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The Way to Hudson Bay: The Life and Times of Jens Munk

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THE WAY TO HUDSON BAY (The Life and Times of Jens Munk)

THORKILD HANSEN (English translation by James McFarlane and John Lynch)
New York: Wm. Collins, Sons and Co. Ltd.; and Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc.;
1970, 341 Pages \$7.95

Canadians, particularly Canadian Lutherans, should be familiar with the ill-fated Danish expedition under Captain Jens Munk into Hudson Bay and the vicinity of Churchill, Manitoba, 1619-1620. The title of the present volume would lead one to anticipate that it would confine itself largely to the Hudson Bay expedition; also that extensive reference would be made to Pastor Rasmus Jensen, not only the first Lutheran clergyman to set foot on western Canadian soil, but the first of any denomination to hold services of worship there.

If this is the expectation, one is liable to be disappointed. Actually the entire life of Jens Munk is covered, and rather extended coverage given even to the life and activities of his father. A great deal of fascinating, and often surprising, information is provided. Few of us are aware of the greatness of Denmark's sea power during that era, or of the relationship between Denmark and Scandinavian and other European countries of that day. All of this provides a very helpful and fascinating backdrop for the life of Jens Munk and is apparently firmly based on historical data.

But the highlight of the book, for us Canadian Lutherans at least, is the account of the actual expedition into Hudson Bay. This is vividly described, and provides exciting reading. On the other hand, some of our dreams of the past become tarnished just a bit, particularly as they related to this first Lutheran clergyman on western Canadian soil. For example we are told, "As chaplain they had to make do with Rasmus Jensen: a sorry figure, unwashed, with a week's growth of stubble on his chin, running eyes, and wheezing voice. But Herr Rasmus was at home in the Scriptures, shuffled around self-effacingly comforting others with God's Word and himself with a dram." (p. 206)

All in all, it is a book which opens a window into a different facet of history, and one which is difficult to close before reading it to its completion.

Earl J. Treusch