

Out of the cold: archaeology on the Arctic Rim of North America. Owen K. Mason and T. Max Friesen. 2017. Washington, DC: The SAA Press. vi + 294 p, illustrated, paperback. ISBN 9780932839558. USD 33.95.

This book is an attempt to present in one volume a comparative overview of archaeology in the North American Arctic regions. The book presents a discourse analysis on what we know about the peopling of the North American Arctic, what archaeological records we have, and what kind of hypotheses we can arrive at regarding the emergence and development of human settlement in this region.

Two authors worked on this topic, and they embraced two defined Arctic territories: one is the Western American Arctic, comprising Alaska and the Aleutian Islands in the Bering strait region; the other is the Eastern American Arctic, referring to Northern Canada, the mainland and numerous islands above the Arctic Circle, and Greenland. Each author dedicates one chapter to his research, bookended by a joint introduction and conclusion. The book therefore consists of four chapters in total. I should mention here that the variation in style, methodology, and analytical approach of the two authors is evident throughout the book, making it impossible for me to read it as one collaborative effort.

The main discussion of human settlement of the American Arctic as featured in this book revolves around climate change and the shift between terrestrial and maritime adaptations. According to the theoretical assumptions of numerous cited researchers, the first people came to the American continent from Siberia via Beringia as they followed mammoth and bison herds that were migrating in search of grasslands. Several cooling and warming periods occurred during the Holocene, and when there were no terrestrial mammals in their new habitat, these people needed to adapt and switch to a maritime diet. This is the big question addressed by this book: what was life in the Arctic like – what did people eat and how did they survive in the extreme environment? Archaeologists today try to answer this question based on material culture records.

The first main chapter is written by Owen K. Mason as an anthology of archaeological sites that have been explored or excavated since the 1930s in the Western American Arctic. The information is presented as a factual description of sites, including their geographical location and the circumstances of their possible emergence. This author refers in detail to the review of artefact collections discovered during these archaeological expeditions. Some qualitative and quantitative analysis of different artefacts, hunting and fishing tools, grave goods, bones, remains of dwelling sites, lithics, pottery, and shamanistic attributes are the focus of the systematic overview of different cultures that occupied this region from prehistory to the 19th century. The sites themselves range from the Ocean Bay and Northern Archaic archaeological cultures to modern Aleut, Alutiiq, Yupik and Inupiat cultures. I have noticed that lithic technologies, namely their stylistic variability and development, play the key role in how the archaeological cultures are defined and classified, as well as marking the transition of one culture into another.

The second main chapter, written by T. Max Friesen, is dedicated to the archaeology of the Eastern American Arctic, which is currently settled by modern Inuit. Compared to the prior chapter, this second one contains more synthesis following the analysis of archaeological data. In this way, logical ties between the facts and their possible interpretations are left plainly for the reader to follow the author's chain of arguments and, in general, resulting in an engaging read. This chapter also gives an overall analysis of the sources on the most intriguing dichotomy of Arctic peoples – on the one hand, the extinction of the Dorset culture, on the other hand, the migration and assimilation of the Thule Inuit culture.

Towards the end of the second chapter comes an empirical description of problems faced by modern archaeology in the Arctic regions. These include innovative use of ethnoarchaeology and ethnographic analogy from modern Inuit elders as additional sources of information to help interpret the Arctic archaeological record, as well as the limits and capabilities of this method.

I would recommend this book to a competent and experienced reader who has at least some background knowledge of North American archaeological sites in the Arctic region, or someone who is acquainted with Arctic cultures. This volume contains an abundance of information, referring to over 500 items in the bibliography. This information, however, is easy to misinterpret for someone with little or no prior knowledge. This is due to a lack of detailed introduction for advanced concepts such as the Arctic Small Tools tradition or Northern Archaic tradition.

I think it would be difficult for a non-specialised reader to comprehend and find distinctions between other such terms, which the authors assume the reader already knows about, such as Paleo-Inuit, Pre-Dorset, Dorset, Clovis or Thule culture. For better or for worse, the nature of this book is relatively dense and the unbroken discussion presupposes familiarity with these and other concepts.

The narrative style tries to uphold the chronology, although the authors pay more attention to some topics and less to others.

In such a way, the content of the book is not always evenly treated. Nevertheless, this is a very good overview of the comparative analysis of the various peoples and cultures who settled the Arctic Rim of North America from the earliest days. (Katrina Grigorjeva, Research Affiliate, Anthropology Research Team, Arctic Centre, University of Lapland, Finland (katrina.grigorjeva.antr@gmail.com))

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