

MÜLLER-WILLE, Ludger and Bernd GIESEKING (eds), 2008 *Bei Inuit und Walfängern auf Baffin-Land (1883/1884): Das arktische Tagebuch des Wilhelm Weike*, Minden, Mindener Geschichtsverein, 321 pages.

Christian Geulen

Volume 32, numéro 2, 2008

Franz Boas et les Inuit  
Franz Boas and the Inuit

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/038225ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/038225ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association Inuksiitiit Katimajit Inc.  
Centre interuniversitaire d'études et de recherches autochtones (CIÉRA)

ISSN

0701-1008 (imprimé)

1708-5268 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Geulen, C. (2008). Compte rendu de [MÜLLER-WILLE, Ludger and Bernd GIESEKING (eds), 2008 *Bei Inuit und Walfängern auf Baffin-Land (1883/1884): Das arktische Tagebuch des Wilhelm Weike*, Minden, Mindener Geschichtsverein, 321 pages.] *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 32(2), 195–197.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/038225ar>

HOOD, Bryan

1998 Theory on Ice: the Discourse of Eastern Canadian Arctic Paleo-Eskimo Archaeology, *Acta Borealia*, 15(2): 3-58.

HOOD, Bryan avec la collaboration de Gary BAIKIE

1998 Mineral Resource Development, Archaeology and Aboriginal Rights in Northern Labrador, *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 22(2): 7-29.

LEROI-GOURHAN André et Michel BRÉZILLON

1966 L'habitation magdalénienne No 1 de Pincevent près Montereau (Seine-et-Marne), *Gallia préhistoire*, 9(2): 263-385.

1972 *Fouilles de Pincevent: essai d'analyse ethnographique d'un habitat magdalénien*, Paris, CNRS, Gallia préhistoire, suppl. 7, 2 tomes.

PLUMET, Patrick

1985 *Archéologie de l'Ungava: Le site de la pointe aux bélougas (Qilalugarsiulik) et les maisons longues dorsétiennes*, Montréal, Laboratoire d'archéologie de l'UQAM, Paléo-Québec, 18.

Yves Labrèche

Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface

200, avenue de la Cathédrale

Winnipeg (MB), R2H 0H7, Canada

ylabrech@ustboniface.mb.ca

MÜLLER-WILLE, Ludger and Bernd GIESEKING (eds)

2008 *Bei Inuit und Walfängern auf Baffin-Land (1883/1884): Das arktische Tagebuch des Wilhelm Weike*, Minden, Mindener Geschichtsverein, 321 pages.

“Captain’s Log:...” Most people will recognise this as the standard beginning of almost all episodes of the TV science fiction series *Star Trek*: the captain of the *Enterprise* recording an entry for his official or personal diary. One wonders how these entries would sound if they were not the captain’s but—for instance—the ship’s cleaning lady’s, janitor’s or cook’s. Surely, they would introduce quite a different perspective on the adventure of exploring the unknown. Precisely such a perspective is now provided in a new book edited by Ludger Müller-Wille and Bernd Giesecking presenting the collected travel-logs and letters of Wilhelm Weike—the servant of the late 19th century’s great anthropologist and scientific explorer Franz Boas. The book consists of a carefully and well edited transcription of Weike’s diaries and letters, written in 1883-1884 and presented here in chronological order. It also includes a short introduction, a time table of the voyage, detailed information about the language and the applied rules of transcription, and finally a long essay by the editors explaining and interpreting the presented material.

Weike wrote his diaries when he accompanied Boas on his famous expedition to the Inuit of Baffin Island. Today this expedition is considered to be a groundbreaking research project and a fundamental experience for Boas that shaped his entire notion of anthropology and his views on the need to preserve Indigenous cultures. In the perspective of his servant, Boas' scientific exploration adventure to the Inuit presents itself in truly a new light. That is not to say that Weike was ignorant of what Boas tried to accomplish scientifically. In fact, to a certain degree, he was trained to work as an assistant and the two men became something like friends during the voyage, staying in close contact until Weike's death in 1917. However, the diaries and letters that Weike wrote—explicitly forced to do so by Boas—clearly present the non-scientific point of view.

It begins with his language, a late 19th century working class German with many colloquial elements, today forgotten expressions and a slightly strange grammar. More important, however, is the fact that Weike's log offers a detailed insight into precisely those aspects of exploration and anthropological field-work that are largely left out in Boas' or any other scientist's accounts of their expeditions. Here we have the voice of the constantly complaining servant who is astonished and sometimes clearly irritated by the amount of energy, bodily work and downright suffering that it takes to explore and survive the unknown. Especially in his letters, Weike underlined the unpleasant aspects of the project his boss was pressing forward and even dared to make fun of him when the great Boas himself seemed exhausted at times.

This changed quite substantially when they arrived in the village of the Inuit where they were to stay for several months before returning home. Here, Weike rather quickly adapted himself to the circumstances, settled and tried to make himself as comfortable as possible. Thus, in opposition to Boas, who approached the Inuit with a liberal, but primarily scientific interest, Weike actually lived among them. Weike was in frequent and close contact with at least 50 of the 300 Inuit of the village, mentioning all of them by name in his diaries. With only minor signs of a racial or civilisational bias, Weike dived into and, to a certain degree, embraced the foreign culture he was confronted with. On several occasions he was thus able to clear difficult situations and to smooth conflicts between the great scientist Boas and his research object, simply because Weike had a far greater insight-knowledge about the Inuit's daily affairs.

That is not to say that Weike was the better anthropologist. His writings about daily life among the Inuit, about their habits, religious beliefs and social gatherings display a certain curiosity, but centre mostly around Weike's own doings and perspectives. However, he described the very same culture that Boas observed scientifically, only with the eyes and the voice of a forced tourist. Moreover, Weike was certainly more open-minded than Boas when it came to actually participating in the daily routines as well as in the cultural rituals of the Inuit. As always in regard to those early anthropological research projects, one can of course only speculate as to the fun that the Inuit themselves must have had with two such distinguished European characters living among them. Today, it is often said that Boas' trip to the Inuit was the

birth of ethnological fieldwork and the method of “participant observation.” After reading the diaries of Boas’ servant, it becomes at least unclear who of the two should really be praised for that innovation.

All in all, the book is surely of limited value in regard of the anthropological data it offers about the Inuit culture of the late 19th century. But it is of great importance for the history of early anthropology and of scientific explorations around 1900. For it reminds us that any scientific discovery is always also a social action taking place in a specific historical context and by no means independently from that background. Sometimes it takes the perspective of a servant from lower-class Eastern Westfalia and his very peculiar, even odd views on a different culture, to acknowledge these social origins of scientific insights; origins that Boas and many other great explorers tend to obscure in their own writings, when they draw their clear-cut scientific conclusions from, in fact, quite contingent experiences: “Captain’s log supplemental....”

Christian Geulen  
Universität Koblenz-Landau  
Institut für Geschichte  
56070 Koblenz  
Germany  
geulen@uni-koblenz.de

SANDLOS, John

2007 *Hunters at the Margin: Native People and Wildlife Conservation in the Northwest Territories*, Vancouver, UBC Press, 244 pages.

Systematic management and regulation of wildlife have long been a preoccupation of biologists, government economic agents, a conservation and environmentally minded public and, often for opposite reasons, those who use wild resources. The fact that mammals, birds and fish have been principal sources of material and cultural sustenance for the Aboriginal societies of Canada’s Arctic and Subarctic means that wildlife policy has inevitably carried with it a human impact generally less felt by more southerly hunters and fishers. This was true in the late 19th century and is still the case today, most notably with regard to the political fate of the polar bear, although that is a still unfolding history.

*Hunters at the Margin* is an important addition to a growing body of work (see Campbell 2004; Collings 1997; Kulchyski and Tester 2007; Usher 2004) on the political ecology of northern wildlife policy and the effect on the Aboriginal societies materially and culturally dependent on these resources. Sandlos, by focusing on the emergence of a conservation consciousness in government circles, albeit with important utilitarian elements, provides a bridge between analyses that have concluded that wildlife policy in the North well into the last century was intentionally ethnocidal or the product of an “Ottawa-ocracy,” and of a scientific community, abysmally ignorant of the realities lived by Inuit, Dene, Cree and Métis. Further, while many recent studies have concentrated on the “story” of a single species, most notably