

Before Boas: The Genesis of Ethnography and Ethnology in the German Enlightenment (Critical Studies in the History of Anthropology)

By Han F. Vermeulen

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The history of anthropology has been written from multiple viewpoints, often from perspectives of gender, nationality, theory, or politics. *Before Boas* delves deeper into issues concerning anthropology's academic origins to present a groundbreaking study that reveals how ethnology and ethnography originated during the eighteenth rather than the nineteenth century, developing parallel to anthropology, or the "natural history of man."

Han F. Vermeulen explores primary and secondary sources from Russia, Germany, Austria, the United States, the Netherlands, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, France, and Great Britain in tracing how "ethnography" was begun as field research by German-speaking historians and naturalists in Siberia (Russia) during the 1730s and 1740s, was generalized as "ethnology" by scholars in Göttingen (Germany) and Vienna (Austria) during the 1770s and 1780s, and was subsequently adopted by researchers in other countries.

Before Boas argues that anthropology and ethnology were separate sciences during the Age of Reason, studying racial and ethnic diversity, respectively. Ethnography and ethnology focused not on "other" cultures but on all peoples of all eras. Following G. W. Leibniz, researchers in these fields categorized peoples primarily according to their languages. Franz Boas professionalized the holistic study of anthropology from the 1880s into the twentieth century.

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Editorial Review

Review

"A short review cannot do justice to the sophistication of the author's comprehensive and remarkable research, which departs from histories that view the origins of anthropology in classical Greece or Renaissance exploration."—*CHOICE*
(*CHOICE*)

"Vermeulen's monograph on the "genesis" of ethnography and ethnology will sit as a large and imposing bookend on any history of anthropology shelf for many years to come."—Huon Wardle, *American Anthropologist*
(Huon Wardle *American Anthropologist* 2017-02-17)

"This important book rewrites the early history of anthropology in new and surprising ways."—James Urry, *Australian Journal of Anthropology*
(James Urry *Australian Journal of Anthropology*)

"*Before Boas* represents a major contribution to the history of anthropology that must be taken into serious consideration by every scholar in our field."—*Ethnohistory*
(*Ethnohistory*)

"Deserving to be called a sensation."—Horst Bredekamp, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*
(Horst Bredekamp *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 2016-12-27)

"This is a unique and detailed study of the eighteenth century origins of ethnology or ethnography that offers a new insight in reexamining the scope and subject matter of these disciplines in their earlier stages."—Madhuvanti Karyekar, *Museum Anthropology Review*
(Madhuvanti Karyekar *Museum Anthropology Review*)

"*Before Boas* will grow in importance with the elapsing of time. Certainly, it will become soon a landmark (if it has not become yet) and will definitively consecrate Han F. Vermeulen as a prominent specialist in this fascinating academic field."—*Anuac*
(*Anuac*)

“This important book introduces the scholarship that underlies the development of modern ethnography and ethnology, especially that of Franz Boas. With exhaustive research Han Vermeulen demonstrates the significance of the German Enlightenment, the ethnolinguistics of Leibniz, and the ethnography of those inspired by Leibniz who undertook scientific descriptions of the peoples of Siberia.”—Herbert S. Lewis, author of *In Defense of Anthropology: An Investigation of the Critique of Anthropology*

(Herbert S. Lewis 2014-09-18)

About the Author

Han F. Vermeulen is a research associate at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle

(Saale) and the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin.

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