



Review Essay

Margaret Pearce
University of Kansas

The North American Journals of Prince Maximilian of Wied. Volume II: April–September 1833. PRINZ MAXIMILIAN VON WIED (edited by Stephen S. Witte and Marsha V. Gallagher; translated by William J. Orr, Paul Schach, and Dieter Karch). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, in cooperation with the Durham Center for Western Studies, Joslyn Art Museum, 2010. Pp. 612, 186 illustrations, 54 color photographs, 5 maps. \$85.00 hardcover. ISBN 978-0-8061-3923-4.

In 2004, the Marge H. Durham Center for Western Studies of the Joslyn Art Museum undertook the massive project of publishing a scholarly English translation of the three manuscript journals recording the scientific expedition of Prince Maximilian of Wied to the Missouri River during 1832–1834. Although portions of the journals have been published in English and French, this project is the first complete and scholarly English translation. Funded largely by private donors as well as the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, the award-winning *Volume I* was released in 2008 in collaboration with the University of Oklahoma Press. This year has now seen publication of *Volume II*, an equally meritorious publication, beautifully designed and produced, and destined to become a classic of scholarly translations of explorer's journals.

In 1815, Prussian naturalist and ethnographer Prince Maximilian of Wied traveled to South America to study Native peoples by following the route of Alexander von Humboldt through Brazil. Maximilian had met von Humboldt on two occasions and consulted with him in Paris in 1814 while serving in the Prussian army. The journals from Maximilian's Brazil

expedition were subsequently published as *Reise nach Brasilien in den Jahren 1815 bis 1817*. Fifteen years later, Maximilian sailed for the United States to make the northern component of what would be his hemispheric comparison of indigenous peoples in the Americas. For this expedition, his original plan was to follow the route of Lewis and Clark and travel up the Missouri River from St. Louis to Fort McKenzie and then into the Rockies, recording his ethnographic observations.

The prince's scholarly achievements have remained largely unknown to the English-speaking public, in part because his extensively annotated and illustrated journals were written in a now obscure, and difficult to translate, German script. In contrast, the comparatively accessible visual works of his assistant, the artist Karl Bodmer, have been widely reproduced and exhibited in the United States, and thus it has been Bodmer who has emerged as the most well-known of the team. (A second expedition assistant, David Dreidoppel, also contributed his expertise in collection of plant specimens, hunting, and taxidermy.) The steady publication of the *North American Journals* translations should, finally, foster a greater awareness and appreciation for Maximilian's contributions. Anyone with an interest in the environmental, Indigenous, social, urban, linguistic, or economic historical geographies of the American West will find these journals absorbing and compelling. Once within its pages, you will be struck by the comprehensive observation record, prose imagery, social and political comment, and geographical scholarship of Maximilian's story, unusual for an expedition journal. Unlike von Humboldt, Maximilian was primarily an ethnographer. Yet his fellow Prussian's influence is evident here, as Maximilian brings a similar sensibility to the practice of his ethnographies, incorporating observations of flora, fauna, geology, climate, and human settlement, expressed through an interconnected narrative of prose, diagram, watercolor, sketch, table, species list, temperature reading, and placename.

Volume I recorded the team's journey from their 1832 trans-Atlantic voyage to their initial months studying and traveling in the United States. Slowed but not stopped by a cholera outbreak, the first leg of their trip included an unplanned but fruitful stay in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania for biology, botany, and hunting; a winter in New Harmony, Indiana for library study as well as consultation with naturalists Thomas Say of the Major Stephen H. Long expedition and Charles-Alexandre Lesueur of the Nicholas Baudin expedition; and then finally to St. Louis to meet with William Clark, by then Superintendent of Indian Affairs.

It is with *Volume II*, however, that the expedition ethnographies truly begin. We are reunited with the team on 10 April, 1833 as they depart St. Louis to travel up the Missouri with the American Fur Company:

...The Yellow Stone's flags were fluttering, the American one aft and a narrower one forward, as depicted here, with the initials of the American Fur Company. Several cannon shots had been fired, whereupon the residents of St. Louis assembled en masse. The Sauk and Kickapoo Indians in their original attire, weapons in hand, stood and sat on the bank. Mr. Bodmer sketched several of the former and the women of the latter as well as the four canoes of the former, which were fastened to each other when they came down the Missouri. These canoes are long and narrow, with a curved beak fore and aft. At least twenty Canadians (engages, or trappers), some of them drunk, were sitting above the deck of our ship; they fired a running volley from their muskets and rifles simultaneously with the frequently discharged cannon....

Above the city, the steep, stratified limestone bank immediately begins again; we pass close to it. The other bank is without rocks, rather low, with cottonwood forests just turning green. A boat with a wide, torn sail passes.

The river forms a broad, brownish gray expanse. Beyond St. Louis, individual dwellings, factories, and the like – mostly constructed from local whitish limestone – appear along the western bank. Green thickets already along the bank. Much wood, branches, and shavings drift past in the Mississippi. Several sandbars. Farther on, cottonwoods along the left bank; before them, borders of willows, which already appear in their light-green color. Deposits of driftwood.... (pp. 4-6)

And so on, in this vein, for six months of entries.

From Fort Union (near present-day Williston, North Dakota), they travel by keelboat to Fort McKenzie (near Loma, Montana). Poling against the current and in a more challenging river course, this leg of the journey comprises five weeks, during which time Maximilian and Bodmer are making detailed notes and sketches of their landscape. Once at Fort McKenzie, instead of continuing over the Rockies as originally planned, they remain at the fort to study and record Blackfeet culture. The journal entries are not all passive observation and congenial discourse. For one, the men are also voracious trappers and hunters, capturing bears in a crate to be floated on their boat and creating their collectable specimens by shotgun wherever and whenever possible. But as well, Maximilian does not ignore the human emotional landscape, as for example in his entries on the events, significance, and individual reactions to an attack by Assiniboine and Cree at Fort McKenzie ("Everyone related his deeds and what had happened to him. The script of the day was written on everyone's brow," p. 398). At the end of the volume, they depart Fort McKenzie in a Mackinaw boat, bound for

Fort Union. The final lines, marked 29 September, leave us hanging on the thread of the narrative: "At 12:30, [a] view of Fort Union on the left bank in the distance. Renewed zeal seized our crew; at one o'clock we reached the fort" (p. 470). What next?

At the back of the book is an interweaving of both the editors' and Maximilian's addenda, including ethnographic notes, tables of Indigenous vocabularies and guides to their pronunciations, weather tables, mileages, lists of the many birds and mammals killed and packed for transport home to Germany, and relevant historical documents.

Maximilian wrote these journals after, not during, the trip, as a way of organizing his field notes into a comprehensive personal research record he called the *Tagebuch*. He then used the *Tagebuch* as the basis for his shorter, formal account for the public, published in 1839–41 as *Reise in das innere Nord-America in den Jahren 1832 bis 1834* with colorized engravings of Bodmer's artwork in an accompanying pictorial atlas. The *Riese* also included a 16" x 32" map by German cartographer William Thorn, based on a map by H. S. Tanner, with additional geographical detail and tribal territories as defined by Maximilian and a cartouche by Bodmer.

The *Reise* was soon translated into both French and English, but the journals themselves remained in the family papers. These papers were eventually consolidated for the Wied family in 1948 as the Maximilian–Bodmer Collection, circulated and shown in the United States during the fifties, and acquired by the New York gallery M. Knoedler and Company. In 1986, the collection was purchased and donated to the Joslyn by the company that would become Enron, the Northern Natural Gas Company of Omaha.

This modern English edition is the first to present the journals in their entirety with scholarly editorial commenting and contextual essays, based on translations made between 1981–2010 by William J. Orr, Paul Schach, and Dieter Karch. The challenge posed by the wide scope of this translation project extends beyond the fact of the German script itself, as the journals also incorporate Indigenous and other European languages and American English, extensive notes at the foot and margins, and artwork to be incorporated into the text.

Although the expedition was linearly constricted along rivers, the extent of geographical analysis extends beyond the riverbanks. Maximilian talked to people and wrote about their lives beyond what he himself empirically observed. As a result, this work can be read for historical geographies of the Mandan, Hidatsa, Omaha, Ponca, Dakota, Lakota, Otoe, Assiniboine, Blackfeet, Shoshone, Cree, and Cheyenne peoples. It comprises a major resource for interpreting the upheavals and dispossessions in the Native world in the aftermath of Lewis and Clark. The work can be read as part of the interpretation of von Humboldt's legacy in the United

States, the biography and techniques of Karl Bodmer, or the material culture and social world of the fur trade. Anyone with an interest in Indigenous languages will find eighteen languages represented and annotated here, much of it original research, with annotations from thirteen Indigenous linguists. Anyone with a love of linguistic geography generally, or the way that words blended in place during the nineteenth century specifically, or the nature of that period's interweaving of European languages in a scientific manuscript, will find much to treasure in this text. Words were important to Maximilian, and the editorial team picks up the thread of their significance. The names of things, people, places, and processes are lovingly translated or left to speak for themselves, annotated or underlined, and cross-referenced or indexed by the editors and consultants. Following these words through the text is a journey unto itself.

The editors further support our potential musings and applications of Maximilian's work through footnoting and detailed indexing of both the general and particulars between these pages (including a separate "Index of Flora and Fauna"). As the footnoting continues along its own rivercourse at the bottom of each page, never dominating the space of the page yet always present, it is possible for the reader to depart on an alternative horizontal exploration of the text to take in the diversity of scholarly delights apart from the daily events. This makes for an immensely rewarding read if you are interested in the connections between Bodmer's daily activities and how to find the products of those activities in manuscripts and paintings at the Joselyn, or the contributions from Native linguistic scholars giving voice to the Native names of things and places, or how a particular sequence or river stretch relates to the Lewis and Clark journals, or how a cave is formed. And, too, Maximilian's own margin notes are incorporated, here: footnotes interleaved across time.

The editors remark that the priority has been to achieve a translation that encourages public enjoyment of the journals by controlling the volume supplementary notes and commenting, and in their balancing of narrative and comment they have looked to Maximilian for guidance. References to both Bodmer and Maximilian's artistic work is cross-referenced to the holdings and publications of the Joseyln, and all of the prince's maps and drawings, in ink and watercolor, are retained and in their original color (including two accounts of Blackfeet cartographic technique and the prince's watercolor re-drawings of the hides themselves). Working with a core interdisciplinary advisory board of experts in Indigenous history, historical geography, and linguistics, the book is also heavily annotated by additional advisors for archaeology, biology, European languages, geology, and illustration identification. Yet the editorial team keeps Maximilian's voice whole and at the forefront.

In harmony with that approach, the editors illustrate the

geographical context of each chapter's route using image details from the Thorn map instead of sequences of contemporary digital maps. This editorial decision retains the expedition voice set by the journals. The tone of Thorn's map and its portrayal of geographical detail relevant only to the United States of the 1830s orient our mental maps without asking us to leave the world of the story.

I eagerly await the forthcoming publication of *Volume III* and the journey from Fort Union home to Neuwied, which among other details will include Maximilian's extensive accounts of Hidatsa and Mandan history and culture in the moment prior to Removal.

Note

1. Although see, for example, Michael G. Noll, "Prince Maximilian's Other Worlds," *The Pennsylvania Geographer* 43 (2005): 65-83; and Michael G. Noll, *Prince Maximilian's America: The Narrated Landscapes of a German Explorer and Naturalist* (doctoral thesis, University of Kansas, 2000); Maximilian Alexander Philipp, Prinz von Wied-Niewied, *People of the first man: Life among the Plains Indians in Their Final Days of Glory*, Davis Thomas and Karin Ronnefeldt, eds. (N. Y.: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1976); and Maximilian Alexander Philipp, Prinz von Wied-Niewied, *Travels in the Interior of North America during the Years 1832-1834* (Taschen, 2001).