only send back reports or diaries, but also artifacts. The objects that reached Germany from Lapland in 1735 and 1739, as well as Greenland in 1740, were among the first to enter the Moravian cabinet of natural curiosities in Barby, founded in the years 1756-58 (Augustin, 2005).

² Zinzendorf to the King of Denmark. Ebersdorf 23th January 1758; Reply by Graf Moltke in the name of the King, manuscript in MAH, R.15.T.a.1.

The written and material testimonies of their presence in the Far North served the Moravian missionaries as proof of their activity and justification of work done in view of receiving support from benefactors and donors. Early reports from the Greenland mission were included in the anthology “Bündigische Sammlungen” published by the Moravians in 1742-45. This compilation of Moravian writings was designed to present their theological doctrine, as well as methods and results of their missionary to a broad, German-speaking audience (Zinzendorf, 1742-45). References in the diaries to extreme weather conditions were meant to justify the possible neglecting of daily religious duties, descriptions of flora and fauna to explain the lack of driftwood (for fuel), seeds and some essential victuals and thus the necessity to import such items at considerable expense from Europe. Descriptions of the environment were partly supposed to indicate suitable locations for stations and settlements while the representation of the “barbarian” customs of indigenous societies could possibly account for the long-winded process of conversion in those parts of the world.

Dionysius Piper was visibly keen to make his description of Iceland and Icelanders correspond to the conditions for settlement and the objectives of the mission. In view of the establishment of a station, he insists on the advantageous situation concerning meteorological conditions, cattle breeding and food supplies as well as the possibilities of finding an adequate location: “The cold is supposed to be as severe here as it is in Greenland. It was uncommonly cold in July. The inhabitants find shelter in huts, which are built from stone and earth. The Lord provided for me. I have a small window in my hut. The other huts are usually dark inside, so much so that one cannot see anything. There are good grazing grounds in this country and they have a lot of sheep. The wool serves for stockings and woollen things. People are very untidy and (...) fishing is their main occupation. However, they usually eat the fish only a few days after they have been caught and start to smell. They say, the seawater has emptied out of them. Apart from that, they are unaffected and honest. They greet and embrace each other without distinguishing gender and call themselves brothers. Their main enjoyment is the drinking of brandy which renders them quite unhuman.”³ In another description he sent to Herrnhut, knowledge about the island is integrated into his missiological discourse – Icelandic is easy to learn and the Icelanders, who respect Christian teachings and live in the fear

³ From the brother Dionysius Piper from Island, Anno 1740, manuscript in MAH, R.19.E.6.

of God, calling themselves like the Moravians do Brothers and Sisters, similarly attaching great importance to mutual visits and singing in choirs, seem to be well-suited to receive the message of the Lord: “After three months, I started to converse with them in their language. They live in peace with each other and are eager to take on duties. Even though they are poor, they like to help each other in whichever way they can and their virtuous nature makes them the more self-assured about their own justification. (...) Dried fish is all they eat and their drink is water and milk. February 12 to May 12 is the period during which they catch and collect the biggest number of fish. On each boat there are 10 to 12 men and whatever they catch they share in equal parts as soon as they return to shore so that no one received more or less than the others; when they leave in the morning, as soon as they have moved off shore some 60 feet, they take off their hats to pray for grace and to fare well. No soon do they return to shore than they praise the Lord who is master of the land and life, then they divide up their catch in equal parts and once they are done, they go inside to eat together; whenever the weather is stormy, they spend their time visiting each other and singing together; they love old historical poems, they enjoy reading the writings of one of the bishops called Wadalin who seems to have been a man of strict morals.”⁴ Another point he insists on in his “Icelandic plan” are the possibilities of finding a suitable location and sufficient stores for a Moravian settlement: “The country has been divided into parts of the land that can nourish 2 to 4 and even up to 8 families. Such a piece of land can be bought for 200 up to 1000 Reichsthaler, depending on whether it is suited for fishing, grazing or breeding. The land is to be used in whichever way one wants. Only a small annual tax is levied though the owner’s possessions are also taken into consideration. If our Brothers would own such a piece of land, they would have leave to buy ships, say of medium size for 6 men, which one can buy on the island’s south coast for 24 to 30 Reichsthaler. Once they would have learnt the trade, they could go out and fish and negotiate with the company to sell the share of their catch they do not need to feed themselves.”⁵

The first Moravian missionaries sent to Lapland brought back knowledge about the indigenous population in order to suggest that a sustained effort was needed to convert them. In the diary from 1734 they

⁴ Dionysius Piper: Island, manuscript in MAH, R.19.E.6.

⁵ Dionysius Piper: Instruction and my ideas about the Icelandic plan, manuscript in MAH, R.19.E.6.

describe shamanistic healing practices in the region of Oulu which they qualify as superstition, thereby legitimizing the need for conversion: “He also told me that a king’s representative was put under a spell by a Finn so that he became ill. His wife then went to a Lapp who was of a fortune telling spirit and with whom she took counsel about her husband’s health. The healer called for a big fire to be lit, fetched his drum to beat it many times before he threw it away to jump into the flames while the others were stoking the fire so that the flames would cover him, which he lay inside for some time only to then tell her as if he had awoken from sleep that her husband could not be cured because he had been put under a deathly spell. The King then decided to declare such practice a capital offence, although many continued to believe in such superstitious practice it appears.”⁶ Zinzendorf interpreted this message as an expression of the missionaries’ fear and replied to the travellers: “You have been afraid of magic drums and wizards, or rather rejected them because of your own faith. How do you account for your idea of having so many scruples, forgetting completely where you belong. You are supposed to learn the language of the Lapps and go to the savage Lapps and who recognize no King, nor do they pay service to the Lord, according to what you write, this is where you are supposed to catch people.”⁷ Similarly, Grasman’s insisting on the hospitality of the Sami he visited close to Kuusamo and their eagerness to welcome visitors reflect the missiological ambition of finding easy contacts to spread the word of the Lord: “Whenever he came to Lapland, they welcomed him in their huts, showing him all their possessions (...) They were surprised to hear that he had gone on such a long journey because of them and were pleased. Apart from that, he could not converse with them since he did not understand their language, nor did they his.”⁸

The Swedish Moravian Östergreen spent the years 1748-52 in Tornio, visiting the Moravian diaspora there and seeking contact with the Sami. The reason for his remaining in town, not rendering himself to the Sami settlements - unlike what Zinzendorf had told the Lapland missionaries to do (Zinzendorf, 1979) - was given in his description of Tornio, referring to

⁶ Travel diary of the brethren Andreas Grasmann, Johann Nitschmann and Daniel Schneider, 1734-1736, manuscript in MAH, R.15.Q.a.

⁷ Zinzendorf to the missionaries in Lapland, Herrnhut 25th September 1735, manuscript in MAH, R.15.Q.a.

⁸ Travel diary of the brethren Andreas Grasmann, Johann Nitschmann and Daniel Schneider, 1734-1736, manuscript in MAH, R.15.Q.a.

the markets where the Sami met with Finnish and Russian farmers. Once again, such historical and topographical knowledge has to fit in the missiological framework: “Tornea is a small town of some 100 houses, most of them ill-constructed, all made of wood including the church. The town was burnt down twice by the Russians during the war against King Charles XII. Most inhabitants live from the trade with the Lapps who come to their market in winter, they also trade with the Finnish and Russian farmers who come to town⁹”. The importance of small towns as church centres where the Sami would meet coming from their widespread dwelling places was underlined by Östergreen as follows: “Cusama is some 20 miles from Tornea and six from Lapland proper. The distance between parish churches is considerable, some 20 miles. Since the war, congregations have to pay contribution both to Sweden and Russia. Most of the Sami can only come to church in winter with their reindeer-sledge, since they usually live ten, twelve, fifteen and even up to eighteen miles from their church, swamps and flooded lakes often preventing them from doing so in summer. These people used to be wandering Laps but have settled since and are called farmers though they are very dispersed. Their food comes from fishing, tilling the ground and cattle-breeding¹⁰”.

Observing and describing the customs of indigenous societies led the Moravians to verify, revise and add knowledge about the people of the Far North. For instance, Neubauer suggests that his account of a Samoyed hut and its inhabitants does not correspond to what one may read in existing descriptions of the Earth but that he is capable of providing a more accurate picture given that he was there to see for himself: “They made fire in the middle, around which they were lying toplless in the severe cold, though their shoulders were covered by reindeer skin. They know nothing about shirts or cloths. Their trousers and boots are but one, after which they put small camisoles made from reindeer on their naked skin. This is their way of dressing at home. When they go out, they put on their coat with a hood on the back, which they pull over their head. They leave the meat to roast on the embers, as I saw for myself. Whenever they have flour, they are supposed to do likewise. In the hut, there were six children, three boys and three girls,

⁹An account of Östergreen about his travel to Sweden and stay in Tornio [Tornea] in Lapland to Johannes von Wattewille, 1748-1752, manuscript in MAH, R.15.Q.d.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

three men and three womenfolk, all of them lying on reindeer skins around the fire¹¹”.

The knowledge about the Arctic that was transmitted also served a didactic purpose in helping to prepare future missionaries while being of use in natural history classes at the theological seminar of the Moravians in Barby. Travel accounts were there to be read, discussed and taught in geography classes. Descriptions of the harsh weather and rough conditions were supposed to allow students to catch glimpses of what life and missionary work out there look like. In the years 1756-58, the cabinet of natural curiosities in Barby was founded. The first eight objects of the collection, notably oil lamps, were brought back in 1762 from Greenland by David Cranz, author of the *Historie* mentioned above. The cabinet's list of provenance of objects compiled by Paul Günther¹²(d. 1792) puts Greenland and Labrador top of the list (Becker, 2005, Uttendörfer 1916). These objects – hunting gear and tools such as *ulus*, the Greenlandic knife used by women, clothing, domestic utensils such as stone jars as well as carved objects made from stone or bone – now belong to the Ethnological Museum in Herrnhut (Nippa, 2003). As the cabinet's collection grew in size, the need for a way of ordering the material became apparent, serving as they were supposed to do as pedagogical tools and *aide-mémoire* in the theological seminar. This task was taken care of by the cabinet's director Johann Jacob Bossart (1721-89) in 1774. His short instruction for the collection of natural specimen of the same year (*Kurze Anweisung Naturalienzusammeln*) relies on Linné's three natural kingdoms to advise missionaries how to collect, prepare, store and describe specimen (Bossart, 1774). The text was sent to the missionaries in Greenland with the instruction to collect rare specimen for the cabinet. In the 1780s the cabinet became so well-known that a number of illustrious personalities rendered themselves there, including Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The cabinet's reputation was notably due to its Greenlandic objects which no other cabinet in the German-speaking regions of Europe could boast of in such number.

Moravian interest in the gathering of knowledge by missionaries manifested itself still more prominently after Zinzendorf's death in 1760. General recognition of the achievements of the Moravians Greenland mission and their contribution to natural history in particular was then largely due to Cranz's *Historie*, published in 1765 (Engl. tr. *History of*

¹¹ Letter from Neubauer, manuscript in MAH, R.15.Q.c

¹² Paul Günther: Pro Memoria, manuscript in MAH, R.4.E.22.

Greenland, 1767, 2nd German edition 1770), in which the author attached himself to justifying the Moravians' efforts in systematic observation for the sake of science (Jensz, 2012). During his commissioned one-year stay in Greenland, he explored the coast, had discussions about natural phenomena, the geography of the country and the behaviour of the Inuit with merchants such as the Lars Dalager while making some meteorological observations himself. All that he gained in the way of knowledge was included in systematic form in his *History*. The widespread acclaim of his seminal book and enquiries he received from scholars thereafter about the reaction of dead bodies and matter to the cold for instance (Cranz, 1770), made the Moravians decide to send the Moravian doctor and botanist Christoph Brasen (1738-74) for a whole year to Greenland in August 1767 in order to collect still more systematic knowledge about the island's natural history and to compile additional material to Cranz's meteorological observations while taking care of the missionaries' health. He was equipped with measuring devices, a thermometer and a barometer, as well as instructions in the form of a grid how to classify the meteorological phenomena observed, all provided by the medical scholar and naturalist Christian Gottlieb Kratzenstein (1723-95), several times Rector of the University of Copenhagen.¹³ Brasen was told to systematically gather specimen of minerals, plants and animals and to observe the weather.¹⁴ His extant manuscript measurements of the weather for the period August 1, 1767 – July 22 1768, and the description of six new bird species, a list and short description of minerals, as well as classifications of plants according to Linné's system were considered pioneering work by Moravian missionaries across the world and the Danish Lutheran stations in Greenland. New specimen and objects thus entered the cabinet in Barby, including minerals, parts of animals such as whale whiskers, ribs and teeth, reindeer antlers, whitefish and seal heads, muscles and a snuff box made from bone¹⁵. The work commissioned both by Kratzenstein and the Moravians was sent to David Cranz to be discussed in the supplement to his *History* published in 1770. Brasen's meteorological observations recommended him for a second enterprise, this time as missionary to Labrador, where he stayed from

¹³ Brasen's explanation to the weather journal, manuscript in MAH, R.15.J.a.13.9.

¹⁴ Christoph Brasen: Birds in Greenland; Minerals in Greenland; Pagina e Linn. Speciebus Plantarum; Observations in Greenland 1767, manuscript in MAH, R.15.J.a.13.9.

¹⁵ List written by Christoph Brasen, sinne anno, manuscript in MAH, R.15.J.a.13.9.

October 1771 until his accidental death in December 1773¹⁶. His observations of the weather there used the same grid as in Greenland and laid the base for systematic measurements in Labrador. Other scholars were interested in receiving specimen from the Moravian missionaries: for instance, the zoologist Johann Christian Fabricius in Copenhagen¹⁷, the medical scholar Georg August Langguth (1711-82) in Wittenberg or the natural historian Johann Hermann (1738-1800) in Strasburg¹⁸ ordered specimen of plants and seal skins. Anton Friedrich Büsching (1724-93), author of a famous description of the earth (Büsching, 1770), asked for details concerning geography and the customs of the Inuit in Greenland, to be included in his monumental work.¹⁹ Thanks to their presence in the Arctic, the Moravians were experts in a position to provide accurate information about this part of the world. Such keen interest served the Moravian enterprise in facilitating the raising of funds to sustain the missionaries' effort, the collecting of specimen becoming unauthorized means to finance their activities, as this letter from the Moravian administrators in charge of the organization of missions to the missionaries in Greenland indicates: "perhaps the selling of some natural specimen could contribute to the economy" (of the mission)²⁰.

The measurements from Greenland published by Cranz and Kratzenstein occasioned a number of queries from scholars about the weather in the Arctic. Johann Daniel Titius, Rector in Wittenberg, asked the Greenland mission for the sending of meteorological observations, which he then published in 1774 in the Wittenberg Weekly (*Wittenberger Wochenblatt*) he edited. He praised the missionaries' contribution to the furthering of

¹⁶ Weather Observations in Labrador from 1th November 1772 to 29th September 1773, manuscript in MAH, R.15.K.a.8; Weather Observations in Labrador 1771-1781, manuscript in MAH, MD 1817.

¹⁷ Letter from Johann Christian Fabricius to the Moravian missionaries in Greenland, Copenhagen 22th May 1769, manuscript in MAH, R.15.J.a.22.b; Brasensent Greenlandicherbage and minerals to Johann Christian Fabricius (1745-1808) – see Notice, manuscript in MAH, R.15.J.a.22.b.

¹⁸ Letter from Johann Jakob Bossart to the missionaries in Greenland 1785, manuscript in MAH, R.4.E.22.

¹⁹ Letter from Anton Friedrich Büsching to Johannes Loretz and Paul Eugen Layritz, St. Petersburg 16th April 1765, manuscript in MAH, R.12.A.a.3.5.b.

²⁰ Letter from the administrators in charge of the organization of missions to Johann Beck and brothers and sisters in Lichtenfels in Greenland, Herrnhut 24th January 1770, manuscript in MAH, R.15.J.b.II.44.

science in a letter addressed to Johann Jacob Bossart in 1789: “Who would have thought in the early days of your congregation that the eager work of your Brethren should contribute to the growth of knowledge in the fields of natural history, geography, the observation of man and science? The remarks of these men are always more valuable when they are based on a simple account of facts, rather than on their own reasonings²¹”. The Meteorological Society of the Palatinate (*Societas Meteorologica Palatina*), founded in 1780, also tried to commission measurements from the missionaries in Greenland in order to enlarge their collection of data, but to no avail. The Moravians did not participate in the campaigns of the society based in Mannheim, but several descriptions of weather events from the diaries of the Greenland stations in the period 1789-1800 and a few measurements of air temperatures did find their way as a supplement to Cranz’s hypotheses on the Greenlandic climate into Gilbert’s *Annalen der Physik* in 1802 (vol. 12, pp. 206-219), reprinted in the *Magazin für den Neuesten Zustand der Naturkunde* in 1805 (vol. 9, pp. 456-470).

The philosopher Christoph Meiners (1747-1810) from Göttingen explained the solid health of the Moravian missionaries in Greenland not suffering from any of the common illnesses in Germany by the influence of Greenland’s climate, assuming the cold weather to have a positive impact as Egede and Cranz had suggested (Meiners, 1789). Immanuel Kant deduced from Cranz’s descriptions that the human body was capable of adapting to the climate and to develop the capacity to survive (Kant, 1839).

The Greenland mission and the Arctic knowledge collected and disseminated by the Moravians, most prominently in Cranz’s famous book, were to serve as a model for the establishment of a number of Protestant missions in the 19th century. The British officer Allen Gardiner (1794-1851), who was keen to have a station founded in Fireland, tried as hard as he could to persuade the Moravians to do so, arguing that their experience in Greenland would stand them in good stead to operate in comparable climatic conditions (Marsch, 1857)²². However, neither his personal contacts with the missionary of the Moravian station in Genadendal (South-Africa) and the Moravian Bishop Hans Peter Hammbeck (1784-1840) whom he met during his journey through Africa in 1836, nor his visit in Herrnhut 1849 sufficed to convince the Moravians of such an enterprise.

²¹ Letter from Johann Daniel Titius to Johann Jakob Bossart, Wittenberg 12th May 1789, R.21.A.62.

²² Application to Establishing a Mission station, manuscript in MAH, R.15.A.11.

Conclusion

Since 1733, the collecting of Arctic knowledge had become a permanent feature of the Moravians' missionary activities and communication strategy. Both the mission in Greenland and the exploratory journeys to Lapland and Iceland provided plenty of opportunities to study land, people and their customs both in cultural and religious terms. Within the particular religious context of a movement of awakening, the goals of the mission and the necessity to justify one's own enterprise while responding to enquiries from scholars, the missionaries engaged in describing the environment and new or little-known phenomena, systematically classifying specimen within the three natural realms defined by Linné, observing the weather, rendering account of the belief-system of the Inuit and the Sami as they saw fit, sending also natural specimen and artefacts back to Europe, as well as communicating results in the media the Moravians preferred to use: handwritten reports and correspondence sent back to Germany, excerpts from the diaries and letters circulating first in the manuscript editions of their proper journal entitled *Gemeinenachrichten*, later printed and also available in English (*Periodical Accounts relating to the Missions of the Church of the United Brethren*) as well as in French in the 19th century. Thanks to their well-established circuits of communication drawing on their broad international network of stations and communities, new knowledge about the Arctic of unprecedented density and precision was disseminated in European societies and elsewhere. The excerpts of reports and descriptions copied/printed in the *Gemeinenachrichten* were rendered available to Moravian communities on all continents, meeting with great interest among readers judging by the regular Arctic contributions to the annual volumes of *Periodical Accounts* for instance. Readers thus gained privileged glimpses of what life in the Arctic was like according to the Moravians. It is understood that this effort of communication was initially a by-product of the missionaries' work in the Arctic, though it did play a non-negligible role in their attempts at legitimizing their enterprise, be it by using their knowledge to account for the difficulties in converting Greenlanders or even contacting the Sami or by relating "success stories" like the letters written by the baptised Inuit. Thus, their Arctic expertise became an integral part of Moravian edification rhetoric. At the same time, the communication of their knowledge to a broader audience also helped to render their missionary

activities visible to an audience going beyond the bounds of their own church of United Brethren. Requests by European scholars multiplied. Missionaries engaged increasingly in the business of observing, collecting, classifying and measuring to send evidence to scholars nourishing the latter's efforts in deploying discourses and theories about the order of things. Linné, Banks, Kant, Herder and many other scholars whose name may not have been as illustrious were interested in receiving reliable information and specimen by the Moravians, another indication, if need be, of the important contribution of their missions to the dissemination of Arctic knowledge in Europe (and elsewhere) during the Enlightenment.

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