

equivalent of £5 million at today's values. He helped in the Oxford Church Mission in London and then joined a cruise ship to Australia, returning by way of the Far East and India. He became passionate about sea cruising and whenever, later in life, he could manage it, he returned to this pastime. He returned to England in time to negotiate his enrolment with Scott and his major adventure began.

Against this exceptional background for a polar explorer, Sara Wheeler has examined the effects on Cherry of his Antarctic adventure, in his resonance to an environment of extreme cold and bitter winds at the time, and subsequently. 'His reward for the worst journey in the world was an affirmation of the value of dignity and the abnegation of the self' she writes (page 119). He came to value greatly the friendship of his comrades, particularly the warmth of his relationship with Bowers and 'Atch' (Dr Edward Atkinson), and he admired the intense asceticism of Wilson. On returning from the 35-day search for the penguin embryo at Cape Crozier in appalling winter conditions he wrote in his diary: 'I'll swear there was still a grace about us when we staggered in. And we kept our tempers — even with God.' He was haunted all his life by feelings of guilt that he had not moved forward with the dogs another 12 miles from One Ton Depot, to reach the tent, perhaps even to have found the remaining members of the Polar Party still alive. Back in Lamer, he resumed his leisured way of life, but suffered from periodic bouts of depression, approaching mental breakdown, and these would last for several months. Sir Raymond Priestley, in a lecture on 'The polar expeditions as a psychological study,' commented: 'Polar madness was a characteristic symptom of exploration work, usually (but not always) after the expedition had returned to civilisation.' In his happier times, Cherry would walk down to visit his neighbours — George Bernard Shaw and his wife Charlotte at Ayot St Lawrence (they read the drafts of *The worst journey* and offered much advice) — or drive in his yellow Rolls-Royce to see Debenham in Cambridge, or to have lunch in London at the Berkeley Hotel.

Cherry married Angela Turner in September 1939. She was 30 years younger, but devoted herself to him and cared for him in his illnesses. Lamer was sold after the war, and Cherry and Angela moved into a block of fashionable flats, Dorset House in London. Cherry became an avid collector of antiquarian books. As guest speaker in 1952 at the Antiquarian Booksellers Association he spoke about books in general: 'I think they are ultimately important as a record of conflict, between wisdom and human folly, between good and sheer human infamy, between light and darkness; and because the best of them include truth and beauty... The best stories are not what people do, but why they do it.' The enigma of Cherry is enshrined in his only book, *The worst journey in the world*, and in this biography Sara Wheeler goes a long way to explain it — even to the extent of visiting Ross Island in the Antarctic. The book is a valuable addition to the literature of the Heroic Age. It is well illustrated, fully referenced in the notes at the end, and includes a select bibliography. Do read it! (Peter

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TUNDRA PASSAGES: GENDER AND HISTORY IN THE RUSSIAN FAR EAST. Petra Rethmann. 2001. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press. xxiv + 219 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-271-02508-X. US\$22.50.

While the Soviet Union's northern regions remained closed to foreign ethnographers, few English language books appeared on the indigenous peoples of the Russian north. Since access became available (c. 1989), a number of valuable book-length ethnographies have allowed the non-Russian reader an understanding of the lives and the challenges facing some of the different peoples of the Russian north (Grant (1995) on the Nivkhi; Balzer (1990) on the Khanty and Mansi; Golovnev and Osherenko (1999) on the Nentsy; Anderson (2000) on the Evenki; Kertulla (2000) on the Yup'ik and Chukchi). Petra Rethmann's *Tundra passages* adds to this opportunity, and also provides us with a distinct focus. She chooses to examine contemporary (post-Soviet) Koriak life through the lens of gender relations, centering her attention particularly on the creativity with which Koriak women are coping with the ruinous predicaments of post-Soviet life on the periphery. Both because of this focus, and because of the attention paid to local interpretations of transition, Rethmann provides us with an especially fecund study.

Rethmann decries the lack of attention to the north and its indigenous population in the literature on post-Soviet transition, and offers her own work as one investigation into 'local struggles for power and meaning' (page xiii). She asserts the need for more attention to such locality studies, which examine indigenous/local persons as active participants in imagining and trying to shape their future, if within the severe constraints imposed by geography, bureaucracy, racism, politics, and economics. She gives special primacy to the need for examining women's strategies, long ignored by Russian and western ethnographers alike. Her book suggests a map for others who might wish similarly to advance our understanding of the local and gendered face of 'transition.'

The first chapters of *Tundra passages* set the stage, describing the study area of the northern tundra and villages of the Kamchatka Peninsula (the southern portion of the Koryak Autonomous Okrug), and surveying key moments of Tsarist and Soviet colonial penetration. Rethman then offers a critique of the state's and regional authorities' imaginings of 'Koriak-ness' as bounded up in traditionalism, primitiveness, and child-likeness. One wonders if stronger examples of such 'imaginings' might not have been proffered — the poem by Kosygin (page 28), for instance, seems tame compared with comparable texts on other indigenous Siberians. If offering not particularly

stark examples of such Soviet imaginings, Rethmann demonstrates more effectively through numerous Koriak anecdotes the disjunctures between the Koriak and Soviet worlds, as the Soviets attempted to impose political, social, and economic structures (chapter 3). Marked and rich is her attentiveness to Koriak interpretations of such disjunctures, such the complexity of local evaluations of marriage arrangements that the Soviets condemned and with which she herself at first found it hard to sympathize.

Rethmann then offers samples from several Koriak women's histories. She notes that she initially assumed such stories would corroborate and add detail to the available official histories of the region (page 70), but instead discovered whole new dimensions of the local histories in these tellings. Offering extensive verbatim quotes from interviews, Rethmann furnishes us with the voice of several Koriak women regarding the critical changes they experienced during the past several decades.

In a short mid-book chapter (chapter 5), Rethmann contemplates her own engagement with her research 'subjects' — her entanglements with their lives and relations, and the ethical dilemmas these pose. I plan to assign this chapter to future students planning fieldwork, as a succinct yet adroit reflection on the complications posed by such relations.

In the second part of the book, Rethmann turns to a more sustained focus on the stories of several women's lives, to explore the agency of women in situations of poverty, racial and gender discrimination, and imported value systems that challenge those of local origin. She first follows the lives of two women who are trying to negotiate paths to self-respect within the constraints of village-living in a mixed ethnic environment (chapter 6); she then turns to the stories of two women who seek to cement relationships with men who live on the land, through the cultural medium of sewing fur-gifts. The juxtaposition of the stories evokes the many complexities of gendered opportunities and confinements that women face in town and on the land, and the employment of 'tradition' and 'modernity' in trying to effect some personal headway. Especially lovely is Rethmann's examination of women's use of preparing fur clothing in sustaining relationships between themselves and the animals that support them, and simultaneously in pursuing relationships with the men they admire. In a final exploration of the complications surrounding, and limitations on, personal agency, Rethmann relates one Koriak woman's quest for realizing a calling of healer. Throughout these accounts, Rethman underscores both the individuality of women's interpretations of their situations, and their creativity in addressing these situations. She avoids exaggeration of their ability to overcome the obstacles that the women face, but does underscore the persistence of their attempts to mitigate the disastrous circumstances of life on the periphery of 'transition.'

If the book is occasionally marred by spotty editing of repetitive phrases and awkward wording (English not being Rethmann's native language), its prose is more often graced with wonderfully evocative passages. Photos

augment the text, allowing glimpses of the landscapes in which women and men struggle to dignify their lives. But it is especially through Rethmann's careful selection of direct quotations from the women and men of Tylmat, Ossora, Rekinniki, and other villages that she offers an opulence of local experiences of articulating with 'reforms' directed from far-away centers.

Throughout her book, Rethmann uses the *leitmotif* of mobility — traveling across distances both physical and social, passages between (changing) Koriak and non-Koriak spaces, and the departures from Koriak spaces, to the arrivals at spaces of hybridity, spaces themselves continually re-negotiated by Koriak women and men, if from a subordinate position. Centered on the locality of experiencing 'transition,' *Tundra passages* makes a commendable contribution to understanding the variegated ways in which those living in periphery, and especially women, endure and attempt to shape the forces that challenge their ability to live a life with dignity. (Gail Fondahl, Geography Programme, University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9, Canada.)

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THE FRANKLIN CONSPIRACY: COVER-UP, BETRAYAL, AND THE ASTONISHING SECRET BEHIND THE LOST ARCTIC EXPEDITION. Jeffrey Blair Latta. 2001. Toronto: Dundurn Press. 320 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-88882-234-0. Can\$22. 99.

Unfortunately the title resembles the sort of sensationalist headlines one sees in tabloid newspapers, and it promises things that the author fails to deliver. After reading the book twice I still do not know what the 'Franklin conspiracy' was all about, or what the 'astonishing secret' was.

In this highly unconventional view of the Franklin expedition and searches there are many surprising interpretations (or implications), among which are the following: Franklin was not sent to find a Northwest Passage, but to find something terribly important on King William Island; he and his men spent not one, but two, winters on Beechey Island; after abandoning the ships they still had plenty of food; the cannibalism story was a fake; the notes found at Victory Point have been misinterpreted by scholars; all the official search expeditions were just a smoke-screen, sent intentionally to where they would not find Franklin; commanders were ordered to conceal any Franklin messages they found in cairns; John Rae secretly visited King