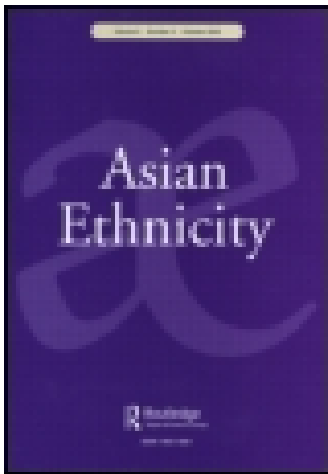


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Wege zum Norden: Wiener Forschungen zu Arktis und Subarktis [Ways to the North: Vienna Arctic and Subarctic Studies], by Stefan Donecker, Igor Eberhard, and Markus Hirnsperger

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BOOK REVIEW

Wege zum Norden: Wiener Forschungen zu Arktis und Subarktis [Ways to the North: Vienna Arctic and Subarctic Studies], by Stefan Donecker, Igor Eberhard, and Markus Hirnsperger, Beiträge zum zirkumpolaren Norden [Contributions to Circumpolar Studies] series, Vol. 2, Wien, LIT Verlag, 2013, X + 182 pp. with illustrations, EUR 19.90 (paperback), ISBN 978-3643504975

Anthropological (in the broader sense of the term) studies of Siberia – which were dreamed of by several generations of scholars ever after Jochelson, Shternberg, and Bogoras – have become a reality in the last two decades. The community of Soviet ethnographers, once closed and having held the exclusive right to explore and describe the ‘traditional culture’ and ‘ethnic origins’ of Siberian and Northern peoples, has finally lost its monopoly over the subject, and in no time have anthropological works started sparkling with new colors due to the influx of novel research paradigms, international collaboration, and the circulation of Siberian data in the context of wider anthropological debates and discourses.

An important contribution to the change of paradigms in anthropological studies of Siberia has been made by those scholars who represent the German-speaking zone of Europe and publish their works in the German language. The collection under review – *Wege zum Norden: Wiener Forschungen zu Arktis und Subarktis* – appears as the second volume in the series on *Contributions to Circumpolar Studies* which was initiated by Peter Schweitzer in 2005. If in the first volume – *Bruchlinien im Eis* – the articles and essays written by Austrian researchers made up about a third of the book, the second volume is composed of those in its entirety. True, some of the authors of the volume have either studied or worked at one time or another at universities of other countries, such as the USA, Canada, Germany, Denmark, and even Russia. It is also true that all (or nearly all) of them are members of the German Ethnological Society where they constitute a substantial part of the Circumpolar North and Siberia Group (*DGV Regionalgruppe Zirkumpolaregebiete und Sibirien*).¹ Yet, we would stress, the volume seems rather ‘Austrian’ in its outcome, and it gives the reader an excellent opportunity to get familiar with thematic interests and research approaches of Austrian scholars of Siberia and, consequently, get a sense of the current state of Siberian and Arctic research in Austria.

There are eight articles in the volume, which may be divided into two groups for the convenience purposes. The first group comprises those articles that address various present-day social issues experienced by peoples living in northern latitudes.

The two articles opening the volume draw substantially on the authors’ own field research. Alexander Köhler traces the correlation between the changing techniques of hunting (hunting carbines, fiberglass boats, and outboard motors) in the west coast of Greenland and the increase in the population of Greenland sharks and attempts to emphasize the importance of examining the role and consequences of technological changes for the system of traditional natural resource use.² Gertrude Eilmsteiner-Saxinger discusses a very

interesting social group in contemporary Russia, which is usually called *vakhtoviki* ('fly-in fly-out workers') and which has just recently drawn the attention of social anthropologists.³ The author examines an array of issues ranging from the reasons making people choose this particular occupation to their perceptions of its negative and positive aspects, discipline and everyday life, rights and duties, and emotions. She makes sound scholarly judgments referring to the field research that she has been conducting for some time in the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous District.

Yet another article may be seen as adjoining the first two in a sense.⁴ Its author, Stefan Pohlmann,⁵ enquires into the history of post-Soviet transformations of the 1990s and early 2000s and tries to reassess perhaps not so much the causes of the obvious lack of civil society structures in Russia as the social mechanisms that compensate in one or another manner for that lack. In Pohlmann's opinion, among such mechanisms are social networks with strong family ties and the system of mutual aid and reciprocal assistance. Doubtless, one can agree with this argument as well as with the author's concluding statement that the case of Russia shows us that civil society is but a long process (60), although both arguments seem perhaps too obvious to be taken as profound answers to the questions posed in the article.

The second group, comprising the rest of the volume's articles, may be said to deal with perceptions and notions of the self and others. Stefan Donecker's essay on the Lutheran theologian Christian Kortoholt's treatise of *Nord-Schwedische Hexerey* (1677)⁶ and Igor Eberhard's article on George R.R. Martin's novel *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996) (there also are the 2010 and 2012 translations to German)⁷ are both based on the literary analysis and make contributions to the issue of using literary texts in anthropology.⁸ The three remaining articles are historiographical in their thematic focus. Thus, Markus Hirnsperger looks at the famous explorers Anders Sjögren, Matthis Castrén, and August Ahlqvist and traces the history of the nineteenth-century Finnish nationalism and early stages of Finno-Ugric ethnology⁹; Elisabeth Öfner examines the little known pages of biography of Josef Troll (1844–1919), a Viennese traveler and collector who undertook a trip to Turkestan in 1888–1889¹⁰; while Stefan Bauer¹¹ discusses the history of extensive Siberian collection in Vienna's Museum of Ethnology and specifically the part that Julius Bryner (1849–1920) played in furnishing the Oroch part of the collection.¹²

The substantial attention devoted to historiography is hardly an accident. The intellectual interests of the series editor, Peter Schweitzer, must have been instrumental in this to some degree.¹³ More generally, however, the high level of attention to historiography seems to be characteristic of every national anthropological school at the time of its maturing. The Austrian school of Northern Studies is no exception here. We do not mean to say that Austrian colleagues are in the beginning of their academic journey to the North.¹⁴ This is not so. What we mean is that, in the history of each and every tradition of Northern Studies, there have been particular stages shaped and defined both by the international currents and the interest in one's own history. Being formed in a variety of combinations, all these national anthropological schools of thought deserve our close attention as anthropologists ourselves.

The volume is going to be of interest both for historians of anthropology and for those who follow the contemporary situation of peoples living in circumpolar latitudes. There is only one wish to make. As Peter Schweitzer points in the introduction, the scholarly 'competition' in Northern Studies in the German-speaking academic zone has increased lately, and considering that there are many roads to the North while traveling alone is dangerous, one cannot but welcome this 'competition' (ix). This observation is fully warranted, and this is exactly why one may wish to see the future volumes in the *Contributions to Circumpolar Studies* series feature an international composition of authors,

possibly extending beyond the limits of the German-speaking zone. That way, the road to the North is likely to be less dangerous and more productive.

Notes on contributors

Dmitri Funk is a professor and chair of the Department of Ethnology at the Moscow State University (since 2013) and a leading researcher at the Tomsk State University. For the last 20 years, he was leading the Siberian Studies department at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. In 2007, he was a recipient of the Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel-Forschungspreis (Alexander von Humboldt Foundation) award for his achievements in ethnology. His scientific interests include (but are not limited to) social and economic transformations, adaptations, and sustainable development in post-Soviet countries; (ethnic) identities and social structures of northern peoples; anthropology of religion, especially interethnic connections/influences in Shamanism, Islam, Buddhism, and neo-religious movements in Northern Asia; epic studies, field linguistics; electronic text corpora and endangered languages/archives; principles and methods of evaluation of ethno-social impact of administrative policies on local communities/cultures; as well as history of ideas in ethnology/folklore. Dmitri Funk has authored, edited and co-edited some 300 academic works.

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Elena Nam has her Candidate of Sciences degree in history from the Tomsk State University (1999). Currently, she is a leading researcher of the Laboratory for Social and Anthropological Research at Tomsk State University. She has authored some 20 papers and a monograph on mythology and ritual practice of Siberian shamanism and on shamanism-like structures in the Ancient Greek tradition.

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Notes

1. There is an article in the volume that discusses the history and activities of the Vienna Arctic-and-Subarctic workgroup (Donecker S., Eberhard I., Hirmsperger M. Die Arbeitsgemeinschaft Arktis und Subarktis. In 15 Jahren von einer studentischen Initiative zur wissenschaftlichen Organisation, S.167–180).
2. Ghost Breeding. Nicht intendierte Konsequenzen des Gebrauchs von Exofakten am Beispiel westgrönländischer Jagdpraxis, S.5–22.
3. Bodenschätze und Menschenschätze. Zur sozialen und materialen Dimension der fossilen Rohstoffe in Nordwest-Sibirien im Kontext des Fernpendelns, S.23–43.
4. Die russische Tradition informeller Netzwerke und der mühsame Weg der russischen Zivilgesellschaft, S.45–62.
5. The author does not emphasize or mention this specifically, but he did research in St. Petersburg on survival strategies among the families with lower-than-average incomes. In view of this research background, Stefan Pohlmann's theoretical arguments indeed gain some weight.
6. Gottes Kirche und des Teufels Kapelle. Das ambivalente Bild des Nordens in Christian Kortholts *Nord-Schwedischer Hexerey* (1677), S.63–86.
7. „Die Angst gehört dem Winter“. Konstruktionen des Nordens und des Winters in George R.R. Martins Fantasy-Epos *Das Lied von Eis und Feuer*, S.143–166.
8. Compare Watson, "Anthropology and Literature."
9. Finno-ugrische Ethnologie und Nationalismus im 19. Jahrhundert. Sjögren, Castren und Ahlqvist im Spannungsfeld nationaler Ideen, S.87–105.
10. Josef Troll – ein Wiener Reisender in Russisch-Turkestan 1888/89. Ein biografischer Beitrag, S.107–126. This is the only article that deviates from the geographical scope indicated in the title of the volume.

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11. Vom Sammeln zum Bewahren. Die Sibirien-Sammlung Bryner im Museum für Völkerkunde Wien, S.127–141.
12. In the description of the Bryner collection, which came from the Barraconta Harbour (Imperial Harbour, and later, Soviet Harbour), there is a mention of *Oretchonen* (S.136); although what was actually meant was the *Oroch*, as the article's author, Stefan Bauer, was correct in acknowledging.
13. See Schweitzer, *Siberia and Anthropology*.
14. There is the word Nordpolstraße put in the volume's subtitle, which is no accident. The small street called 'North Pole' in Vienna reminds one of the Austro-Hungarian North Pole Expedition of 1872–1874 that led to the discovery of Franz-Josef Land.

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