



## Book Review

**Oliver Grimm (ed.):** *Bear and Human: Facets of a Multi-Layered Relationship from Past to Recent Times, with Emphasis on Northern Europe*, vols 1–3. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2023, 1198 pp.

The relationship between bears and humans has been rich and diverse wherever they have lived side by side, as A. Irving Hallowell (1926) demonstrated a century ago in his pioneering study of the spiritual and cultural dimensions of human-bear relations in different societies in the northern hemisphere. This relationship extends far back into human history, and it can be widely observed in archaeological findings and ethnographic texts, oral history, art, and artefacts. It is therefore unsurprising that several studies and analyses of the bear's significance in different cultures have appeared in the century since Hallowell's study. One of the most recent and notable is the three-volume *Bear and Human*, edited by Oliver Grimm.

Scholarly anthologies frequently have their roots in conferences and workshops. This is also so here as a result of discussions held in Germany in connection with the establishment of the Centre for Baltic and Scandinavian Archaeology (ZBSA, Zentrum für Baltische und Skandinavische Archäologie) in 2008–2010. *Bear and Human* continues the series of publications based on the ZBSA workshops.

This multidisciplinary work explores the complex relationship between bears and humans from prehistory to the present day across Europe, from England to Russia as the publisher puts it. It brings together 64 articles in the fields of biology, archaeology and archaeozoology, art history, the study of religions, and philology. Topics include the role of the bear in religious and cultural practices, the representation of the bear in art, bear-related taboos, and the presence of bear remains in tombs and churches. Due to the large number of authors and diverse themes, the book is multifaceted and even fragmented. By combining research from different disciplines, however, the collection also provides a comprehensive overview of the diverse and varied relationships between humans and bears throughout history in northern Europe.

The three books consist of twelve thematic chapters that are not entirely consistent. Except for the first chapter, which is an introduction by the editor, there are two chapters (three on bear hunting and four on animal agency) with only one article each, while the most extensive chapters contain nine, and one even sixteen. Chapter 2 focuses on bears in biology, with eight articles offering a multidimensional picture of the bear in Europe. The bear is a biologically fascinating and highly adaptable species, but it is also a symbol with historical and cultural

significance. Bear management and conservation cannot rely only on natural science but require an understanding of the cultural value attributed to the bear.

The books' emphasis is on archaeological research, which is understandable given their background. Two chapters (5 and 6) are devoted to bears in archaeozoological studies in northern Europe. These cover a third of the books, but they of course overlap with other disciplines such as history and the study of religion. Chapter 5 focuses on five geographical areas, Britain, Sweden, eastern Fennoscandia, Germany, and eastern Europe. Hannah O'Regan points out that the significance of bears in Britain varied greatly and at different times: they were commodities, symbols, and entertainers for people. Ola Magnell notes that in Sweden bears were associated with both hunting and the fur trade, and bear claws and teeth were used in ritual contexts. In Finland bears were regarded as almost humanlike ancestors, as Kristiina Mannermaa, Tuija Kirkkinen, and Suvi Viranta-Kovanen point out. Ulrich Schmölcke writes that bears were once common in northern Germany but gradually became extinct, with the last individuals disappearing in the eighteenth century. In the early stages bears were little hunted, but during the Iron Age their claws were used in burials. Ekaterina Kashina and Anastasia Khramtsova write that in the forest zone of eastern Europe the bear was both game and a special spiritual creature.

Chapter 6 continues the archaeozoological theme in northern Europe but includes sixteen more focused analyses covering a wide geographical and temporal range. The articles show that the bear acted as a versatile border crosser, moving between nature and culture, the sacred and the everyday, the pre-Christian and the Christian, and the local and the global. However, differences in research traditions reveal how much current interpretations depend on the available material (archaeological, literary, ethnographic) and the perspective chosen by the researcher.

Bear remains from the Stone Age are discussed in articles by Tobias Lindström and by Lutz Klassen and Kristian Murphy Gregersen. Lindström examines bear remains and descriptions at sites of the Pitted Ware culture in Sweden. Klassen and Gregersen show that bears were revered as sacred animals in the Danish Mesolithic context, whereas their status in the Neolithic environment became that of more utilitarian and symbolic animals. Hannah Strehlau examines burials during the late Iron Age in Uppland in Sweden.

Five articles focus on the Viking Age. John Ljungkvist and Karl-Johan Lindholm examine the role of the bear in the cultural and religious transition of the Viking Age; Ola Magnell investigates the remains at Frösö church, which link the bear to religious rituals and the arrival of Christianity; and Jane Jordahl, John Ljungkvist, and Sabine Sten provide

an overview of bear claw finds in Gotland, which are interpreted as symbols of status, power, and possibly of a connection with ancestors. Meanwhile, Rudolf Gustavsson and John Ljungkvist compare bear remains in two different contexts: Iron Age graves and in a castle after 1500 CE. Anja Mansrud offers a multispecies perspective on the use of bear claws in burial traditions in southern Norway.

Four articles discuss the Sámi context and burials in particular. Oliver Grimm examines bearskin burials in Norway and Sweden; Elisabeth Iregren discusses Sámi bear burial rituals in the Swedish part of Sápmi; Ingrid Sommerseth presents similar observations from Norway; and Marte Spangen, Anna-Kaisa Salmi, Tiina Äikäs, and Markus Fjellström examine bear remains at offering sites.

Three papers focus on the Russian region. Andrei Zinoviev examines the trade in bearskins in the late first and early second millennia, based on Russian sources; Elena Tianina examines what archaeological finds reveal about the bear cult in medieval Novgorod; and Alexander Syrovatko, Natalia Svirskina, and Liudmila Plekhanova present the use of bear remains in a cremation burial in the Moscow region in the twelfth century.

From a museological perspective the article by Kristin Armstrong Oman and Elna Siv Kristoffersen is particularly interesting. It discusses the world's oldest intact polar bear skeleton, found in southwestern

Norway, and its presentation in a museum exhibition.

Chapter 7 focuses on bears in the history of religion, and its articles provide a multifaceted picture of bears' status. Olof Sundqvist examines the role of bears in the warrior-band of *berserker*, while Håkan Rydving compares the bear rituals of the Khanty and Sámi peoples based on local sources, emphasizing their differences and diversity. Vesa Matteo Piludu offers three articles, one of which deals with Finno-Karelian bear hunting rituals in the forest, another with bear feasts in the village with the bear a guest of honour, and the third with bear skull rituals, in which the skull and bones were returned to the forest and their heavenly origin to ensure regeneration. Marja-Liisa Keinänen examines the relationship between swidden cultivators and forest peasants and the bear in Savonia in Finland and in central Scandinavia, and Tuija Kirkinen describes the use of bear meat in Finland in ritual and contemporary culinary contexts. Two authors examine how Christian churches adopted symbolic and practical elements from bears. Teppo Korhonen explains how bearskins were used as gifts to churches from the mid-Middle Ages until the 1890s, and Jahn Børø Jahnsen shows that bearskins, paws, and claws were used in medieval churches as both practical and magical objects.

Other key themes in the books, organized by chapter, include the bear in literary studies and the history of ideas, philology, image

science, and classical antiquity. The last chapter contains a scattered collection of articles which, according to the title, examine bears from a broader perspective.

These comprehensive books contain one article on bear–human relations in North America. In his article in Chapter 12 Kerry Hull discusses the multifaceted relationship between bears and Indigenous peoples in North America. The text is based on archaeological and ethnographic research that sheds light on the role of bears as spiritual, cultural, and economic factors in various Indigenous communities. He provides an overview of how Indigenous peoples have viewed bears in a multifaceted way for thousands of years, both as animals to be hunted and as spiritual and cultural beings. Of the books' 1,198 pages, only 22 are devoted to North America, which raises the question of why the subject is not dealt with more extensively and comprehensively. The relationship between bears and humans in the cultures of North American Indigenous peoples certainly deserves much more attention, especially as the bear–human relationship has been so significant and multiform in these cultures and has also been extensively studied.

Multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity do not automatically imply global coverage; rather, the articles are limited to the academic and institutional network within which the books were created. Given the books' background, it is understandable that the editorial focus is

on Europe, but its starting point, the different dimensions of a multilayered bear–human relationship from the past to the present, suggests that the subject should be dealt with more broadly. It would have been justified to have included a comprehensive and diverse selection of articles examining the significance of bears in the cultures of North American Indigenous peoples. The Ainu bear-sending ceremony, *iomante*, in northern Japan would also have deserved attention. Of course, this would have meant expanding the books, perhaps even to four volumes, but it would have been worthwhile. The books would thus have been a valuable update to the study of the relationship between bears and humans in the northern hemisphere that Hallowell initiated a century ago.

#### *Bibliography*

Hallowell, A. Irving. 1926. "Bear Ceremonialism in the Northern Hemisphere." *American Anthropologist* 28: 1–175.

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