

**Bellingshausen and the Russian antarctic expedition, 1819–21.** Rip Bulkeley. 2014. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 312 p, illustrated, hardcover. ISBN 978–0–230–36326–7. £60.00.

doi:[10.1017/S0032247416000036](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247416000036)

It has become commonplace for books on exploration to have titles that include a phrase such as ‘the forgotten explorer’ or ‘the forgotten expedition’. It adds the drama of an untold and neglected story. For a man who, it has been claimed, discovered a continent, Bellingshausen’s exploits have been largely overlooked, at least until recently. One problem was that Bellingshausen did not understand what he had found. He did not land and triumphantly claim a territory for his sovereign in the same way that his predecessor James Cook ‘landed in three different places, displayed our colours, and took possession of the country (South Georgia) under a discharge of small arms’ (Cook 1777: 213). There is now general agreement that Bellingshausen had seen an iceshelf and that such a glaciological structure can be considered as an integral part of the continent of Antarctica.

Rip Bulkeley has undertaken extremely detailed research into, and assessment of, this neglected expedition and the complexities of why it has been overlooked and what it achieved. As a Russian speaker, he has been able to translate diaries, letters and reports that are not available to non-Russian speakers and sometimes not even studied by Russian scholars. He has therefore had the opportunity to shed light where previously there was only darkness.

The book is much more than a simple narrative of an expedition. Indeed, it is so densely packed with facts and the necessary interpretations of early 19th century Russian and English terminology that it is not an easy read and it also has an unusual layout. I would have found a chronological summary of the expedition and a good map of its route extremely useful.

Part I includes the biography of Bellingshausen and some introductory sections that set the scene: the politics of the expedition, its scientific equipment and navigational techniques. The last include the Russians’ continued use of the Julian calendar after most of Europe had changed to the Gregorian calendar. Also, ships recorded days as starting at midday rather than at midnight. These are important points when discussing closely contested priority for discoveries. There follows a section on ice terminology – ice islands, ice hills, main ice, field ice and so on – in both Russian and English usage. These bear on what Bellingshausen and other navigators actually saw. Finally, there is a section devoted to the definition of a continent. Is it restricted to a single, large, continuous landmass or does it include islands fringing the landmass, such as the South Shetland Islands?

Part II, the ‘meat’ of the book, is Bulkeley’s translations, with commentaries and explanatory footnotes, of Bellingshausen’s official reports and letters, followed by the diary of the able seaman Yegor Kisilëv, the journal of the astronomer Ivan Simonov, letters by Lieutenant Mikhail Lazarev and other documents. Researchers of Antarctic history have cause to be extremely grateful to Bulkeley for making available in English primary material that has previously existed only in the original Russian. These texts shed a remarkable light on the details of

the expedition which, among other things, give a window into life on a 19<sup>th</sup> century sailing ship.

There are some notable observations and insights to be culled from the pages, according to the reader’s interests. From my interest in South Georgia, I learned that the sealers used penguin skins to fuel the rendering of elephant seal blubber into oil. Of more significant interest, Bellingshausen was ahead of his time for his suggestion that the South Sandwich Islands were a range of underwater mountains that linked with South Georgia, the (fictional) Aurora Islands, the Falkland Islands and mainland South America.

Part III assesses the achievements of the expedition in science and geographical discoveries, and, often overlooked, in seamanship. The science was disappointing as the expedition was understaffed and underfunded, and publication was inadequate. On the other hand, advance in geography was well-served. Bulkeley makes the telling point that Bellingshausen ‘surveyed more of the Antarctic zone in two seasons than Cook achieved in three, and who discovered the first lands beyond the Circle’ (page 207). The discoveries covered South Georgia, the South Sandwiches, South Shetlands, Peter I and Alexander I Islands, and the mainland of Antarctica. Seamanship was first-class. The ships had many narrow escapes in Antarctic waters, threading their way between ice floes and icebergs often in poor visibility and gale force winds.

For general readers of Antarctic history, the best known episodes of Bellingshausen’s expedition are the sighting of the continent and his meeting with the American sealer Nathaniel Palmer on February 4, 1820 among the South Shetland Islands. They may be familiar with Palmer striking the ship’s bell and hearing an answering toll coming through the fog, and when they met Palmer claiming to have seen the Antarctic mainland and Bellingshausen expostulating ‘What shall I say to my master . . . I name the land you have discovered in honor of yourself, noble boy, Palmer Land’ (Spears 1922: 75). Bulkeley scarcely mentions the meeting but, since the publication of this book, he has discussed it in great detail in *Polar Record* (Bulkeley 2015).

As to the possible sighting of the Antarctic mainland on 16 January 1820, before either Palmer or Edward Bransfield and William Smith, much depends on how the Russian texts are interpreted. In particular the meanings of terms used for different ice formations and whether any indicate a sighting of the mainland of Antarctica. Did Bellingshausen see ‘a continuous ice field containing icebergs’ (page 205) or ‘more solid and permanent ice barriers, sheets or tongues, which have been named as geographical features’ (page 206)? Bulkeley concludes that Bellingshausen did not see the Antarctic mainland until between 5 and 6 February 1820, 18 days after Bransfield and Smith, when ‘a main of ice was sighted . . . which stretched as far as we could see, rising to the south like land’ (page 83). This runs contrary to the conclusion of some other modern authors (e.g. Headland 2009: 126).

In the end, does it matter who spotted Antarctica first, especially if they did not know what they were seeing? Bellingshausen’s primacy was important for the political aims of Soviet Russia, and played a part in the national pride of America and Britain. Yet surely the achievements in geography and science, and the achievements of driving small wooden sailing vessels through stormy, ice-infested seas are more important to the wider Antarctic community.

The reader might think this is a definitive account of Bellingshausen's voyage to Antarctica but one of the last sections is *Future research*. Bulkeley draws attention with 'more than the conventional modesty that this book is far from being the last word on the subject' (page 208). There are documents that need to be studied or discovered, including Bellingshausen's own journal. Able Seaman Kisilëv's diary only came to light in a pile of old books in the 1930s. This is a clarion call to archivists and researchers but Bulkeley shows that the final word has not been written in a sapient comment: 'Nevertheless, it may be necessary to explain for some readers that what historians need most of all, rather like natural scientists, are mistakes. Other people's mistakes are often useful, but the most fruitful mistakes are those we make ourselves. By finding them and working through them we know we are pushing a little more light, here and there, into the for us unbearable darkness of the human past. The worst mistakes,

of course, are the ones we fail to notice until after publication' (page xvii). And, as the author also wrote, 'history is as full of tricks as a bagful of monkeys' (page 6). (Robert Burton, 63 Common Lane, Hemingford Abbots, Huntingdon PE28 9AW, U.K. ([rwburton@ntlworld.com](mailto:rwburton@ntlworld.com))).

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**Diplomacy on ice. Energy and the environment in the arctic and antarctic.** Rebecca Pincus and Saleem H. Ali (editors). 2015. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. xiv + 298 p, hardcover, illustrated. ISBN 978-0-300-20516-9. US\$ 85.00.

doi:[10.1017/S0032247416000048](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247416000048)

It does not happen very often that an edited volume has a dedication printed in it. This reviewer has in fact never seen that. But there are always 'firsts' and it is thus that this volume is 'dedicated to all those scholars who commit to work in extreme environments and have a planetary vision of diplomacy.' And 15 articles by 25 of these scholars, plus a short *Preface*, an *Introduction* and an *Epilogue* by the editors and a *Foreword* by renowned environmental lawyer James Gustave Speth, challenge the reader for a better understanding of the different notions, approaches and concepts of polar diplomacy beyond that of a 'race' for the Arctic, but rather towards means of co-operation. Setting the bar rather high, this volume aims to flesh out overlooked themes in the scholarly literature and to open up new pathways of discussion that highlight the cooperative structures as well as challenges in both polar regions.

Part 1, *The law - legal structures in the polar regions*, plunges right in and without a doubt meets the expectations of the knowledge-thirsty reader. Duyck, for instance, discusses the role of non-state actors in both polar regions and concludes that while structurally different, both polar governance systems allow for significant input of non-state actors such as indigenous peoples organisations in the Arctic or the Scientific Committee of Antarctic Research (SCAR) in the Antarctic. As Liggett shows, the way the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) has been functioning since the adoption of the Antarctic Treaty does not necessarily extend into the future and she concludes that it needs 'potentially drastic step to bring the regime in line with the contemporary global environment' (page 70). But it is especially Hossain's paper on the legal framework pertaining to invasive species in the Arctic which caught this reviewer's attention. While mentioned as an important threat to Arctic biodiversity already in the *Arctic climate impact assessment* (ACIA 2005) and further underlined in the *Arctic biodiversity assessment* (CAFF 2013), Hossain touches upon the legal issues pertaining to this threat, highlighting the difficulties in legal responses

to a persevering and potentially increasing problem. Unfortunately Hossain does not cover the legal elements pertaining to hybrid species resulting from these invasions, a significantly under-explored element of polar law (see also Trouwborst 2014).

Part 2 screens the *Critical actors: power dynamics and driving forces in polar regions*. Once again, five articles comprise this part. Bertelsen and Hansen open up this part with a comparative study on energy harnessing in Iceland and which contributes to the countries diversifying their economies. Iceland's success in doing so could indeed serve as a lesson for Greenland in its pursuit of building a resilient economy. However, at the same time, environmental problems associated with energy exploitation in Iceland 'require careful democratic deliberation' (page 127). Unfortunately, Zia and other's contribution *Arctic melting tests the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* does not provide new insight into the jurisdictional disputes in the Arctic, but rather summarises what has been published elsewhere. Also their discussion on alternatives to UNCLOS, such as a biosphere reserve based on the Antarctic experience, is rather brief and does not present a deeper elaboration on the (dis)advantages or degree of realistic implementation of such proposal. Arthur Mason, on the other hand, opens a wholly new chapter on the role of consulting agencies as active actors in the Arctic, shaping the region's development and economic significance. This reviewer has not come across any similar studies in the Arctic yet – which is, however, not to say that they don't exist – making Mason's contribution a unique piece for the understanding of Arctic socio-economic status quo. While somewhat missing the red thread in Mason's article, this reviewer regards it as an article providing significant ground work for further research. Whether by intent or not, in light of Mason's article the paper *Connecting China through 'creative diplomacy' - Greenland, Australia, and climate cooperation in polar regions* can be read through a different lens. After all, one of the authors, Damien Degeorges, works as a consultant on Arctic matters. Highlighting the special role of Greenland and Australia with their respective climate 'laboratories' and their rare earth elements, the authors show how diplomatic leverage in the polar regions can benefit from geographic and geological circumstances. As the last contribution to this part, Pincus touches upon the securitisation of the Arctic, especially from a US perspective. While not explicitly making reference