ISSN 2754-5547

https://doi.org/10.52230/LPMJ3817

‘Annaliese Jacobs Claydon, Arctic Circles and Imperial Knowledge: The Franklin Family, Indigenous Intermediaries, and the Politics of Truth’

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To cite this book review: Sarah Pickman, ‘Annaliese Jacobs Claydon, Arctic Circles and Imperial Knowledge: The Franklin Family, Indigenous Intermediaries, and the Politics of Truth’, *Journal of Australian, Canadian, and Aotearoa New Zealand Studies* 5 (September 2025): 184-185, https://doi.org/10.52230/RFLB2158

Annaliese Jacobs Claydon, *Arctic Circles and Imperial Knowledge: The Franklin Family, Indigenous Intermediaries, and the Politics of Truth* (Bloomsbury, 2024), 296pp. Hardback. US$115.00. ISBN: 978-1-3502-9294-9.

The title of Annaliese Jacobs Claydon's *Arctic Circles and Imperial Knowledge* invokes the geographic scope of her work: the latitudes of the circumpolar north. However, in Claydon's hands the idea of an 'Arctic circle' is a double entendre: it is also a powerful framing for networks of relationships and information-sharing among actors with varying stakes in the Arctic in the early nineteenth century. The overlapping circles that Claydon examines – professional, social, familial, and intimate – provide an insightful way of understanding Arctic exploration's place in the British empire, while connecting it to issues of gender, class, Indigeneity, and the politics of truth.

The circles that Claydon analyzes radiate from the Franklin family. Sir John Franklin (1786-1847) is remembered today as the leader of a British naval expedition that seemingly vanished in the Canadian Arctic in 1845. Franklin had previously led two overland Arctic expeditions in the 1820s and served as colonial governor of Tasmania from 1837 to 1843. Franklin's first wife Eleanor, his second wife Jane, his niece Sophia Cracroft, and his daughter Eleanor Isabella all moved within networks of scientific luminaries, naval officials, and Indigenous agents. Each also collected, shared, and evaluated information about Sir John's activities in ways that reflected their own goals, position, and struggles for control over public narratives about Franklin.

Claydon begins with a chapter on Franklin's early expeditions. These ventures unfolded against the turbulent politics of the early nineteenth-century Canadian North, in which fur traders and Indigenous leaders vied for control over the flow of knowledge and goods. Franklin and his men depended on these figures for information and provisions, even as they mistrusted many of these individuals. Meanwhile, the wives of expedition members left behind, like Eleanor Franklin, evaluated the truthfulness of the information their husbands shared in private letters and published accounts. The second chapter expands on how explorers' families at home 'became...gatekeepers of information from the field,' in a social world that was a 'perilous sphere that required endless self-fashioning' (p. 58). Women especially had to tread carefully to be considered authorities, couching their expertise in the language of error-prone womanly modesty. Gendered struggles over information are also key to Chapter Three, which traces how Jane Franklin tried to control criticism that attended her husband's management of the United Kingdom (UK)'s Tasmanian colony; taking on a public role that opened her to accusations of being a 'manly' woman who manipulated her weak-willed husband. Claydon shows how Jane's zeal to improve the Franklins' reputation included establishing a local scientific society that would 'promot[e] science as a marker of colonial civility and the Franklins as civilizers of colonial society' (p. 108). Among the supposedly scientific information Jane circulated was her theory about 'improving' Indigenous children by forcibly removing them from their parents; a position that put her at odds with prominent British humanitarians. Jane's beliefs were reflected in her treatment of Mithina and Adolphus, two Indigenous Tasmanian children taken from their families to the Franklins' home to be experiments in Jane's philosophy.

The fourth chapter delves into information that Inuit individuals passed on to European Franklin searchers after 1847. It analyzes how Jane Franklin, Sophia

Cracroft, and others in the UK framed Inuit testimony as credible or not credible, in order to suit their own theories about what happened to the missing expedition. Here, Claydon develops a theme that runs throughout the book, concerning long stretches of silence that characterized the flow of information between the Arctic and the UK during the early nineteenth century. It was, as Claydon astutely observes, an 'arrhythmic pulse of information that, like an arrhythmic heartbeat, produced intense anxiety' – and in the absence of verifiable facts, allowed new ideas about the expedition's fate to take hold (p. 140). One such theory was that Franklin and his men were alive but trapped in an open polar sea: a hypothesis that Claydon examines further in the last chapter.

Claydon's book stands out for centering figures often overlooked in published Arctic narratives, from Inuit and Yellowknife interlocutors to whalers and fur traders, to metropolitan women who worked tirelessly to burnish male relatives' reputations. She also shows how nineteenth-century British interest in Arctic exploration was mobilized in discourse around an array of seemingly disparate imperial concerns, from anxiety around Russian encroachment on the Canadian fur trade, to Tasmanian settlers' fight to end the transportation of English prisoners. But more broadly, Claydon demonstrates how Arctic exploration became a battleground for determining how the credibility of knowledge and knowers could be assessed. *Arctic Circles and Imperial Knowledge* is a useful and illuminating read for both polar scholars and anyone interested in how information was made, shared, and often weaponized in the British empire.

Sarah Pickman