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Response to Excerpt's from Beattie and Geiger's *Frozen in Time*

We have finally reached a mention of a “true” North-West Passage (the Simpson Strait), even if the men on the Franklin expedition did not know at the time that it was a NWP. We also hear about the first successful traversal of a NWP in 1903 by Amundsen, almost half a century after the final Franklin expedition. We then return in another eighty years with Beatty's forensic treatment. It is interesting to compare the differences in perspective between these three accounts.

Chapter 7 of *Frozen in Time* details various attempts at recovering the bodies or further details of the fates of the explorers in the years shortly after the expedition. The nature of the evidence is primarily in three forms: verifiable artifacts of the Franklin expedition (mostly through trading with the Inuit people), anecdotal stories of human remains, and second-hand stories from the Inuit people. Of these, only the first category are verifiably true. The second category, as discovered by Beatty, is more than likely to have some false positives due to human remains from people other than those from the Franklin expedition. And the Inuit people, who only happen upon the Franklin expeditioners by chance, can only provide sparse accounts to the best of their memory, also without much chance for verifiability. At this time in the mid-19th century, cameras were not used in the recovery missions (most likely; I don't know enough about camera technology history), and we are only presented artistic depictions of various scenes, such as the the depiction of M'Clintock discovering the lifeboat containing skeletons (87). Moreover, there is almost no surviving written work by the explorers: we do get a mysterious “Peglar papers” with backwards writing (81) and the notes left by Lieutenant Gore and Captain Fitzjames (83), but other books that had been found had been carelessly destroyed by Inuit children (75). The lack of concrete evidence, especially written evidence, provides much towards the

mystery of the Franklin expedition. If a single written first-hand history of a man (e.g., if one of the books that were ripped up by the Inuit children) were retrieved, the Franklin expedition would be much less well known.

Beattie only briefly mentions the *Gjoa*, whose six-person crew led by Amundsen was the first ship to successfully traverse a NWP. The only detail that is mentioned is that the boat was an “old wooden sloop” (100), that Amundsen was inspired by Franklin’s 1819 expedition, and that Amundsen would go on to die in a plane crash in the Arctic in 1928. However, from a quick perusal of the Wikipedia page on the *Gjoa*, I discovered that the boat and crew are so small in response to the Franklin tragedy – the reasoning is that “intended to live off the limited resources of the land and sea through which he was to travel, and reasoned that the land could sustain only a tiny crew (this had been a cause of the catastrophic failure of John Franklin's expedition fifty years previously) ... [and] her shallow draught would help her traverse the shoals of the Arctic straits.” Unlike Franklin, Amundsen was well aware of the possibility of spending multiple winters stuck in the ice, which it was. The Wikipedia article also notes that the ship was stuck for two years in the same spot (like Franklin’s ship) but the crew spent much time learning from the Inuit people, thus avoiding the cultural failure of not learning from the Inuit people on how to be self-sufficient (and also avoiding scurvy on the way).

Finally, Beattie’s journey in the 1980’s was a breath of fresh air for me, as it felt like the first modern account of scientific investigation in our readings thus far. We are able to achieve a modern level of confidence on various conjectures – the evidence is of a very different nature, via studies of bone samples in cannibalism scenarios and bone sample identification. While it is obvious that over a century’s worth of Arctic climate had erased more of the evidence, it is interesting that only one skeleton of the 129 men was identified. We do not get any accounts of finding Inuit skeletons from the earlier explorers, so it is unclear whether those earlier explorers attributed all human remains to the doomed expedition, or if they ignored unidentified skeletons. It gives proper closure to the accusation of cannibalism, at the cost of making the Franklin expedition much less an object of the imagination.