

Julia Strobel
Julia.strobel@unibe.ch

Betreut von: Prof. Dr. Urte Krass

A Matter of Time – Franklin's Pocket Watches In The Arctic

In her master thesis, the author examines how the Inuit transformed some pocket watches, carried to the Arctic by members of the third Franklin expedition in the middle of the 19th century. She builds her reasoning around eleven pocket watch fragments, which Dr John Rae traded back in 1854. They are now in the National Maritime Museum's collection in Greenwich. To establish the transformation process, she first examines how Franklin's men used these objects before she later turns to the site where the Netsilingmiut found these.

While pocket watches and chronometers were essential as navigation tools, the officers used them also for self-fashioning and wore them usually in their vest pockets. However, the men started to wear them around their necks during the expedition. The Netsilingmiut, the Inuit who lived in the most northern point of the Arctic in today's Nunavut (Canada), found their camps and frozen bodies. The author suggests that the pocket watches worked as *aarnguat*, amulets that gave the wearer specific skills. The traces on the pocket watch fragments in England support this theory. Not the physical intactness of the object mattered in these cases; it was the biography and the provenience – the *Anima* – that was significant. In England, the pocket watch fragment was exhibited with ethnographic objects from the Inuit in various places. At the same time, the Inuit wore these objects on their clothing, showing the network of the individual.

Julia Strobel studied art history and World Arts & Music at the University of Bern. During her studies, she focused on the circulation of objects and the adaptation processes in the early modern period. For her article *Der Elefantentstuhl aus den Knochen Süleymans – Lücken innerhalb des Provenienznarrativs*, she won the price VKKS Förderpreis 2019, a price that is annually given to the best student contributions. Her interest lies currently in 19th century Switzerland and colonial objects in Swiss school collections. For her master thesis, she created the blog [A Matter of Time](#), in which she published her research into pocket watches.