

Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson. 2025. *Iceland and Greenland: A Millennium of Perceptions*. Translated by Julian Meldon D'Arcy. Reykjavík: Sögufélagið. 303 pages. ISBN: 978-9935-466-48-8.

In *Iceland and Greenland: A Millennium of Perceptions*, Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson provides a comprehensive overview of outsider images of Iceland and Greenland, how these were created, and how they subsequently developed. Despite the two countries and peoples being quite dissimilar to one another, the images that have arisen are similar in nature. Both islands are presented as being endowed with a certain strangeness or otherness, rooted in so-called Borealism, an exoticization of the Far North as seen from the Western European centre. This strangeness can take many shapes according to Sumarliði. Portrayals of Icelanders and Greenlanders can be contradictory, leading to them being at the same time primitive, immoral, ugly, wild, developed, wise, enticing, and cultivated. Sumarliði aims to establish the common thread that ties all these disparate images together, namely an exoticization of the (Arctic) North, by surveying the development of the discourses surrounding Iceland and Greenland from the Middle Ages up to the twenty-first century.

Sumarliði is one of the leading scholars when it comes to the discursive construction of Iceland, building his analyses on theories of postcolonialism, discourse analysis, and imagology. The discursive deconstruction that Sumarliði undertakes clearly takes its inspiration from Edward Said's pivotal work *Orientalism* (1978), which opened new avenues in the field of postcolonialism in regard to the social construction of a region and the interplay between knowledge and power. Sumarliði's work has been crucial to the application of this framework to the North, and Iceland in particular. He draws upon the contributions of numerous scholars concerning the imaginings and "essence" of the North, such as Gísli Pálsson, Kristinn Schram, and Juha Ridanpää. Sumarliði, however, has been keen to integrate the theoretical framework of imagology, a field rather uncommon outside of Western Europe, where the focus is on cross-national perceptions of people groups as expressed in literature. All in all, the book can be seen as a synthesis of Sumarliði's work on the two countries to date, combining insights from his previous publications into one comprehensive overview.

The book explores four main time periods during which key developments take place in the discourses and images surrounding Iceland and Greenland: the Middle Ages to 1500, 1500 to 1750, 1750 to 1900, and finally 1900 to the present day. Sumarliði begins with an extensive introduction to his methodological

framework and the discursive tendencies regarding the North in general, which form the basis for his subsequent analysis of Iceland and Greenland. The remainder of the book is dedicated to discussing primary sources by foreign writers about Iceland and Greenland, irrespective of whether they actually visited these islands, and placing them in a discursive, historical, and cultural context. His analysis covers accounts of Iceland and Greenland and their inhabitants in scholarly and literary works, with latter sections of the book having a distinct focus on travelogues. Iceland and Greenland are shown to be imagined in similar ways, although he identifies a gradual divergence from the nineteenth century onwards whereby Iceland slowly becomes integrated into a European cultural understanding whilst Greenland is pushed farther out into the realm of the exotic and the colonial.

*Iceland and Greenland* is an adaption of the Icelandic-language original *Í fjarska norðursins: Ísland og Grænland—viðhorfasaga í þúsund ár*, originally published in 2020. It has been well-adapted for an Anglophone audience by translator Julian Meldon D'Arcy. While it is assumed that readers are at least somewhat acquainted with the two countries discussed, the work takes care to guide the reader through the necessary historical and cultural background in order to make sense of the images under discussion. Very culturally specific discussions from the original are omitted or replaced by more general ones. The cited sources also differ between the two different books, with the English adaption including more English-language primary sources than the original. This, however, is more of a strength than a weakness, demonstrating an awareness that its Anglophone audience has a different cultural understanding than its Icelandic one, and as such the book either leaves out or adds information where necessary.

The book is clearly written for the layman, using quite accessible language and extensively explaining the theoretical frameworks and scholarly terms to allow any reader to understand the image deconstruction taking place. This does sometimes mean that analysis of primary sources can feel shallow and underdeveloped, as some of the specifics have been left out for the sake of brevity and clarity. This, however, is not necessarily a great fault given that the book discusses a rather small niche within the field of Scandinavian Studies (and likewise within the fields of postcolonial studies and imagology). The book's accessibility makes it an ideal work for anyone setting out to explore perceptions of Iceland and Greenland for scholarly purposes, filling in the gaps for anyone approaching the book from a broader background. It is first and foremost a comprehensive overview of Sumarliði's own scholarship. Its core strengths lie precisely therein, showcasing the presumed origins of dominant discourses and their subsequent transformations. The many layers of discourse on places as heavily fantasized about as Greenland and Iceland are thus

uncovered, permitting readers to see each addition to these narratives and when they entered the picture.

Sumarliði's research has been uniquely important to understanding perceptions of Iceland and Greenland, and the book is a great introduction to his work on the topic, both for scholars interested in this specific convergence of themes and non-scholars interested in how Iceland and Greenland are presented in the media. While it does lack depth at points, it compensates for this by being a vital and comprehensive overview of how images of Iceland and Greenland were constructed, reiterated, and developed over the past millennium—shedding light on a small but fascinating area of study.

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