

Introduction: In the Footsteps of a Giant

Igor Krupnik and Kenneth L. Pratt

On 16 September 2010, northern anthropology lost one of its most renowned ethnologists with the unexpected passing of Ernest S. Burch, Jr., who died at his home in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, at age 72 (Fig. 1). Known almost universally as “Tiger,” he was a passionate and meticulous researcher, an extremely productive and influential scholar, and a “professional” in the very best sense of the word. These traits earned him the enduring respect of his colleagues, who included not just social scientists but also wildlife biologists, Iñupiaq elders, local and academic historians, and those of us who cut our teeth reading Tiger’s work and discussing our research with him at meetings and gatherings through the years.¹

Born in New Haven, Connecticut, on 17 April 1938, Tiger was the eldest of three children of Elsie Lillard Burch and the late Ernest S. Burch, Sr. After Tiger’s father graduated from Yale Law School, the family moved to Harrisburg, PA and then to a small nearby farm where Tiger and his siblings grew up. Tiger’s formal academic resume included a degree in Sociology from Princeton University (BA, 1960, *cum laude*), graduate degrees in Anthropology from the University of Chicago (MA, 1963; PhD, 1966), and service as associate professor and chair in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Manitoba (1966–74; see Correll, this volume). After leaving academia in 1975, Tiger became a research associate at the Smithsonian Institution (1979) and its Arctic Studies Center in Washington, D.C. (1988, Fitzhugh, this volume). He spent the next 30 years of his career as an independent researcher. The majority of his anthropological work and writing was produced out of his home office and without permanent institutional support.

Burch’s arctic career began at age 16 as a junior crewmember of Donald B. MacMillan’s 1954 expedition to Labrador, Baffin Island, and Green-

land. Following a summer of field research in Labrador in 1959, Burch began what turned out to be a lifelong relationship with the Iñupiaq peoples of Northwest Alaska. He spent 11 months in the village of Kivalina in 1960–1961 doing what was essentially an environmental and subsistence study. Accompanied by his wife Deanne, in May 1964 Tiger returned to Kivalina to conduct his dissertation research; however, in December the project came to a tragic halt when he was badly burned attempting to save his field notes from a gasoline fire. Despite severe injuries, just five months later Tiger and Deanne were back in Kivalina. He resumed his research and completed his dissertation shortly thereafter. Tiger conducted additional fieldwork in northwestern Alaska in 1969–70 and 1974–75, accumulating a large and diverse body of data. Those data provided the foundation for his most important publications and for the later encyclopedic trilogy on the Iñupiaq peoples of Northwest Alaska (Burch 1998, 2005, 2006) that has become the centerpiece of his scholastic legacy.

Burch was a master of an ethnohistorical method that allowed him to make significant contributions to the study of the Alaskan Iñupiat during the traditional and early contact era, the Caribou Inuit of Central Canada, and Inuit interactions with their Athabaskan-speaking neighbors in Alaska (Mishler, this volume) and Canada. He also compiled a comprehensive map of indigenous peoples of the Arctic ca. 1825 (Wheelersburg, this volume) and wrote several papers assessing the relevance of hunter-gatherer research (Krupnik, Stern, this volume).

Burch’s work was characterized by precision, deliberation, exhaustive research using archival records, and critical attention to detail. He was entirely transparent in stating his objectives and theoretical orientations, the sources of information he consulted, and how he conducted his

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Figure 1. Tiger Burch at the 7th International Congress of Arctic Social Sciences, Nuuk, August 2008 (Photo: Birger Poppel, courtesy IASSA).

research. He was dedicated to ensuring that his results were accurate, verifiable, and meaningful and to improving the methods and techniques of anthropology. Tiger consistently evaluated existing concepts, both his and his colleagues', and called for their rejection if he found them unsound. He possessed great self-confidence but was also well-known for refuting his earlier work when later research revealed errors of fact or interpretation.

The latest example came from Tiger's last field trip when two of his colleagues (Matt Ganley and Ken Pratt) arranged to fly him to Nome, Alaska, in September 2009 and take him on a tour of old caribou hunting and drive sites on the Seward Peninsula. Knowing of his research on historical caribou herds in Alaska, they were curious to see how he would interpret the diversity of such sites and the associated cultural features (Fig. 2). While boarding the flight home Tiger stated that he had arrived in Nome thinking he knew everything there was to know about caribou and caribou hunting, but was leaving with the realization that he actually knew almost nothing about the subject. Both assessments were obviously exaggerations, but the statement underscored his constant will-

ingness to learn new things and adjust his thinking accordingly.

Tiger never sought the spotlight and appeared uncomfortable when it shone on him, which it often did. His accomplishments were formally recognized by his peers on two notable occasions: he received the Alaska Anthropological Association's "Professional Achievement Award" in 2003 (Fig. 3) and the "Life Achievement Award" of the International Congress of Arctic Social Scientists in 2008 (Fig. 4).² The present volume will further recognize and highlight his gigantic footprint in the realm of arctic social sciences.

The Structure of the Volume

When the news about Tiger Burch's passing spread among the arctic scholarly community, many people immediately offered their help in honoring his life and legacy. Igor Krupnik and Kenneth Pratt organized two conference sessions dedicated to Tiger's work at, respectively, the 7th International Congress of Arctic Social Sciences (ICASS VII, June 2011) in Akureyri, Iceland and the 38th Annual Meeting of the Alaska Anthropological



Figure 2. Tiger poses in the “Throne of the Caribou King;” Cobblestone River, Seward Peninsula, Alaska, September 2009. The site offers a remarkable vista of the river valley below, in which local hunters traditionally harvested migrating caribou (Photo: Ken Pratt, courtesy U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, ANCSA Office).



Figure 3. Tiger Burch, Wendy Arundale, Robert Ackerman and William Workman at the 1991 (?) Alaska Anthropological Association meeting in Anchorage. Between 1981 and 2003, Tiger delivered seven presentations at the annual association papers meetings, of which four ended up as published papers (Photo courtesy Kerry Feldman).



Figure 4. IASSA honorary members, Robert Petersen, Ernest S. Burch, Jr., and Ludger Müller-Wille, with Hans-Pavia Rosing (second from right), former President of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference at IASSA reception in Nuuk, August 23, 2008. Photo: Léo-Paul Dana with permission.



Figure 5. Session honoring Tiger Burch at the 38th annual meeting of the Alaska Anthropological Association, March 2011 (Photographer, Amber Lincoln).

Association in Fairbanks, Alaska (March 2011–Fig. 5). The two venues quickly became a coordinated effort. Susan Kaplan, then editor of *Arctic Anthropology*, kindly agreed to consider the papers from the two symposia for publication in the journal as a Festschrift to Tiger Burch.

Seventeen papers were ultimately selected for inclusion in Tiger's festschrift volume. Most came as rewritten and expanded session presentations; five papers (Mager, Friesen, Mason, Correll, and Fitzhugh) were submitted by contributors who did not take part in the sessions. As editors, we believe that the scope and diversity of the collection embodies Tiger's remarkably broad interests, literally *From Kinship to Caribou*. It also represents a lively mix of contributors: ethnologists, archaeologists, ethnohistorians, and biologists. The scope indicates that Tiger's ethnographic work is beginning to stimulate research in fields and regions beyond those that Tiger pursued during his lifetime. This is evident in the fact that the volume includes five scientific papers that are written by archaeologists or are archaeological in nature, and seven papers that concern regions in which Tiger never worked.

When organizing contributions to the festschrift volume, we decided to focus on *major research themes* (or fields) that Tiger Burch explored during his scholarly life. Krupnik's opening paper introduces the organizational framework to assess Tiger's overall scientific legacy that includes more than 20 major projects he undertook between 1960 and 2010. The nine scientific papers that follow cover some of Burch's favorite research fields, in roughly chronological order. Friesen's paper applies Tiger's trademark concept of aboriginal Alaskan Iñupiaq societies ("nations") to the 19th century Inuvialuit of the Mackenzie Delta. The papers by Hill and Gronnøw build on Tiger's concept of

the "nonempirical environment" of Northwest Alaskan Iñupiat and apply it to the Yupiit of Western Alaska and prehistoric Saqqaq people of West Greenland, respectively. Another of Tiger's favorite topics, aboriginal conflict and warfare, is addressed by Mason, who explores current archaeological evidence on prehistoric Northwest Alaskan "warfare" societies. Tiger's life-long dedication to ethnohistory inspired two papers: Pratt offers a new interpretation of Eskimo-Athabaskan occupations of the Unalakleet River valley; and Ganley and Wheeler discuss the nature of Chugach socio-territorial groups in the Prince William Sound region during the early contact period. Wheelersburg's paper analyzes the general context of Burch's seminal map, *Peoples of the Arctic circa 1825*, and its coverage of the Scandinavian Sámi societies specifically. Jensen tests the method of ethnographic "upstreaming" favored by Tiger to construe North Alaskan Iñupiaq early contact and precontact storage practices for whaling equipment. The paper by Mager continues Tiger's last major study of human-caribou-reindeer interactions in Alaska, addressing the demise of the Iñupiaq reindeer economy in Barrow during the 1940s.

The seven shorter and more personal papers that follow explore various aspects of Tiger's relationships with his colleagues, also in a chronological sequence. The opening paper by Correll introduces Tiger's early years at the University of Manitoba (1966–1974) and their collaboration in the study of Alaskan Iñupiaq and Caribou Inuit societies. Mishler recounts his partnership with Tiger in the late 1980s and early 1990s in a paper about the Di'hañi Gwich'in. Bockstoce introduces an unknown chapter of Tiger's research: their joint effort to publish three late 19th century reports on the Iñupiat of Northwest Alaska (that, unfortunately, did not materialize). Jolles addresses Tiger's collaboration with the late Herbert Anungazuk, an Iñupiaq historian from Wales who worked with the National Park Service. Fienup-Riordan's contribution dwells on Tiger's monumental insight into even the most mundane-seeming aspects of traditional Iñupiaq social and daily life (his *Cultural and Natural Heritage of Northwest Alaska* series) in exploring the use of water by the Yupiit of Western Alaska. Fitzhugh reminisces on Tiger's relations with the Smithsonian Institution and, later, its Arctic Studies Center, with which Tiger was affiliated till his last days. The section also includes Stern's preliminary overview of Burch's personal papers that are now archived in the Alaska and Polar Regions Collections at Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks. The volume concludes with the full bibliography of Tiger's publications and some of his unpublished writings compiled by Stern, with the assistance of Krupnik and Pratt.

Despite the variety of papers in this festschrift collection honoring Tiger, we are humbled by the task of assessing his scholarly life barely a year after his passing. His loss is still too immediate and too emotional for many of us, and many aspects of Tiger's monumental legacy are yet to be addressed, even discovered. A thorough study of his 50-year research record, both published and unpublished, has just started. One lasting piece of his legacy, his unfinished manuscript on the history of caribou herds in Northwest Alaska has been just published (Burch 2012, Igor Krupnik and Jim Dau, eds.) and a collection of his essays in Alaskan ethnography and ethnohistory (Erica Hill, ed.) is currently in press. One major article manuscript was recently published (Burch 2010) and at least one more book-length work has been recovered (Krupnik, Stern, this volume). Nonetheless, we believe that this first collection of papers addressing many aspects of Tiger's life and research methods will be a useful companion to his encyclopedic books, particularly to new generations of scholars who did not have the privilege of knowing our dear colleague and friend.

Acknowledgments. We are grateful to many people who were instrumental in the planning and production of this volume. Our warmest thanks go to the participants of Tiger's two memorial sessions, to those who talked and those who listened. Your energy and dedication to Tiger's legacy helped make them unforgettable events. Susan Kaplan, then editor of *Arctic Anthropology*, immediately embraced our proposal to combine the session papers in this festschrift issue and Christyann Darwent, the current editor, was our enthusiastic and devoted partner during the editing and production period. Deanne Burch, Tiger's wife of 47 years, shared several photographs used as illustrations in this collection. Our colleagues, Jim Dau, Yvon Csonka, Ludger Müller-Wille, Robert Drozda and Aron Crowell helped by reviewing selected papers for the issue. Many other readers and reviewers are acknowledged in individual contributions. IASSA kindly granted its permission to reproduce the photo of Tiger and other recipients of the IASSA "Life Achievement Award" that was taken by Leo-Paul Dana and first published in the *North-ern Notes* Newsletter in 2010 (no. 33, p.5). Erica Hill, Bill Fitzhugh, and Kerry Feldman made valu-

able comments and additions to the first draft of this Introduction. We thank you all.

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Endnotes

1. The shortened version of Burch's biography presented below is taken primarily from Pratt 2011.
2. Burch was instrumental in the establishment and early development of both professional organizations. According to Kerry Feldman (personal communication 2011), one of the founders of the Alaska Anthropological Association and its current President, "[Tiger] strongly supported the Association, almost since its origin in 1975, mainly by his presence, but also by his many conference papers, and by his willingness to talk and share information with anyone, especially students, interested in what he knew about Iñupiat culture and ethnohistory." Tiger was among the founding members of the International Arctic Social Sciences Association (August 1990) and he delivered one of the keynote talks, "The Organization of Arctic Social Sciences," at the Association's first congress (October 1992).

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