

**BRAVO, Michael and Sverker SORLIN (eds), 2002, *Narrating the Arctic: A Cultural History of Nordic Scientific Practices*, Canton, Science History Publications, ix + 373 pages; figures, maps, and photos; chapter notes and index.**

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## Recensions / Book reviews

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BRAVO, Michael and Sverker SORLIN (eds)

2002 *Narrating the Arctic: A Cultural History of Nordic Scientific Practices*, Canton, Science History Publications, ix + 373 pages; figures, maps, and photos; chapter notes and index.

One fine day in March, I found myself browsing a bookstore in Iqaluit (Canada) with a good friend, who told me I had to read *Narrating the Arctic: A Cultural History of Nordic Scientific Practices*. I admit the attractive hardcover was new and promised to be a stimulating read. The anthology's alluring layout, title, and language hinted of a sort of northern engagement that I had been yearning for. Months after this lasting impression, I was not disappointed. Overall I found the eight authors offered more than an assortment of historical facts on the north. Interspersed with figures and maps, these Nordic scholars proposed an analytical and theoretical post-colonial discourse. The "Arctic Zone" becoming, as Gísli Pálsson (p. 275) noted, a "discursive space." History is spoken and written as narrative and cultural analysis is based on a re-evaluation of master narrative with inclusion of alternative versions of the people and place, time and space. Indigenous cultural perspectives are juxtaposed with "dominating" cultural practices and values of southern scientists. Hybrid views emerge, over time, as cultures blend and knowledge practices change and are shaped by Arctic realities. According to the editors Michael Bravo and Sverker Sorlin (p. 23), "narrative is located in the field in many forms: as an integral part of an indigenous hunting strategy, as a textual form of acknowledging and thereby silencing indigenous voices, and through the interactions of scientific and indigenous agencies."

As for science talked about in this book, it is both the physical and social sciences, and more precisely their different methodologies and schools of thought. A significant contribution from these essayists is tracing the evolution of paradigms and debates that emerged in the search to both understand and frame the Arctic into various ways of thinking and talking about the north. Sorlin (p. 96) writes "the physical and biological sciences were for industrial and agricultural wealth, whereas the anthropological and cultural sciences were for the dominance of people. Thus there were two hegemonies; of land and of people."

There are few history books written about a specific geography and people that have as much relevance for other parts of the north (and the people living there) than I have found with *Narrating the Arctic*. This anthology of nine essays is set in three parts. Part one, "Meta-Narratives of Northern Nations," introduces readers to the main players; scientists and nations. Names like Stefansson, Smilla, Rasmussen, and Koch are discussed in detail, sometimes as representatives of the major nations, who were often in competition to study the north into being (in particular for Greenland and Spitsbergen/Svalbard). Part two, "Claims and Controversies in the Field," focuses on

much of the cartographic and competing international interests jockeying for ownership of both knowledge and actual geography by Norway, Sweden, Holland, Russia, Finland, etc. Part three, "Technologies of Indigeneity," speaks to the major contests of research practices. We read about shifts from colonizing methods, to improvements through the use of indigenous practices. Eventually much of the fieldwork is displaced with technology and so we see an ebb and flow of being on the land with being somewhat removed (whether in museums or the cockpit of airplanes).

What sets this book apart from other older history books is that it speaks of more than the particularistic history of science in the Scandinavian north. It offers broader lessons to the cultural development of science, the ties between religion, knowledge and economics, and the inevitable clash between indigenous and newcomers. How these general historical ideas are played out in the Nordic Arctic is of equal value to understanding how these forces are being played out in Siberia or Alaska today. For example, in Denendeh (Northwest Territories, Canada) there is much talk of a pipeline corridor running from the gas fields of the Beaufort Sea through the Mackenzie Delta and south along the Dehcho (Mackenzie River) to Alberta. The advance of this project emerged out of various influences, including natural resource exploitation and advances in science and technology acclimatized to northern environments. Here and in other circumpolar locations science played a significant role, as do nationalist (territorial) aspirations (economic and otherwise). As Bravo and Sorlin (p. 14) note, "natural history became one of the several methods [...] to establish territorial control and economic usefulness in the Hinterland north."

I have had the honour to attend several meetings of the Arctic Council and these essays gave me greater appreciation for the tensions and alliances of today and their historical roots. There are obvious parallels to the history of Nordic Arctic scientific exploration for North American audiences. Bravo and Sorlin (p. 14) suggest the "Arctic is not a straightforward geographic category" and by this we can read several essays in this anthology that speak to drawn out cartographic debates, somewhat focused on questions of where, and who the legitimate producers of knowledge were (and who had the right to authorize knowledge). Similarly, whether speaking about the Faroe Islands or Iceland, the style of scientific practice in the field, in museums and at other national institutions, illustrates the challenges to generating knowledge that emerge. As there are different sites for the production and consumption of knowledge, different approaches to field practices came into conflict through clashes between adopting Indigenous or modern technologies. If there is a weakness in the analysis, it is that the authors tell us little about the sites of knowledge consumption, classrooms and universities, and the book focuses mainly on the means of gathering information. Where we do learn something about the sites for consumption we read about court challenges, ego clashes and competition between various canons. The anthology is most effective in highlighting several stages of significant scientific change in which to understand our current views of the north today.

For Bravo and Sorlin (p. 9), "it is necessary in our time to get beyond the national historiography and find the themes and lineages that are of a wider scholarly interest and that will help us understand the role of science in the encounter of expanding

industrial nations with new territories and indigenous populations." Those with an interest in colonial history will find this book useful for there are obvious underlying similarities to the events in the north that can be readily compared with Mead's, Said's and other scholars' exotic warm locals. Analytical comparisons of centre and periphery, indigenous peoples and Europeans, gender and the production of knowledge are just a sample of the themes that are developed in this compilation. A significant theme found in many of the chapters is the close connection between science and religion, a relationship generally divorced after the halcyon days of science, and science education at the turn of the century. For those with little knowledge of the history of Nordic regions, this book is accessible and interesting. For those with little knowledge of the history of science this book will be a welcome introduction. For those studying the environmental history of the north, the book is well worthy of others that are beginning to be produced on different regions in the north, such as Lyle Dick's (2001) *Muskox Land*.

Readers of *Études/Inuit/Studies* will think long and hard on forgetting and remembering, thought and practice, while reading *Narrating the Arctic*. For those of us living and working in different parts of the circumpolar world, a comparative history of Nordic science is most welcome. The north, whether it is Greenland or Norway, serves as sites for the interrogation of ideas about how the now has become. For example, discussing the origins of Saami reindeer husbandry, Sorlin (p. 78) notes the contentious theory about the influence of taxation. This collection of essays reflects a comparison that entertains not only histories about explorer/hero scientists, which is important, but to also interrogate the many forces that shape both a national and circumpolar understanding of these men and their practices. In this regard, the critical self-awareness of arctic science is a long overdue exercise.

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BUCHWALD, Vagn Fabritius

2001 *Ancient Iron and Slags in Greenland*, Meddelelser om Grønland: Man & Society, 26, 92 pages. Illustrated.

Metallurgist Vagn Fabritius Buchwald has published extensively on the subject of ancient iron production as it relates (or does not) to the Inuit and Norse settlement of Greenland. In so doing, he has enlarged our understanding of the sources of available iron, the scope of metal use and the impact of these cultural groups on each other. In a previous monograph, he and co-author Gert Mosdal (1985) presented a method for differentiating between meteoritic iron (from the Cape York meteor shower in northwest Greenland), telluric iron (from iron-rich basalt outcrops local to Disco Bay in west Greenland) and smelted, or wrought, iron (of European origin), based on relative nickel content and degree of structural homogeneity. "At that time," he states in his