

against the background of Austro-Hungarian history, as the authors affirm (page 348), though this might have included more references to the history of Arctic exploration.

By the 1870s, the Arctic in general perhaps no longer appeared as unimaginable as the authors seem to suggest at one point in relation to the trope of Arctic sublime (page 453). Still, the readings of the source material clearly reveal how dependent Austro-Hungarian discourses about the Arctic were on the topoi one had come to expect at that stage: that is icebergs, polar night, midsummer night sun, polar lights and polar bears. This may not come as a big surprise to specialists, but it is an important point to stress in view of the tropology of Arctic discourse and the idea of projecting time and again the same views or images onto the Arctic. Another important result is the foregrounding of the expedition's return as a media event to be read against the background of sensationalism and the development of mass media. The Arctic seemed to offer an ideal venue for conjuring up feelings of pathos strong enough to make the audience want to discover more in the following issue. The Austro-Hungarian expedition's evident function in this respect and perhaps even pioneering role in a central European context is a factor that has not been looked at previously in such depth. Finally, the study also confirms the idea that the Arctic was

largely subject to appropriation from the outside, be it from other Arctic countries like Norway or those European states that had been present in the Arctic for a long time such as Britain or France – and newcomers like the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, pursuing her dream of *Austria felix* farthest north.

Passagiere des Eises is indispensable reading to anyone interested in the Austro-Hungarian North Pole Expedition and a major contribution to the study of Arctic discourse that one would gladly see come out in English too. (Jan Borm, University of Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, 47, boulevard Vauban, 78280 Guyancourt, France. (jan.borm@uvsq.fr)).

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A HISTORY OF THE ARCTIC. NATURE, EXPLORATION AND EXPLOITATION. John McCannon. 2012. London: Reaktion Books. 349 p, illustrated, hardcover. ISBN 978-1-78023-018-4. £25.00.

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Before I start the review of this book, please allow me to apologise. Because as the title of this volume, already published in 2012 without having been reviewed in *Polar Record*, implies, the main focus is historical. However, I'm not a historian. It is therefore not possible for me to review this book based on a historian's expertise. But as you will see, this is not necessarily bad. Because while the title and scope of this outstanding book are without a doubt historical, it is not an academic history of the Arctic, but rather written as a novel. Of course, the main protagonist is not a person, but a geographical region and McCannon shows great talent in conveying prehistorical, historical as well as contemporary data to a lay reader by having written *A history of the Arctic* in a way that spans captivating narratives on the natural environment, people and peoples living in the far north. Or let me put it this way: while containing an almost insatiable wealth of information, this book is incredibly fun to read!

McCannon's book is subdivided into seven chapters, six of which constitute distinct time periods: pre-history to 1500 CE, 1500–1800, 1800–1914, 1914–1945, 1945–1991 and 1991 to the present. Chapter 1 provides the *Origins: introduction and environmental overview*. Here, the reader is made acquainted with the natural history of the Arctic while also the key species, in the sense as being a target of human exploitation, are being introduced. Compared with the other chapters, this is rather short and with *Encounters: prehistory and early history to 1500 CE* the joy of reading this book really starts. One of the reasons is the wonderful way in which the reader gains access to information that one would not encounter that frequently. Of course, having studied the Arctic, the Bering land bridge, for instance, as being key to the population of the Americas or the

different stages in the population of Greenland, is not unheard of. Yet McCannon does not state these as indisputable facts, but rather discusses them within frameworks of other theories, just to reach specific conclusions. And therefore the diversity in historical inquiry is unveiled, broadening the reader's understanding of how to interpret historical evidence.

And the further history proceeds towards the present, the more the reader understands the vital and mostly economically-driven history of the Arctic, a narrative that certainly is of high relevance today still. While in the past it was primarily furs, coal, gold and ultimately power that pushed Europeans into the north, it now appears to be the need for hydrocarbons, a fact that McCannon will also refer to later on in his book. But while history becomes graspable and the present volume is certainly wonderfully comprehensive, the reader needs to bear in mind that it is not necessarily new information that McCannon reveals, nor is his approach new. In other words, *A history of the Arctic* is primarily a European history of the Arctic. It is the Europeans that force their hegemony upon the natives all across the circumpolar north and the book does not consider the aboriginal history of the Arctic. For example, McCannon refers to the hostility between the Chukchi, Koryak and Itelmen that united as a response to Russian oppression (page 109) or the 'mutual detestation' of the Ob Nentsy and Khanty (page 150). Yet the reader is left in the dark as to why these peoples had major differences. Here, McCannon could have entered new grounds and he could have made the book make a bigger contribution to the understanding of Arctic history than it already does.

Indeed, this is further emphasised by the fact that the chapter *Crusades: 1800 to 1914* is a broad overview of the European 'discoveries' of the Arctic, meaning a short overview of polar exploration. While for the lay person this is truly enlightening and certainly of great interest, more advanced scholars of polar history will not necessarily find new information in this chapter. This contributes to the impression that the goal of this volume is not to present new historical findings or

a new way of presenting Arctic history, but rather to generate a comprehensive volume on the matter to non-professionals in the field. The difference to other 'histories' on the Arctic is that McCannon's book does not just focus on one particular aspect of Arctic history, but that it is an encompassing swing at the history of the north. And this comes particularly to the fore in his gripping chapter *Subjugations: 1914 to 1945*. While not delving into too much detail, as nowhere in the book really, this chapter results in a few pages on the Second World War that vividly describe the war-driven transformation of the Arctic: while before the war it was still considered a frontier and almost a boundary that claimed many a life due to its remoteness, during the war it became a theatre of military conflict and the 'Arctic regions were now physically accessible. They were economically valuable' (page 235).

This trend continues in the times after the war that McCannon eloquently describes and summarises in *Contaminations: 1945 to 1991*. Here he covers the anthropogenic environmental changes, the military build-up and of course the changes in Arctic demographics. And it is impressive how the author manages to filter and present the most important elements of the complex geopolitical and socio-economic developments that had taken a hold of the Arctic during that time. Given the scope of the book, McCannon does not delve deeply into specific events or does not get lost in historical interpretations. Instead, he establishes linkages, such as the influence of the emerging environmental movement in the 1960s on changes in native livelihoods that he briefly describes and contextualises.

And here lies probably the keyword of *A history of the Arctic*: contextualisation. The book reads from top to back like one comprehensive narrative. The author has created a timeline of events that feed into each other, influence one another and

build on top of each other until we have reached the *Extinctions: 1991 to the present*. The 'present' obviously ends in 2012. It is thus that the book does not cover most recent developments in Ukraine and its (possible) effects on Arctic cooperation. Also, for example, McCannon's assertion that the Goliat gas field in the Barents see would start production in 2013 (page 288) has thus far not occurred. Be that as it may, also in this last chapter the author manages impressively to summarise key events and key developments in combination with the ongoing discourse on the Arctic, its environment, climatic changes and peoples. But he does not end on a too positive note as the two last sentences of this volume show: 'I myself confess to dark expectations about whether we will set our course correctly and respond adequately or in time. I hope for nothing more than to be proven wrong' (page 307).

With this *A history of the Arctic* ends and leaves this reviewer deeply impressed by the eloquence with which McCannon has approached the theme of the book. While sources are provided these are not too numerous and the reader is compelled to be delving into a narrative of the Arctic that reads more like a novel than a fact-based book. It is in that sense a popular scientific volume. Note also that with the titles of each chapter, the author provides a keyword that frames the main focus of the respective chapter and filter the most important retrospective discourse on the Arctic for that particular time. And while the book does not contain much 'new' historical information, it is nevertheless so nicely compiled and arranged that it should be a prerequisite for all those interested in Arctic history and / or engage in studying the Arctic one way or the other. (Nikolas Sellheim, Faculty of Law, University of Lapland, PO Box 122, 96101 Rovaniemi, Finland. (nikolas.sellheim@ulapland.fi)).

THE LAST OF THE ICE HUNTERS. AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND SEAL HUNT. Shannon Ryan. 2014. St. John's: Flanker Press Ltd. xvi + 460 p, softcover. ISBN 978-1-77117-316-2. CA\$ 21.95.

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It has not been long that this reviewer was to review John Gillett's memoirs as a sealer in the Newfoundland seal hunt (Gillett 2015). From the same publisher now comes an additional volume dealing with the controversial commercial seal hunt still carried out in Atlantic Canada. However, while Gillett's account stretches into the present, Shannon Ryan presents an oral history of the seal hunt up until 1950. This date has not been chosen incidentally, but it marks the end of the *Newfoundland* seal hunt to become the *Canadian* seal hunt, given that Newfoundland became part of Canada in 1949 (page 42).

The present volume is subdivided into two major parts, plus an introduction and a short conclusion by the author. It consists primarily of interviews that were carried out in the 1970s and 1980s with sealers, business workers associated with the sealing industry and others one way or the other engaged in the seal hunt. The outcome is a deeply moving insight into the conditions of the large-scale, indeed highly commercial seal hunt which can no longer be compared to the still ongoing, much smaller scale hunt.

But this volume is much more than a reproduction of interviews. It is a window into the past of Newfoundland as a whole as the interviewees present a plethora of different facets of the living conditions on an island which has been subject to the harsh north Atlantic climate. This is particularly the case in the first of the two major parts, entitled *Long interviews: setting the stage*. Here, as the title implies, interviews, or to be more precise, monologues, of the interviewees stretch over several pages and open up the sealing industry as a historical and crucially important industry for the economy and identity of the island and for the islanders. For example, the accounts of the sealers themselves who engaged in the hunt on the large steamers that found their introduction into the hunt in the early 20th century offers an insightful account of the human dimension of this activity, often labeled as 'barbaric.' From an ethnographic perspective these accounts are invaluable as they make the motivations behind the hunt, the interaction between the sealers and the dangers which they were exposed to more understandable.

The ethnographic importance of this work is emphasised by the second large part of this book, *Interview extracts with selected topics*. While indeed the first 120 pages set the stage, the second part of the book serves as a work of reference and the reader is able to understand the cultural dimension of the seal hunt for Newfoundland. Here, especially the keywords such as 'accident', 'danger', 'death', '*Newfoundland* disaster', the darkest year in Newfoundland sealing history when 273