

***Northern Folk: Living Traditions of North East Scotland.***  
**Edited by Valentina Bold and Tom McKean. General Editor:**  
**James Porter. (Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen, 1999.**  
**CD-ROM (Windows / Mac OS) EICD01)**

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voir avec le mystère célébré, quand ce ne sont pas des ballades absolument incongrues dans une célébration liturgique" (p. 80).

The routines of ritual are a connection between its present performance and every previous performance of that ritual up to the first one, but they are a structure within which actions are performed not by rote but with an intensity that makes them perpetually new. So too of the cantor's songs: the word is sacrosanct, but the many of the melodies need only adhere to a general structure, within which the cantor as performer / artist can improvise and experiment. Sheldon Posen, writing of the Jewish cantors of the Greater Ottawa area, refers to the *nusakh*, the mode (in the manner of the modes of the medieval Western church — Aeolian, Phrygian, Mixolydian) appropriate to a particular time of the holy calendar. By virtue of appropriate mode and syllabic scansion, one of his informants was able to incorporate the melody of a Chris de Burgh song (p. 141).

It is difficult to say how true is Kononenko's claim that "the cantor is an artist guided by faith" (p. 10): just as easily, the cantor is a faithful guided by art. More likely, to distinguish the two is only to make our task of discussing the cantor's art easier: it is a false distinction that forces us to view one only in light of the other. The editor has done an adequate job of balancing the two approaches, but has provided an excellent bibliography for facilitating further research.

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***Northern Folk: Living Traditions of North East Scotland.* Edited by Valentina Bold<sup>1</sup> and Tom McKean. General Editor: James Porter. (Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen, 1999. CD-ROM (Windows / Mac OS) EICD01).**

The power of multimedia lies in the idea that users can choose their own paths through the material on offer. No two journeys through a CD-ROM will be the same. Even if the user revisits particular information, a slightly different navigational path leads to new

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1. See article in this issue p. 111.

juxtapositions, triggering new associations. Secondly, and more obviously, multimedia allows the user to absorb information through both sight and sound, as well as through physical interaction with the interface. *Northern Folk: Living Traditions of North East Scotland* is an exciting undertaking by the Elphinstone Institute at the University of Aberdeen. The user has the choice of working through the CD-ROM in English, Scots, or Gaelic, the three main languages of Scotland, and the user may switch languages at any time. Featured are video and audio clips highlighting work (domestic work, fishing, rural life, and industry), community (belief, custom, and entertainment), and recreation (music, story, and song). A total of thirty video clips, each approximately 1-2 minutes long, present interviews with North East Scottish residents, providing first-hand accounts of local traditions. Video topics include how to make cheese and potato soup, the transition from horses to tractors, the fishing industry, the «guttin trade» (fish gutting), the explosion of the Piper Alpha oil rig in 1988, dealing with tragedy, children's rhymes, going dancing on Saturday afternoons in the "old days", Clavie night (a fire festival held in Burghead [northeast of Inverness] on January 11), Sunday school, learning and performing music, singing songs appropriately, the importance of oral tradition (narratives in particular), and getting a reaction from an audience. Footage of the consultant speaking is supplemented with slide shows of relevant pictures. To ensure understanding of spoken Scots, subtitled transcriptions are provided.

The slide-show pictures featured in the videos can also be found in the "gallery", along with audio tracks and transcribed excerpts from interviews. The pictures are grouped together as they are in the video clips. Clicking on the pictures brings up selected interview extracts from a variety of consultants. Thus, clicking on the pictures under the heading "Music Introduction" brings up interview clips about the bagpipes, music in the house, learning the fiddle, strathspeys and reels, and the song lyrics of "To My Flute". Under the heading "Sunday School", interview excerpts pertain to teaching religious faith, weekends, a rhyme about a preacher, God, books and teachers. The interview excerpts are transcribed in Scots, rather than modified into standard English. Although particularly unusual or difficult words are hyperlinked to English translations, and while I personally had no problem with the Scots transcriptions, I wonder how accessible the transcriptions are to those who speak English as a second language or even to those who aren't familiar with Scots. The gallery is organized in the same way as

the video clips: in three broad categories of work, community, and recreation. A map of North East Scotland is also available. When the mouse is moved over the map, different communities are highlighted and associated with the various consultants.

The gallery also includes a list of consultants, providing name, year and place of birth, and current area of residence. It is unclear whether or not the editors conducted all the interviews or whether other collectors were involved. The list of more than 50 names indicates that approximately 60% of the consultants are male. Efforts were clearly made to have a good cross-section of ages as there are fairly even numbers of elderly and middle-aged consultants. Approximately 20% of consultants are under the age of twenty. Three consultants are from India, and one appears to have Indian ancestry but came to Aberdeen from Glasgow. One Italian living in North-East Scotland is included, as are two Americans. The rest are Scots who either currently reside in North-East Scotland, regardless of place of birth, or those who were born in North-East Scotland and now reside elsewhere.

Despite the wonderful opportunity to include sound, there are only ten musical examples and very little documentation is provided. These soundtracks accompany the introductions to the videos and cover a range of performances, including fiddle ("Tullochgorum" by J. Scott Skinner; "Farewell to the Creeks" by Carmen Higgins), pipe band ("Cock o' the North" by The Gordon Highlanders), singing ("The Beggar King" by Lucy Stewart; "Will the Angels" by Jane Turriff), and jaw's harp ("Lord Lindoch" by George Murray). The gallery includes the same tunes, along with their titles and the performers' names. Oddly, some song lyrics are provided in the interview excerpts, but transcriptions of the accompanying melodies are not supplied.

One of the most useful features of this CD-ROM is its list of resources. An annotated bibliography is provided for each category of the CD-ROM and the resources are scholarly, and even occasionally obscure. Resources are provided for museums and archives (unfortunately, all located in Scotland); books and journals; and audio and film. Some resources, particularly films and recordings, may be difficult to access outside of the UK. In addition, a link is provided to the University of Aberdeen's companion website where one can find additional, more theoretical information regarding, for example, oral traditions and the history of the region.

The focus on individuals and first-hand accounts is quite extraordinary. Hearing and reading clips from so many interviews is captivating, although I am unsure what criteria were used to select consultants. Having drawn on such a large number of consultants the editors enabled a broad range of experiences and memories to be represented, describing ways of life from the early twentieth century to contemporary society. While the editors have also made some effort to portray the multicultural face of North-East Scotland, minority cultures are, regrettably, somewhat underrepresented. However, the emphasis on and presentation of first-hand accounts is bound to appeal to ethnologists interested in differing methods of portraying their consultants' voices.

One aspect of this CD-ROM I find frustrating, though, is that it doesn't seem to be aimed at a particular audience. Everything is presented as an "information bite", which is well-suited for a computer audience (given that it's much easier to read lengthy texts in hard copy), but comes at the expense of detail and depth. As a result, my first impression was that it was aimed at primary and secondary school-aged children. The resources, on the other hand, are generally academic in nature and are not necessarily readily accessible, thereby suggesting that they are most appropriate for graduate students and other scholars. Meanwhile, the theoretical content on the companion website at the University of Aberdeen (<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/northernfolk.htm>) seems geared for undergraduate students, with questions provided for potential class discussion (e.g., "Do singers talk about songs differently (compare the accounts from different singers in this Gallery)? " and "How do collectors decide which songs are important? ").

Given that the information provided is mostly brief rather than thorough, I believe that this CD-ROM would be best used to supplement an undergraduate course or unit, such as one focusing on Scottish folklore, as a means of enlivening a lecture and augmenting spoken lectures with images and music. One of my own undergraduate professors used a CD-ROM to supplement his lectures about Middle English literature and the memories of many of the images presented remain with me still. *Northern Folk* might also be used in a world cultures or world music course. It would also prove interesting to use it as an example of ethnography in a graduate course.

The CD-ROM is relatively easy to navigate since all the main menu options remain at the top of the monitor. However, I was surprised that the map is not included as an option (it is reached through the Gallery or, less obviously, through the Work, Community, and Recreation introductory pages). In addition, the label of "Gallery" is somewhat misleading. I associate "Gallery" simply with images whereas this Gallery features so much more. The brief overviews of Work, Community, and Recreation, along with their accompanying video clips, are the featured aspects of this CD-ROM whereas the Gallery appears to have a subordinate role. And yet I found the Gallery much more useful and engaging than the video clips. More information is provided, and the user has more control over exploration.

Whatever my concerns with this CD-ROM, it is still an important and pioneering work. Academic CD-ROMs are still something of a rarity. Moreover, multimedia software and hardware are imperfect and constantly in development. Having worked in multimedia myself, both as a teacher of multimedia art and as an academic experimenting with multimedia presentations, I have no doubt that this CD-ROM was an intense labour of love, taking much more time than if the editors had simply chosen to create a book, or a even a film. But their efforts are worth it, as learning about a particular culture is so much more engaging and immediate when presented through an interactive medium. As the editors gain experience, and with feedback from this CD-ROM, I am certain that their future projects will only strengthen in content and presentation.

To order, send £20.00 for each CD-ROM (plus £2.00 for shipping and handling for overseas orders) to The Secretary, The Elphinstone Institute, King's College, 24 High Street, Aberdeen, AB24 3EB, UK.

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