

BOOK REVIEW

Review of *The 1926/27 Soviet polar census expeditions*, by David G. Anderson (2011). Oxford: Berghahn Books. 332 pp. ISBN 978-1845457662.

After the Russian Civil War, in 1925, the new Soviet leaders cast their eyes on the thinly populated and remote northern areas of the Russian Empire to make them active parts of the Soviet project. In 1926–1927, the Soviet administration initiated expeditions to gather data on the whereabouts, economy and living conditions of rural people in the Arctic and sub-Arctic in the young Soviet Union. This turned into a massive ethnological programme that gathered demographic and economic data on almost every household as well as other unique materials such as photographs, maps, kinship charts, narrative transcripts and artefacts. The present book presents a number of analyses from 8 years' investigations of parts of the collected material by a large, well-qualified team of scientists.

The book is subdivided into 11 main chapters and an appendix. The editor, David Anderson, is a professor of anthropology at the University of Tromsø, Norway, with long experience in research connected to indigenous identity and indigenous peoples' rights in northern Russia and Siberia. The other contributors are anthropologists, archaeologists, ethnohistorians, historians and experts in regional politics and related disciplines from Norway, Great Britain, Russia and the USA.

The book seems to aim at a topical rather than a geographical coverage of the data. After the general introductory Chapter 1, the book is geographically concentrated in the European and western Siberian sectors of the Russian North. Chapters 2–8 cover seasonal mobility and sacred landscape geography among Northern hunter-gatherers (Peter Jordan), Nenets demography (Elena A. Volzhanina), the census in the Obdor region (Elena M. Glavatskaya), household structure in the Barents region (Gunnar Thorvaldsen), surveys on the Kanin Peninsula (Igor Semenov), the Arctic fox trade (Konstantin B. Klovov) and reindeer herding on the Kanin Peninsula (Stanislav Kiselev).

Only the last three chapters deal with central and eastern Siberia. Chapters 9–11 cover the demography of the Zhuia River Valley in eastern Siberia (David G. Anderson, Evgenii M. Ineshin and John P. Ziker), identity

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THE 1926/27 SOVIET POLAR CENSUS EXPEDITIONS

Edited by David G. Anderson

and fishing among the Essei Yakuts in Evenkia (Tatiana Argounova-Low) and subsistence and residence in the Putoran Uplands and Taimyr Lowlands (John P. Ziker).

The Russian Far East (Chukotka, Kamchatka, Amur region, Sakhalin) is not represented.

The volume is sparsely illustrated with some nice archival photographs; maps and diagrams are reduced to an absolute minimum in many chapters. The book contains a comprehensive bibliography listing ca. 350 articles and books as well as an overview of the original census archives. Russian bibliographic references and the archives are transliterated but not translated. As their reading demands knowledge of the original language anyway, providing them in Cyrillic would have benefited readers of Russian.

The book reveals a comprehensive insight into the geography and living conditions of the people of—primarily—the western sector of the Russian North

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during the 1920s. All in all, this book is an important contribution to our knowledge about the ethnography and ethnohistory of the indigenous peoples of this region as well as about the immense work undertaken

during the very early years of the Soviet Union in an effort to understand the demography and livelihoods of these peoples. The volume belongs on the shelves of all researchers working on these issues.