

**THE TENACITY OF ETHNICITY: A SIBERIAN SAGA IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE.** Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer. 1999. Princeton: Princeton University Press. xvi + 326 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-691-00673-3.

This is the first monograph-length ethnographic treatment of Siberian Khanty people by Marjorie Balzer since the author's well-read and well-respected doctoral thesis in 1979. Balzer was one of a small set of North American and European scholars to break the trail in the study of Siberia when fieldwork became possible in the early 1980s. Her many articles and edited collections have played an important role in introducing Siberian ethnography to a new generation of students. With the publication of this book, she has returned in a way to her beginning, revisiting the theme of her classic journal article 'Ethnicity without power,' published in *Slavic Review* in 1983.

*Tenacity of ethnicity* has many themes. It is most deeply an exploration of the way that Khanty identity has adapted itself to the various pressures of collectivisation, resettlement, massive industrialisation, and, most recently, the dislocations of market reforms. The work is painted in a pan-aboriginal frame featuring snapshot comparisons between Khanty people and North American aboriginal political movements (hence the sub-title). Supplementing the author's earlier contributions are well-written and well-researched historical chapters that chart the extension of Russian trade, military, and mission relations into Khanty territory. Going beyond her original work are several chapters, most significantly 1 and 8, that review three decades of anthropological theorising on identity and apply them in a creative way to Khanty movements.

The best part of this book is the wealth of new observations of meetings between the ethnographer and Khanty people in various sites from western Siberian villages to meeting halls. Balzer has been able to reflect succinctly on her first fieldwork in 1976, contributing to the new genre of retrospective ethnography pioneered by Caroline Humphrey with the reprinting and updating of *Karl Marx Collective* in 1999. The ethnographic material is richest in the discussion of neo-shamanic movements and the role of artists in politics. However the book also balances these accounts with observations of the effect of education policy and petrochemical development on families.

Theoretically, Balzer 'revitalises' the term revitalisation, launching a defence of political movements that capture an 'idealised past in order to reintegrate it with an uncertain future' (page 75). She encourages anthropologists to go beyond deconstructivist critiques of how tradition is 'invented' or processed by Siberian intellectuals to examine instead the way in which it creatively contributes to the massive social changes that rock post-Soviet Russia. This approach, probably best represented in the works of Anne Fienup-Riordan on Alaskan Eskimos, is applied here for the first time in a systematic way to Khanty people, who arguably were one

of the sets of pioneers of the aboriginal rights movement in Siberia. With Balzer's long connection with this movement, spanning 25 years, she is in the best position to evaluate its career.

In the concluding chapter Balzer ambitiously integrates her view of Siberian revitalisation with the theories of 12 theorists of identity. Her synthesis is represented with an intriguing tree (page 205) wherein key elements of each theory (for example, Benedict Anderson's idea of print capitalism) becomes reflected in the action of Khanty or Mansi peoples through 'sap' that 'flows in varying amounts with varying saliency.' Balzer's central message, as I take it, is a bid for an ecumenical approach to theorising, wherein any author has access to a germ of the truth. This, I am sure, is true. However, it might have been more helpful to have had Balzer's authoritative view of the 'forest,' giving her opinion of which works in a growing literature on Siberian people provide the best examples of one or another perspective.

In addition to the ethnographic and theoretical arguments, the book comes with several appendices giving the reader an English language copy of one of the first aboriginal rights petitions in Siberia, a list of films (although without addresses of where to obtain some of the rarer prints), and a standard table of Siberian nationalities from the 1989 census. The index gives a complete list of Russian language terms, theorists quoted, and places. The reader should be warned that there are some misleading faults in the citations and footnotes.

The book should be a welcome contribution to the libraries of specialists to the region as well as to yet another generation of students learning about Siberia. (David Anderson, Department of Sociology, University of Aberdeen, Dunbar Street, Aberdeen AB24 3QY.)

**THE BIG FREEZE.** C.J. Charley. 2000. London: Puffin Books. 154 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-141-30345-X. £3.99

**CONQUERING THE WORLD.** C.J. Charley. 2000. London: Puffin Books. 154 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-141-30346-8. £3.99

These two books, by writer, teacher, and traveller Catherine Charley, are great fun. They're aimed at the young reader — I'd say about 10 to 12 years old, and they're certainly the types of book I'd like to have read at that age — and they look at humans pitting themselves against hostile environments all over the world. The book of more interest to readers of *Polar Record* will be *The big freeze*. It gives a capsulated history of polar exploration, and looks in more detail at some of the well-known expeditions: Hudson, Franklin, Nansen, Peary, and Cook for the Arctic; Shackleton, Scott, Amundsen, Mawson for the Antarctic; plus lots of others in briefer snippets.

In fact the book is full of snippets. How to cope with a polar bear. How to survive extreme cold. How to go to the toilet in the cold! There's just the kind of trivia guaranteed to break the ice at parties. Did you know that

Bothie is the only dog to have peed at both the North Pole and South Pole? Or that toothpaste will freeze in the tube, so if you want to use it in the morning you have to sleep with it in your sleeping bag? There's a glossary to help the reader understand some of the more unusual terms, and there's also a historical timeline listing important dates. I wasn't always sure that the history was thorough. It didn't mention John Davis, the first man to step on to the Antarctic continent in 1821, for instance, but that's a minor detail. The book is fun to read, contains a wealth and diversity of information, and I'm pleased to see that it also has an index. There are several photos, including some gruesome ones, such as the mummified bodies of some of the members of the Franklin expedition, or Ranulph Fiennes' frostbite. It probably could have had more illustrations to break up the text, as the look of the pages is solid in parts and might put off the younger reader.

The other volume, *Conquering the world*, is in the same format, a mixture of history, adventure stories, and helpful hints to survive in extreme conditions. Because its topic is much wider, it does not cover individual expeditions in such detail, so the text comes in smaller bite-size chunks. But there is still a tremendous wealth of facts and stories. I rather liked the section that looked at all the different ways people have travelled round the world — or as far as they could get — whether by car, bicycle, balloon, or even a wheelchair or a horse-drawn caravan.

Both books have plenty to offer and are ideal for a long read or just dipping into. Good stuff for that long car ride — or whatever your next extreme expedition is. (Mike Ashley, 4 Thistlebank, Walderslade, Chatham, Kent ME5 8AD.)

### BRIEF REVIEWS

**LET HEROES SPEAK: ANTARCTIC EXPLORERS, 1772–1922.** Michael H. Rosove. 2000. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press. xi + 358 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 1-55750-967-0. US\$34.95.

Benjamin Disraeli noted that success was the rarest of outcomes. Michael Rosove has attempted an extremely difficult task — to retell the story of Antarctic exploration from Captain Cook's voyages to the death of Sir Ernest Shackleton. What Rosove wants is to let the heroes tell much of the tale. The approach is unique in the field of polar literature: a thoughtful and insightful narrative that is woven around lengthy and appropriate primary source quotations. Rosove's superb blending of narrative and apt quotation succeeds in creating a work that both the beginner and the serious polar buff will want to read and own. Here at last is an amateur historian who restores one's faith in the ability of non-professionals to weave a tale with clarity, balance, and accuracy. This book is in many ways a model of excellence in historical writing.

Each expedition or era is described in a chapter. The narrative is ideal for the beginner in the field because the story of each expedition is supremely self-contained. Rosove does not hesitate to assess — which is what he

should do — but he has no axe to grind. My impression is that he came to this subject to celebrate heroes, not destroy them.

The illustrations are well chosen, and few are from the standard pool of photographs from which the casual writer of polar literatures draws his/her illustrations. The maps, too, show a degree of determination to produce the best possible volume, for they illustrate with great clarity essential geography that the reader will want to comprehend.

For some time a variety of books could claim to be the one that someone should read to gain an appreciation of Antarctica's past. The great works of Apsley Cherry-Garrard and Sir Ernest Shackleton will still draw the serious reader. But if you are interested in a thorough and balanced survey of the entire period of Antarctic history from 1772 to 1922, you need look no further than this splendid and delightful volume.

**ANCIENT HARPOON HEADS OF NUNAVUT: AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE.** Robert W. Park and Douglas R. Stenton. 1998. Ottawa: Parks Canada. viii + 108 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-662-27996-4.

**ANCIENT STONE TOOLS OF NUNAVUT: AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE.** Douglas R. Stenton and Robert W. Park. 1998. Ottawa: Parks Canada. viii + 118 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-662-64374-7.

**THE INUKSUK BOOK.** Mary Wallace. 1999. Toronto: Greedy de Pencier Books. 64 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 1-895688-91-4.

On 1 April 1999 the eastern half of the Canadian Arctic (until then part of the Northwest Territories) came under a new government, that of the Nunavut Territory. Canada is periodically thrown into confusion by the stated intention of the government of the Province of Quebec to separate from the Canadian Federation. Much less widely noticed was this separation from the NWT. The NWT had earlier evolved from control by the federal government in Ottawa to the predominantly aboriginal NWT government, located in Yellowknife. The recently separated Nunavut Territory now has a new, Inuit-centred legislative assembly in Iqaluit. The new territory remains strongly within the Canadian Federation, however, and Nunavut receives much federal support, financially and, for want of a better word, spiritually. The latter, however, may leave something to be desired.

Three new publications on the archaeology of the region reflect these circumstances. All describe Inuit artefacts. The two 'guides' follow in the tradition of federal government publications, well-written and presented, authoritative in content, and well-illustrated. Park and Stenton's book on harpoon heads is largely a detailed catalogue of the types found, and that on tools (Stenton and Park) is similarly much concerned with physical description, although also containing interesting accounts of their use, repair, and rediscovery. This is fortunate, since these days one is not allowed to collect, or even move, such artefacts, and this surely reduces demand