The work here ranges from overviews of traditional hunting brigades to a nutritional analysis of local diets. The fourth section presents an interesting collection of new and in some sense radical analyses of traditional toponyms (A.A. Kochnev), a set of articles on mortuary ceremony (V.N. Nuvano, S.S. Gagarin), and a rather strange “debate” between two linguists, Australian Michael Dunn and St. Petersburg-based Aleksei Alekseevich Burykin, on the legacy of the Soviet school of linguistic research. The history of Bogoraz’ scientific legacy that frames the volume (most of which has been published previously) takes a revisionist stance. Underscoring the fact that the bulk of Bogoraz’ scientific work was published in English, it implies that those Russian scholars who followed him, although their contribution is rarely acknowledged, contributed most to the contemporary state of knowledge about Chukotka’s Native people published in Russian. The strongest article in this section is the previously published biography of Bogoraz’ student Aleksandr Forstein (1904–68), which includes what I understand to be a previously unpublished set of his photographs.

The English summary of the volume follows the structure of the Russian preface, but unlike the latter, places its emphasis on “the golden core” of the living memory of Chukotka’s elders. The English table of contents likewise has been edited to stress the connection between Chukotkans and Alaskan Native peoples by opting to use the spelling of Siberian Yupik names used in Alaska. Beyond its unique content, this book is an interesting milestone in itself in the history of Russian ethnography. It is one of only a few works published in Russian that attempt to place primary texts from authoritative elders at front stage (this genre is much better known in North America than in Eurasia). Further, it styles itself as a continuation of a window of reform in Russia by publishing critical accounts of collectivization and by contributing to the rehabilitation of previously repressed scholars. The editors correctly note that this style of academic publishing has carved a rather deep niche for itself in Western and Central Siberia but has been conspicuously silent in the Far East. The guiding metaphor—that of being a collection that follows Bogoraz’ path—implies that the authors here are continuing the work the Bogoraz started during his exile and contract research in the Imperial period and during his zenith in the heady days of the early Soviet period. By reintroducing Russian readers to a fragment of Bogoraz’ opus published overseas, the editors hope to bridge the gap that was introduced when scientific contact with North American and European “bourgeois” scholars was cut. To that end, the Russian-language contribution by the only foreign scholar is an interesting case. Dunn presents a well-documented criticism of one of the fundamental grammars of the Chukot language, identifying the structural formalism of Russian linguistic science as an obstacle to the true understanding and reproduction of a living language. The article is followed by an unreferenced and rather unscholarly rebuttal by Burykin questioning the linguistic competence of the author (and...
The celebrated Soviet scientist Mikhail Mikhailovich Ermolaev, whose life as an Arctic scientist spanned the period from just after the foundation of the Soviet Union in 1924 until his death during the year of its collapse, is the subject of this biography, conscientiously translated by William Barr. During Ermolaev’s long life, his work involved a range of related academic disciplines from geology to geophysics and geochemistry and was conducted both in the field in the far North, in a university setting, and in the GULag prison camp system following his re-arrest in 1940.

After a first chapter on Ermolaev’s early life prior to his 1925 voyage to Novaia Zemlia, the bulk of the book is concerned with his career in the field during the 1920s and 1930s and the period from 1938 to 1954, during which he was first imprisoned and then, after a brief period of freedom during 1940, became an inmate of the GULag camp system and exile. Events in Ermolaev’s life are described alongside elements of his scientific work, with further details on the latter in particular provided in Barr’s notes and in appendices.

From this reviewer’s perspective, the material on Ermolaev’s arrest in 1938, release and re-arrest in 1940, and subsequent work within the GULag system is particularly interesting, both in terms of the role of the system in the Soviet “conquest” of the Arctic and considering Ermolaev’s experiences as a case study of its functioning. Here family materials provide a context that reinforces the emotional suffering endured by many families during the era of the “Great Purges” in the USSR.

The authors of this biography, Ermolaev’s son Aleksei and V.D. Dibner, a colleague of Ermolaev’s late in his life, had access to privileged personal materials, including what appears to be a considerable amount of correspondence—much held by the family and some obtained from archives of the security services. Unfortunately, neither of the authors is a professional historian, and hence the attribution of material to sources in the endnotes is weak. On occasion, the authors have resorted to the Soviet-style device of presenting what is no doubt paraphrasing as direct speech. Although the authors do not eulogize their subject (as one might expect given the relationship of the authors to the subject and the very traditional Russian academic biographical style), this biography lacks a critical edge that might have made for livelier reading and indeed provided a more multidimensional portrayal of Ermolaev. The author’s conscious avoidance of critical comments by the subject about other figures certainly contributes to making some of the material a little “dry.” Some of the material on Ermolaev’s early and later life, which is likely to interest a far more limited audience than the core of the book, could perhaps have been omitted to abridge these hefty 591 pages.

William Barr has done an excellent job of translating this work, which is also well illustrated. It is not entirely clear, however, what the purpose of the book is, other than serving as a memorial to Ermolaev. This goal may appeal to family, friends and colleagues, but many readers of this English translation are more likely to be interested in Ermolaev’s perspective on Soviet Arctic exploration and development and his experiences of the tumultuous period of the “Great Purges” and late Stalinism. Though I accept that there was an honourable attempt to be sensitive to the desires of the family in production of the English translation, more ruthless editing and additional endnotes by the translator could have given those topics more prominence—perhaps leading to greater exposure for this prominent figure in Arctic science.

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Zellen, a former journalist and newspaper editor who worked for the Inuvialuit in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, during the 1990s, argues that the Arctic has reached a “tipping point” in terms of both climate change and consequent geopolitical (read: military, economic, and politically strategic) importance on the international stage. With the loss of sea ice, melting permafrost, warming ambient temperatures, and consequent changes in flora and fauna...