

BOOK REVIEW

Review of *Into the ice: the history of Norway and the polar regions*, by Einar-Arne Drivenes & Harald Dag Jølle (2006). Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag. 559 pp. ISBN 978-82-05-36185-0

How timely for a deep and engaging analysis of Norway's polar history to be available in English, as climate change, global warming and competition for scarce resources are pressing issues among academics, in global society and in the far north.

Two colleagues from the Department of History at the University of Tromsø, Norway—Einar-Arne Drivenes and Harald Dag Jølle—have pulled together a timely and comprehensive treatment of the Arctic, based upon their three-volume work (totalling over 1600 pages) published in Norwegian by the same publishing house a few years ago (Drivenes & Jølle 2004a, b, c). The presentation is masterful, including maps, charts, artwork and images to fully capture the historic connections, personalities and contested sovereignty of the Arctic in Norwegian history.

What is especially remarkable about this historic analysis is the attention to the international politics of the polar regions. Rejecting the notion of “globalization” as inherently new, the authors (to their credit) establish the enduring global connections of the Arctic past and continuity with the present. Leading explorers such as Fridtjof Nansen, Roald Amundsen and Otto Sverdrup figure prominently in the detailed accounts of Arctic discovery and contested-governance issues.

The strength of this analysis is the extent of its scope. Not only do the historians map how the Arctic played a critical role in the political history of Norway and its foreign relations, but they also attribute the growing interest in the Arctic to the salience of a global environmental movement. As the authors state, “only after the polar regions’ vulnerability and environmental significance were documented in the 1990s was there a noticeable interest in research funding. . . . and the cold, remote areas of the globe became more important arenas . . .” (p. 371). Scientific findings combining studies of air, sea and land masses bring new insights into our understanding of both global climate and environmental degradation. The Arctic is at the heart of the global interdisciplinary investigation currently underway.

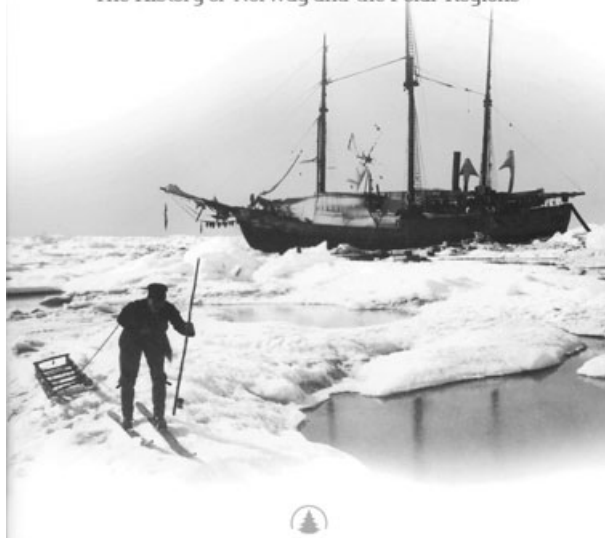
Correspondence

Christine Ingebritsen, Department of Scandinavian Studies, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195, USA. E-mail: ingie@u.washington.edu

EINAR-ARNE DRIVENES I HARALD DAG JØLLE (eds.)

Into the Ice

The History of Norway and the Polar Regions



A thoughtful and critical discussion of the history of modern Norwegian whaling (politics and culture) adds greatly to the literature in English on this topic. A statistic not widely known is offered on p. 388—“as a point of comparison, if we were to add up the nation’s entire income from whaling 1905–1970, it would be equivalent to the Norwegian Petroleum Fund at the start of the new millennium”. Whaling and sealing, as documented in this volume, have experienced tremendous global pressure and criticism. Although marginally important to the Norwegian economy, the government maintains support for peripheral activities less valued in an era of active, interventionist animal-rights and animal-welfare movements. In recent decades, the role of fish has surpassed other types of marine harvesting in size, volume and revenues. Yet, as the authors point out, the greatest challenges to northern fisheries are the expanding petroleum industry and the effects of global climate change.

The authors also effectively document the transition in the Arctic from a site of Norwegian nation-building and polar discovery, to one of extraction of vital natural resources informed by new technologies.

A final contribution of these authors is the highly detailed timeline documenting significant Norwegian expeditions and polar activity. This is a unique feature, dating from 1596 to 2006 (see pp. 481–507).

In closing, this book is required reading for scholars interested in the far north, academics teaching or conducting research on Scandinavia, students of climate change and Arctic studies, and those seeking a fresh look at a topic from two reliable and globally engaged historians. For my part, I have found much here to inform undergraduate and graduate teaching at the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington.

As we contemplate the decision of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize Committee to honor former Vice President Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate

Change, this scholarly contribution allows us to reflect back upon the history of the polar regions with a new, fresh, global account.

References

- Drivenes E.A. & Jølle H.D. 2004a. *Norsk polarhistorie. I. Ekspedisjonene. (Norwegian polar history. I. The expeditions.)* Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag.
- Drivenes E.A. & Jølle H.D. 2004b. *Norsk polarhistorie. II. Vitenskapene. (Norwegian polar history. II. The science.)* Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag.
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