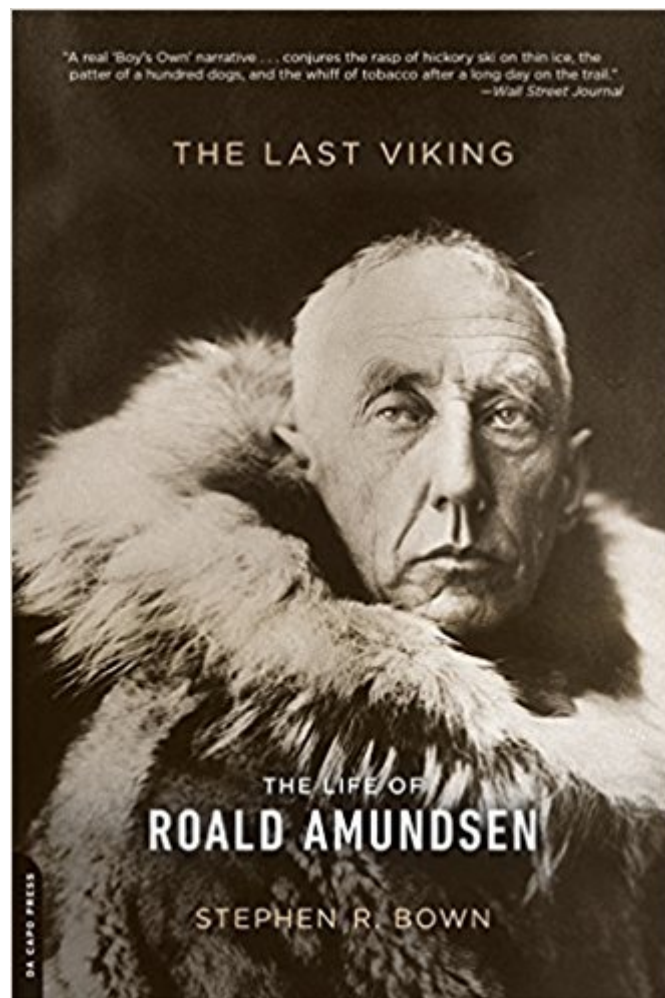




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# The Last Viking: The Life Of Roald Amundsen (A Merloyd Lawrence Book)



## Synopsis

The Last Viking unravels the life of the man who stands head and shoulders above all those who raced to map the last corners of the world. In 1900, the four great geographical mysteries—the Northwest Passage, the Northeast Passage, the South Pole, and the North Pole—remained blank spots on the globe. Within twenty years Roald Amundsen would claim all four prizes. Renowned for his determination and technical skills, both feared and beloved by his men, Amundsen is a legend of the heroic age of exploration, which shortly thereafter would be tamed by technology, commerce, and publicity. Fêfêted in his lifetime as an international celebrity, pursued by women and creditors, he died in the Arctic on a rescue mission for an inept rival explorer. Stephen R. Bown has unearthed archival material to give Amundsen's life the grim immediacy of Apsley Cherry-Garrard's The Worst Journey in the World, the exciting detail of The Endurance, and the suspense of a Jon Krakauer tale. The Last Viking is both a thrilling literary biography and a cracking good story.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Brown's biography breaks some new ground in detailing the explorer's time spent in New York and the evidence of his sense of humor, which stands in contrast to the usual picture of him as cold, methodical and harsh.”—Winnipeg Free Press, 10/6/12  
“Bown's tension-packed narrative recounts the illustrious career of the most accomplished polar explorer of all time.”—Shipwreckology.com, 10/25/12  
“In a world where little is left to explore, Bown

transports his readers to a time when great men battled nature to explore the earth's last remaining terra incognita. As the winter months approach, readers would be well served to buy *The Last Viking* and curl up in front of a roaring fire to enjoy Bown's gripping account of Amundsen's epic polar adventures. —Maclean's, 10/26/12; Bown draws on extensive research and access to the personal journals of Amundsen and his travel companions to paint rich and gripping accounts of his perilous voyages. These are often marvelously entertaining. —Calgary Herald, 10/19/12; Sheds new light on the life and legend of Roald Amundsen. —Wall Street Journal, 11/9/12; Mr. Bown has produced a solid, entertaining account of Amundsen's adventures, through which he scrolls with pleasing attention to detail. This is a real 'Boy's Own' narrative, one that conjures the rasp of hickory ski on thin ice, the patter of a hundred dogs, and the whiff of tobacco after a long day on the trail. Mr. Bown is especially good on historical context. —Toronto Sunday Star, 11/4/12; Bown's research is impeccable and his writing lucid. —San Antonio Express-News, 11/11/12; A fascinating look into the life of the Norwegian explorer; Bown deftly captures the true essence of the man instead of merely paying homage to the legend; The Last Viking gives readers an in-depth look into what it was like to travel into some of the last unknown regions of the world without today's fancy gadgets or even the basics such as maps, local guides or reliable communication. Amundsen, perhaps the greatest polar explorer of all time, comes to life once again to ignite the spirit of exploration in all of us. —Toronto Globe & Mail, 11/16/12; Bown writes from the lofty, distancing heights of the fair-minded historian; The work is sharp-eyed, thorough and convincing, and constitutes a significant addition to the Arctic canon. —Daily Speculations blog, 11/27/12; One of Bown's strengths in writing this biography is his ability to write about Amundsen's expeditions; often multi-year affairs during which the crew was completely isolated; in a way that engages readers accustomed to satellite phones and real-time updates; Bown's clear prose never gets bogged down by the vast emptiness of its settings or by Amundsen's regular successes in his expeditions. And when things do go wrong, such as when Amundsen attempts to fly a plane over the North Pole, Bown writes a tense narrative in which men struggle against themselves and nature to survive... The Last Viking should restore this remarkable man's place in the canon of explorers, while winning itself a prized place on the shelves of adventure enthusiasts. —Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, 12/15/2013; These later stories of Amundsen's life are less frequently told, and Bown has done a good job of restoring them to Amundsen's biography; Since the highly private Amundsen kept his private life to

himself, we get little insight into the man (and Bown wisely avoids speculation). What we do get is an overdue acknowledgment of what Amundsen was: the greatest polar adventurer who ever lived, and the man whose life was the capstone on the Age of Exploration. — The Historian, Vol. 76, No. 2; [A] full-bodied tale; The book provides detailed insights into the preparations and human elements involved in surveying arctic regions. — Using actual diary entries from the Arctic expeditions to chilling effect, Bown makes the reader feel as though they have embarked on a journey through the world's harshest climates and inhospitable lands; [Amundsen] lived a life suited for the pages of an adventure novel. Bown's new biography reads as such. — Portland Book Review, December-February 2012; Bown is a terrific writer, never sensational, always seeming to share the achievements of a friend. His discretion about Amundsen's personal life leaves us with an endearing, enigmatic hero. — Bookworm Sez — syndicated column, 12/4/12; Armchair adventurers will love reading The Last Viking. — The Homestretch — on CBC Radio, 11/26/12; Reveals the private side of a man whose exploits made him a household name in the early 20th century. — ; [Bown] did his homework. The bibliography is basically every book out there, plus he did a lot of his own work in extensive newspaper story research (NYT; predominantly). There is a lot of controversy about this man and his methods; a lot of bias that Bown seems to navigate around. If you haven't read about polar exploration it's a good book to read since it relates the entire history of man's search for the final fabled lost lands or undiscovered sea lanes that would make trade travel quicker and cheaper; In this day of constant communication the book acts like an escape of sorts to a time when years would go by between shoving off on an expedition and returning. — Politics and Patriotism Show — (blog), 11/21/12; An eye opening history of the larger-than-life Norwegian explorer; Intensely researched and passionately written. — Literary Review of Canada, October 2012; A riveting tale of adventure, political intrigue and achievement; Exceptionally well researched and eminently readable; An important contribution to the historiography of polar exploration. — Milwaukee Shepherd Express, 12/4/12 Sacramento Book Review/San Francisco Book Review, 12/7/12; Stephen Brown makes Amundsen feel real, not just a part of history. Brown's stories are well-researched and it shows in the book. It is really detailed and covers many different aspects of Amundsen's life; The pace of the book was excellent and every part is filled with suspense; This is a great book for anyone, especially if you want to relive the moments of an unexplored Earth. — Reference and Research Book News, December 2012 ; [Bown] describes

Amundsen's approach to expeditions as military operations and portrays his gift for flamboyant self-promotion and publicity seeking on the lecture circuit. —CBC Books, 12/17/12; Bown draws on extensive research to create a clear and often surprising portrait of a truly adventurous spirit. —Library Journal, 12/20/12; A great new biography; Well written and enjoyable, the book uses ample quotes from Amundsen to give readers a sense of the man; a great title for collections that don't own Amundsen's own books or previous biographies, this volume is recommended for readers high school-age and up who are interested in polar exploration. —Minneapolis Star-Tribune, 1/8/13; [A] persuasive and highly readable biography/adventure story. —Curled Up with a Good Book Long-listed for the BC National Award for Canadian Non-Fiction One of the Toronto Globe & Mail's Globe 100: The Globe's Top Non-Fiction Books of the Year Named to Kirkus Reviews's &#147;Best Books of 2012 —list Named a San Francisco Book Review Staff Pick for &#147;Best Books of 2012 Winnipeg Free Press, &#147;Best of the Best —roundup, 12/22/12 Kirkus Reviews (starred), 8/15/12; An intensely researched, thoroughly enjoyable life of one history's best explorers; A superb biography of a fiercely driven explorer who traveled across the last inaccessible areas on earth before technical advances made the journey much easier. —Booklist, September 2012; [An] enjoyable, informative biography. —Publishers Weekly, 8/27/12; [A] captivating account of the Norwegian's extraordinary life; Bown makes a compelling case that Amundsen deserves renewed recognition for his outstanding achievements. —London Sunday Times 9/16/12; [A] fascinating biography; As a depiction of an explorer's life it is intelligent and often thrilling. —Boston Globe, 9/30/12; A compelling and enjoyable introduction to the man and his adventures. Bown writes Amundsen's story with a sharp eye to what's important; Amundsen's life is without a doubt fascinating, and Bown does it a service by getting out of the way and just telling the story. At about 300 pages, this is a pleasurable, entertaining read that never overstays its welcome. —Internet Review of Books, 12/19/12; Amundsen's exciting life makes this an amazing read and the sixteen pages of photos are captivating. —Santa Fe New Mexican, 1/18/13; [A] comprehensive biography; An eye-opening mind-blowing page-turner. Bown has the ability to convey reams of facts, figures, and statistics while engaging the reader in Amundsen's many life-and-death adventures. —Canada's History; Those who love tales of Arctic exploration and discovery will not be disappointed by Stephen R. Bown's fresh look at the man many consider to be the world's greatest polar explorer. From beginning to end, the Canadian writer's

telling of Roald Amundsen's life is a thrilling yet thoughtful narrative. —Phi Beta Kappa's Key Reporter, 5/24/13; Author Stephen Bown hopes to repair Amundsen's reputation and re-introduce his achievements to readers at a time when exploration on a grand geographic scale seems like ancient history. He succeeds; his Amundsen is complicated and compelling, capable of leading men through deadly danger and telling self-deprecating stories to rapturous lecture audiences later; The New York Times published hundreds of articles chronicling his voyages, and Bown gracefully weaves together these and other journalistic records, along with journals kept by Amundsen and his men, to paint a surprisingly intimate portrait of a complex, at times difficult, yet eminently admirable man. —Denver Post, 9/30/12; A deep, spine-chilling look at the life of Roald Amundsen, Norwegian polar explorer. —Tucson Citizen, 10/4/12; An outstanding biography of a focused, determined man; Bown has served up a crisply written book that is exciting, meticulously researched, and an appropriate literary tribute to one of history's greatest explorers. —Bookviews blog, October 2012; The story of a man who accomplished in two decades what other explorers of his day couldn't do in a lifetime; The world needs heroes like Amundsen, warts and all. —WomanAroundTown.com, 9/27/12; Details both the good and the bad about his extraordinary man. —InfoDad.com, 10/18/12

Stephen R. Bown is the author of *Scurvy: How a Surgeon, a Mariner and A Gentleman Solved the Greatest Medical Mystery of the Age of Sail*, selected as one of the *Globe and Mail's* Top 100 books of 2004, and *A Most Damnable Invention: Dynamite, Nitrates and the Making of the Modern World*, selected for the *Scientific American Book Club*, the *History Book Club* and the *Quality Paperback Book Club*. He lives with his wife and two young children near Banff in the Canadian Rockies. [www.stephenrbown.net](http://www.stephenrbown.net)

I've enjoyed some classics in this genre such as *Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage* and *Arctic Adventure: My Life in the Frozen North* (which is a lesser known but great account of life in the Arctic). So I was interested in *The Last Viking*. *The Last Viking* is a well-crafted work on both the life and achievements of Roald Amundsen, one of history's greatest explorers. Among Amundsen's headline accomplishments were that he was the first European to sail the Northwest Passage, the first person to see the North Pole, and the first human to reach the South Pole. The Norwegian press called him "The Last Viking." While author Stephen R. Bown is clearly taken with Amundsen's life and heroics, he doesn't shy away from showing us his warts too.

Brown gives us a 21st century look at Amundsen, a man characterized by intense determination and passion, but with a stubbornness and inability to express feelings that could be infuriating; a man who was capable of great charm, but also great arrogance. But when it came to exploration, Amundsen had the humility to learn from the Inuit who, unlike most Europeans of his day, he considered his cultural equal. Brown does a fine job chronicling the details and historical context of Amundsen's adventures. Through these details, we get entertaining accounts of the travels and travails of the Last Viking. Armchair explorers will be pleased as there is plenty of good adventure, such as plane crashes and maulings by polar bears.

Interesting read that accurately describes the race for the poles, preparations and technology of that time. It does not go into highly detailed accounts of the actual expeditions which was OK. You can read additional books on the subject if you enjoy the minute by minute details. Outstanding resource section at the back of book that links you to the movies taken during the expedition.

As a fan of Arctic exploration *The Last Viking* is one of the best books I have read on this topic. Stephen Brown has done an outstanding job of detailing the life of one of the great explorers of all time. When we think of Roald Amundsen we usually just think of his being the first to reach the South Pole. Brown goes much further and takes us through the life of this incredible man beginning with his early days and a step by step journey through his many adventures. What really made Amundsen such a great and successful explorer was his willingness to learn from others, to study, to read, and to prepare before launching into his journeys. His first great success was his trip on the *Goja* through the Northwest passage. In that experience he lived with and studied the Inuit People and gained great insight as to how to how they survived in such cold and harsh climates. With that knowledge, he successfully accomplished his goal of later reaching the South Pole. Amundsen was constantly on the go and lectured and traveled extensively as he loved to tell people about his travels. The author gives us a good insight into the total life of Amundsen beyond just his exploration epics. We find how he related others, not just those on his trips, but the general public who loved hearing him speak and relate his experiences. We learn a great deal about his final trip, a joint effort with the Italians in a dirigible from Spitzbergen across the North Pole to Alaska. Truly, this man was one of the greatest explorers in history. He accomplished all he set out to do. This book is well worth your time and I highly recommend it.

Stephen Brown's research was impeccable. His research and bibliography was extensive. I

appreciated Brown's attention to detail as well as his commentary. In reading about the exploits of an explorer who was rocking the world nearly 100 years ago, it is important to understand both the times and the context for which his actions turned. Brown really puts it together with a clear and in depth look at a truly remarkable man. If Roald Amundsen had one weakness, he could only be accused of being human. Don't let the one negative review by Ron DiGiovanni sway you. After all, Ron does admit to "harbored ... suspicion" about Amundsen, and his sour-grapes review reflects a predisposition for disliking the man.

I purchased the book for several reasons. First, I was scheduled to attend a webinar by the author. Second, I was preparing a presentation "Leadership Lessons from the South Pole" for a professional group in the Twin Cities (MN). But most of all, I have an abiding admiration for Amundsen's management and leadership traits/skills. I first became familiar with his life when I read Roland Huntford's "The Last Place on Earth." Since then, I've read several books and many articles about polar explorers such as Amundsen, Scott, and Shackleton. Brown's book seems to be well researched and is easy to read. I learned several things about Amundsen that I did not know. Amundsen was not only "The Last Viking" but the greatest polar explorer since he had three most significant firsts: the Northwest Passage, the South Pole, and the North Pole. Managers and leaders could learn a lot by reading this book.

This book read like some of the best non-fiction for the first half, with Roald Amundsen's voyage to the South Pole described in detail. Most fascinating was the information about the preparations he did for the trip, from studying Inuit clothing to testing various types of dogsleds and skis. The second half of the book describes his various North Pole adventures, but it gets a bit windy and defensive towards the end, defending Amundsen against the reputations of other explorers like Scott. I read this in anticipation of a trip to Norway later this year. I did not know much about Amundsen and was greatly educated about his accomplishments - I believe I will appreciate seeing the Fram and other ships at the Viking museum when I go much more now! Would definitely recommend this for those who like non-fiction page-turners.

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