

Although brief, the period of commercial whaling in the bay had a profound impact on the various Inuit groups of the northern Keewatin. It resulted in significant changes in distribution patterns, seasonal movements, and especially in the material culture of the Inuit. Probably the most striking fact to emerge from Comer's journal in this connection is that whaleboats owned by and entirely manned by Inuit were actively engaged in whaling almost on a contract basis.

Over the decade in which he spent repeated winters in Hudson Bay, Comer developed numerous close friendships among the Inuit and went to considerable lengths to help them whenever possible. The depth of his feeling for them emerges clearly from the pages of his journal. Although entirely self-educated in the field, Comer was a keen amateur anthropologist, making plaster casts of the faces and hands of many of his Inuit friends, collecting artifacts, and taking some excellent photographs, from which Ross has made an excellent selection to illustrate the journal. Comer also published a number of scientific papers on the Inuit of this area in journals such as the *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society of New York* and the *American Anthropologist* and freely made his information available to anthropologists such as Franz Boas.

One of the ironies of the political history of the Canadian Arctic is that the Canadian government awoke to the possible dangers to Canadian sovereignty represented by the American whalers wintering in Hudson Bay and the Beaufort Sea when the danger had all but passed. It must have come as a rude shock to Comer to find in the fall of 1903 that his ship *Era*, practically the last of her breed, would be sharing her wintering harbour at Cape Fullerton with an official Canadian government expedition aboard the *Neptune*, led by A.P. Low, and including a detachment of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police under the command of the rather officious Inspector Moodie, who took very seriously his duties of maintaining surveillance of the trading and other activities of the American "intruders". During the following winter Comer and his men again enjoyed the mixed blessings of wintering in close proximity to an official Canadian government expedition, this time aboard the *Arctic* with Inspector Moodie in overall command. Published accounts of both these expeditions as seen from the Canadian viewpoint have long been available (Low, 1906; Moodie, 1905, 1906), and it is both illuminating and often entertaining to be able to compare Comer's descriptions of events with these earlier accounts — especially with regard to Moodie's attempts to influence or curtail the American captain's activities.

Ross is the acknowledged expert on this era of commercial whaling in Hudson Bay and he has a number of impressive scholarly works on the topic to his credit (Ross, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1979). In his acknowledgements he describes the task of editing Comer's journal as "a pleasant side trip from research" into this area. But this is not to suggest that he has in any way relaxed his usual rigorous scholarly standards. His introduction, some 35 pages in length, represents an excellent sketch of American whaling in the Bay at this period, with all its implications both with regard to the Inuit and to Canadian sovereignty; and his footnotes, which occur in just the right number to clarify without interrupting the flow of the journal, are of an equally high scholarly standard. As exemplifying the flavour that Ross has imparted to the work, one footnote deserves to be quoted at length. Footnoting the occasion in November 1903 when Inspector Moodie held a formal ceremony to impress upon the Inuit that they were citizens of Canada and subjects of King Edward VII, Ross writes:

Moodie then questioned the Eskimos about their practices of infanticide, parricide and cannibalism, to which they understandably gave evasive answers. Following his interrogation Moodie "with real ceremony presented a suit of woolen underclothes to each of the twenty-two adult Eskimos and a tuque, a pair of mittens and a sash to each of the boys."...The irony of the situation, although not apparent to Moodie, was abundantly clear to Borden, Comer, and most certainly to the Eskimos. Here were a people who had maintained intimate ties with foreign whalers for more than forty years being treated as simple, helpless, credulous savages. Here were men who possessed whaleboats, darting guns, shoulder guns, and all the sophisticated paraphernalia employed in the pursuit of bowhead whales, who hunted

with telescopes and powerful repeating rifles, and who normally wore American trousers, shirts, jackets, hats and sunglasses. Here were women who used manufactured domestic implements and containers, who made up clothes on sewing machines, who attended shipboard dances in imported dresses, and who bore children sired by the whalers. To these people an officious, uniformed stranger was distributing underwear as if it were a priceless treasure and lecturing them on morals and their allegiance to a big white chief. When Moodie suggested that the Eskimos might wish to travel 500 miles to Churchill to send joyful messages of thanks to the king, no one responded.

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EMILE PETITOT: UN CAPITOLO DI STORIA DELLE ESPLORAZIONI CANADESI. By SIMONETTA BALLO ALAGNA. Genoa: Libreria Editrice Mario Bozzi, 1983. 264 p. Softcover. (In Italian.)

The biographing of Arctic explorers is an expanding and highly rewarding area of research, being partly stimulated by such excellent reference aids as *The exploration of Northern Canada, 500-1928*. From such a work it is possible to gain some notion of the vast range of exploration in Canada and the need to acknowledge the achievements of those who, though not capturing the public imagination as completely as, say, Franklin did, nevertheless made an important contribution to the exploration of the Canadian north and its peoples. One such person was Fr. Emile Petitot (1838-1916), a man who lapsed into near obscurity well before his death but now seems to have been refurbished by a spate of publications in recent years. Petitot is in the long and generally honourable tradition of missionaries who involuntarily became discoverers; he also typifies the self-sufficient explorer who realizes he must master many skills. So it is that Petitot became a first-rate geographer and cartographer, filling in many blanks that still existed in the maps of northwest Canada in the late nineteenth century (for which he was awarded the Back Prize in 1883). He was a great linguist who not only learned to communicate directly with the native peoples but actually compiled and published a monumental dictionary of Athapaskan Indian languages. His gift for language is evident, too, in his detailed and graphic chronicles and journals, among the most entertaining of which is *Les Grands Esquimaux*, recently translated into English by E. Otto Höhn

under the title *Among Chiglit Eskimos* (1981). Though he did not have the expertise of a Back or a Hood, Petitot also illustrated his accounts with sketches (sadly missing from the present study), which, all in all, are an invaluable record of places and peoples now changed far beyond memorial reconstruction. Above all, Petitot was an explorer of great objectivity and understanding who saw native peoples in their own right rather than as they ought to be when "civilized" by Europe. (In this respect it is illuminating to read his comments on Eskimo women in *Les Grands Esquimaux*.)

Professor Simonetta Alagna has presented a clear, orderly and sympathetic account of Petitot's exploration and missionary activities among the Eskimo of northwest Canada, basing her researches very securely on the letters and journals of the man himself and footnoting her points with an academic thoroughness often lacking in works of this kind. There are occasions, however, especially in the early part of the book, when the background knowledge seems inadequate to the task of placing Petitot in context.

The study is divided into four logically arranged chapters, each prefaced by an abstract for ease of reference. The first chapter gives a short and necessarily superficial account of Canadian exploration in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and (bemusingly) the economic condition of the northwest; it ends with an all too brief account of the missionary and scientific work of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the French order to which Petitot belonged.

Chapter two moves into the subject proper with a short statement of Petitot's accomplishments and the essential data of his early life, followed by a description of his first tour of duty in which he reached the Mackenzie Valley in August 1862 and spent the next thirteen years at Fort Providence, Fort Resolution and Fort Good Hope, which was his main base. Petitot's reactions *en route* to his first destination are shown to include those on the plight of the "Peaux-Rouges", based as they are on the realization that the Europeans could or would be the instrument of their destruction and extinction.

The main material relating to Petitot's explorations is contained in the third chapter, which includes coverage of those relating to the Anderson River, the Mackenzie delta, Alaska and the Great Bear Lake (something of Petitot's achievements being reflected in the fact that a lake and a river were named after him). Alagna's account is easy to follow but might have been a little more detailed and interpretative.

To round off the volume there is a somewhat slender final chapter summarizing Petitot's work, and then the most valuable scholarly part of the book: sixty pages comprising thirteen of Petitot's unpublished letters, translated from the original French into an Italian that admirably conveys the engaging informality of his style. Among other useful components of the book are a bibliography of Petitot's copious writings, a reasonably comprehensive index, and six of Petitot's maps, though most of the reproductions are too dark and too reduced in scale.

Some aspects of Petitot's work have been passed over—understandably, because the focus of the study was mainly on his explorations and missionary work. Even so, Petitot's linguistic achievements and his moral, philosophical and sociological observations merit more extended treatment. Nevertheless, Professor Alagna has presented a good basic study of Petitot for the general reader, while providing a comprehensive set of bibliographical tools for the scholar. It is to be hoped that her study may shortly be seen in an English translation.

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