

The Spectral Arctic: A History of Ghosts and Dreams in Polar Exploration

Shane McCorristine

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In *The Spectral Arctic*, Shane McCorristine focuses on early explorations of the Arctic. Citing numerous reports of ghostly presences, uncharacteristically strong belief in omens, and seemingly prophetic dreams, he notes that paranormal phenomena have long been part of the record. The book persuasively argues that these experiences should not be dismissed as arising from purely physical causes like starvation and exhaustion, but should be reevaluated as important records of how the Arctic experience affected the psychology, beliefs, and attitudes of explorers.

To make these points, the book plows a deep research trail, not only citing heroic narratives written in retrospect, but also taking care to include excerpts from letters, private diaries, and official journals kept as journeys progressed. A wide number of expeditions are referenced, and the book draws especially heavily on the famous Franklin expedition, a team of 128 men and two boats that departed England in 1845 under the leadership of experienced explorer John Franklin. None were ever seen again. Interest in the Franklin expedition was renewed in 2014, when both ships, along with a number of well-preserved corpses, were discovered.

The book is written as a scholarly study, in a staunchly academic style that, at times, blurs the points being made. References are inserted in the text, eliminating the need to backtrack to the bibliography, while quoted material is organized in thematic chapters: on the cultural influences in England that spurred men to undertake such hazardous missions, on the ways in which natives of the Arctic and non-native explorers influenced each other's narratives, and on the appearance of women in Arctic lore. The book is well served by a color map, numerous black-and-white illustrations and photographs, and an especially full and well-arranged bibliography.

A deeply interesting work on the psychology of adventurers, *The Spectral Arctic* is a sound addition to the canon of Arctic exploration literature.

SUSAN WAGGONER (University Press 2018)

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