

single definitive interpretation of the book and its contents, but there is a sense that progress has been made in understanding what cultural interpretation is all about.

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Jens Peder Hart Hansen, Jorgen Meldgaard and Jorgen Nordqvist, Editors, *The Greenland Mummies*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991 (192 pages).

Books devoted to the archaeology and/or physical anthropology of the circumpolar region are, as a rule, very rare. Rarer still are books on the peoples and past cultures of the far north designed to appeal to a broad public readership. Since 1987, however, two such books have gone to press: *Frozen in Time* by Beattie and Geiger (1987), first published in 1987;¹ and the 1991 English edition of *The Greenland Mummies* by Hansen, Meldgaard and Nordqvist (1991).

Frozen in Time tells the tale of the exhumation and medical examination of the incredibly well-preserved bodies of three sailors associated with the ill-fated Franklin expedition to discover the Northwest Passage. Prior to the publication of this work the general public had been riveted (perhaps as much by our morbid curiosity with the dead as by any intellectually motivated interest) by the well-publicized (in newspapers, magazines and television) unveiling of the three 150-year-old faces—faces that could in fact have been our own. This, of course, virtually guaranteed the success of the book.

The Greenland Mummies describes the discovery, excavation and scientific study of the 500-year-old mummified remains of eight Greenlandic Inuit buried in two adjacent graves near the abandoned west Greenland settlement of Qilakitsoq. Though perhaps less immediately compelling to the ethnocentric European psyche than the frozen faces of John Torrington, John Hartnell and William Braine, *The Greenland*

Mummies offers potentially far greater rewards to the careful reader. These include a rare and intimate insight into the reconstructed world of the 15th-century west Greenland Inuit and a generally well-crafted introduction to the diverse, complex and highly sophisticated techniques employed by the nearly fifty researchers from Denmark and Greenland involved in the study of the prehistoric human remains from Qilakitsoq.

The Greenland Mummies is divided into nine chapters, each co-authored by a different group of specialists (in one case no fewer than twenty-eight co-authors are identified, which seems excessive). Throughout the volume, the printed text is generously supplemented by carefully drawn maps and figures and, in several instances, by absolutely stunning colour photographs. A detailed catalogue of the cultural remains (mainly items of skin clothing) associated with each burial is appended.

The scholastic diversity of the researchers contributing to this work is one of the strengths of *The Greenland Mummies*. In this book the reader is exposed to and learns from specialists representing an eclectic cross-section of modern archaeological, ethnohistorical and physical anthropological sub-disciplines. This diversity, however, is also one of the weaknesses of the volume.

Because this volume is comprised of a series of chapters written by independent groups of co-authors there is little continuity to the book beyond that of their common point of reference—the mummies themselves. This lack of continuity is exacerbated by the rather perplexing ordering and organization of some of the chapters.

Chapter 1 is devoted largely to an historical review of the Norse occupation of Greenland (which makes for interesting reading but one is forced to wonder what direct relevance it has to the immediate topic of the book). This rather peripatetic chapter also contains an idiosyncratic and largely out-of-date summary of "Inuit" prehistory, as assessment (based more on ethnohistorical documents than on baseline biological data) of the natural resources of the Nuussuaq Peninsula (the larger study area surrounding Qilakitsoq) and a very brief discussion of other archaeological sites found in the immediate vicinity of the burial site. *The Greenland Mummies* would have benefited immeasurably from a stronger, clearer introductory chapter outlining the background data of direct relevance to the rest of the text and introducing the material dealt with in subsequent sections.

Chapter 2 of this book contains a more or less straightforward description of the discovery and retrieval of the eight mummies from Qilakitsoq. Included in this section is a very clear discussion of how the burials were dated using corrected and calibrated C-14 dates. Lay readers will, I think, find this review very useful. Chapter 2 ends on a slightly

jarring note, however, with a detailed discussion of various processes of mummification. Though relevant to the book as a whole, this discussion seems out of place in a chapter ostensibly devoted to a general description of the retrieval of the mummies.

Pre-Christian Greenland Inuit perceptions of death and burial are discussed in Chapter 3. As an independent essay, this chapter could stand alone as an interesting and well-written document. Unfortunately, that is how it reads—as an independent document. No attempt is made to integrate this ethnohistorical review with the grave sites from Qilakitsoq or with the mummies retrieved from them.

Chapter 4 describes the substantive results of the many laboratory tests conducted on the Greenland mummies once they had been removed to Copenhagen. This chapter, the longest and most ambitious in the book, reads like a scientific detective story. Basic questions about the eight deceased Inuit are asked: What sex were they? How old were they when they died? What did they die of? Were they related? The answers are sought using modern laboratory techniques. Occasionally unexpected results were obtained, such as evidence for the presence of a malignant tumour in the cranium of one of the adults, raising new questions needing answers. All in all, this is an extremely interesting, informative and well-written section of the book.

One of the many unexpected, though not entirely unanticipated, results of the laboratory analysis of the Qilakitsoq mummies was the detection of facial tattooing scars on five of the six adult females. The process of detecting these markings (using infra-red photography) and a brief discussion of circumpolar conventions for facial tattooing are detailed in Chapter 5.

In the latter section of Chapter 5, the co-authors suggest that the revealed tattoo marks are stylistically similar to patterns of facial scarification recorded amongst ethnographic Inuit populations from western and eastern Greenland and the central Canadian Arctic. The authors also state that similar tattoo designs occur on carved depictions of human faces found in Dorset culture (ca. 2500-1000 B.P.) archaeological sites. In conjunction with this latter observation it is worth noting that evidence (in the form of a small, realistic ivory carving of a human face) for facial tattoo markings comparable to those preserved on the Greenland mummies has been reported from an early pre-Dorset (ca. 3900-3400 B.P.) site on northeastern Devon Island in the Canadian high Arctic (Helmer 1986).

The six adult and two infant mummies recovered from Qilakitsoq were found fully dressed in beautifully tailored skin clothing manufactured from contrasting textures and colours of seal, bird and caribou hide. Additional

pieces of apparel—loose parkas, trousers and *kamiks* (boots)—were also discovered in association with the bodies. The adaptive significance of Inuit clothing is discussed in Chapter 6. A lengthy and well-illustrated description of the techniques used to manufacture the various items and clothing associated with the mummies from west Greenland is also included (a more detailed review of each item of clothing recovered from Qilakitsoq is provided in Appendix 1).

From their general discussion of skin clothing manufacture, the co-authors of Chapter 6 move to a detailed description of the methods used to stabilize and conserve the skin garments from Qilakitsoq. This rather technical review is followed by an essay on early 16th-century through late 19th-century depictions (largely in painting and carved figures) of west Greenland Inuit garb.

Each of the topics covered in Chapter 6—the review of skin clothing manufacturing techniques, the discussion of conservation strategies and the historical overview of changing clothing styles—is interesting in its own right. Presented as a palimpsest, however, this complex interweaving of topics detracts from the not-insubstantial contribution of the chapter.

Chapter 7 of *The Greenland Mummies* assesses the palaeo-environmental context of west Greenland during the late 15th century—the period when the eight individuals buried at Qilakitsoq were thought to have been alive. This begins with a clearly written and informative discussion of how palaeo-climates can be reconstructed through the O_{18}/O_{16} isotopic analysis of ice cores extracted from the Greenland ice cap. A detailed account of the mineral residues found amongst folds in the mummies' clothing follows. Here, the co-authors demonstrate (based on the discovery of several grains of a rare mineral not found in close proximity to the burial site) that at least some of the individuals buried at Qilakitsoq had travelled quite widely in the west Greenland district immediately prior to their demise.

Chapter 7 also includes a summary of the plant materials found in association with the mummies (i.e., grasses used to line the soles of *kamiks*, plants used to line the individual graves, and pollen and plant fragments discovered in the internal organs of one of the mummies). This chapter (and indeed the book) concludes with a discussion of the changes in levels of heavy metal pollutants that have occurred in west Greenland since the 15th century.

In many respects *The Greenland Mummies* is an interesting and worthy book. As noted in the introduction to this review, casual readers will be informed about the significant site of Qilakitsoq, the eight Inuit that were buried there and how these 15th-century west Greenlanders lived. They will also learn a great deal about the vast battery of sophisticated

analytical techniques that archaeologists, physical anthropologists, palynologists and climatologists can bring to bear on their investigation of the past.

Despite all of these positive attributes, however, there is one glaring omission in the text of *The Greenland Mummies* that, in my opinion, detracts from the volume as a whole. In North America, Australia and New Zealand (and other regions around the globe where Western colonial populations currently constitute a majority), Aboriginal peoples are beginning to voice their dismay at what they perceive to be a co-option of their past by largely non-Native archaeologists, physical anthropologists and other researchers. There is growing opposition amongst North American Native peoples to the excavation, display and/or curation of human remains. This has led to active demands by Native organizations for the reburial of skeletal remains housed in museums and laboratories and the cessation of all grave excavations. In 1986, the Society for American Archaeology (the major professional body of North American archaeologists) formally recognized these concerns, though the S.A.A., could not, and still does not, support the request to cease all recovery and scientific study of human remains (Kintigh 1990).

In Canada, the study of Indian and Inuit skeletal remains has also become a hotly contested political issue. Most Canadian museums and archaeology/anthropology departments have removed Native skeletal remains from public display. Archaeologists are becoming increasingly reluctant to remove human remains fortuitously discovered in the course of their excavations. The treatment of Aboriginal skeletal remains continues to be a pressing policy issue of the Canadian Archaeological Association.²

In *The Greenland Mummies* we are told of the discovery of the bodies of the eight Inuit, their recovery from the grave site, their shipment to Denmark for analysis and conservation and their return to Greenland, where they have been placed on public display in the Greenland National Museum. Nowhere in this volume are the ethics of dealing with the dead addressed. It is possible that Native Greenlanders do not have the same degree of politicized opposition to dealing with the remains of their ancestors as do other Aboriginal groups. Even so, given that *The Greenland Mummies* has been targeted towards a largely English-speaking North American audience, the editors of this volume could have (and perhaps should have) dealt with this issue head on. As it now stands, *The Greenland Mummies* runs the risk of contributing to the negative image that archaeologists and physical anthropologists already have amongst Native peoples.

The preceding remarks notwithstanding, I recommend this book to

anyone with an interest in Arctic prehistory and ethnography. The authors and publishers are to be credited for making the results of such a thorough and sophisticated study available to the English-speaking academic community and public at large.

James W. Helmer

Notes

1 *The Greenland Mummies* was first published in Danish and Greenlandic in 1985 (Hansen, Meldgaard and Nordqvist 1985a). A 1985 article in the *National Geographic* (Hansen, Meldgaard and Nordqvist 1985b) first brought the Qilakitsoq burials to the attention of the English-speaking public.

2 It is important to note here that members of the S.A.A. and C.A.A. staunchly maintain the legitimacy of examining prehistoric skeletal material and the importance of the scientific results that can be obtained from such studies. Archaeologists working in Canada and the U.S. are also sensitive to the concerns of Aboriginal peoples. Continued dialogue, interaction and co-operation at all levels between archaeologists, physical anthropologists and Native politicians are necessary to avoid confrontation and loss of access to this important part of the archaeological record.

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Larry Krotz, *Indian Country: Inside Another Canada*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1990 (254 pages).

Indian Country is the latest of two books on Native Indians in Canada written by Larry Krotz, a freelance writer, filmmaker and novelist. His other book, *Urban Indians: The Strangers in Canadian Cities*, was published in 1980. Presumably, *Indian Country* attempts to show problems and perspectives of Canada's other Indians, those living on reserves across the country.

Indian Country is essentially a journalist endeavour, written to inform