

CLIMATE DEVELOPMENT AND HISTORY OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC REALM

Gerold Wefer, Wolfgang H. Berger, and Karl-Ernst Behre, Eds., 2002, 486 pp., \$109.00, hardbound, Springer-Verlag, ISBN 3-540-43201-9

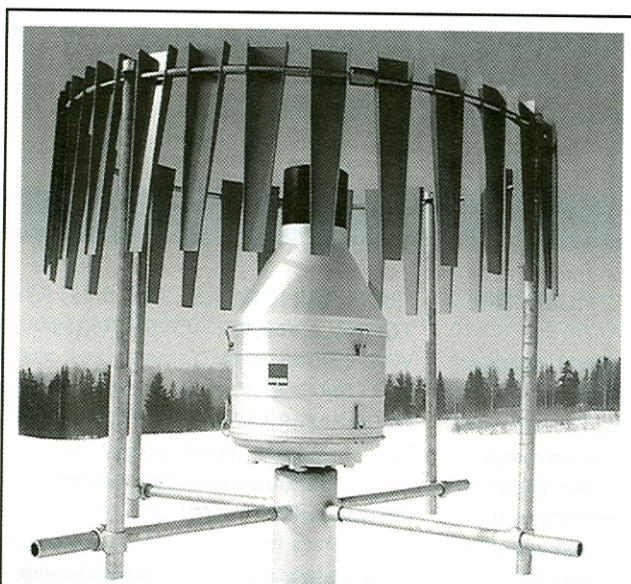
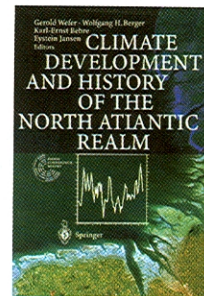
When given the assignment to write this review, the task was presented to me as primarily intended to help potential buyers make the right decision about whether or not to purchase the book in question. So let me get right to the crux of the matter. I view scientific books as falling into four broad categories: there are those rare gems, such as *Numerical Recipes in Fortran* (Press 1992) or *Geophysical Fluid Dynamics* (Pedlosky 1987), without which no bookshelf is complete. Then there are books which, while not indispensable, are very useful and “nice to have around,” rarely letting you down when casually consulted about their subject matter. The third category comprises books that are fun and at times interesting and well-written, but which lack a clear and coherent organizing principle. As such, they don't automatically come to mind as a potential resource, even when the question at hand is in fact answered very well somewhere in those books. The fourth category, of course, comprises, well, all other

books. . . . The book in question here falls, in my view, squarely in the third category.

The first sign of trouble arises no later than the title; “What IS the North Atlantic Realm!?”, I sheepishly asked myself immediately upon receiving the book, and for a long time thereafter. After reading the book, I think I know what the editors mean, and it is simply “the North Atlantic,” or perhaps “the North Atlantic region.” The choice of the vague and obtuse “Realm” instead of a word that actually describes the book's content is emblematic of the book's principal weakness—its unclear direction. In all fairness, however, it should be stated that the book stemmed from a conference that expressly set out to bridge the (substantial) gaps between what the humanities, the social sciences, and the physical sciences have to bring to bear on the problem of North Atlantic climate variability. Given the enormity of this thankless task, one may reasonably argue that any final product at all is an impressive, commendable feat.

The book comprises individual contributions by various authors, divided into sections titled “Concepts and Ideas,” “Decadal to Millennial Variability,” “Holocene Variability,” “Climate History and Human Activity,” and “Coastal Zone and Human Activity.” I found both the writing and the reported work widely variable in quality, accessibility, and style. Most striking is the incongruence between the highly general, at times almost philosophical, musings of some of the (book's best) papers and other highly specific, technical papers with very narrow geographical and thematic focus, and thus, most likely, limited general applicability. I found providing the transdisciplinary contributions of the former ilk a loving home to be the book's primary, and very important, contribution. Conversely, the technical papers of the latter category would have fit much more naturally in a discipline-specific journal with a better-defined readership.

Some of the individual contributions of the “generalist” type are both wonderfully thoughtful and unusual. An excellent example is Wolfgang Berger's introductory paper, “Climate History and the Great Geophysical Experiment.” Not only is the paper well-written and cogently argued, it is also an unabashed (if subtle and indirect) call to arms for geophysicists



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to reconsider their self-imposed neutrality on the question of greenhouse-gas induced global climate change and take a public stand. I can say categorically that readers interested in (or concerned with) the role of the intellectual-activist geophysicist in one of today's most pressing issues will surely be rewarded by Berger's understated, yet crystal-clear, essay.

Another fascinating part of the book that will probably be novel to all but the most well-read of geophysicists is the section titled "Climate History and Human activity." Among the papers of this section, my personal favorite is J. Baten's, which shows intriguing suggestive—if by no means conclusive—evidence for a relationship between human height and climate, presumably through nutrition. Figures 2 and 4 of his paper make a particularly persuasive case for such relationships among various groups (e.g., non-elite Bavarian soldiers—the Israeli in me is doubly intrigued by that!), emphasizing the pivotal role of climate in human evolution during historical times. It would have been wonderful if somebody took this observation a step further and tried to assess whether or not today's modern society is beyond the grip of such forces of biological evolution (e.g., can the McDonald's corporation redirect human evolution toward, say, smaller brain mass?).

The technical quality is in general very high, with mostly excellent figures and highly readable text. Photos and other color graphics are also reproduced extremely well, and the book feels solid and robust in

one's hands. The one technical glitch, unfortunately repeated over and over, is midline words broken by a hyphen (as in "Geo-rge Bu-sh").

In conclusion, this book contains many gems, as well as ample amounts of material that would have fit much better in disciplinary technical journals. Its principal weakness is the lack of a coherent organizing principle tying together the widely disparate contributions. At the same time, some of the book's general-readership essays are wonderful and well worth reading. Providing these papers with a high quality home is the book's main, and substantial, contribution.

—GIDON ESHEL

Gidon Eshel is an assistant professor of geophysics at the University of Chicago. He received his Ph.D. at Columbia University under the supervision of Mark Cane, and was a NOAA/UCAR Global and Climate Change postdoctoral fellow at Harvard University, where he worked with Brian Farrell. Before coming to Chicago, he was a member of the scientific staff at the Department of Physical Oceanography of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.

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THE FORGOTTEN STORM: THE GREAT TRI-STATE TORNADO OF 1925

Wallace Akin, 2002, 173 pp., \$19.95, hardbound, The Lyons Press, ISBN 1-58574-607-X

This rather short, 14-chapter book documents the path of North America's deadliest tornado as it crossed Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana. The first chapter sets the meteorological stage. Chapters 2–13 each document a portion of the path. Chapter 14 and 15 wrap up the story and provide a bit of information about other deadly tornadoes. The choice of title is certainly odd. This event is among the least-forgotten storms in the written history of this country.

Wallace Akin was just two years old when he personally experienced the tornado at Murphysboro, Illinois. In his stories of survival, he uses an easy-to-read style and includes local color, family stories, and historical background about the region. They add a nice

touch for the general reader. A personal passion does shine through in places. The book also borrows heavily from other meteorological texts, especially

Wilson and Changnon (1971). Inserts covering such phenomena as downbursts, supercells, and hail are appropriately placed and will be helpful to a nonmeteorologist. *The Forgotten Storm* might have worked as a good meteorological text for beginners. However, in this reviewer's opinion, the author made one unfortunate decision. He did not have the text proofread by a meteorologist with tornado research experience. This resulted in a book with so many misstatements and

errors that it ruins its potential as a useful public education tool. There are thousands of potential review-

