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Travels in the North

A Multidisciplinary Approach
to the Long History of Northern Travel Writing

Edited by

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and Per Pippin Aspaas

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Foreword

“Travels in the North” is the title of a symposium that was hosted by the *Centre franco-norvégien en sciences sociales et humaines*, in Paris, 5–6 October 2011. The *Centre* is owned by the Norwegian Universities of Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, and Tromsø, and constitutes a part of the *Fondation Maison des Sciences de l’Homme* in Paris. The symposium took place in conjunction with the annual meeting of the board of the *Centre*.

The interdisciplinary research group Narrating the High North of the University of Tromsø had been invited to organize the symposium. Initiated in 2010 by Professor of History Einar-Arne Drivenes, Professor of Nordic Literature Henning Howlid Wærp and Professor of History of Science Robert Marc Friedman, the Narrating the High North group currently includes some 25 scholars, predominantly from the disciplines of history and literary studies. A recent special issue of the online journal *Nordlit* gives an idea of the range of research undertaken by members of this group (Wærp, ed., 2012).¹ Further collective works include two anthologies focusing on Arctic travel narratives (Ryall, Schimanski and Wærp, eds., 2010; Schimanski, Theodorsen and Wærp, eds., 2011)² and a special issue of the journal *Acta Borealia* on the history of research into the Northern Light (Aspaas, Friedman and Widmalm, eds., 2012).³

The aim of the “Travels in the North” symposium was to bring together researchers from various disciplines and from different universities to discuss aspects of the long history of travels in the North. Priority was given to early career scholars, that is, scholars that are not yet professors. Only four of the speakers were actually members of Narrating the High North group. The rest were assembled from various institutions across Europe. They

- 1 Henning Howlid Wærp, ed. *Narrating the High North*, special issue of *Nordlit* 29 (2012). URL: <http://septentrio.uit.no/index.php/nordlit/issue/view/206>.
- 2 Anka Ryall, Johan Schimanski and Henning Howlid Wærp, eds. *Arctic Discourses*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010; Johan Schimanski, Cathrine Theodorsen and Henning Howlid Wærp, eds. *Reiser og ekspedisjoner i det litterære Arktis*, Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag, 2011.
- 3 Per Pippin Aspaas, Robert Marc Friedman and Sven Widmalm, eds., *The History of Research into the Aurora Borealis*, special issue of *Acta Borealia* Vol. 29,2 (2012).

were invited to present papers on any topic, using any analytical approach they preferred, provided their presentations related to both “Travels” and “North”. Per Pippin Aspaas and Marie-Theres Federhofer were responsible for the programme; the sessions were chaired by Einar-Arne Drivenes and Henning Howlid Wærp; Silje Gaupseth volunteered to serve as a main editor of the proceedings.

A selection of the papers have found their way into this book. Their authors analyse representations of natural and cultural phenomena in the North found in travel writing, documentary literature and scientific texts, ranging from the tenth to the twentieth centuries. Travel literature by its very nature contains elements of image-making, both of the *persona* of the traveller himself/herself and of the regions encountered. A common theme of the contributions is the imagery of the North, or the *imaginatio borealis*. Readers interested in the shifting images of the North, ranging from an uncivilised and dangerous space to an idyllic, fascinating, even politically paradigmatic region, will find plenty of food for thought in this volume. Furthermore, not only the imagery, but also the infrastructure for travel, economic activity and theories of natural phenomena in the North are topics that are treated at length in individual chapters of this book.

In editing this anthology, we have encouraged the contributors to write in ways that should enable scholars outside their respective fields of specialty to appreciate their findings. The articles have been written in English or German, depending on the preferred language of the author. We have not sought to make any synthesis of the papers, but hope the contributions will stand alone as what they really are—individual analyses of bits and pieces of the long history of travels in, and representations of, the northern parts of our planet. We acknowledge the generous financial support and memorable hosting of the symposium by the *Centre franco-norvégien en sciences sociales et humaines*; the support for printing costs offered by the Narrating the High North group and the Department for Culture and Literature of the University of Tromsø; and last, but not least, the rewarding cooperation with the authors.

Tromsø, 07 November 2013

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