

Northscapes: History, Technology, and the Making of Northern Environments. DOLLY JØRGENSEN and SVERKER SÖRLIN, eds. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013. Pp. 324, figures, maps, index. CDN\$34.95 paper. ISBN 978-07748-2572-6. CDN\$95.00 cloth. ISBN 978-0-7748-2571-9.

I begin my Geography of the Arctic undergraduate class with a deceptively simple question: where is the “Arctic”? Is it the Arctic Circle (66°33’N latitude)? Is it the 10°C July isotherm, which similarly, though much less straightforwardly, encircles the globe’s high northern regions? How about latitudinal treeline (which maps closely onto the isotherm, but with much fuzzier boundaries) or the limits of permafrost? Perhaps it would be better to simply settle on the Arctic Ocean basin and littoral states—though that raises the thorny issue of Denmark’s inclusion or exclusion, via Greenland. These state-centric boundaries also risk ignoring the important material and cultural presence of Arctic indigenous territories like Sápmi and Inuit Nunaat. And these contemporary geographical manifestations of an indigenous Arctic intersect in complex ways with longstanding “southern” imagined geographies of the Arctic, whether classical notions of Ultima Thule or more recent geographical assessments of “nordicity.”

Similar definitional conundrums are encountered, investigated and provided new insight in this excellent collection of essays. To the debates over “what is north,” the authors and editors of *Northscapes* contribute a novel critical focus on the “technology-environment” nexus in the north and its role in shaping place and environment in the region. Rejecting the notion of the north as empty frontier or Arctic sublime, the collection’s focus on technologies (from the transformative to the mundane) highlights the complex interactions of northern peoples, northern environments, and exogenous actors, from explorers and settlers to sheep and crops. “Technology” is here conceptualized in the broadest of terms to encompass a wide variety of material and conceptual mediations between humans and the non-human environment, from systems of knowledge and classification, to agricultural practices and home-building techniques, to more conventionally understood technologies such as railways and aircraft. In so doing, *Northscapes* develops a provocative understanding of the globe’s seemingly “remote” northern spaces as (to quote the epilogue by Finn Arne Jørgensen) a networked region (internally and externally connected), a hybrid landscape of nature, culture and technology, and a site of consumption (by insiders and outsiders) (p. 277-78).

Unlike many edited collections, *Northscapes* is at once diverse yet coherent in its approach to its subject. Emerging from the activities of a new Nordic Environmental History Network, the chapters include case studies from around the circumpolar Arctic, with the notable exception of Greenland (which is, nevertheless, touched on in the opening chapter on the natural history of the Arctic). Organized into four main themes (Exploring, Colonizing, Working and Imagining the North), the temporal range varies considerably, from the Viking-Norse period (AD 850-1250) to more or less contemporary expressions of place and history. This geographical and temporal diversity opens up interesting opportunities for comparative reflection on the Arctic experience, both within and between chapters. For instance, in her chapter on Soviet northern colonization, Julia Lajus explores how the nascent Soviet state looked to models and practices from Norway and Canada to guide its conquest of Arctic lands and resources. Similarly, the emphasis throughout the volume on environment, land and resources at the expanding peripheries of Euro-American societies invites comparisons between the chapters on the assimilation of these territories into regional and global networks of settlement, colonization, knowledge and trade.

Readers interested in the historical geography of the Arctic will find much of interest in these pages. Authors tackle topics including the circulation of knowledge about the north, Nordic cultural landscapes, agricultural landscape transformations, technology and urbanization

in the north, and imaginative geographies of “northernness.” What they will not find are many geographers. The bulk of the authors are themselves historians (joined by an anthropologist and archaeologist), and while the selected bibliography features many geographers, from Braun to Wynn, one wonders whether even greater conceptual coherence and depth might have been provided through a more explicit engagements with geographical concepts around peripherality, frontiers, and resources, such as those emerging from the “new” resource geographies. The generally excellent final essay, for instance, relies on William Cronon’s excellent, but now somewhat dated *Nature’s Metropolis* to frame a discussion of the north as resource hinterland, yet considerable work by resource, economic and, yes, historical geographers since that book’s publication have both expanded upon and refined this concept considerably (including in the Arctic context).

These comments aside, *Northscapes* represents an excellent contribution to the burgeoning environmental, historical and geographical literature on the Arctic. Through its theme of technologies (including both “tools” and systems of knowledge), it brings a novel focus to bear on the region’s human-environment dynamics and highlights the deep continuities in the long-term human effort to adapt to and transform the Arctic’s intemperate landscapes. The collection should remain an important contribution to the historical-geographical study of the changing Arctic for years to come.

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