

READINGS IN SAAMI HISTORY, CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

II. Edited by ROGER KVIST. Umeå: Center for Arctic Cultural Research, Umeå University, 1991. Miscellaneous Publication No. 12. 157 p., maps, diagrams, bib. Softbound. Swedish crowns 130.

The Center for Arctic Cultural Research at Umeå University, Sweden, is a recently established institute engaged in interdisciplinary research in the North focusing on cultural issues. Reports from this research activity occasionally appear in a series named Miscellaneous Publications. The content as well as scientific quality vary greatly, both from volume to volume and within the same volume, a fact that causes certain difficulties for a reviewer.

The reports are mainly published in Swedish, but in order to reach an international readership, some of them are also issued in English or even French whenever called for. The objective of the present volume is to communicate to an international research community about research currently carried out at the University of Umeå. In no way does it give fair treatment to Swedish accomplishments in general, although that is stated as one of its purposes. Apart from the area of archeology, I must convey that this report is far from representative.

Of particular interest is the fact that no less than half of the ten contributors are Sámi, which indicates an increasing Sámi commitment in research activity concerning significant Sámi problems of inquiry.

All the scholarly papers in the volume report from the most topical fields of investigation. In particular I am thinking of the four papers in archeology. Here, thorough discussions of new findings are connected to the raising of intricate and important issues. Certainly this is a way to create new insight, and the activity of the Department of Archeology at Umeå University is quite impressive.

By examining the prehistoric use of pitfalls in Åsele, Lars Göran Spång offers both new insight and an informative argument related to the distinction between moose hunting and reindeer hunting. He also demonstrates how difficult it is to draw accurate conclusions on ethnic grounds; for example, which people, ethnically speaking, carried out pitfall hunting? In other words, what can surely be defined as Sámi and what is not Sámi, or what perhaps may only be Sámi according to prehistoric land use patterns? Spång brings us a bit further in this line of thinking.

Kjell Åke Aronsson gives a neat presentation of the Forest Sámi and their reindeer herding patterns from A.D. 0 to 1800, based on archeological data in conjunction with older records/reports. Aronsson's paper is short but to the point and well researched. Among other things, it shows what archeology, through its specific methods, can add to many unanswered questions in the general field of Sámi cultural history.

Inga-Maria Mulk, herself a Sámi, focuses on change and looks into the adaptive transition of the mountain Sámi in Jokkmokk. In her reasoning, Mulk argues convincingly in support of Tomasson/Manker and against Kjellström's disputable guesswork on the question of dwelling sites described as *stalotomter*. These dwelling sites date to the period A.D. 500-1500, and the name derives from old Sámi informants who referred to them in memorial culture as "stalo-graves." In Sámi traditions Stalo was a giantlike legendary figure representing the antithesis to the Sámi. A common understanding is that he was physically big and strong but stupid, in contrast to the small but smart Sámi. The scholarly debate mainly relates to the ethnic designation of the *stalotomter*—Sámi or non-Sámi and to what extent they are connected to Sámi culture history. Kjellström is the most ardent critic in recent years concerning a Sámi designation too one-sided, whereas Tomasson/Manker represents an older generation of Sámi experts who argues in favor of these dwelling sites being closely linked to Sámi culture. It is in this perspective that Inga-Maria Mulk's contribution should be viewed. Mulk is able to base her argumentation on solid facts emanating from recent archeological excavations *in situ*—concrete findings are the foundation; mere speculations are left aside. And, of course, if we are to extend our knowledge about ancient Sámi life styles, etc., without question this is the way to go. Mulk's findings are promising and call for further research.

The fourth archeologist follows up from the region of Arjeplog and adds a special aspect of inquiry by focusing on spatial structuring in the Sámi cultural landscape. In what ways are we able to trace socio-structural patterning—e.g., the traditional *sii'da*-system—back to prehistoric time? The approach by Ingela Bergman points in the right direction, I think.

One more article deserves special attention. In a cohesive and penetrating discussion both in time and space, Robert Wheelersburg, the only non-Scandinavian scholar appearing in the volume, presents an economic-historical exploration that is quite elucidative. Significant problems are identified and profoundly discussed showing how industrial developments in Sámi habitats over time have influenced circumstances shaping the Sámi way of life. The national Swedish economy is juxtaposed with that of the more locally bound Sámi economy, intensifying a contact situation in which the Sámi minority obviously turns out as the weak, losing party. This is far from new; much analytical work has been done in this area for years. The special approach in terms of economic history, however, is fresh and adds a dimension to our general understanding.

The scanty treatment of the legal struggle for improved land rights definitely needs updating. Here the author shows total ignorance of the existence of a great bulk of current research. I must maintain that this group of Umeå papers gives the reader an unmistakable impression of provincialism.

Brief papers on Sámi land rights by Steinar Pedersen, on reindeer herding and stock farming by Krister Stoor, both fairly young Sámi scholars, and finally on Sámi folk medicine by Lillian Rathje are all informative reports but lack originality in theorizing and creating new insight. However, Pedersen makes an important observation regarding the linguistic criterion, i.e., proficiency in Norwegian as a precondition for buying land for private ownership among sedentary Sámi in northern Norway. The implication is that such policy inevitably led to increased assimilation.

The volume ends with two papers by two Sámi active in Sámi politics as well as academically trained. One deals with the language issue, the other with current ideology formulating. The papers sum up the state of affairs at present without much personal reflection. They are strictly informative and for those who are well informed they have little new to offer. I would have preferred to see more innovative thinking connected to the factual frame of reference listed. After all, Elina Helander is a distinguished linguist specializing in bi- and tri-linguistic problems among the Sámi.

In summing up, my assessment is that the volume is diversified and very uneven in scholarly quality. Some papers are well balanced between empirical evidence and sound theorizing. Others show no theoretical aspiration, or far too little, to make the volume on the whole an important scholarly contribution. There is little editing and it is difficult to consider the various articles as a powerful joint set of papers reflecting contemporary Sámi cultural research. Proofreading could be far better, and language editing needs to be improved.

The book is not for students. It addresses itself primarily to scholars having a specialist interest in the Sámi culture. For those engaged in comparative analysis regarding subarctic cultural history and prehistoric issues, it offers some useful case studies.

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ARCTIC CIRCLE SONGS. By ROBBIE NEWTON DRUMMOND. Waterloo: Penumbra Press, 1991. 74 p., photos. Softbound. Cdn\$9.95.

Robbie Newton Drummond is a doctor who lives and practices in Crowsnest Pass in southern Alberta. He is also a poet who has been making a considerable name for himself recently through his numerous publications in journals, anthologies and in his chapbook *Owl in*

a Cage. Between 1985 and 1987, he spent two years in the Western Arctic, and these poems form a record of that time as well as providing the writer with his first full-length book — a very big step towards his becoming recognized, as he surely will be, as one of Canada's fine poets.

Arctic Circle Songs derives from two main sources. First, after Drummond "was recruited by the Federal Department of Health . . . to fill the rotating space in the on-call roster at the Inuvik General Hospital," he came to know a huge array of people — "the newborn and the elderly, the drunk and disorderly, the sagacious and the courageous, the 'white trash' Southerners, the tough old pilots and trappers, and all the tribes of the North: the Inuvialuit, the Metis, the Slaveys and Loucheux of the Dene Nation, and of course the ever-present civil servants." These people filled his waiting room, his imagination, and, now, they fill his poetry.

Second, the book explores the writer's own private attempts to understand, to find a context in, to co-exist with, to look at the intruder-self in the face of that "awesome expanse of space that requires no human affirmation to exist." The resulting book is rich and human. The poet/physician/southerner has come away with much wisdom, humility and awe, and his finely crafted poems translate those same privileges to us. This is a book of great power and interest; the fifty poems — or, as the subtitle calls them, "Fifty 'Delta hushpuppies'"; the short but precise and revealing Afterword; the curious but apt photographs of a human figure suspended off-balance against the sky, no solid ground in sight — all combine to create surprise and pleasure, work to savour and go back to.

This is a wise book. It does not exaggerate for effect, pretend to the sort of knowledge a temporary immigrant is tempted to boast about but can never feel in the bone. It is full of humility and wonder. But it is wise, too, in its judgements of people (including the observing, sometimes bemused, sometimes exhilarated self), and the huge reactive, unsettling battle to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest a land and culture almost beyond belief.

Written somewhat like a verse diary, with the place (Inuvik, N.W.T., or Banks Island, N.W.T., etc.) underlining each poem to locate it, Drummond's book ranges widely as he shapes his responses to people and place in vital but restrained language.

A major point: This book should not put off non-readers of contemporary poetry. It is not for English professors and fellow poets (though this one loves it!); it requires no knowledge of arcane language or theory. It is accessible and warm, with an eye for some gloriously evocative details — Carmen Kudlak, drunk on warm ale, stripping in the "Zoo"; the "unmarried soldier boys" in the bar, trying to "pick up a few fast dances / from the Native girls. / In their West Edmonton Mall / designer jeans and leather, / they're innocent / as a case of clap"; Hawaiian Night on New Year's Eve, where "A whiff of easy love percolates / like the smell of fresh-spilt beer"; the season's last Winnebago leaving on the ferry; a truck-load of "lettuce and disposable / diapers for the Bay" coming back the other way; the sixteen-year-old giving birth, not letting herself make a sound, "her blue jeans / thrown off, leather / jacket, a rock 'n' roll / skull and bones"; a tragic shooting, "The logic in the gut / of a forty of rye" — detail after marvellous detail. This is a poet who can create a scene in a few lines and take us into it: "A shield of invincible boredom / makes her immune to Buddy's beery blather . . . The road band plays another song," or the chef from Hamilton creating, for the tourists, his "'Muskox Stroganoff,' / 'Caribou Shishkebab' and 'Char Parisien' / and the 'piece de degustation,' / 'Muktuk *al fresco*' sliced from / below the spoutskin of a Beluga."

Grotesque, funny, frightened, ordinary, astounding, Drummond's people are simultaneously archetypes and idiosyncratic individuals. What better place than a hospital doctor's office for observing, listening, watching, getting to know people at their most honest, their most vulnerable? Never condescending, never sentimental, the poet shows us humanity in all its variety, all its sadness and joy.

But there remains the cold lonely beauty, the terror of the Arctic, to confront alone. And the lyricism in these more personal poems is perhaps less unusual, more expected, but beautifully crafted and shaped:

..... Icefog
rises, whites out shoreline. Here
a man has no size. His breathcloud
vanishes. Adrift in the flat freeze
he veers . . .

This is a book for anybody interested in the Arctic, its people, its customs, its geography, the way it impinges, massively, on people. It gives us a different vision — through the eye of doctor and poet — while remaining accessible and deeply human. I recommend it strongly, if only because it opens up our awareness to the actual *people* more observantly and shrewdly than most northern poetry has done before. And I haven't even discussed the wonderful Tuktoyaktuk poems, or the two poems that frame the other forty-eight — "Nanook and Barbie: In Love" and "She-Wolf and Anchor Man; a Dinner for Two" — both of which are audacious, strong poems that help unify the emotions of the collection.

Arctic Circle Songs, beautifully produced (as usual with Penumbra), marks not only the major debut of an extremely good poet, but gives us perceptive and energetic insights into a part of the world still rarely observed by our artists in this kind of depth. Robbie Newton Drummond goes much deeper than the picture postcards. His book is a delight and I strongly recommend it.

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BOOKS RECEIVED

- ARCTIC HOMELAND: KINSHIP, COMMUNITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHWEST GREENLAND. By MARK NUTTALL. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992. ISBN 0-8020-7391-3 pb; 0-8020-2886-1 cloth. 194 p., maps, b&w illus., bib., index. Hardbound, Cdn\$50.00. Softbound, Cdn\$19.95.
- ARCTIC UUMARUQ 1990 — ARCTIC ALIVE: PROCEEDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, NORTH SLOPE BOROUGH CONFERENCE ON SCIENCE EDUCATION. Edited by DAVID W. NORTON. Barrow: Arctic Sivunmun Iisagvik College, 1992. (Available from Arctic Sivunmun Iisagvik College, North Slope Borough, Board of Higher Education, Barrow, Alaska 99723-7337.) ISBN 1-881246-00-0. ix + 49 p., index. Softbound. No price indicated.
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- REALMS OF GOLD, A CATALOGUE OF MAPS IN THE LIBRARY OF THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY. By MURPHY D. SMITH. Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1991. xxiii + 599 p., b&w illus., index. Hardbound. US\$50.00.
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