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ARTICOLI

PIER PAOLO ALFEI[1]

MAPPING SVALBARD BETWEEN XIX AND XX CENTURIES: GERARD DE GEER AND THE ARCTIC ARCHIPELAGO, 1882-1931[2]

The first cartographic representation of the Svalbard archipelago[3] dates to the late 16th century, more specifically to a map which appeared in 1599 in the second part of the Latin edition of Jan Huygen van Linschoten's *Itinerarium* published by Cornelius Claesz (Conway, 1903). Whereas, thirteen years later, on a map published by Hessel Gerritsz, the modern name «Spitsbergen, in the form Spitsenbergen» appeared in print for the first time (Arlov, 2020, p. 6). From the discovery of the archipelago in 1596 until the end of the 18th century, Dutch cartographers played a key role in mapping Svalbard (Conway, 1914; Wieder, 1919; Jones, 2014). The voyages of explorers such as Willem Barents, motivated by aims such as finding a shorter trading route to Asia (Arlov, 2005; Jones, 2020) or new whale fishing grounds, were prodromal to the production of over two hundred Dutch maps published between XVII and XIX centuries (Wieder, 1919; Avango et alii, 2014, p. 17).

During the 17th century, the development of the Dutch whaling industry stimulated a more exact representation of the coastline of the western part of the archipelago. A significant caesura can be seen in the foundation in 1617 of the settlement of Smeerenburg, a strategic Dutch whaling hub in the Arctic (Mecking, 1928; Hacquebord, 1984). Thus, we moved from a very approximate representation of the archipelago – exemplified by the «t'Nieulant» of the updated version of Mercator atlas by Jodocus Hondius – to the world-map by Georg Matthäus Vischer (1639), which showed «Spitsbergen fairly correctly» (Conway, 1903, p. 637). Vischer's work would have later been the source of the

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[2] Part of the bibliography was consulted during my Ph.D. research visiting at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim: my most sincere thanks go to the professors Monica Miscali and Jan Frode Hatlen for the great opportunity, and to the librarians Jenny Bakken Aslaksen, Maylen Valsø, Mildrid Moen, Inger Marie Gran for their assistance in Dragvoll Library. Finally, I would like to thank all those who facilitated the consultation of documents in Stockholm and in Oslo, and particularly Maria Asp.

[3] In this paper the archipelago will be called by the name adopted since the 1920s, namely Svalbard (instead of «Spitzbergen»). Similarly, the current Norwegian toponymy will be used; hence the use of terms such as Hinlopenstretet (instead of «Hinlopen Strait»).

local Charts of Smeerenburg Bay by Hendrick Donker (1655), Johannes van Loon (1660), and Johannes van Keulen (1705-1710) (Ibidem). During the 17th century, while the coastlines of the western and central areas of the archipelago began to be progressively mapped, although the interior was «mostly empty» (Briså, 2020, p. 43), the eastern area, then almost unexplored, continued to be barely sketched out. In fact, although the Dutch in the first half of the 17th century had (a very approximate) knowledge of the northern coast beyond what would later be called Hinlopenstret, Sjuøyane, Hopen and Edgeøya, it is also true that they did not know about Heleysundet and, above all, the «*eastern* coast of the North East Land [Nordaustlandet]» (Wieder, 1919, p. 2, my emphasis). Hinlopenstretet from its first occurrence in maps, or Joan Blaeu's *Atlas Maior* (1662-1665), represented a watershed between the two sides of the archipelago, as emerges from the famous *Terre Artiche* by Vincenzo Maria Coronelli (1691).

The first complete representation of what is now known as Nordaustlandet would have to wait until 1710. In fact, the first circumnavigation of the Svalbard archipelago by the Dutch whaler Cornelis Giles (1707), gave rise to the *Nieuwe Afteekening van Het Eyland Spits-bergen opgegeven door de Commandeurs Giles en Outger Rep en in't Ligt gebragt en uyt gegevon door Gerard van Keulen*, considered by Martin Conway «the high-water mark of the prescientific surveys of Spitsbergen» due to the fact that «almost every important feature of the coast [was] set down somehow» (Conway, 1903, p. 643). The chart, also representing an early outline of the «Noord Ooster Land», was to be one of the main models for cartographic representation of the archipelago until the first half of the 19th century (Wieder, 1919).

A new phase in the study and cartographic representation of the Svalbard archipelago occurred with the Swedish scientific expeditions in the contemporary era (Nathorst, 1906). According to a bibliography published in the journal «Ymer» in 1909, sixty maps and map sketches were published in Sweden from the mid-eighteenth century to the early twentieth century based on twenty-four scientific expeditions (De Geer et alii, 1909). Inaugurating the Swedish scientific endeavor in Svalbard was Anton Rolandsson Martin, a pupil of Cari von Linné who embarked as a naturalist on a whaler and explored Forlandsøyane, west of Prins Karls Forland, in 1758 (Rolandsson Martin, 1758 and 1881; Nordström, 1881; Daniel, 1911; Frängsmyr, 1989; Hansen, 2018). From then until the mid-19th century, the Swedish contribution to the exploration and cartographic study of the archipelago was episodic, nevertheless worthy of mention, as in the case of zoologist Sven Lovén's expedition in 1837 (De Geer et alii, 1909). The turning point came with the Swedish scientific expedition of 1858 led by Otto Torell, which ushered in the heyday of polar research in the Nordic country (Nathorst, 1900; Nelje, 1998). It was in fact during «the second half of the 19th century» that «a growing number of smaller expeditions» were organized which in turn «required more accurate maps» (Arlov, 2020, p. 8). More specifically, the 1858 expedition aimed to conduct geomagnetic, geological, botanical, zoological, marine and, above all, to make detailed geographic surveys (Nordenskiöld, 1859;

Quennerstedt, 1863; Officer, Page, 2012). It was then that Torell took up the idea of measuring a meridian arc at Spitsbergen, which was carried forward in the following years (Torell, 1861; Dunér et alii, 1867): in the words of Hans Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, thus opened «a new era in the progress of Spitsbergen cartography» (Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, 1933, p. 15).

Like the Dutch explorers in the 17th and 18th centuries, the new cartographic investigations of the Svalbard archipelago were prompted by strategic interests. In 1864, during the completion of the preliminary survey for the measurement of an arc of the meridian, Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld discovered a phosphate-rich area in the heart of Isfjorden. At a time when, for many, the Svalbard appeared «like a new Alaska»[4], plans were initiated to exploit the coprolite beds at Kapp Thordsen (Staël-Holstein, 1932; Avango, 2005). Scientific and strategic objectives (both interdependent) prompted a series of Swedish expeditions which explored western Svalbard in depth (De Geer, 1930; Wråkberg, 1999): these resulted in a deeper knowledge of Isfjorden and Bellsund, as shown in the *Geological sketch-map of Spitsbergen* published by Nordenskiöld in 1866 (De Geer, 1919).

Important was the exploration, and the subsequent improved cartographic representation, of a series of other areas of the archipelago that had previously been unexplored or only just sighted: from Storfjorden (1864) to vast areas of Nordaustlandet (1868). The exploration and subsequent cartographic study of the north coast of Svalbard and Nordaustlandet following Nordenskiöld expedition of 1868 was important as well (Nordenskiöld, 1869). From these and other expeditions (among which one could mention a geological expedition by Alfred Gabriel Nathorst and Hjalmar Wilander in Isfjorden in 1870), originated the updated map of the archipelago which appeared in Nordenskiöld's *Redogörelse för den svenska polarexpeditionen ar 1872-1873* (Nordenskiöld, 1875), recently defined as follows: «the first reliable general map of Spitsbergen, on which for the first time the geographic names of that land were fixed as to their position» (Officer, Page, 2012, p. 99).

The arctic expeditions led by Nordenskiöld in the 1860s and 1870s, and the voyage of the *Vega* (Nordenskiöld, 1882), indeed contributed definitively to establishing Sweden's leading role among the arctic nations. It was in this context that, in the 1880s, the Swedish scientist Gerard De Geer[5] began to study the Svalbard archipelago.

[4] «Spetsbergen stått som ett nytt Alaska». Kungliga Vetenskapsakademiens Arkiv (from now on KVA), Gerard De Geer (GDG), b. 4, f. 4, *Spetsbergen*, «Afton-tidningen», 24 October 1919.

[5] For a biographical overview see: Hult De Geer, 1918; Bailey, 1943; Lundqvist, 1966; Cato, Stevens, 2012.

De Geer's expeditions in Svalbard archipelago, 1882-1901

De Geer's cartographic study of Svalbard is based on six expeditions to the archipelago in which the Swedish scientist took part in 1882, 1896, 1899, 1901, 1908 and 1910 (Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, 1968). Even if the main purpose of these voyages was the same in technical terms, namely «to carry out photogrammetric surveys to produce increasingly detailed geological maps of the archipelago» (Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, 1931)[6], it is nevertheless possible to divide them in two distinct phases belonging to two different political scenarios. The first four expeditions were purely exploratory, as a means of giving more human knowledge about unknown areas; on the contrary, the last two ones – analyzed in the next paragraph – belonged to a new era marked by polar imperialism. It is now worth focusing on the first four expeditions (1882, 1896, 1899, 1901), which fall within the «golden age of Swedish polar exploration» defined by Dag Avango as the period between 1858 and 1904 and associated with figures such as «Adolf E. Nordenskiöld, Gerard De Geer, Otto Torell, A. G. Nathorst and Gunnar Andersson» (Avango, 2005, p. 50, my translation).

Gerard De Geer first travelled to Svalbard in 1882 on a geological expedition to Isfjorden under the leadership of Nathorst and in conjunction with the Swedish Meteorological Expedition (Nathorst, 1884; Staël-Holstein, 1932; Liljequist, 1993). According to De Geer himself, during this first mission it was possible «to make a first attempt at combining the dispersed observations of the sketch-map into an almost continuous synthetical small-scale map» (De Geer, 1919, p. 162): or the *Geological sketch map of Spitsbergen* (1894), from which the geological structure of Svalbard emerges in its main lines (Nathorst, 1894). In 1896 De Geer returned to the archipelago contextually to the polar expedition of Salomon August Andrée (Madsen, 1943) for a more in-depth cartographic survey of Isfjorden and Bellsund (De Geer, 1896a and 1896b; Dainelli, 1960). As Wilhelmsson Ahlmann would have recalled years later, the stated goal of this second expedition was for De Geer a planned investigation on a larger scale of a contiguous area to obtain, through systematic measurements and mapping, the cartographic basis necessary for a more exact representation of arctic nature (Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, 1968). More specifically, De Geer mapped an area of «10,000 square kilometers» through photogrammetry and carried out depth surveys in the Isfjorden (Madsen, 1943, p. 287). With the collected material De Geer drew a new map of Svalbard, with a greater focus on the coastlines and a reliable topography of the Isfjorden area (De Geer, 1896b). Of note, was a more exact depiction of «new-found mountain folds in Oscar II Land, West of the Ice

[6] A comparative study of various writings in the journal «Ymer» shows that De Geer «made extensive use of photogrammetric cameras, to precisely measure distances and angles» during the mapping work conducted in Svalbard (Van Der Meer, 2004).

Fjord» (De Geer, 1919, p. 162). In the words of De Geer, it began in Isfjorden in 1896, the first more detailed mapping of a larger area at higher latitudes»[7].

Three years later, in 1899, De Geer, accompanied by the captain and topographer Otto Wilhelm von Knorring, was invited to take part in one of the major international scientific missions at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, namely the Swedish Russian Arc-of-Meridian (Wråkberg, 2002a). Initially conceived by the explorer Edward Sabine in 1823, later discussed by the physicist Jakob Karl Emil Chydenius (Chydenius, 1862) and the astronomer Nils Christofer Dunér (Dunér et alii,1867), the project of measuring a meridian arc to be conducted in the archipelago was systematized by Per Gustaf Rosén in 1891 (Rosén, 1893). On the initiative of the Stockholm Academy of Sciences and the Imperial Academy in Saint Petersburg, the expedition set off from Tromsø in the summer of 1899: three Russian ships headed to Hornsund, in southern Svalbard; while the Swedish gunboat *Svensksund* headed north to Heklahuken, in the far north of the archipelago (Carlheim-Gyllensköld, 1899; Backlund, 1900 and 1901). In short, over a period of four years, the Swedes on the one hand investigated the northern part of the archipelago, between Hinlopenstretet and Nordaustlandet (Jäderin, 1898; Carlheim-Gyllensköld, 1900; Rabot, 1901); the Russians, on the other hand, concentrated on the southern and central part of the archipelago, from Sørkapp to Storfjorden (De Geer, 1900; Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, 1968). The Swedish Russian Meridian Arc «produced a series of high-precision maps based on modern geodetic and topographic methods» (Arlov, 2020, p. 8) through measurements taken from southern Svalbard to the northernmost Rossøya (Liljequist, 1993). If in 1882 and 1896 De Geer investigated and mapped the central-western area of the archipelago (Isfjorden and Bellsund), in 1899 he studied the «southern and south-eastern Spitsbergen» while in 1901 he investigated not only the «north-western» part of the archipelago (Ivi, p. 321) but also several areas of the Hinlopenstretet and Nordaustlandet. As emerges from the handwritten notes of the *Résultats des travaux cartographiques*, for example, De Geer was able to update the «topography of the western part of Nordaustlandet, which he had never dealt with in detail before», with particular attention to the Gustav Adolf Land (Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, 1968, p. 173). It was from this experience and through «sketches and photos of the Swedish arc measurement expedition», that De Geer produced one of his most important cartographic works, namely the *Map of the North Coast of Spitzbergen* (De Geer, 1913 and 1923) (fig. 1), so defined by Wilhelmsson Ahlmann in 1933: «No other map of North-East Land can compete in accuracy with this» (Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, 1933, p. 18).

[7] KVA, GDG, b. 4, f. 4, undated newspaper clipping, Gerard De Geer, *Spetsbergsfrågan*.

Figure 1. Nasjonalbiblioteket, GH18alb. Detail. Gerard De Geer (second from left) during the expedition in Isfjorden in 1908

De Geer's expeditions in Svalbard archipelago, 1908-1910

It is not so much a question of honour and national prestige that marks the break between De Geer's first four expeditions to Svalbard (1882, 1896, 1899, 1901) and his last two ones in the arctic archipelago (1908, 1910). After all, Nordenskiöld had already inaugurated the «tradition of male Viking raids» in the 1860s and 1870s, soon taken up by explorers such as the Norwegian Fridtjof Nansen (Aas, 2021, p. 241). Andrée's 1896 polar expedition itself – under which De Geer's geographical-geological mission to Isfjorden was organised – had «a considerable dose of national pride, since at that time Sweden was competing with other countries for polar supremacy», above all Norway (Casagrande, 2019, p. 101, my translation). In this regard, it should be borne in mind that although the two countries were united «under one monarchy», they often «lived separate identities» (Casagrande, 2020, p. 9). Nor is it merely the discovery of the «financial value of coal mining» by Søren Zachariassen in 1899 and the creation of the *Isfjord Coal Company Spitsbergen* partnership in 1900 (Drivenes, Jølle, 2004): episodes that could have been considered during De Geer's voyage to Isfjorden in 1901. A relevant watershed between the expeditions of 1882-1901 and those of 1908-

1910 was the dissolution of the Swedish Norwegian Union in 1905, which led to a resurgence of nationalist sentiments in both countries and a renewed strategic interest in the Svalbard archipelago. Although in the spring of 1870 «the occupation of Svalbard was being deliberated in Stockholm» (Trygve, 1954, p. 22), it is also true that between 1871 and 1872, the two powers most interested in the archipelago, namely the Kingdom of Sweden-Norway and the Russian Empire, proposed to keep Svalbard a *no man's land*, or in the words of General Oscar Magnus Fredrik Björnstjerna: «a tacit agreement between the governments which considers this group of islands as an undecided domain accessible to all states whose nationals seek to exploit its natural resources» (Timtchenko, 1996, p. 42, my translation). The situation changed in 1905, when «currents of "miniature imperialism" erupted in Norway, stimulated by the national self-assertion in the polar expeditions» (Østerud, 1996, pp. 33-34) [8]. Oslo's aspirations towards Svalbard, Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands gained ground (Staël-Holstein, 1932; Skagestad, 1975; Berg, 1995; Drivenes, Jølle, 2004) [9]. Above all, after the dissolution of the Union in 1905, in Norway «annexing Spitsbergen became a national ambition» (Arlov, 2020, p. 10). After independence, various Norwegian scientist «acted strategically to ensure that Spitsbergen was a territory worth acquiring, in national and commercial terms» (Jones, 2012, p. 287). Among them was Gunnar Isachsen, who in 1906 led the first Norwegian cartographic expedition to the archipelago, funded by Prince Albert I of Monaco (Hoel, 1929). However, Norway did not claim the entire archipelago. As has been observed, in fact, «the authorities were keen to be seen to be keeping a low profile in "no man's land"» (Arlov, 2020, p. 149), aware that this operation would have compromised the delicate balance with other powers that had (once again) turned their attention to Svalbard, including Sweden.

Starting in 1905, «Swedish foreign policy actors sought to influence the future legal status of Spitsbergen and therefore supported research activities, land claims, and mining, using them as representations of Swedish effective occupation in negotiations with other states with which Sweden competed for influence» (Avango et alii, 2017, p. 339). Among those working for the Swedish

[8] Consider for example the success of Roald Amundsen's expedition on the *Gjøa* through the Northwest Passage (1903-1906). Polar Heroes played a key role in consolidating Nordic national identity: in Norway figures like Fridtjof Nansen, Otto Sverdrup and Roald Amundsen acquired a strong patriotic meaning (Eriksen, 2004; Fulsås, 2004; Aronsson et alii, 2008; Wråkberg 2019; Aas, 2022). A passage from the preface recently written by Norwegian Minister Jonas Gahr Støre to a book dedicated to the Gjøa expedition is significant in this regard: «Polar explorers and polar history are an important part of the Norwegian identity» (Støre, 2011, p. 5).

[9] On the origins of Norwegian polar imperialism, whose examination is beyond the scope of this article, the scientific literature offers different interpretations. An interesting reading is provided by Roald Berg, who states that «the first wave of a Norwegian polar imperialism ran parallel to the European scramble for Africa» (Berg, 2017, p. 22). On Norwegian polar imperialism, see also Aas (2022).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs were several polar researchers who opposed Norway's annexation of Svalbard: among them, from 1907 onwards «Gerard De Geer played a leading role» (Avango, 2005, p. 67, my translation). In that year, when «the idea of setting up a coal-mining operation at Spitsbergen» re-emerged in Stockholm political circles (Avango et alii, 2017, p. 328), De Geer organised «his greatest expedition» to Svalbard (fig. 2).

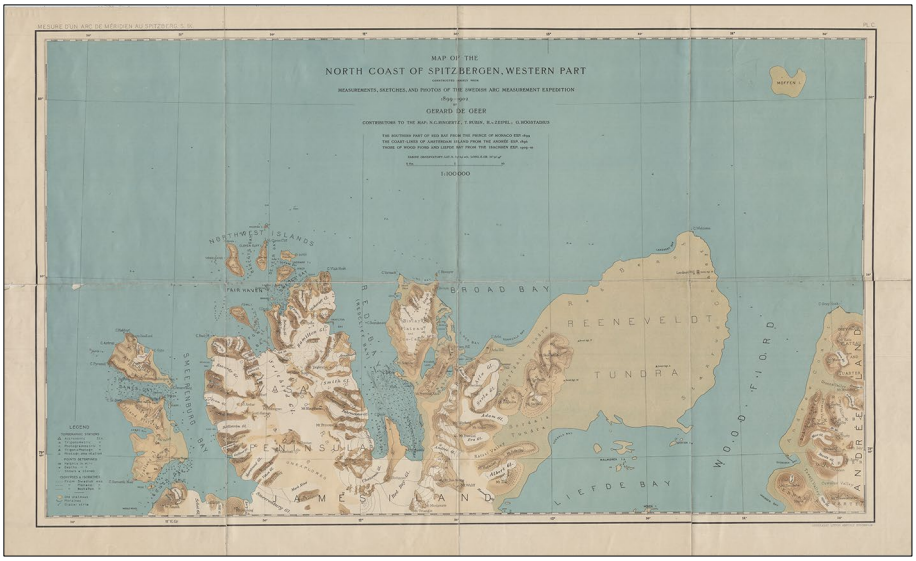

Figure 2. Norsk Polarinstitutt (NP), Gerard De Geer, *Map of the North Coast of Spitzbergen, Western Part. Constructed mainly from measurements, sketches, and photos of the Swedish Arc Measurement Expedition 1899-1902*, scale 1:100.000, 1910[10]

Conducted in 1908 with the gunboat *Svensksund*, the expedition involved extensive cartographic, zoological, palaeontological, oceanographic and glaciological research (Avango, 2005). The main scientific achievement was the completion of the survey of Isfjorden, which had begun half a century earlier during Nordenskiöld's voyage to Kapp Thordsen (De Geer, 1908a, 1908b, 1909 and 1919; Rudmose-Brown, 1920). The objectives of the expedition were not exclusively scientific, so much so that it has also been interpreted as an expression of Swedish colonialist policy in the archipelago: in the correspondence with Fredrick Burrall, head of *The Arctic Coal Co.* in Longyear, there are, for example, «indications that De Geer, during the expedition, inspected Advent for a potential buyer in Sweden» (Avango, 2005, p. 57, my translation). An operation which indeed would requires further archival investigation in relation to the political history of the archipelago: in 1905 the Boston mining company had

[10] I am grateful to Oddveig Øien Ørvoll (NP) for the sending of a digital copy of the document.

«bought undeveloped Norwegian claims in Advent Bay», starting industrial-scale coal production there, (Great Britain Foreign Office Historical Section, 1918, p. 15), and since 1906 «had controlled the eastern side» of Gronfjørden (Avango et alii, 2011, p. 35).

Behind the expedition organised and led by De Geer in Isfjorden in 1908 lay first Sweden's strategic interests in the coal of the Svalbard archipelago. As Dag Avango pointed out, De Geer promoted the creation of a Swedish coal industry as early as 1907-1908, or even before he was involved in the better-known subsequent project linked to *Jernkontoret*, «the branch organization of the Swedish steel industry» (Avango et alii, 2017). In January 1909, Frans G. Stridsberg and De Geer, supported by other scientists such as Bertil Högbom, proposed to *Jernkontoret* an expedition to be organised to take possession of coal deposits in Svalbard in the name of Sweden (Avango, 2015). Already during the preparatory phase in the spring of 1909, De Geer put forward the hypothesis (which later proved to be correct) of the existence of a coal deposit in Pyramiden (Avango, 2005). De Geer's geological studies, to quote another scholar's observation on the relationship between scientific cognition and material exploitation, served «as an instrument to pursue political strategies» and «to provide a tool for justifying territorial claims» (Susi, 2010, p. 70). Thus began the project for a «geological excursion» in Isfjorden led by De Geer under the international scientific framework of the 11th International Conference on Geology held in Stockholm (Liljequist, 1993). The «excursion» undoubtedly had a political significance that should not be underestimated, considering that one of the objectives of the event was to give «an impression of what Swedish exploration in Svalbard had accomplished» (Mathisen, 1954, p. 91). The desire to show the world Sweden's scientific achievements in the archipelago was due to the fact that during that summer took place the first of three international conferences (1910, 1912, 1914) organised for the purpose of agreeing to an international administration and judiciary policy for Spitsbergen (Drivenes, Jølle, 2004)[11]. Sixty-five scientists from fourteen countries (Madsen, 1943) participated at the 11th International Conference on Geology held in Stockholm and the subsequent expedition to Isfjorden (July-August 1910). Among the participants were two Italians, the paleontologist Serafino Cerulli Irelli (professor at *La Sapienza* University of Rome) and the geologist Ettore Mattirolo, author of what is perhaps the only Italian source on the events examined here, or *Escursione geologica da Stoccolma all'Isfjord (Spitzberg)*. According to the pamphlet, the two Italian scientists attended a lecture by De Geer (Mattirolo, 1911). It was on that occasion that De Geer – as testified by Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, who was present

[11] The first of the «three-party conferences between Norway, Sweden and Russia» (Arlov, 2010, p. 10) held in Christiania (Oslo) between 19 July and 11 August 1919 ended in a stalemate: the proposals put forward for a form of joint government («condominium») met with firm opposition from Berlin, London and Washington (Arlov, 1988).

at the time – «maintained his old point of view that it would be most appropriate for Spitsbergen to be recognised internationally as a no man's land» (rather than Norwegian) and «also endeavoured to spread this opinion among his *foreign* colleagues» (Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, 1968, p. 177, my translation, my emphasis). It is possible to hypothesise that this Swedish propaganda influenced the opinion of some of the foreign participants, including Mattirolo, as can be inferred from the following passage of the Italian's memoirs (published the following year) concerning Svalbard: «sono di nessuno e di tutti, su cui niuno può vantare indiscutibili diritti di sovranità; *se mai*, *più che altri, possono vantarne gli svedesi* [If there is anyone who can claim more sovereignty rights than others, it is the Swedes]» (Mattirolo, 1911, pp. 72-73, my translation, my emphasis).

The «geological excursion» led by De Geer took place in Isfjorden during the summer of 1910. Among the areas visited were the mine in Adventfjorden, the mountains around Pyramiden and Tschemakfjellet, and, finally, Grønfjordbreane (De Geer, 1910a and 1910b; Mattirolo, 1911). The main result of this last expedition was, in terms of the cartographic study of Svalbard, a *Geological map of Central Spitzbergen* (scale 1: 200.000): first published in the guidebook of the excursion (De Geer, 1911), the map contained relevant topographical updates and the indication of the depth profiles of the various fjords of the archipelago (Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, 1968). During the same period, an expedition promoted by De Geer and financed by both *Jernkontoret* and *Trafikaktiebolaget Grängesberg–Oxelösunds* was sent to annex four areas selected by the Swedish geologist with a view to mining them: Braganza Bay (Braganzavågen), Bünsow Land, Pyramiden and Erdmann Tundra (Erdmannflya). The mission, which included one of De Geer's collaborators (Högbom), an engineer (Ohlsson), two miners and the ship's crew, lasted a total of twenty-four days (12-23 July; 28-31 July; 5-8 August; 22-25 August 1910) and involved extensive geological analyses and soundings, particularly around Pyramiden (south and south-west of the mountain). From 12 July onwards, the team led by Högbom left signs bearing the words «Swedish occupation of coal mining» at the boundaries of the annexed areas, followed by the extent of the claimed area and the date[12]. In 1911, the *Aktiebolaget Isfjorden-Belsund* – a mining company founded by the *Jernkontoret* – visited Bünsow Land and Pyramiden[13] and «explored the Swedish coal deposits during annual expeditions in the following years, preparing them for mining» (Avango et alii, 2011). Particularly significant in this regard is De Geer's creation for the second expedition of the *Aktiebolaget Isfjorden-Bellsund* of a *Map of Central Spitzbergen with the main coal-district*

[12] RN, Utenriksdepartementet, Spitsbergenkommissæren, b. 15, f. 13, *Arbeten utförda på Svenska Stenkolsaktiebolaget Spetsbergens annektionsområde Pyramidberget*.

[13] Riksarkivet, Stockholm (from now on RS), Svenska Stenkolsaktiebolaget Spetsbergen, 1916-1926, b. 4, Spitsbergernkommissæren, *Uppgift på expeditioner till annektionsområden, som antingen genom överlåtelse eller köp sedermera övergått till Svenska Stenkolsaktiebolaget Spetsbergen*, Stockholm, 2 November 1925.

to the scale 1:300,000 (De Geer, 1912 and 1919) with red boxes delimiting Swedish claims in Braganzavågen, Bünsow Land, Pyramiden, Erdmannflya, and – in the updated version – Adventfjorden (fig. 3).

Figure 3. NP, Gerard De Geer, *Map of Central Spitzbergen with the main coal*-district, scale 1:300,000, 1919. Detail. The red boxes (in the original map) delimit Swedish claims in Isfjorden, more precisely: around Erdmann Tundra (Erdmannflya); around Pyramiden and Mimers Bukta (Mimers Bay), west of Billefjorden and Petuniabukta; in Bünsow Land; in Adventfjorden (Advent Bay); around Braganzabukta and the inner end of Lågfjorden[14]

The consolidation of the areas claimed by the Swedes often proceeded in an anti-Norwegian manner (as exemplified by various disputes over the areas

[14] I am grateful to Oddveig Øien Ørvoll (NP) for the sending of a digital copy of the document.

claimed in Adventfjorden): for example, in 1914 «Sweden successfully opposed any Norwegian ambitions for establishing an Arctic empire, supported by the traditional opponent to Norwegian rule, Russia» (Berg, 2017, p. 23). It was in this context that the foundations were soon laid for Sweden's most famous mining project in Svalbard: in July 1917, an expedition sent by *Aktiebolaget Spetsbergens Svenska Kolfält* (formerly *Aktiebolaget Isfjorden-Bellsund*) began the construction of the Svea mine (Sveagruvan) in Braganzavågen and coal extraction, which continued uninterrupted until the mid-1920s[15].

An «invaluable assistance». De Geer's scientific support to Polar expeditions during the interwar period

The completion of the survey of Isfjorden in 1908 and the field investigation of Swedish claims in Svalbard (especially around Pyramiden and Braganzavågen) marked the end of a phase of Swedish scientific research in the archipelago. As has been observed, a period of intense Swedish research focused in western Spitsbergen, which began in the 1860s, was followed first in the 1910s and then especially in the 1920s by a sharp decline (Wråkberg, 1999). A caesura can be identified in the Svalbard Treaty (1920), which dashed the hopes of Stockholm of keeping Svalbard a *no man's land*: in fact, «after more than thirty years of diplomatic manoeuvring to bring the islands under Norwegian rule» (Berg, 2013, p. 153), the sovereignty of Svalbard was assigned to Norway (Berg, 2023). In this process, a key role was played by the Norwegian Coal Companies, which proved to be «crucial in shifting the [Norwegian] political authorities from a passive to an active stance on sovereignty during the final phase of the war and during the 1919 peace conference» (Arlov, 2022). It is true that, thanks to article 3 of the Svalbard Treaty[16], Swedish coal mining continued to operate in the archipelago: Svenska Stenkolsaktiebolaget Spetsbergen (formerly *Aktiebolaget Spetsbergens Svenska Kolfält* and, before that, *Aktiebolaget Isfjorden-Bellsund*), administered Sveagruvan, which in the mid-1920s had «about 200 inhabitants»

[15] RS, Svenska Stenkolsaktiebolaget Spitsbergen, 1916-1926, Spitsbergernkommissaeren, b.4, H. L. F. Lagercrantz, *Aktiebolaget Spetsbergens Svenska Kolfält. Styrelsens förvaltningsberättelse för tiden 1 januari-31 augusti 1917*, 30 October 1917; RS, Svenska Stenkolsaktiebolaget Spetsbergen, 1916-1926, b. 4, Spitsbergernkommissæren, *Uppgift på expeditioner till annektionsområden, som antingen genom överlåtelse eller köp sedermera övergått till Svenska Stenkolsaktiebolaget Spetsbergen*, Stockholm, 2 November 1925. See also: Jakobsson, Kellerman, 1979; Avango, 2004 and 2005.

[16] «The nationals of all the High Contracting Parties […] 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». *The Svalbard Treaty*, Paris, 9 February 1920, https://www.jus.uio.no/english/services/library/treaties/01/1-11/svalbard-treaty.html (3 October 2025).

(Hoel, 1924). However, the new project was relatively short-lived, leading to the liquidation of Svenska Stenkolsaktiebolaget Spetsbergen between spring and summer 1926 and the dissolution of the network of Swedish polar stakeholders, of which De Geer was part. The collapse of Stockholm's coal ambitions in Svalbard definitively reduced the role of Swedish scientists in the archipelago in favour of the Norwegian ones. In De Geer's life, the period as director of the Stockholm Geochronological Institute (1924-1943) thus corresponded to a distancing of the geologist from the politics of the arctic archipelago: from being the spearhead of Swedish scientific research and a defender in the field of Stockholm's coal interests in Svalbard, De Geer co-operated as scientific advisor for Svalbard cartography for several polar expeditions organised during the interwar period. A new phase in De Geer's work on the arctic archipelago was beginning in the spirit of international cooperation.

Contextually to the decline and collapse of the project of Svenska Stenkolsaktiebolaget Spetsbergen and the dissolution of the network of Swedish polar stakeholders, De Geer made a fundamental contribution to the preparations of several international polar expeditions, sending to the explorers one or more of his maps: the Third Oxford University Arctic Expedition (1924), the Amundsen-Ellsworth polar flight with the Dornier Wals N-24 and N-25 (1925), the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight with the airship *Norge* (1926), the airship *Italia* polar expedition (1928) and the Swedish Norwegian Arctic Expedition (1931) (De Geer, 1928; Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, 1933). Among these, the most significant support was given to the expeditions of Umberto Nobile and Hans Wilhelmsson Ahlmann. In 1926, at the suggestion of Giovanni Roncagli, Secretary of the Italian Geographical Society, De Geer made his maps of the archipelago available to Nobile[17]. As emerges from the personal correspondence between De Geer and the Italian General, the Swedish geologist made an even greater contribution to the preparations for the scientific expedition of the airship *Italia*. First, De Geer sent several writings of his own to Rome, such as *On the principal geographic problem of the polar region* (De Geer, 1926)[18], considered by Nobile «of a great value»[19]. Secondly, De Geer shared with the Italian General all the maps he had drawn over the years of the Svalbard archipelago, and in particular the *Map of the northern coast of Spitzbergen*. This map proved to be extremely important for the Italian polar expedition, as can be seen from a manuscript by the Swedish scientist himself: «Already before starting the expedition from Italy, Nobile had received *my maps of Northern Spitsbergen*, and those being *the only existing real maps from this part of the land*, this was the natural

[17] KVA, GDG, Giovanni Roncagli to Gerard De Geer, 19 December 1925.

[18] KVA, GDG, b. 2, f. 1927, Umberto Nobile to Gerard De Geer, 16 October 1927. It is to this text that Nobile refers in his history of the expedition published in 1930 (Nobile, 1930, p. 62).

[19] KVA, GDG, b. 2, f. 1927, Umberto Nobile to Gerard De Geer, 21 November 1927.

reason why he had no need for another set of the same maps» (De Geer, 1928, p. 5, my emphasis).

A particularly thorny issue was the language used in the toponymy of the maps provided by De Geer: Nobile himself, in fact, pointed out the «great differences»[20] between the maps sent by the Swedish geologist and those received by other scientists, including the Norwegian Adolf Hoel[21]. De Geer, for example, would have mentioned in 1928 that «much confusion [had] also arisen from modifications or unfounded translations of the original names or those fixed in Spitsbergen's vast literature» (De Geer, 1928, p. 3). The question of a possible standardization of the toponymy to be used in maps representing Svalbard it was a crucial issue in Norway, as for the Nordic country mapping and place names at Svalbard was part of the national policy towards the arctic archipelago (Drivenes, Jølle, 2004; Berg, 2013). In 1920, Hoel having been given the task of establishing «a uniform nomenclature on place names in Spitsbergen», after consultation with De Geer, realized that standardizing the toponymy was «a difficult thing to do since De Geer himself had named many of the places – *with Swedish names that now had to be removed*» (Sörlin, 2002, p. 108, my emphasis). To solve the problem of map toponymy, De Geer «advocated the systematic use of "binary nomenclature" – internationally stereotyped proper names, but with geographic terms "that can be translated into different languages for ease of use and to alter Babylonian confusion" » (Roberts, 1948, p. 174).

An interesting issue from a cartographic point of view concerns also the then presumed existence of Giles Land, supposedly discovered by Cornelis Giles between Nordaustlandet and Franz Josef Land during the first circumnavigation of the Svalbard archipelago[22]. The search for that island – often accompanied by a question mark on contemporary maps, as in the case of the *Carte de l'Archipel Francois-Joseph* of 1914 by Breitfuß (Albanov, 1928) – was indeed a burning issue in the 1920s: for example, discovering Giles Island was also one of the objectives of Grettir Algarsson's proposed polar flight in 1925 (Worsley, 1927). As is known, the non-existence of Giles Land was proven during the second flight of the airship *Italia* in 1928 (Nobile et alii, 1929; Nobile, 1945; Wråkberg, 2002b; Friolo 2009). However, De Geer continued to believe that Giles Island existed and that it was not included in the maps previously sent to Nobile: these, in fact, «did not extend sufficiently far towards the east» of Nordaustlandet (De Geer, 1928, p. 2). In July 1928, in a dispute with Frantinšek Běhounek who (like Nobile) claimed that Giles Island did not exist[23], «Svenska Morgenbladet» he reiterated

[20] Museum "Umberto Nobile", Umberto Nobile, *Esposizione del generale Nobile sul volo polare*, Rome, 5 April 1928, p. 7.

[21] Museum "Umberto Nobile", Adolf Hoel to Nobile, 14 March 1928.

[22] The non-existence of Giles Land was finally demonstrated by Umberto Nobile in 1928 (Friolo, 2009).

[23] Consider also, by way of example, the following statement by Běhounek: «The expedition fulfilled these tasks, as the amount of data collected, measurements taken and

his belief in the island's existence and hypothesised that the «last ill-fated voyage» of the airship *Italia* had also been inspired by the «desire to verify once again» that Giles Land «did not exist in the area indicated by the nautical charts»:

> «Right on the edge of a Dutch nautical chart, published by Gerard van Keulen in the early 1700s, just above 80 degrees north latitude, there is an island marked with the name "Commandeur Giles Land ontdekt 1707 is hoog Land". This island is also indicated on an English map from 1873, by J. C. Wells, in the same place, but with the name changed to Gillis Land. In later British nautical charts, the island was somehow moved about one and a half degrees of latitude further north. As a result, the real Giles' Land, lying further south, was regarded as a different location and took the name "Vitön" (White Island). The explorer Nathorst informed me that, when he attempted to determine the exact position of the White Island, he found that it was precisely the island discovered in 1707 by Captain Giles. Since the members of the Nobile expedition were unaware of these circumstances, as was Prof. Běhounek, who was not a professional geographer, Nobile and his companions searched in vain for Giles Land where it had been mistakenly placed on British nautical charts after 1873. It is perhaps not impossible that the last ill-fated voyage of the airship "Italia" on its return from the Pole was not made directly towards King's Bay, but towards the south-east, precisely because of the desire to verify once again that this land [Giles Island] did not exist in the area indicated by the nautical charts»[24].

More in general, the charts provided by De Geer to Nobile proved useful for the airship *Italia*'s navigation in the north-eastern part of the archipelago during its second flight to Severnaja Zemlja on 15-18 May 1928 (Nobile, 1930). De Geer's contribution was important in the period following the crash of *Italia* on 25 May 1928 as well. The Swedish geologist, in fact, due to the crash of the airship, published an updated map «at a scale of 1:500 000 of the northern Spitsbergen coastline with the North-Eastern Land and surrounding region» (Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, 1933, p. 19). Compiled chiefly «from the results of his own and the other Swedish expeditions, and of course also from the other maps of the latter part of the 19th century» (Ibidem), De Geer's new map was handed over to the Swedish rescue expedition[25]. In particular, De Geer's map was given to the aviator Viktor Nilsson (De Geer, 1928), pilot of the three-engine Junker G24 *Uppland*, and proved useful in the search for the Red Tent in June 1928 in

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observations of every species allow me to affirm that, apart from the exceptional importance of the geographical results, one of which was proof of the non-existence of Gillis Land». *Smentite categoriche* …, my translation.

[24] «att Italias sista olyckliga färd mot sydost i stället fö mot söder direkt till Kings Bay, delvis kan ha föanletts av en önskan att yterrligare konstatera frånvaron av land i den angivna trakten». Gerard De Geer, *Om Giles Land och Andréefyndet*, «Svenska Morgenbladet», 30 August 1930, my translation, my emphasis.

[25] *Sverige sänder mera hjälp*..., 1928. The Swedish air mission to rescue the *Italia* castaways took place between 1 June and 13 July 1928.

Nordaustlandet, between Murchison Bay and Esmarkøya (Alfei, 2025). During the same period, De Geer did not limit himself to providing maps but also made his expertise and knowledge available to international rescue efforts, as evidenced by many interviews released to the Swedish press and by the manuscript *To the rescue of the Nobile Expedition*, dated June 1928. The Swedish geologist, for example, noted that the maps used at the time in the rescue operations incorrectly reproduced the Wahlenbergfjorden (only half the actual length), from where any sled expedition should have started (De Geer, 1928): this knowledge came from a study done in 1924 to support the Third Oxford University Expedition, which explored also «the less known inner part of Wahlenberg Bay» (Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, 1933, p. 18). Furthermore, one may consider the hypothesis put forward by De Geer in June 1928 regarding the possible route of the march on the ice pack taken by Finn Malmgren, Adalberto Mariano and Filippo Zappi after the crash of the airship *Italia*: «about the same track as the Swedish sledge journey of 1873, probably crossing Cape Dickson over the same depression as the Swedes» (De Geer, 1928, p. 5; Alfei, 2024).

Two years later, as highlighted by Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, De Geer provided «invaluable assistance, both in planning […] and in other preparatory work» of the Swedish Norwegian Arctic Expedition of 1931 (Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, 1933, p. 1; Olson, 1933). The director of the Geochronological Institute of Stockholm was consulted for his more than thirty years of knowledge of Nordaustlandet: in this regard, it is worth mentioning, as seen above, the *Map of the northern coast of Spitsbergen* drawn up at the beginning of the 20th century and praised by Wilhelmsson Ahlmann himself. The main scientific objectives of the Swedish Norwegian Arctic Expedition of 1931 were «geological investigations» around Hinlopenstretet and «physical-geographical» research in Nordaustlandet[26]. After all, the numerous rescue operations organised to search for the castaways of the airship *Italia* in 1928 had «supplied no new knowledge of North-East Land», except for the sled rescue expedition led by the Norwegian Rolf S. Tandberg (Tandberg, 1928): this mission, in particular, «traced the coastline of the North East Land from Sabiner Land to Esmark Land, which differs significantly from previous ideas» (Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, 1933, p. 19). Despite Tandberg's expedition, in the early 1930s Nordaustlandet still appeared to be «like a little-known region, parts of which had even remained completely unexplored» (Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, 1932, p. 177, my translation). De Geer contributed to the preparations for the expedition, with a focus on cartographic issues: it is significant that still in December 1930 he hoped that the new expedition would have achieved «a real mapping of Giles Island»[27]. The scientific preparations for the expedition, to which De Geer contributed, took place, as

[26] RS, Utrikesdepartementet, b. «Svenska arktiska expeditioner», Hans Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, *P.M.*, Stockholm, 3 May 1931, my translation.

[27] KVA, GDG, b. 2, f. «Spetsbergexpeditionen 1931», Gerard De Geer, *Förslag till en aktuell Spetsbergexpedition*..., 1930, my translation.

noted by the geologist, in «friendly collaboration» («vävansapligt samarbete») with Norwegian researchers[28] fulfilling the wishes expressed in November 1928 to the Minister of Foreign Affairs for a «benevolent cooperation» («välvilligt samarbete») in Svalbard between Swedes and Norwegians[29]. Similar praise for international cooperation was also expressed by the Norwegian members of the expedition, as evidenced by a letter from Adolf Hoel to Wilhelmsson Ahlmann in January 1931[30].

In the climate of cordial international cooperation created around the Swedish Norwegian Arctic Expedition of 1931, Gerard De Geer submitted a proposal to the diplomat Johan Beck-Friis that would have been unimaginable in the 1910s, at the time of Swedish claims on Braganzavågen, Bünsow Land, Pyramiden, Erdmannflya and Advent Fjorden: «I propose that the Swedish State hand over its legal claims to the Norwegian authorities of the three Swedish wintering stations at Mossel Bay, Cape Thordsen and Treurenburg Bay»[31]. The three stations at Mosselbukta/Mossel Bay, Sorgfjorden/Treurenberg Bay (both in the northern part of Ny-Friesland) and Kapp Thordsen/Cape Thordsen (in the heart of Isfjorden), built respectively by Nordenskiöld in 1872-1873, Edvard Jäderin in 1899-1900 and by Nils Gustaf Ekholm in 1882-1883 (Nathorst, 1909), had been indeed «*actively defended* [by Sweden] during negotiations» on the question of sovereignty over the archipelago during the 1910s (Avango, 2005, p. 56, my translation, my emphasis)[32]. The proposal to renounce legal claims over the three research stations would have been implemented at the dawn of the Second World War, when in May 1939 the Swedish diplomatic authorities agreed to make the building in Sorgfjorden available to the Governor of Svalbard[33]. In addition to the Swedish Norwegian Arctic Expedition of 1931 and De Geer's proposal concerning the three winter stations at Mosselbukta, Kapp Thordsen and Sorgfjorden, a third episode would have consolidated Stockholm's new policy of cooperation in Svalbard: the participation in the Second International Polar Year, held between 1932 and 1933 (Barr, Luedecke, 2010). The Swedish

[28] Ivi, my translation.

[29] RS, Utrikesdepartementet, b. «Vetenskapligaekspeditioner och arbeten», Gerard De Geer to Ernst Trygger, 6 November 1928.

[30] KVA, GDG, b. 2, f. «Spetsbergexpeditionen 1931», Adolf Hoel to Hans Wilhelmsson Ahlmann, 13 January 1931.

[31] Ivi, f. «1931», Gerard De Geer to Johan Beck-Friis, 18 September 1931, my translation.

[32] The wintering station in Sorgfjorden had been used by several recent Norwegians expeditions, from that of Hagerup-Jensen in 1921 to that of Alfred Svendsen in 1927. Riksarkivet, Oslo (from now on RO), Handels-og industridepartmentet, Industrikontoret, b. 11, f. «Restene av svensk overvintringsstasjon ved Treurenberg Bay», P.M., 29 June 1937.

[33] Ivi, f. «Restene av svensk overvintringsstasjon ved Treurenberg Bay (Sorgfjorden)», Alfred Madsen to Utenriksdepartementet, 31 May 1939.

expedition programme included magnetic observations and aurora measurements «at the old Swedish coal mine Svea» (Sveagruvan, in Braganzavågen) and «meteorological observations» at Nordenskiöldfjellet[34]. Nevertheless, as stated in the mission plan (*Förslag till instruktion för den Svenska expeditionen till Spetsbergen under det internationella polaråret 1932-1933*), «the main purpose of the expeditions [was] to collaborate with other countries»[35].

Conclusions

Sten De Geerfjellet, Kapp De Geer, De Geerfonna, De Geerbukta, De Geerelva, De Geerdalen, and De Geerfjellet are place names in Svalbard that attest to the decades-long scientific contribution of Swedish geologist Gerard De Geer to the study of the archipelago. This research article has highlighted, first and foremost, the key role played by De Geer in the scientific mapping of Svalbard over half a century, from his first trip to the archipelago in 1882 to the cartographic support he provided to the Swedish Norwegian Arctic Expedition of 1931. During his first four expeditions in the archipelago in 1882, 1896, 1899 and 1901, De Geer thoroughly explored the regions of Isfjorden, Bellsund, Hinlopenstretet and Nordaustlandet. These experiences led to the creation of his *Geological sketch map of Spitsbergen* and, above all, the *Map of the North Coast of Spitzbergen*. Nevertheless, retracing De Geer's story also means studying the rise and fall of Swedish industrial presence in Svalbard. After the dissolution of the Swedish Norwegian Union in 1905 and the renewed strategic interest in the archipelago, De Geer – part of the Swedish polar stakeholder opposed to Norwegian annexation of the archipelago – since 1907 promoted the creation of a Swedish coal industry in Svalbard. His fifth and sixth trips (1908 and 1910) in Isfjorden were thus inextricably linked to the rise of Stockholm's projects in the archipelago, which took shape in the actions of *Jernkontoret* and in the claims to several areas selected by De Geer with a view to mining them. The most representative cartographic product of this second highly politicised phase is the *Map of Central Spitzbergen with the main coal-district*, with red boxes delimiting Swedish claims in Braganzavågen, Bünsow Land, Pyramiden, Erdmannflya, and Adventfjorden. After the signing of the Svalbard Treaty in 1920, which definitively assigned sovereignty of Svalbard to Norway, Stockholm's efforts (now scaled back) exclusively focused on the activities of the Svenska Stenkolsaktiebolaget Spetsbergen (formerly *Aktiebolaget Spetsbergens Svenska Kolfält* and, before that, *Aktiebolaget Isfjorden-Bellsund*). With the decline and liquidation

[34] KVA, GDG, b. 2, f. «1931», F. Lindholm, *Rapport från Svenska övervintringsexpeditionen på Spetsbergen under 2:dra internationella polaråret 1932-1933*, Stockholm, 8 November 1933, my translation.

[35] Ivi, *Förslag till instruktion för den Svenska expeditionen till Spetsbergen under det internationella polaråret 1932-1933*, my translation.

of this mining company in 1926, the dissolution of the network of Swedish polar stakeholders, and more generally the end of Stockholm's ambitions for the coal of Svalbard, De Geer distanced himself from the political affairs of the archipelago and collaborated in the cartographic preparation of a series of international expeditions organised during the interwar period: the Third Oxford University Arctic Expedition (1924), the Amundsen-Ellsworth polar flight with the Dornier Wals N-24 and N-25 (1925), the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight with airship *Norge* (1926), the airship *Italia* polar expedition (1928) and the Swedish-Norwegian Arctic Expedition (1931). Between 1924 and 1931, De Geer produced and published new maps of Svalbard, including an updated map «at a scale of 1:500 000 of the northern Spitsbergen coastline with the North-Eastern Land and surrounding region», which was given to the Swedish aviator Viktor Nilsson in 1928 and proved essential in the international rescue operations organised to search for the castaways of the *Italia* airship. It was during this less politicised phase that De Geer returned to the study of purely exploratory aspects of cartography such as the study of the alleged existence of Giles Island. In the context of renewed international cooperation, based on the Svalbard Treaty, De Geer provided extensive cartographic support to the Arctic expeditions of 1924-1931, but also argued that Sweden should have «hand[ed] over its legal claims to the Norwegian authorities» of the Swedish stations in Mosselbukta, Sorgfjorden and Kapp Thordsen: a proposal that would have been unthinkable at the time of the Isfjorden expeditions of the 1910s. The events linking Gerard De Geer to Svalbard ultimately serve as a litmus test for studying the history of exploration and mapping of the archipelago in the modern age, the rise and fall of Swedish coal ambitions in Isfjorden, and the history of the Arctic between XIX and XX centuries.

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MAPPING SVALBARD BETWEEN XIX AND XX CENTURIES: GERARD DE GEER AND THE ARCTIC ARCHIPELAGO, 1882-1931 – The research examines the fifty-year contribution of Swedish geologist Gerard De Geer to the cartographic study of Svalbard. The first paragraph provides a historical overview of the mapping of the archipelago from its discovery to the expeditions of Swedish explorer Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld. The second paragraph analyses De Geer's first four trips to Svalbard (1882, 1896, 1899, 1901) in Isfjorden, Bellsund, Hinlopenstretet and Nordaustlandet, after which he created the *Geological sketch map of Spitsbergen* and the *Map of the North Coast of Spitzbergen*. The third paragraph examines De Geer's fifth and sixth expedition to Isfjorden (1908 and 1910), with particular attention to Stockholm's strategic ambitions for Svalbard's coal. The *Map of Central Spitzbergen with the main coal-district* was produced during this period: the chart delimits the Swedish legal claims in five mining areas (Braganzavågen, Bünsow Land, Pyramiden, Erdmannflya and Adventfjorden). Finally, the fourth paragraph analyses De Geer's contribution to the cartographic preparations for several polar expeditions carried out between the 1920s and 1930s in the light of the climate of international cooperation inaugurated by the Svalbard Treaty (1920) and following both the liquidation of the mining company Svenska Stenkolsaktiebolaget Spetsbergen and the collapse of Swedish strategic interests in the archipelago. The work is based on contemporary Swedish publications and primary sources kept in the Archives of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences and in the National Archives in Oslo and Stockholm.

Keywords: Mapping; Isfjorden; Nordaustlandet; Coal mines; Polar expeditions

CARTOGRAFARE LE SVALBARD TRA IL XIX E IL XX SECOLO: GERARD DE GEER E L'ARCIPELAGO ARTICO, 1882-1931 – La ricerca esamina il contributo cinquantennale del geologo svedese Gerard De Geer allo studio cartografico delle Svalbard. Il primo paragrafo fornisce una panoramica storica sul lavoro di mappatura dell'arcipelago dalla sua scoperta sino alle spedizioni dell'esploratore svedese Adolf Erik

Nordenskiöld. Il secondo paragrafo analizza i primi quattro viaggi esplorativi di De Geer alle Svalbard (1882, 1896, 1899, 1901) nell'Isfjorden, nel Bellsund, nell'Hinlopenstretet e nel Nordaustlandet, da cui risultarono la *Geological sketch map of Spitsbergen* e la *Map of the North Coast of Spitzbergen*. Il terzo paragrafo esamina il quinto e il sesto viaggio di De Geer nell'Isfjorden (1908 e 1910) con particolare attenzione alle ambizioni strategiche di Stoccolma per il carbone delle Svalbard. Risale a questi anni la realizzazione della *Map of Central Spitzbergen with the main coal-district*, dove sono segnate le cinque aree minerarie rivendicate dagli svedesi (Braganzavågen, Bünsow Land, Pyramiden, Erdmannflya, Adventfjorden). Il quarto paragrafo analizza, infine, il contributo di De Geer ai preparativi cartografici di alcune spedizioni polari svoltesi tra gli anni Venti e Trenta alla luce del clima di cooperazione internazionale inaugurato dal Trattato delle Svalbard (1920) e seguito alla liquidazione della compagnia mineraria Svenska Stenkolsaktiebolaget Spetsbergen e al crollo degli interessi strategici svedesi nell'arcipelago. Il lavoro si basa su pubblicazioni svedesi coeve e su fonti primarie conservate presso gli archivi dell'Accademia reale svedese delle Scienze e presso gli archivi nazionali a Oslo e Stoccolma.

Parole chiave: Cartografia; Isfjorden; Nordaustlandet; Miniere di carbone; Spedizioni polari