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## **Far from the truth: distance, information, and credibility in the Early Modern World**

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HAKLUYT SOCIETY STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF TRAVEL

# Far from the Truth

Distance, Information,  
and Credibility in the  
Early Modern World

Edited by  
MICHEL VAN GROESEN  
and JOHANNES MÜLLER



# Far from the Truth

Information and knowledge were essential tools of early modern Europe's global ambitions. This volume addresses a key concern that emerged as the competition for geopolitical influence increased: how could information from afar be trusted when there was no obvious strategy for verification? How did notions of doubt develop in relation to intercultural encounters? Who were those in the position to use misinformation in their favour, and how did this affect trust? How, in other words, did distance affect credibility, and which intellectual and epistemological strategies did early modern Europe devise to cope with this problem?

The movement of information, and its transformations in the process of gathering, ordering, and disseminating, makes it necessary to employ both a global and a local perspective in order to understand its significance. The rise of print, leading to various new forms of mediation, played a crucial role everywhere, inspiring theories of modernization in which media served as agents of new connections and, eventually, of globalization. Paradoxically, during the entire period between 1500 and 1800, the demise of distance through various strategies of verification coincided with constructions of otherness that emphasized the cultural and geographical difference between Europe and the worlds it encountered.

Ten leading scholars of the early modern world address the relationship between distance, information, and credibility from a variety of perspectives. This volume will be an essential companion to those interested in the history of knowledge and early modern encounters, as well as specialists in the history of empire and print culture.

**Michiel van Groesen** is Professor of Maritime History at Leiden University. His work is interdisciplinary in nature, focusing on the culture of early modern Europe's imperial expansion and the politics of global interactions. He is the author of two books, *Representations of the Overseas World in the De Bry Collection of Voyages, 1590–1634* (Brill, 2008) and *Amsterdam's Atlantic: Print Culture and the Making of Dutch Brazil* (Penn, 2017). He is currently completing a monograph on the circulation of news and information in the Atlantic world, which is provisionally entitled *An Ocean of Rumours*, and will appear with Cambridge University Press.

**Johannes Müller** is an assistant professor at the Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society. His research focuses on environmental history, memory studies, and the history of knowledge. Among his publications are the volumes *Exile Memories and the Dutch Revolt: The Narrated Diaspora, 1550–1750* (Brill, 2016), *Memory before Modernity. Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Brill, 2013, co-edited with Judith Pollmann, Erika Kuijpers, and Jasper van der Steen), and he is currently preparing a book manuscript on the impact of climate on fish and fisheries with marine biologist Daniel Pauly.

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Distance, Information, and Credibility in the Early Modern World

*Edited by Michiel van Groesen and Johannes Müller*

# **Far from the Truth**

Distance, Information, and Credibility in  
the Early Modern World

**Edited by**

**Michiel van Groesen and Johannes Müller**



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Looking back, the conference at Leiden University from which this volume stems appears to be situated in another time – organized as it was in January 2020, right before a global pandemic raised unforeseen and often unprecedented questions about the credibility of information and the value, and the cost, of distance. During that difficult period, in the memory of the editors, the conference came to symbolize everything that is enjoyable about historical research – to learn about different times and cultures, to discover new information and share new ideas, and to collectively develop a set of analytical tools to solve a pressing problem that many early modern Europeans faced: how to find out who to trust, and what to believe, when physical distance did not permit for direct observation, and familiar mechanisms of authentication and verification could not be applied.

*Far from the Truth* attempts to offer multiple answers to these questions, all based on original research into various cultures of information management from the period between 1450 and 1750. We are grateful to all eight contributors for sharing their opinions and interpretations with us. The scholarship on display here is indebted to others as well. Esther Baakman, Tiffany Bousard, and Arthur Weststeijn were members of the project team that initiated discussions and came up with the plan to organize a conference on the tension between distance and credibility in early modern Europe. Their thoughts on the theme have already appeared in writing, much earlier than the volume you are holding today. We would also like to thank Malick Ghaem and Lia Markey for giving papers, which, in due course and in a different form, will be published elsewhere. Leiden University continues to provide an excellent institutional environment for answering challenging questions about early modernity: Jeroen Duindam, Jos Gommans, Damian Pargas, Judith Pollmann, and Paul Smith – as well as Surekha Davies who made the short trip from Utrecht – chaired sessions and engaged in the dialogues and debates that ensued. We are grateful to them, and to the Institute for History which hosted the conference, for providing the informal atmosphere that permits good scholarship.

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to ensure that this volume is available in Open Access immediately upon appearance. We are grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their critical observations, which we believe have made both the individual chapters and the book as a whole better and more cohesive, and to Sjors Stuurman for helping us make the index. A particular word of thanks is due to Daniel Carey, who together with Joan-Pau Rubiés edits the Hakluyt Society Studies in the History of Travel that provides such a welcome home for this volume. Dan has read the entire volume at short notice, has pointed out errors and inconsistencies, and has provided us with exactly the right blend of commentary and encouragement to get as close to the truth as we realistically could.

Michiel van Groesen and Johannes Müller, Leiden, July 2023

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**Ricardo Padrón** is Professor of Spanish at the University of Virginia, United States. His articles on the early modern Spanish geopolitical imagination have appeared in a number of prominent journals, including *Representations*, the *Colonial Latin American Review*, the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* and the *Hispanic Review*. He is the author of two scholarly monographs on the subject, *The Spacious Word: Cartography, Literature, and Empire in Early Modern Spain* (Chicago UP, 2004) and *The Indies of the Setting Sun: How Early Modern Spain Mapped the Far East as the Transpacific West* (Chicago UP, 2020). He has received support for his research from the American Council of Learned Societies and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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# Introduction

## Distance, Credibility, and European Geographies of Information, 1450–1750

*Michiel van Groesen and Johannes Müller*

In the early modern period, distance played a significant role in how people perceived credibility. Horizons expanded, but the speed of communication remained slow: information took long to travel across oceans, plains, and mountain ranges. Physical distance hence created a new sense of disconnect. In a period when people were used to rely on local sources of knowledge, many viewed information from faraway places with scepticism as they were unable to verify its accuracy. In historical scholarship, the period between 1450 and 1750 has become emblematic of the rapid emergence of exchanges, connections, and transfer patterns that shape our present globalized world. Long understood and framed as the “Age of Discovery” or “Age of Encounters”, or instead critically examined as the era of asymmetrical proto-imperialism, the period witnessed a dramatic increase in distant exchanges and the mobility of people, goods, and ideas. For good reasons, then, scholars of early modern Europe have been quick to adopt “global” approaches. They have pointed out in multiple ways that new geographical connections and entanglements established a paradigmatic shift in European thought, and for centuries remained an important catalyst of cultural assimilation and historical change. The unbalanced concentration on early modern connections and mobilities, however, can easily be prone to overlooking the physical and technological restrictions of the early modern world. Several recent articles have demonstrated that distance remained a cause of delay and uncertainty throughout early modern Europe, providing ample opportunities for error, manipulation, and distortion in ways that are difficult to imagine from a twenty-first century perspective.<sup>1</sup>

1 For good recent essays that provide the historiographical groundwork for this volume, see Daniel Carey, “The Problem of Credibility in Early Modern Travel”, *Renaissance Studies* 33, no. 4 (2019): 524–47; Filippo De Vivo, “Microhistories of Long-Distance Information: Space, Movement, and Agency in the Early Modern News”, *Past & Present* 242 (2019): 179–214; and Stefania Tutino, “Historical Authenticity and the Expanding Horizons of the Seventeenth-Century Catholic Church”, *Journal of Modern History* 92, no. 1 (2020): 1–39. By adding the notion of geographical and cultural distance to the problem of credibility, the volume addresses issues that have first been put on the scholarly agenda in important

Distance also provided a considerable challenge to communication. The inability to verify what was reported from beyond the horizon severely deferred the European acceptance and exegesis of information, particularly when conventional truths were bluntly dismissed by individual eyewitnesses who lacked the authority of classical learning. The erosion of traditional frameworks of knowledge, moreover, coincided with the brittleness of belief as Christianity's consensus disintegrated and confessions drifted apart. The world of learning, gradually yet unevenly, began to develop new, and increasingly independent, strategies to evaluate information. Early modern Europe's mounting susceptibility to new ideas meant that marvellous testimonies of cultures and civilizations far away resulted in a cacophony of competing realities. But what was "fake" and what was "true"? After the first wave of incredulity had receded and a global perspective progressively took hold among recipients of information, European geopolitical agendas added another layer to the noise: propaganda typically accompanied colonial triumphs, and measured silences followed transoceanic defeats, thus providing new and conflicting filters of uncertainty. The onset of globalization, it is fair to say, truly transformed the Old World's intellectual outlook.

The key question that this volume attempts to address is how exactly this process unfolded. European armchair travellers, of course, did not stand by helplessly, waiting to be washed away by a flood of long-distance (mis)information.<sup>2</sup> When the initial shock had disappeared, they quickly began to reconstruct and reconfigure their comforting cultural hierarchies by employing what Joan-Pau Rubiés has termed the "languages of Christianity and civility".<sup>3</sup> A subsequent era of unrivalled curiosity heralded the quest for a more concerted intellectual response, and ultimately a more orderly form of

monographs such as Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Brendan Dooley, *The Social History of Skepticism: Experience and Doubt in Early Modern Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); and Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge. From Gutenberg to Diderot* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

- 2 Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). The term "long-distance information" is used by De Vivo, "Microhistories". It is worth emphasizing that we are interested mainly in European configurations of distance and credibility. There are very good recent examples of scholarship on non-European people grappling with the same issue; see for example Gregory E. Dowd, *Groundless: Rumors, Legends, and Hoaxes on the Early American Frontier* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015); Katherine Grandjean, *American Passage: The Communications Frontier in Early New England* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); and Julius S. Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (New York: Versa, 2018).
- 3 Joan-Pau Rubiés, "New Worlds and Renaissance Ethnology", *History and Anthropology* 6, no. 2/3 (1993): 158. For an extensive comparative exercise between East and West, see Serge Gruzinski, *What Time is it There? America and Islam at the Dawn of Modern Times* (New York: Polity Press, 2010).

information management – often a local rather than a global occupation.<sup>4</sup> But doubts remained nonetheless. The natural suspicion of recipients, seeking verification of stories that appeared fabricated, forced their itinerant compatriots to work harder, as it were, to emphasize the veracity of their tales, sometimes by character references in the paratexts of their printed accounts or by simply insisting that what they reported was true, but often by devising new, more elaborate rhetorical strategies to vouch for the authenticity of their testimonies and encourage their acceptance.<sup>5</sup>

The early modern relationship between distance and credibility, although not necessarily inversely proportional, is sufficiently tense to merit scrutiny. Historians in recent years have emphasized that oceans and other geographical barriers developed into new channels of information and transfer, and have explored the ways in which new media and technological innovations brought about a gradual “demise of distance”. A wholesale transformation of global communication networks did not occur, however, until the invention of the telegraph and the steamship in the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> It is for this reason that the early modern movement of information should not be taken for granted, and that the question how distance affected the transfer of values and ideas in the early modern world is crucial to understanding Europe’s response to the emergence of global opportunity. What happened to information once it had travelled halfway around the world? Under which circumstances were testimonies from afar relied upon or distrusted? Which mechanisms were employed to establish credibility, and which strategies did communicators and audiences use to authenticate information? Studying the relationship between distance, information, and credibility in the early modern era, the scope of this volume stretches over three centuries and allows for a grasp of the diachronic dimension of the changing dynamics between these forces – leading to one more additional question: Along which lines did the relationship between distance and credibility change, and how linear were these developments in an early modern setting?

### **Re-establishing Familiarity in a Globalizing World**

Notions of geographical and cultural distance appear to have changed several times between the late Middle Ages and the eighteenth century, when the world arguably became both bigger and smaller. On the one hand, as European ships

4 See for example Arndt Brendecke, *The Empirical Empire: Spanish Colonial Rule and the Politics of Knowledge* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016); Filippo De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Daniela Bleichmar, *Visible Empire: Botanical Expeditions and Visual Culture in the Hispanic Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

5 Carey, “The Problem of Credibility”, esp. 525–31.

6 John J. McCusker, “The Demise of Distance: The Business Press and the Origins of the Information Revolution in the Early Modern Atlantic World”, *American Historical Review* 110, no. 2 (2005): 295–321.

rounded the Cape of Good Hope, sailed towards the Caribbean and South America, or circumnavigated the globe, traditional cosmology and cosmography – both built on the foundations of classical antiquity – ceased to provide satisfying answers.<sup>7</sup> Travellers, both faithful and imaginative ones, marvelled at the new worlds they encountered, and the multitude of islands and landmasses that suddenly appeared on formerly empty maps.<sup>8</sup> The increasing flow of information, facilitated in Europe by the rise of print, constituted a professional sphere of exchange and transfer in which news was disseminated quickly, stereotypes emerged and endured, and foreign regions gradually appeared closer and more familiar.<sup>9</sup> However, despite the increasing frequency and quantity of information exchange, questions of verification and authentication remained persistent throughout the period discussed in this book.

The dialectical relationship between distance and familiarity becomes manifest in the world of early modern media. Even in our contemporary mediatized world, media not only connect disparate regions, they also exclude a wide range of geographies from their maps. The distances and proximities created by news media, for example, are inherently selective and contextualized.<sup>10</sup> As a result, large parts of the globe remain *terra incognita* in the mainstream of news. We can hardly overestimate the role of media in

7 On the “defeat” of cosmography in sixteenth-century Europe, see Frank Lespringant, *Mapping the Renaissance World: The Geographical Imagination in the Age of Discovery* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994). For a more positive view, see Maria M. Portuondo, *Secret Science: Spanish Cosmography and the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). On the impact of America on Europe in the sixteenth century, see the excellent essays in Karen Ordahl Kupperman, ed. *America in European Consciousness, 1493–1750* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). On the failure of eyewitness testimonies at the expense of learned knowledge, at least initially, see Anthony Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Shock of Discovery and the Power of Tradition* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

8 Good recent studies include Ricardo Padrón, *The Indies of the Setting Sun: How Early Modern Spain Mapped the Far East as the Transpacific West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020); Elizabeth Horodowich, *The Venetian Discovery of America: Geographic Imagination and Print Culture in the Age of Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Lia Markey, *Imagining the Americas in Medici Florence* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016); Surekha Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human: New Worlds, Maps and Monsters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

9 See for example Michiel van Groesen, *The Representations of the Overseas World in the De Bry Collection of Voyages (1590–1634)* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Sabine MacCormack, *On the Wings of Time: Rome, the Incas, Spain, and Peru* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes, 1250–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and the classic multi-volume Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*. 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965–1993).

10 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of Mass Media* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

creating and defining centres and peripheries, but it is not only the selection of certain geographical areas over others that creates such irregularities. The ways in which media can produce distance are also qualitative: medial depictions of foreign countries or continents are often designed in terms of otherness that revolve around the contrast between “here” and “there”. The history of early modern European print media offers relevant precursors, as the role of early print in covering and depicting the non-European world is full of contradictions and complexities: Books, pamphlets, newspapers, images, and maps, as well as handwritten letters and documents did not only bridge and overcome distances and integrate vast geographical spaces into one continuum, but they also did the opposite. Media that offered access to information about new worlds and promote understanding by using recognizable monikers such as *New Spain*, *New France* or *New England* often opted to do so by artificially distancing the “exotic” elements of these worlds from the cultures and societies Europeans were familiar with at the same time. Paradoxically – and this holds true for the entire period between 1450 and 1750 – the psychological demise of distance went hand in hand with medial constructions of otherness that relied on the emphasis of cultural and geographical distance between Europe and the world beyond.<sup>11</sup>

To understand the flexibility and the often questionable status of information, as well as the formative and transformative role that early modern media played in the process of verification and authentication, it is important to pay close attention to matters of genre, materiality, and distribution in recontextualizing, distorting or suppressing information. Conventions determined what could be shared with others, and how that could be done to reach out, appeal, and exert influence. Cultures of perception from the era between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, notoriously difficult to grasp, mattered too. Early modern Europeans, judging from their own comments in letters to friends and colleagues as well as from the limited traces of reading practices that have survived, were well aware of the different meanings that different genres affixed to global information, and harboured a healthy dose of scepticism.<sup>12</sup> On top of that, reading, information management, and even collecting were mostly individual practices, and could lead to a variety of interpretations on distant cultures and societies regardless of typographical fixity and nascent notions of contemporaneity in the Old World.<sup>13</sup>

11 Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography*, 297–301. See also Ralph Bauer, *The Cultural Geography of Colonial American Literatures: Empire, Travel, Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4–5, who emphasizes lateral connections of trust and credibility between colonies.

12 See for example the contributions by Joan-Pau Rubiés and Ricardo Padrón in this volume. On information and information management, see Blair, *Too Much to Know*; Ann Blair, Paul Duguid, Anja-Silvia Goeing, and Anthony Grafton, ed. *Information: A Historical Companion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

13 The notion of typographical fixity was famously coined by Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural*

All of this raises questions about the specific ways in which distance and familiarity were construed and disseminated within different media genres, the materiality of circulation, and the degree to which observations were either carefully edited or instead presented as “raw” and authentic sources. In which form were testimonies most effective in claiming authenticity – printed or in manuscript – and what happened to sensitive information once it became public? Another crucial revolving point in the quest for credibility was the changing notions of time and authority and the question of how, when, and under which circumstances older sets of knowledge needed to be updated or abandoned altogether. And finally, it is crucial to emphasize the role of publishers, translators, and illustrators in the production and dissemination of printed materials: how did the publication process impact credibility, and which part did early modern Europe’s media infrastructure play – and the reputations of their various actors – as information was collected, ordered, and managed? How did the expectation of the book and print market inform authorial and editorial decisions, and to which extent were travel accounts, to mention just one example, sold and bought as reliable documents on the world abroad or merely for their literary or entertainment value?

The ambivalent relationship between distance and familiarity complicated the notion of credibility. Spatial distance confounded the possibility to evaluate information and verify dubious claims, a problem that was widely recognized in early modern Europe. As the sixteenth-century Marburg professor Johann Dryander put it in his preface to Hans Staden’s seminal *Warhaftige Historia* (1557), distance was the natural ally of liars, stating that “Those who lie, lie from far abroad. For no one ever goes there to verify their claims, and instead of taking the effort to do so, he would rather believe it.”<sup>14</sup> More than eighty years later, in 1638, the Amsterdam newspaper editor Broer Jansz was sarcastically advised by competitors “to lie some more about Brazil, since it is far enough away from here”, while in Spain, around the same time, the poet Francisco de Quevedo mused that news reports from abroad “fall like rain, and so do lies.”<sup>15</sup> And another sixty years later, for reasons of vanity and

*Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), and subsequently challenged by Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). On collecting, see Daniela Bleichmar and Peter C. Mancall, *Collecting Across Cultures: Material Exchanges in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). The concept of contemporaneity, the awareness that everyone had access to more or less the same information at the same time, is developed in Brendan Dooley, ed. *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

14 Hans Staden, *Warhaftige Historia* (Marburg: Kolben, 1557), [A4r].

15 Henk Borst, “Broer Jansz in Antwerpse ogen: De Amsterdamse courrantier na de slag bij Kallo in 1638 neergezet als propagandist”, *De zeventiende eeuw* 25, no. 1 (2009): 86; Arthur Weststeijn, “Empire in Fragments: Transatlantic News and Print Media in the Iberian World, c. 1600–40”, *Renaissance Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (2021): 528–70.

commercial gain, the Franciscan friar Louis Hennepin boasted in his *Nouvelle Découverte d'un tres grand pays* (1697) to have been the first to descend the Mississippi river – a claim that led Robert La Salle to object that “he will not fail to exaggerate everything [...] he speaks more in keeping with what he wishes than with what he knows”.<sup>16</sup> Hennepin’s lies, however, did not stand in the way of the appearance of numerous reprints and translations well into the eighteenth century – which partly explains why the problem persisted for so long. The tension between distance and credibility in eyewitness accounts remained so ubiquitous that conscious yet only thinly veiled attempts at verisimilitude, like Daniel Defoe’s *The Life, Adventures and Piracies of the Famous Captain Singleton* (1720), occasionally succeeded in fooling credulous readers.<sup>17</sup>

### Observation and the Question of Testimonial Authority

Authority claims through eyewitnessing had belonged to the repertoire of European travel writing since the Middle Ages. Unlike medieval encyclopaedias, cosmographies, and bestiaries which were largely based on textual authority and often had a general moral and theological meaning, early modern travel accounts told specific stories, laid out in a specific time and place. Consequently, their authors felt the urge to present their narratives as both literally and morally true.<sup>18</sup> Editions of the accounts of Marco Polo and Sir John Mandeville, then, routinely introduced the authors as direct eyewitnesses of the places and events they described – to such an extent in fact that it exerted an influence on early modern etymologies, because travellers time and again lamented what Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park call “the inadequacy of language” to communicate their experiences in foreign lands.<sup>19</sup> Three German testimonies from across the period discussed in this volume elucidate the problem, and its persistence. As these examples from between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries illustrate, questions of credibility continued to inform both reading and writing practices.

While the subjective nature of human experience and the specific conditions of communicating individual perceptions were only later conceptualized in more theoretical terms, its basic mechanisms belonged to the vocabularies of early modern readers and writers. Travel was at the heart of reflections on the subjective nature of experience. The modern Dutch and German terms for experience (“ervaren” or “erfahren”), are directly derived from notions connected to “travelling” (“varen” or “fahren”). The semantic change that took

16 Percy G. Adams, *Travelers & Travel Liars, 1660–1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 45–49.

17 *Ibid.*, 3.

18 Andrea Frisch, *The Invention of the Eyewitness: Witnessing and Testimony in Early Modern France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

19 Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone, 1998), 62–63.

place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reflects the status of travellers (“fahrer”) as speaking from personal experience, and underlines their status as the most reliable interlocutors of knowledge and information. Yet personal experience, perception, and direct testimony were not automatically accepted as truth, and pre-modern authors and readers were clearly able to take the subjectivity of observing eyewitnesses into account. As Hans Schiltberger (1380 – after 1427), a Bavarian traveller to Turkey, India, and Persia, notes in his *Reisebuch*, the temporal distance between his actual travels and his narrative did not allow him to recall everything correctly. In his preface he explicitly did not rule out errors and lacunae in his memory. He also acknowledged that the specific circumstances of his travels shaped his perspective as well. As a Mongol captive, he had participated in Timur’s campaign to India and he notified the reader that his position did not allow him to see everything he wanted in the countries he travelled, and that the specific circumstances of his travels shaped his perspective as well:

And what I have experienced (“erfahren”) in my time among the heathens was only written down later, and I cannot report everything I witnessed (“erfahren”), as I do not remember everything clearly. And in my time among the heathens, I was not able to intensively travel (“erfahren”) to all the places in the lands and cities where I have been, because I was a captive and I did not belong to myself.<sup>20</sup>

Not belonging to himself and not being able to see everything he wanted was the reason for long inclusions of other travel narratives, especially passages from Mandeville. These intertextual interventions, he assured his readership, did not undermine his status as a witness but served to complete his own perspective.<sup>21</sup>

Schiltberger’s experience of not belonging to himself was not limited to his actual captivity, and his work appears to contain several subjective perspectives. His account switches between the first and the third person, and the episode of his captivity seems to refer to a different self than the one that leaves Germany and returns home after thirty-three years. Early modern ideas about the impact of individual subjectivities as a factor in travel writing and personal testimony were diverse and often presupposed a wider critical epistemological apparatus. European audiences were clearly capable of differentiating between various subjective perspectives and they were willing to find traces of empirical observation in accounts they deemed distorted by the specific circumstances of their production – but it required considerable

20 Hans Schiltberger, *Reisebuch*, edited by Valentin Langmantel (Tübingen: Litterarischer Verein, 1885), 1.

21 Albrecht Claassen, “Global Travel in the Late Middle Ages: The Eyewitness Account of Johann Schiltberger”, *The Medieval History Journal* 23, no. 1 (2020): 74–101; Mary Baine Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World. Exotic European Travel Writing, 400–1600* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).



effort.<sup>22</sup> For authors, citing eyewitnesses did not necessarily mean that their testimonies were absolutely reliable but that they could be ascribed to an individual perspective and critically examined as subjective accounts.

Attributing observations to specific observers and subjecting them to critical examinations was not an invention of the Enlightenment, but it did become more prominent during the eighteenth century. As the German naturalist and ethnologist Georg Forster notes in the preface to *A Voyage Round the World* (1777), “the same objects may have been seen in different points of view, and [...] the same fact may often have given rise to different ideas.”<sup>23</sup> Each perspective on the world beyond the horizon could manifest itself in different ways to different observers. It was therefore important to be familiar with the background of the person who authored an account from far abroad and the context in which it was written:

Two travellers seldom saw the same object in the same manner, and each reported the fact differently, according to his sensations, and his peculiar mode of thinking. It was therefore necessary to be acquainted with the observer, before any use could be made of his observations.<sup>24</sup>

Critically reflecting on the subjective nature of empirical observation, Forster justified his decision to include parts from James Cook’s notebook into his travel narrative: even though the two men had been on the same ship, Cook’s role was very different to Forster’s and mixing the two perspectives would offer a more complete account of the journey. The Italo-French painter Jean-François Rigaud’s 1780 portrait of Georg and his father, the zoologist Johann Reinhold Forster, at work in New Zealand suggested that distance could be overcome if only one scientifically described one’s observations (Figure 0.1).

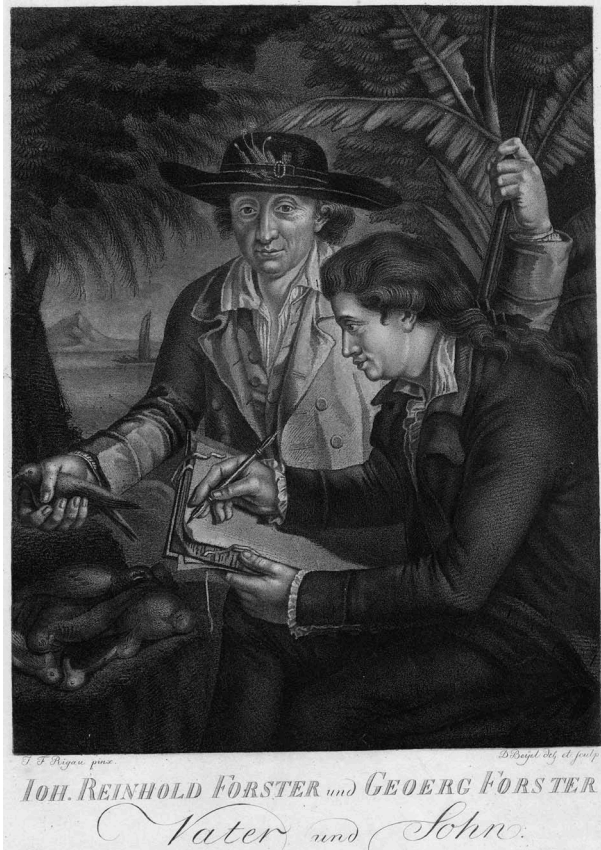
The physical presence of eyewitnesses and the possibility to question them about their information was certainly an indication of credibility. In the preface to Hans Staden’s sixteenth-century *Historia*, Johann Dryander introduced the protagonist of the Brazilian travel account as a local who was known to everyone as a son of honourable parents.<sup>25</sup> Another reason to trust his account was his reference to Heliodorus Hessus, another Marburger, whom he had met in Brazil. Staden, Dryander asserted, did not know that Hessus had also travelled to South America, which was proof of the account’s truthfulness. On the other hand, sceptics could just await Hessus’s return and if Staden’s *Historia* was indeed a collection of lies, its author would become

22 A good example is Gabriel Rollenhagen’s *Vier Bücher Wunderbarlicher biß daher unerhörter, und ungleublicher Indianischer reysen* (Magdeburg: Bötcher, 1603), discussed more extensively in Chapter 5 below.

23 Georg Forster, *A Voyage Round the World* (London: White, Robson, Elmsly, and Robinson, 1777), viii.

24 *Ibid.*, xi.

25 Staden, *Warhaftige Historia*, [A3r]. Trust was evidently a social category, as emphasized by Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*, 6.



*Figure 0.1 Daniel Beyel, after Jean-François Rigaud, Portrait of Dr Johann Reinhold Forster and his son Georg Forster (c.1799).*  
Source: Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg Carl von Ossietzky.

known as an “unreliable man”. Hessus probably died ten years after the book’s publication, but the possibility of his return could promote the assumption that Staden would not have dared to merely invent the stories of his stay on the other side of the ocean as it potentially affected his reputation. Dryander’s preface also reflects the distrust that travellers faced in general: in the eyes of the “common man”, living a vagrant life was the most obvious sign that someone should not be trusted and it was due to the unreliability of travellers that truthful observers faced scepticism. The credibility of witnesses to global travel, thus, often depended on their embeddedness in local networks and knowledge about their whereabouts. As Dryander made clear, Staden was not a vagrant or a permanent traveller – which might indicate that he might tell different stories everywhere he came – but his two Brazilian adventures were the only longer voyages he had ever made. The rest of his life

was well-known to his fellow citizens and his embeddedness in a network of familiar names and persons who might show up to confirm or disprove his claims was reason enough for him to believe him.

Even though Dryander made clear that there were good reasons to doubt the accounts of travellers – there had been so many examples of invented and manipulated travel narratives – he also warned of a categorical distrust towards all accounts from far abroad. Writing off any testimony of hitherto unknown places, people or natural phenomena contained a bias that was also fundamentally anti-intellectual. The same prejudice had been already made by the “common people” who could not accept the calculations of cosmography as they could not imagine the vast distances between the earth, the sun, and the moon.<sup>26</sup> To dispute everything that could not be confirmed by daily experience was thus nothing but methodical ignorance, and readers should not exclude the possibility that seemingly incredible accounts contained some truth. The problem of how to distinguish between truthfulness and manipulation, he admitted, could never be fully solved with the help of scholarly methods. Intuition, sensation, and emotion became equally important instruments of examination and evaluation, and helped to facilitate the consolidation of information into knowledge well into the eighteenth century.

Europe’s expanding geographical horizons between 1450 and 1750, of course, had a substantial effect on the political balance of power, meaning that sensory means of verification were also applied to information that was produced by those who, almost by default, could not be trusted. From Columbus’s voyages onwards, the Catholic Church appropriated and tried to monopolize the Americas, but found it increasingly difficult to find the right balance between authenticity, credibility, and faith in the divine truth as it attempted to capitalize on the challenges of worldwide conversions in a context of increasing confessional strife. According to Stefania Tutino, “the increased rate of mobility and the enlarged scope of the Catholic missionary efforts made the task of verifying the truth of the facts more difficult, while simultaneously raising the theological, devotional, ideological, and polemical stakes in the battle to prove that the Roman Catholic Church was the same as the one true Church of Christ”.<sup>27</sup> By the seventeenth century, the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds had definitively become geographical extensions of the European theatre of war, and as a result, truth became even more conditional. The Reformation had witnessed the rise of largely parallel cultures of belonging, in which different media catered mainly, or at times only, for those within their own bubble.<sup>28</sup> Information by coreligionists was privileged over information from opposing confessions. Tenacious myths, such as the Black Legend of Spanish atrocities in the Americas, represented truth and untruth

26 Staden, *Warhaftige Historia*, [B1r].

27 Tutino, “Historical Authenticity”, 4.

28 Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

at the same time, depending again on one's perspective.<sup>29</sup> Hence the process by which credibility, authenticity, doctrinal dogmas, global propaganda, and ideological drive intertwined and differentiated became "tortuous and painful" at least until the onset of a more scientific approach to verification in the later eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup> In the meantime global conflict ensured that long-distance information invited competition as much as exchange, adding a political layer to Fernand Braudel's timeless creed that distance was the "first enemy" of communication in early modern society.<sup>31</sup>

*Far from the Truth* addresses these issues by bringing together a diverse range of scholarly approaches and academic disciplines – examining textual, visual, material, and psychological strategies of persuasion and reception. The volume opens with shipboard perspectives from Portugal, which shaped the early stages of globalization and conditioned the European gaze by exploring West Africa, rounding the Cape of Good Hope, and reporting on the riches of the Indian Ocean world. From his viewpoint on the front deck, Josiah Blackmore argues in Chapter 1 that the Portuguese in the fifteenth century developed a seafaring epistemology, with ships as vessels of truth, that culminated in Luís de Camões's *Lusiads* and retained its significance throughout the early modern era – even serving to facilitate the credibility of legendary tales of monsters which were never completely eradicated. In Chapter 2, Joan-Pau Rubiés revisits the canonical travel accounts of Amerigo Vespucci, Ludovico de Vartema, and Antonio Pigafetta to demonstrate that the longing to establish credibility from a distance was widely shared, and that the rudimentary tools to do so were already in place as early as the first half of the sixteenth century. The observer's perceived honesty, the quality of his observations, the reliability of his sources, and the means of disseminating his experiences would remain key components in early modern attempts to distinguish truth from lies, facts from fiction. Stephanie Leitch, in Chapter 3, reminds us that these modes of information management were not exclusively textual. Influential publishers like Theodore de Bry and Levinus Hulsius, active around 1600 in Frankfurt, the epicentre of the European book market, did not travel themselves, but were instrumental in making the Americas more recognizable to home audiences by copying and recontextualizing

29 Margaret R. Greer, Walter D. Mignolo, and Maureen Quilligan, ed. *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Harold J. Cook, *Matters of Exchange: Commerce, Medicine, and Science in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 175–225.

30 Tutino, "Historical Authenticity", 39. A key role in the Church's missionary efforts was of course reserved for the Jesuits, see Markus Friedrich, *Der lange Arm Roms? Globale Verwaltung und Kommunikation im Jesuitenorden, 1540–1773* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2011) See Renate Dürr's chapter in this volume on John Lockman's self-conscious attempts to understand beyond the confessional divide.

31 De Vivo, "Microhistories", 180; Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. 2 vols. (New York: Harper Collins, 1972), II, 358–69.

printed images which were deeply familiar. European iconography provided sufficient comfort to create a stock catalogue of “novel” interpretations that persisted until the Age of Enlightenment.

Yet the means of authentication did not develop in linear ways. In Chapter 4, Ricardo Padrón unpicks the discussion in early modern Europe about the number of islands in the archipelagos of Southeast Asia. He shows that although eyewitness accounts gradually led to more exactitude, the myths about an exaggerated “multitude of islands” that had originated in the later Middle Ages continued to be propelled in various genres – relying on the same rhetoric of (in this case imagined) precision. Johannes Müller, in Chapter 5, proceeds to examine the rigorous methods of source criticism that emerged in attempts to overcome geographical distance. Gabriel Rollenhagen, an aspiring German emblemist and poet, systematically challenged forty false propositions about nature, science, and geography, undermining what was left of the cosmographical tradition while at the same time developing a new method to expose persistent misconceptions. The rise of individual scepticism that the likes of Rollenhagen promoted put the onus on those responsible for disseminating information to be even more conscious of the connection between credibility and reputation. The French newspaper editor Théophraste Renaudot, Michiel van Groesen writes (Chapter 6), was by many considered unreliable because of his position as the mouthpiece of Cardinal Richelieu. Geographical and metaphorical distance, in Renaudot’s *Gazette de France*, offered a respite: since news from the Americas was not overly politicized in Paris until the ascent of Colbert, Renaudot could use it to shore up his credibility – offering nuance in his coverage when other media did not, and providing multiple eyewitness perspectives on important geopolitical turning points. Renaudot’s transoceanic reporting was an exception, however: linear progress was still not achieved.

As the seventeenth century progressed, and geopolitical rivalry replaced curiosity as the main impetus for European engagement with the non-European world, the tension between distance and credibility affected other forms of information management too. Christina Brauner, in Chapter 7, examines the life of political treaties between European merchant companies and African polities on the Gold Coast, and studies the different interpretations of trust that facilitated both the conception and the validity of these diplomatic documents. The materiality of the treaties in particular, traceable in the archives, reflects their multiple meanings. The archive itself is the main focus of Chapter 8, as Nicholas Popper explores the single-minded attempts of the English Secretary of State Joseph Williamson to keep control over the rapidly expanding British Empire by gathering, ordering, and filing letters he received from correspondents in the Caribbean. Popper shows that Williamson used his personal archive to support political decision-making, and to carve out a key role in controlling the flow of transoceanic information. Renate Dürr, in the volume’s final chapter, follows the dynamics of establishing credibility into the eighteenth century. Despite the English scholar John Lockman’s heartfelt aversion to the Jesuit order, he recognized that Jesuit

letters contained valuable information on regions that few Europeans had visited. The problem, obviously, was one of trust. For this reason Lockman set up his own system to distinguish fact from fabrication in the catalogue of “dangerous knowledge” that the Society provided. His extensive footnotes provided an antidote to clearly biased truths that threatened to develop into mainstream viewpoints, and allowed readers to become eyewitnesses themselves. The volume concludes with a short coda by Miles Ogborn, who reflects on the nature of truth and the attempts at different ways to reach different truths – or even possible truths – in early modern Europe.

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Contemporaries would have recognized the problems discussed in this volume, because they, too, abundantly realized that distance and credibility mattered. In 1739, the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume devoted two sections of his foundational work *A Treatise of Human Nature* to “contiguity and distance in space and time”.<sup>32</sup> Hume was more preoccupied with the temporal version of distance than with the geographical kind, but was quick to acknowledge that in reflecting on any object distant from ourselves, “we are oblig’d not only to reach it at first by passing thro’ all the intermediate space betwixt ourselves and the object, but also to renew our progress every moment; being every moment recall’d to the consideration of ourselves and our present situation”. Distance, in other words, required (self-)reflection at every step of the way towards a full understanding. Of course, Hume continued, “the fewer steps we make to arrive at the object, and the smoother the road is, this diminution of vivacity is less sensibly felt, but still may be observ’d more or less in proportion to the degrees of distance and difficulty”. Proximity was a virtue, in other words, to such an extent even that, according to Hume,

men are principally concern’d about those objects, which are not much remov’d either in space or time, enjoying the present, and leaving what is afar off to the care of chance and fortune. Talk to a man of his condition thirty years hence, and he will not regard you. Speak of what is to happen to-morrow, and he will lend you attention. The breaking of a mirror gives us more concern when at home, than the burning of a house, when abroad, and some hundred leagues distant.

“Distance”, Hume concluded, “weakens the conception and passion”. As the various tales in this volume demonstrate, however, this was not a universal

32 In quoting Hume, we have used the digitized edition at [www.davidhume.org](http://www.davidhume.org). The section entitled “Of contiguity and distance in space and time” comprises Sections VII and VIII of Part 3 (“Of the Will and the Passions”) of Book 2 (“Of The Passions”) of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, first published in London by John Noon in 1739–40.

truth. For some early modern Europeans, that which was remote was simply too important to leave to “the care of chance and fortune”. Hume, then, proceeded by challenging his own reasoning, raising the problem “why a very great distance increases our esteem and admiration for an object”. His answer to this question merits being quoted in full here:

’tis evident that the mere view and contemplation of any greatness, whether successive or extended, enlarges the soul, and gives it a sensible delight and pleasure. A wide plain, the ocean, eternity, a succession of several ages; all these are entertaining objects, and excel every thing, however beautiful, which accompanies not its beauty with a suitable greatness. Now when any very distant object is presented to the imagination, we naturally reflect on the interpos’d distance, and by that means, conceiving something great and magnificent, receive the usual satisfaction.

It is unlikely that Hume’s contemporaries, most importantly those who had themselves travelled the world, regarded wide plains and oceans primarily as “entertaining objects” which helped to conceive satisfaction. What they might have more readily subscribed to is the philosopher’s idea that the human imagination played a key role in overcoming distance.

More than two-and-a-half centuries later, Carlo Ginzburg criticized Hume’s attempts to overcome the contradictions inherent in his reasoning as “disappointing insofar as they are drawn from individual psychology only”.<sup>33</sup> Ginzburg has a point. Although early modern Europeans would have used different terminology, it is precisely this individual nature of the human imagination in relating or translating distance that presented others with the arguably even more challenging problem of credibility. Who and what to believe, and why? These questions in turn produced an equally compelling and, one hopes, universal human passion: the desire to uncover and transcend alternative facts, and to create a practicable toolkit to do so. The chapters below will follow on the trail of David Hume by finding out how Europeans between 1450 and 1750 used their imagination in attempting to smoothen the road from there to here, and collectively provide a better understanding of the itineraries towards distant truths, no matter how strange, incredible or elusive.

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33 Carlo Ginzburg, “Killing a Chinese Mandarin: The Moral Implications of Distance”, *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 1 (1994): 57–59, with the quotation on p. 59.

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# 1 Reports from the Edges of Iberian Empire

*Josiah Blackmore*

Truth, distance, and credibility are a triumvirate of ideas that suffused writings produced under the aegis of Iberian empire from the Middle Ages to early modernity. The Iberian empire generated, and was accompanied by, a prolific culture of writing and documentation that encompassed a wide generic sweep and included chronicles, poetry, letters, official reports of all kinds, and individual travel accounts covering an array of historical moments and objectives. The geographic and ethnographic realms that seafaring opened to Western eyes, in all corners of the globe, meant that there were evolving and elastic correlations between forms of eyewitnessing and narrative productivity that invoked different authorial strategies and intellectual traditions in establishing claims of authority and truth. From the mid-fifteenth century, when chroniclers began to document Portuguese incursions into uncharted sub-Saharan Africa, to the seventeenth century, when print culture saw a flourishing of stories of monsters and marvels in territories of Iberian colonial interests, authors created various rhetorical strategies to lend credibility to documents that recounted experiences in geographical peripheries and brought an ever-increasing store of new kinds of knowledge back to a Western and European population and readership. Such forms of knowledge include, but by no means are limited to, geography, navigation, botany, zoology, meteorology, and what we could term proto-ethnography. The recent work of scholars such as Pablo F. Gómez and Allison Margaret Bigelow reveal how indigenous cultures participated in knowledge production in the arena of early modern Iberian empire, and provides important counterpoints to a (presumed) European perspective that structures many texts composed by Iberian writers and which are the object of my analyses.

In this brief essay, my purpose is to explore specific, selected moments in the relationship between truth and distance in early modern Iberian empire, with a focus on Portuguese texts from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. While a vast number of primary sources might be marshalled into such a study, I concentrate only on a handful of writings, as signposts of sorts, that address the dynamic between truth and distance.<sup>1</sup> We begin with a fifteenth-century travel

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of representative texts produced in early modern Portuguese empire, see Luís de Sousa Rebelo, “Language and Literature in the Portuguese

book that shares affinities with medieval travel narratives of journeys to the East but that was composed in the early years of Portuguese expansion into Africa by a prince of the Portuguese court. We then move to a historical chronicle about the first naval excursions along the west African coast and other books describing the geographies of Africa and Asia. In the eighteenth century, reports of monsters haunting the domains of Iberian empire allow for a critical reflection on truth and the extraordinary. Finally, we end with comments on Brazil as a world and nature in transformation. Each of the texts engaged here provides different aspects of claims to truth, distance, and credibility that persisted and informed Iberian imperial textual culture, and it would be possible to adduce many more given the extensive Iberian imperial archive.

### Early Portuguese Observers

The *Libro del infante Don Pedro* (Book of the Prince Dom Pedro of Portugal Who Travelled Over the Four Parts of the World), first printed in 1515, recounts the real and imaginary travels of the Portuguese prince the Infante D. Pedro to the court of Prester John between 1425 and 1428.<sup>2</sup> Pedro, João I's likely successor to the throne, sojourned east to the Holy Land, and the part historical, part imaginative account of his pilgrimage was composed in Castilian by Gómez de Santisteban, one of Pedro's traveling companions. The book participates in the medieval travel narrative tradition and includes *mirabilia* in the Mandevillian fashion. It was printed in 111 editions over the years: 59 in Spanish, and the remainder in Portuguese translation.<sup>3</sup> By the early sixteenth century, nearly a century of Portuguese expeditions to western Africa had been taking place (not to mention the Spanish writings on the New World initiated by Columbus's diaries), whose particulars were recorded in the chronicles of Gomes Eanes de Zurara (c.1410–c.1474), the Portuguese court chronicler charged by King Afonso V with narrating the history of the Portuguese excursions into Africa beginning with the capture of Ceuta in 1415. Zurara's *Crónica dos feitos notáveis que se passaram na conquista de Guiné por mandado do Infante D. Henrique* (Chronicle of the Notable Deeds that Occurred in the Conquest of Guinea by Order of Prince Henry, completed mid fifteenth century) stands out in the chronicler's *oeuvre* for its

Empire", in *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400–1800*, ed. Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto, 358–89 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 358–89.

2 The Infante D. Pedro (1392–1449), Duke of Coimbra, was one of the sons of King João I (r. 1385–1433). João I was the founder of the Avis dynasty and, for many scholars, the progenitor of Portuguese overseas expansion when he sent a naval expedition to conquer the Moroccan city of Ceuta in 1415. The most thorough study of the *Libro del infante D. Pedro* remains Francis M. Rogers, *The Travels of the Infante Dom Pedro of Portugal* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1961).

3 Rogers, *The Travels of the Infante*, vii.

descriptions of the newly visited coast of “Guiné” (a toponym that designated, generally, western Africa) as a result of voyages ordered by Prince Henry, “the Navigator” (1394–1460). These voyages initiated the Atlantic slave trade, beginning in 1441. Though the novelty of sub-Saharan Africa and Africans to Portuguese and European eyes might logically create an expectation of a rhetoric of the marvellous in the chronicle, this is not the case. To the contrary, Zurara’s text almost entirely eschews this posture. Herman L. Bennett accordingly argues that “disclosing, unveiling, and subjecting Guinea to the Portuguese gaze elicited little wonder and even fewer marvels”.<sup>4</sup>

Such a perspective stands in contrast to the content of the *Libro del infante Don Pedro*, published over half a century after Zurara had completed his histories. While a portion of the *Libro* recounts the actual travels of Pedro in Europe, the majority of the book imaginatively places the prince in an eastern realm overflowing in natural wonders. If we might notionally posit an incommensurability between the book’s reports of marvellous beings and wondrous nature and the increasing body of practical and scientific knowledge on Africa, India, and Brazil by the time Santisteban’s book appeared, this incommensurability may be explained, at least partially, by the central role of Prester John in the story. The possible alliance with the mythic priest-king and the populations of eastern Christians under his rule was purportedly one of the motives for Portuguese voyages to Africa and India. Apart from Zurara’s mention of the possible existence of Christians in other parts of the world as a reason for Prince Henry’s interest in exploring Africa, other, later texts, such as the *Carta das Novas que vieram a El Rei Nosso Senhor do Descobrimento do Preste João* (Letter of the News that Reached Our Lord the King on the Discovery of Prester John, 1521), Francisco Álvares’s *Verdadeira Informação das Terras do Preste João das Índias* (True Information on the Lands of Prester John of the Indies, 1540), or Pero Pais’s *História da Etiópia* (History of Ethiopia, 1622) attest to a practice of Portuguese travel with the express purpose of locating and establishing diplomatic relations with Prester John. Military seafarers sought the Prester’s allyship and searched for him by following the course of the Senegal River (traditionally thought to be a branch of the Nile), and contact with Prester John became one of the principal objectives of King João II’s (1455–1495) foreign policy.<sup>5</sup> The truth claims that pervade Pedro’s far-reaching, marvel-rich book rely not so much on the historical eyewitnessing of Pedro and his companions, but instead on the central role of Garci Ramírez, the traveling company’s interpreter or *faraute*.

4 Herman Bennett, *African Kings and Black Slaves: Sovereignty and Dispossession in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 69. Bennett also notes that “even as blacks, Guinea’s inhabitants symbolized the familiar and the knowable that could be incorporated into Portugal’s, and, therefore, Europe’s cosmos” (73).

5 For more on Prester John in early modern Portuguese expansion, see Luís Filipe Thomaz, “Preste João”, in *Dicionário de história dos descobrimentos portugueses*, ed. Luís de Albuquerque, 2 vols (Lisbon: Caminho, 1994), II, 918–23.

Ramírez purportedly knows “all the languages of the world”, and is the only person to engage in direct dialogue with distant potentates in the entirety of the tale. What emerges is the primacy of linguistic mediation – and specifically, translation – as both a guarantor of truth and credibility and as an increasingly practical necessity as Portuguese voyagers visit previously unknown peoples. Zurara acknowledges the authority and valued role of the *linguas* (interpreters) who accompanied the nautical expeditions to Africa, in part because they performed a cartographic function – identifying and locating new language communities in geographical space – and in part because of their supposed spiritual and moral superiority over non-Western peoples through the knowledge of languages. In Portuguese imperial texts, religious conversion was also a linguistic act, with new converts initially learning to “speak Christian” (“falar cristão”, i.e. Portuguese).

We return briefly to Zurara, who establishes a crux of truth, credibility, and navigation in the *Crónica de Guiné*. The chattel raids on black Africans who lived south of Cape Bojador occupy the majority of the chronicler’s attention. In an introductory chapter, Zurara details five reasons why Henry ordered the expeditions to the lands of Guinea:

- 1 to explore the lands south of Bojador and the Canaries which were, until then, only the matter of legend;
- 2 to discover if there were populations of Christians with whom the Portuguese could enter into trading alliances;
- 3 to ascertain the degree and geographical reach of “Moorish” (i.e. African) military strength;
- 4 to discover if there were any Christian princes in the lands; and
- 5 to convert non-Christians to the Christian faith.

Zurara’s enumeration of the reasons for Henry’s African expeditions favours the prince’s desire to accrue knowledge (the first four of the five motives attest to this) over the desire to convert non-Christians to the Christian faith, which in this instance also functions as an implicit justification for the violence of the slaving raids. For Zurara, the primacy of knowledge-gathering that subtends Henry’s expeditions casts the voyages within a more universal philosophical frame, one that would appear to echo Aristotle’s opening claim in the *Metaphysics* that all humans naturally desire to know, a conceit which became something of a commonplace in Portuguese expansionist writers.<sup>6</sup> The novelty, although not wonder nor marvels, of distant sub-Saharan peoples and geographies tacitly foregrounds the issue of historiographic truth. For Luís Filipe Barreto, Zurara’s historiographic truth rests on an Aristotelian *imitatio* in which that which is written is a faithful representation of the

6 “All men by nature desire to know”, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1552.

seen.<sup>7</sup> If we agree with Barreto's claim, we must also note that such *imitatio* is only part of the architecture of Zuraran truth. Equally important in this regard is Zurara's observation on his task as a chronicler. In order for his readers to have a complete knowledge of events, Zurara tells us, the king asked him to compile into one volume a number of various accounts by different authors.<sup>8</sup> Thus both Zurara's compositional and editorial activities as chronicler are a guarantor of truth; the relationship between rigorous methodology and historiographic reliability is an idea we also find in Zurara's predecessor as court chronicler, Fernão Lopes. And finally, the nautical frame of the history Zurara tells is significant. Prince Henry's knowledge-gathering projects are realized through a series of nautical excursions, so we find here the first gestures toward a correlation between forms of new knowledge and seafaring. Since ships instantiate possibilities of new knowledge they bear epistemological importance. We might call this a seafaring epistemology, an idea that will gain momentum in the sixteenth century and inform the conceptual world of texts like the epic poem *Os Lusíadas* (1572) of Luís de Camões.<sup>9</sup>

A similar nautico-epistemological frame shapes the diary of Vasco da Gama's first round-trip voyage to India in 1497–99, *Roteiro da primeira viagem de Vasco da Gama* (Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco da Gama), putatively composed by ship secretary Álvaro Velho. Velho's account is one example of the nautical genre of the *roteiro* (ship diary, commonly designated in English as "rutter"), and in this particular author's hand it is a combination of eyewitness travel account, historical chronicle, and nautical diary. Velho's text parses Gama's voyage into daily entries, with accompanying technical information regarding wind, weather, and nautical manoeuvring. What Velho's account shares with Zurara's chronicle is not only an interest in documenting newly discovered geographical regions and peoples by Portuguese seafarers but the unfolding of history and historical eyewitnessing as a nautical voyage. Nautical travel itself lays implicit claims to empirical truth, credibility, and reliability and therefore, by association, to seemingly unimaginable phenomena that might be reported from within this frame. In the Iberian maritime, imperialist mentality, few people wield as much uncontested authority as a seafaring or mariner eyewitness. Two examples of this authority are the *Esmeraldo de situ orbis*, a geographic treatise composed in the early sixteenth century by Duarte Pacheco Pereira, and the *Roteiro da África do sul e sueste desde o Cabo da Boa Esperança até ao das Correntes* (Rutter of South and Southeast Africa, from the Cape of Good Hope to Cape

7 Luís Filipe Barreto, *Descobrimientos e renascimento: formas de ser e pensar nos séculos XV e XVI* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1982), 76.

8 *Crónica dos feitos notáveis que se passaram na conquista da Guiné por mandado do infante D. Henrique*, ed. Torquato de Sousa Soares, 2 vols (Lisbon: Academia Portuguesa da História, 1978), I, 15.

9 I explore several facets of this dimension of Camões's work in Josiah Blackmore, *The Inner Sea: Maritime Literary Culture in Early Modern Portugal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).

Corrientes, 1576), a cartographic description of the south African coastline by Manuel de Mesquita Perestrelo.

Duarte Pacheco Pereira's *Esmeraldo de situ orbis* is a description of the coastal geography of the entirety of western Africa to the Cape of Good Hope as well as a historical record of Portuguese mercantile activities in this region. While doubts relating to the credibility of the information reported are not recorded in the book, Pereira establishes practices of geographic and cartographic description that implicitly lend authority and credibility to his writing. In one of his chapters, Pereira avers:

Three things are to be regarded in the description of a land; first, the landmarks and shape of the coast, so that it may be recognised: and if it cannot be recognised by this first means, doubts may be removed by the second, namely, the trend of the coast one is in search of, whether north and south or east and west or NE and SW [...] If this method of identification fails, then observe the degrees of latitude and of the place encountered.<sup>10</sup>

In the first instance, Pereira here addresses the scientific practicality of his treatise and its utility for travellers and navigators. Yet we might consider Pereira's chorography also as discursive principles of truth: to provide descriptions of this nature is to lend a truth value to the surrounding work as a whole. Similarly, in the *Roteiro of South and Southeast Africa*, Perestrelo describes numerous locales of the African coastline as a guide for future pilots and navigators and includes a series of drawings to aid identification. In both the prose descriptions and the drawings, Perestrelo necessarily assumes a sea-borne viewing of the coast since this is the perspective of the navigator, a perspective that Perestrelo terms "de mar em fora" (from the sea). Perestrelo's limning of the south African coast is bound to his experience as a cartographer because he frequently corrects the errors of previous maps. The authoritative, carto-chorographic eye observes the coast from on board a ship. While the practical aspect of *roteiros* requires such a vantage-point, the repeated locution "de mar em fora" goes beyond the pragmatic to buttress the accuracy and reliability of the *Roteiro*. As in all *roteiros*, eyewitness experience and the seaborne or on-board perspective coalesce, so that first-hand observation from the deck of a ship is a component of imperial authority. This deck bound perspective underlies the entirety of Camões's historico-imaginative narrative of Vasco da Gama's voyage to India and the encounters

10 *Esmeraldo de situ orbis*, transl. and ed. George Kimble (London: Hakluyt Society, 1937), 33. "Tres sam as cousas principaes que se deuem olhar na descriçam da terra, primeiramente os sinaees e feyçam da costa, pera se hauer de conhecer; e nam se conhecendo pola primeira, pola segunda parte se tiraram de duuida,.s. veja como se corre a costa e luguar em cuja busca for, se norte e sul, se lest e oest, ou nordest e sudueste quando por isto nam for conhecida, veja se os graaos da ladeza em que se topar" (Portuguese original, 124).



with new worlds that the poem charts and incorporates into a sense of national destiny and new historical order.

On-board authoritative viewing implicates the question of seafaring in general and the role of nautical travel in establishing regimes of reliability. A New World example takes us to the hinterlands of the Americas in 1500 and the finding of “the land commonly called Brazil” by the fleet of Pedro Álvares Cabral. Cabral’s spring landing on the coast, and the ensuing days of exploration and interaction with Tupi natives, are the topic of the famous *Carta* (Letter) by ship secretary Pero Vaz de Caminha, addressed to King Manuel I of Portugal (r. 1495–1521) and dated 1 May 1500. Although no *mirabilia* are recorded in the sense of phenomena that seem to operate outside the laws of nature or nature’s attested patterns, Caminha nonetheless reports on a natural world that exists in an almost unprecedented degree of abundance. Truth and credibility occupy Caminha’s thoughts at the outset of his document, which begins:

The admiral of this fleet, besides the other captains, will write to Your Majesty telling you the news of the finding of this new territory of Your Majesty’s which has just been discovered on this voyage. But I, too, cannot but give my account of this matter to Your Majesty, as well as I can, though I know that my powers of telling and relating it are less than any man’s.<sup>11</sup>

Two items are noteworthy here. The first is Caminha’s use of *navegação*, which Ley translates as “voyage”. The particular ocean voyage of Cabral that Caminha relates is one meaning of the term, but there is also another, more conceptual one: *navegação* is the entire, inter-connected imperial and commercial enterprise of seafaring as part of monarchical authority and dominion, which includes the geographic regions circumscribed by such seafaring. *Navegação*, then, may denote any one voyage as much as the exercise of sea power as part of the crown’s prerogative in the pursuit of overseas interests and the extension of the crown’s authority to overseas territories. As such, *navegação* lends authority and credibility to the narrative of far-off events and realities. Here, the “navigation” in question is the *carreira da Índia*, or the oceanic trading route between Portugal and India inaugurated by Vasco da Gama that Cabral was reputedly following when his fleet was blown off course and landed on the shores of what would be known as Brazil. The sovereign’s imperial, mercantile interests underlie Caminha’s act of New World witnessing. This act of witnessing brings us to the second point, which

11 “Posto que o Capitão-mor desta vossa frota, e assim os outros capitães escrevam a Vossa Alteza a nova do achamento desta vossa terra nova, que nesta navegação agora se achou, não deixarei também de dar minha conta disso a Vossa Alteza, o melhor que eu puder, ainda que – para o bem contar e falar –, o saiba fazer pior que todos”. I cite the translation of C.D. Ley, ed., *Portuguese Voyages 1498–1663: Tales from the Great Age of Discovery* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 41.

is Caminha's designation of his own discursive activity as "contar e falar" (to recount [or narrate] and speak, not "relate" as in the translation). If *contar* labels the writer's narrative act, the amplification of this with *falar* requires comment. Such textual "speaking" may simply be a reference to the humanistic understanding of letters in *artes dictaminis* as speeches<sup>12</sup> – Caminha would certainly have been familiar with this concept in his capacity as a professional scribe. However, it is more likely that "to speak" emphasizes Caminha's eyewitness status in the face of the novelties encountered in the "Land of the True Cross". Caminha's epistolary "speaking" is decidedly a discourse of first-person presence, an act of authority, by dint of Caminha's own participation in imperial *navegação*, that mediates between the distant shores of a previously unknown land to Europeans and a home culture of political sovereignty.

### **Horror, Wonder, and Monsters**

So far I have considered a few examples of narratives created within the political, economic, and religious machinery of Iberian overseas expansion in which geographical distance figures prominently and which motivates claims to authority and informs certain rhetorical strategies on the parts of writers. I turn now to the eighteenth century, a period in particular in which stories of monsters and the wondrous proliferated. Such narratives generally presuppose a geographical distance from a "centre" – such as the seat of regal authority – as a condition of their telling. My modest aim is to consider, briefly, how some Iberian reports of monsters and the wondrous participate in authorial strategies of truth and credibility that undergirded many less "imaginative" imperial texts such as chronicles or reports. Many of these tales are situated in the New World. Since Columbus, monsters were part of the mindset of New World explorers; Nicolás Wey Gómez, for example, writes that the Caribes encountered by the Italian admiral "perfectly seemed to match the profile of the 'monstrous men' Columbus and his contemporaries had expected to chance upon in the farthest reaches of the inhabited world".<sup>13</sup> The existence of monstrous or marvellous peoples, Wey Gómez explains, was related to theories of geographical places in which "extreme latitudes, hot or cold, gave rise to extreme natures" and, in the case of the Mediterranean world, explains why Ethiopia and India "were veritable factories of marvels and monsters".<sup>14</sup> Different places had different natures, which in turn influenced the natures of bodies to be found. Surekha Davies studies the environmental influences on (indigenous) bodies and temperaments in her study of the representation of

12 Ronald Witt, "Medieval 'Ars Dictaminis' and the Beginnings of Humanism: A New Construction of the Problem", *Renaissance Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (1982): 9–10.

13 Nicolás Wey Gómez, *The Tropics of Empire: Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2008), 22.

14 *Ibid.*, 85.

monstrous peoples on Renaissance maps, providing many detailed analyses of how mapmakers “used particular rhetorical devices and formal layouts to encourage their audiences to consider their works as containing reliable knowledge”.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Davies notes, “monstrous births and monstrous peoples began to converge [in pre-modernity] in several discourses, particularly in the context of natural history. Voyages of exploration were one of the drivers of this conversion.”<sup>16</sup>

By the eighteenth century, stories of monsters had a widespread popular appeal as much as they continued to claim the attention of more learned circles. Reports of monsters, horrors, wonders, disasters, and prodigies appeared in pamphlets (*folhetos*) sold on the streets, essentially the Portuguese equivalents of newsletters.<sup>17</sup> Known as “string literature” due to the manner of display of the pamphlets for sale, this form of textual media in Portugal dates to the sixteenth century with narratives of shipwreck. Such pamphlets also were printed and sold in Spain and were known as *relaciones de sucesos*.<sup>18</sup> A more learned readership continued to take an interest in these narratives, as evidenced by the appearance of such accounts in the *Gazeta de Lisboa* and the *Jornal Enciclopédico*. While the entertainment value of such stories is readily apparent, questions of authority, reliability, and scientific veracity brought these narratives/reports into longer-standing debates about various forms of truth and the shifting pre-modern categories of fact and fiction – or, in the idiom of the day, *verdade* (truth) and *fábula* (fable).

One issue that faces the scholar of these accounts is the archival corpus. By nature ephemera, these pamphlets are self-contained, meaning that they were characteristically not extracts from longer works and were meant to stand independently. The extant corpus, numbering in the hundreds with new items regularly discovered in archives, libraries, and private collections to this day, is highly eclectic, since those examples that do survive owe as much to historical accident as to the deliberate efforts of archivists and scholars. There is no definitive corpus, no field-defining anthology. It is an ever-expanding body of materials. Yet despite the aleatory survival of the *folhetos* corpus there are commonalities that make a discernible critical perspective possible: the commonalities include the astronomical, medical, and zoological monsters and

15 Surekha Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human: New Worlds, Maps and Monsters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 2.

16 *Ibid.*, 39.

17 For an overview of some of these eighteenth-century accounts, see P. Fontes da Costa, “Between Fact and Fiction: Narratives of Monsters in Eighteenth-Century Portugal”, *Portuguese Studies* 20, no. 1 (2004): 63–72. On monsters in early modern Spain, see Elena del Río Parra, *Una era de monstruos: representaciones de lo deforme en el Siglo de Oro español* (Frankfurt: Vervuert, 2003).

18 Augustin Redondo, “Los prodigios en las relaciones de sucesos de los siglos XVI y XVII”, in *Las Relaciones de Sucesos en España (1500–1750)*. *Actas del primer coloquio internacional*, ed. María Cruz García de Enterría et al., 287–303. (Alcalá: Servicio de Publicaciones, 1996) studies the relation between the monstrous and the prodigious in early modern Spanish accounts.

prodigies that populate their pages, the geographical regions where these anomalies reside, or the intellectual disciplines that tacitly inform these reports (e.g. natural history, theology, or imperial politics). The terms the various *folhetos* authors themselves use to designate their accounts are sometimes generic and sometimes carry specific connotations. Most of them are titled *relações* (accounts) in Portuguese, or *relaciones* in Spanish. As a textual genre, the focus of a *relação* is typically narrow, concentrating on one event or topic and sometimes a tightly circumscribed related set of events. *Dissertação* (dissertation or disquisition) is also attested but is a much less frequent label, and usually designates a text that is moralistic in nature.

Apart from the generic, narrative labels, a lexicon and attitude of horror, wonder, charisma, astonishment, and repulsion suffuses these stories. It is perhaps reductive to think of these writerly states of mind and emotion as strategies for popularizing the accounts or taking advantage of a credulous reading public, although this no doubt held true to some degree. Like other, earlier accounts of *mirabilia*, these tales of monsters and prodigies establish limit-cases of the credibility of writers who characteristically report from geographically distant locales. That is to say, the tension between the exuberant and extraordinary nature of monsters, horrors, and wonder, and the notion of the credibility and “truth” of the eyewitness narrator, surely constituted part of the appeal of these stories. “Monster rhetoric” pushes at the borders of credibility while at the same time maintaining certain taxonomies that vouch for the veracity of the event, taxonomies, or disciplines such as theology, natural history, or biblical exegesis. Across the many accounts, there is a consistent engagement with words and terminology, both in terms of definitions and in how such definitions must be revised and re-applied. This suggests that monsters verge on exhausting the semantic possibilities of lexemes or practices of verisimilitude. The concept of distance underlies these narratives as well, and the geographies of monsters range from the very distant from (e.g. Brazil, Peru, or Chile) to less distant domestic villages in Portugal. Yet these accounts, in their shifting indications of geographical distances from the remote to the very proximate, compel us to consider “distance” as not simply geographical or even transoceanic but also as a moral, social, religious, or political concept, relative and elastic in its numerous usages.

The putative empiricism of the extraordinary is part of the extraordinary story, and is a factor that does not merely operate as an enhancement to the appeal of the tale but carries a considerable *gravitas* and connects with established intellectual traditions. Let us consider a few examples. The first is a pamphlet titled *Oraculo prophético, proegomeno da Teratologia, ou Historia Prodígiosa, em que se dà completa noticia de todos os Monstros, composto, para confusão de pessoas ignorantes, satisfação de homens sabios, exterminio de prophecias falsas, e explicação de verdadeiras prophecias* (Prophetic Oracle, prologue to the Teratology, or Prodigious History, in which a complete account of all Monsters is given, for confusion of the ignorant, satisfaction of the wise, an end to false prophecies, and an explanation of true prophecies) by

Anselmo Caetano Munhoz de Avreu Gusmão e Castellobranco, published in 1733 in Lisbon. At one point, Castellobranco provides a catalogue of monsters and prodigies occurring throughout history, with numerous *auctoritates* attesting to their authenticity. The many items of this inventory are each preceded by the verb “*imaginam*” (they imagine), a lexical tag that suggests Castellobranco might have been familiar with earlier theories of cognition in which the imagination (*imaginatio*) was one of the faculties of the brain which exercised a combinatory power of visual images which entered through the eyes and interacted with images already stored in memory. Such a power allowed for the creation of hybrid or chimerical forms that did not exist in empirical reality.<sup>19</sup> Yet, if this is the case, in Castellobranco’s pages the verb *imaginar* corroborates the empirical existence of monsters rather than questions it. There is a power of intellection and observation that lies at the basis of Castellobranco’s list. The author likely coins a neologism here: *teratoscopos*, “teratoscopes” or “monster watchers”. The coinage identifies – even creates – a proper scientific and intellectual occupation, able to sustain the weight of close and repeated scrutiny.<sup>20</sup>

Reports of monsters in Asia were part of the eighteenth-century flourishing of string literature. Accounts of monsters in Turkey, such as the *Emblema Vivente* (Living Emblem, 1727), are thinly disguised moralistic statements on the threat of the Ottoman Empire to Christianity. The New World housed any number of fantastic and terrifying beings, such as the account of the *Monstruo prodigioso que appareceu no Reyno de Chile* (Prodigious Monster that appeared in the Kingdom of Chile), published in 1751. It tells of a fearsome beast in the Andes, which, when in hiding, mysteriously causes a sourceless light to illuminate entire swaths of hills and valleys; once espied, it quickly hides. Its body is exuberantly chimerical and hybrid. Mauricio Onetto-Pavez argues that the story reflects political controversies centring on the limits of Portuguese sovereignty in

19 Michelle Karnes, “Marvels in the Medieval Imagination”, *Speculum* 90, no. 2 (2015): 327–65 notes that “the marvel is unsettling precisely because of the realness – the sheer bodiliness – of imaginative effect” (331).

20 Dictionaries and encyclopaedias provide another forum for theoretical considerations of terms. Consider the seminal *Vocabulary* published by the Anglo-French cleric Rafael Bluteau (Rafael Bluteau, *Vocabulario portuguez & latino* [Coimbra: Collegio das Artes da Companhia de Jesu, 1712–1728]). This work gives many meanings of “monster”. According to Bluteau, monsters do not reproduce (a reversal of Pliny the Elder’s presentation of monstrous “races” in the *Historia naturalis*); a monster may be someone who is “very ugly”; in the moral sense, it is someone who is “extremely evil”; or it may be a prodigy. Bluteau’s definitions taxonomize monsters and monstrosity into physiological, aesthetic, moral, and divinatory categories. The lexicographer also provides a brief comment on killing a monster: “The theologians say that, whoever kills a monster who has all the parts of a human body but might have the head and face of an animal, this is not considered murder, and does not deserve punishment”). Bluteau thus establishes a spiritual-forensic dimension to monstrosity.

the New World and disputes with the Inquisition.<sup>21</sup> This, in Onetto-Pavez's argument, occasions a presentation of a mysterious and enigmatic natural world, characterized by abundance, that is meant to serve as an enticement for Portuguese travellers to leave Portugal and settle in the region.<sup>22</sup> In this line of thought, the report is propagandistic. If a counterargument could be made that a story of horror is unlikely to serve as an alluring transoceanic welcome mat, the argument nonetheless recognizes the motif of a lavish and abundant natural world that we find in earlier accounts such as the diaries of Columbus or the *Letter* of Caminha. We may profitably recall Wey Gómez's arguments about habits of thought in geographers like Strabo and Ptolemy, reiterated and relocated to the arena of Iberian New World imperialism by figures like Columbus, that "every place had its own unique nature, that similar places gave way to similar natures, and that different places gave way to different natures".<sup>23</sup> The proliferation of monster narratives almost two centuries after the Spanish and Portuguese arrivals on New World shores may be understood as attempts to re-inscribe, and not merely respond to, a fascination with the intricate alliance between place and nature. To narrate monsters as existing in the New World is to reaffirm the extraordinary and different natural world that obtains in overseas territories; such a world, then, continues to entice with its promise of abundance, including the abundance of material wealth like gold and silver. Monsters exist primarily in the eyes and pens of those who claim to have seen them, and who write about them – they are therefore primarily a category of the observer. The monster tales hence intensify an appealing realm of other-placedness. What we could add to the idea of a monstrous, marvellous and exotic nature in the Americas is the protean nature of nature itself, of an almost endlessly frolicking and recombinatory nature, a *lusus naturae*. In the story of the prodigious monster of Chile, disbelief itself functions as a reliable measure of authoritative, empirical witnessing (who would believe what people saw?), while the combinatory and mercurial powers of the natural world, and its capacity to reconfigure and redefine categories of existence, holds promise as exuberantly other states of existence.

- 21 Mauricio Onetto-Pavez, "Un monstruo prodigioso en el Reino de Chile / A prodigious monster in the Kingdom of Chile", *Estudios filológicos* 61 (2018): 321–39. On monsters and conquistatorial justification, see Miguel Rojas Mix, "Los monstruos: ¿mitos de legitimación de la conquista?" In *América Latina: Palabra, Literatura e Cultura*, ed. Ana Pizarro, 3 vols (São Paulo: Memorial, 1993–1995), I: 123–50.
- 22 As a complement to Onetto-Pavez's study, see the study on the Baroque aesthetic, monstrosity, and markets by Azucena Hernández-Ramírez, "Barroco, monstruosidad y mercancía en *Historia general y natural de las Indias*, de Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo", *Hispanic Review* 84, no. 1 (2016): 69–92.
- 23 Wey Gómez, *Tropics of Empire*, 49.

## Shipwreck and a Protean Brazil

We now return to the sixteenth century and to the coasts of Brazil, this time in a shipwreck narrative (*Viagem da nau São Francisco no ano de 1596*; The Voyage of the Ship São Francisco in the Year 1596) penned by Gaspar Afonso, a preeminent Jesuit, who recounts a journey from Portugal to India in 1596 that was forced to Brazil by a storm.<sup>24</sup> As a genre, shipwreck narratives are notably bereft of wonders and *mirabilia*: the urgent necessities and contingencies of maritime peril, survival, finding food, or negotiating often hostile landscapes take centre stage and cast the marvellous to the margins. These tales also take place at a distance from Portugal, and in one regard they are only too credible in terms of the hardships and horrors they describe. Afonso's narrative is exceptional in its details of the tribulations of the ship *S. Francisco*. If not by vocation then by inclination Afonso is a naturalist, an observer of the *rerum naturae* of Brazil. One of the conceits that pervades the Jesuit's story is the protean transformation of the world around him, a shapeshifting natural world that reveals realities that are primordially new. His narrative is quasi-Ovidian in spirit, one that seems at odds with its purpose to inform and report. While Afonso acknowledges some forms of superstition and *mirabilia* as risible – such as the crew's conviction that one of the huge fish swimming beside the vessel is actually a transformed sorceress they had encountered on shore – he also reports with sobriety of purpose some natural phenomena that are equally extraordinary.<sup>25</sup>

My use of “protean” here is deliberate, since the figure of the mythical Proteus often appears in connection with Brazil in other texts of the sixteenth century. Apart from a literary legacy originating in antiquity and extending through Italian Renaissance writers and Camões,<sup>26</sup> we find protean notions of transformation and metamorphosis not only in Gaspar Afonso but also in early maps of, or that include, Brazil. For example, in Sebastião Lopes's map of 1563 of Portuguese Atlantic explorations, Proteus figures prominently: not only does he clearly stand as a sort of emblem of oceanic enterprise, but more specifically presides over Brazil itself, and his contiguous placement next to the wind rose on the map creates a metonymy that links the maritime deity of transformation with the crossing of the Atlantic. In this nautical visual field, Proteus becomes an icon for Brazil itself. On an earlier map from 1530 (from the anonymous Luso-French atlas housed in the National Library in The Hague), the cartographer takes care to depict the daily routines of life in Brazil: cutting wood, the building and layout

24 For the full text, see Giulia Lanciani, *Sucessos e naufrágios das naus portuguesas* (Lisbon: Caminho, 1997), 415–74.

25 The incredible nature of some of Afonso's observations fall in line with a conceptualization of Brazil as a space of novelty and transformation, based primarily on the natural world. For a study of the scepticism in Europe regarding the “dangerous knowledge” of Jesuit writers, see the essay by Renate Dürr in this volume.

26 For example, see Roger Friedlein, “Profecia e metarreflexividade: a figura de Proteu na encenação épica da poesia no Renascimento português”, *Revista do centro de estudos portugueses* 30 (2010): 155–85.

of indigenous dwellings, fights between native tribes, and flora and fauna all fill in the geographical, mapped space of Brazil. In the margins of this map we find a swimming Proteus, now changing into a fish, now a bird. The ichthyological and avian Proteus serves as a transition figure between Africa and Brazil, as if to suggest that the nature of the oceanic enterprise mutates from east to west, not to mention the more kaleidoscopic metamorphosis of nature itself. The implicit link of Portuguese navigators to Proteus is conceivably a nod to a “civilizing” influence over nature, as much as it is a tacit suggestion that, in a constantly changing and changed world revealed by oceanic voyaging, new cognitive processes and metaphors are necessary.<sup>27</sup>

One telling example in Afonso’s shipwreck tale is the *cão de Japão* (dog of Japan), a canine that can change itself into a fish at will, a legend Afonso corroborates by his own experience when he claims he found such a creature dead on the beach, having died before the transformation could complete itself; he writes that he found a fish-dog (perhaps a dead seal?). Another example is the cycle of transformation in which birds become butterflies then birds again. These metamorphoses, marvellous as they are, testify to the Iberian commitment to natural history that is part of the discourse of empiricism. Afonso never questions the credibility of such phenomena which in itself is a strategy of authorization. The Jesuit’s narrative of transformations witnessed in 1596 enshrines the idea that the very nature of the things transformed is at stake. These are not cosmetic transformations but transformations of essence. In this convertibility, Brazil as a natural and real world is almost alchemical, since the nature of nature shifts and mutates. We could also note that, as a Jesuit missionary, Gaspar Afonso is sensitive to the spiritual implications of metamorphosis as a figure for conversion. There is a spiritual truth to the marvellous that underlies Afonso’s claims of veracity, much as it does the writings of the noted missionary and contemporary of Gaspar Afonso, Manuel da Nóbrega. In two of Nóbrega’s many letters on Brazil, Nóbrega makes telling references to writing as an activity that conjoins maritime travel and conversion. In one of these letters dated August 1549, the Jesuit father refers to Brazil as inherently rich and fruitful, and therefore ripe for harvesting in the vineyard of the Lord; furthermore, “just a few letters are sufficient, because everything is blank paper and one only needs to write at will”.<sup>28</sup> Inscribing a blank page as a metaphor for conversion is attested in other texts, but Nóbrega’s use here refers to the perceived facility of religious conversion of the Tupi,<sup>29</sup> while also identifying the ease with which Europeans

27 On the relationship between Protean characteristics and civilized society, see Angelo Bartlett Giamatti, *Exile and Change in Renaissance Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 116–17.

28 Manuel da Nóbrega, *Cartas do Brasil e mais escritos (opera omnia)*, ed. Serafim Leite (Coimbra: Por ordem da Universidade, 1955), 54: “poucas letras bastam, porque é tudo papel branco e não há mais que escrever à vontade.”

29 On the conceit of imprinting Christianity onto non-Christian souls, see Luciana Villas Bôas, “Arte de memória e escrita dos primeiros jesuítas no Brasil”, *Estudios portugueses y brasileños* 11 (2011): 25–38.



exercise an authority over novelty. Nóbrega invokes navigation as a guarantor of credibility in yet another letter, when he notes “through the ships in Bahia I wrote about our activities in this land”.<sup>30</sup> Here there is a nautical double agency: ships are the means by which Nóbrega travelled through Bahia, but since Nóbrega’s principal activity is scribal, they are agents and vessels of the word: both the *logos* issuing from Nóbrega’s hand and the *verbum Dei*. Ships carry the word. To write as a consequence of seafaring, and where seafaring and writing are even coterminous, is to wield credibility and truth.

## Conclusion

Considerations of truth and credibility, in the Portuguese and Spanish historiographic tradition (if we understand “historiographic” broadly to mean texts which claim to document empirical realities), have long been part of that very tradition. Already in the early to mid-fifteenth century, Fernão Lopes, the first royally appointed chronicler to the Portuguese court, reflected on the question of historiographic bias and the creation of historical truth in the prologue to the first part of his late fourteenth-century *Crónica de D. João I* (Chronicle of King João I). Lopes felt compelled to make such a critical reflection since his chronicle narrates the rise to power of a king not born into the line of regal succession; João I’s ascension to the throne inaugurated the dynasty of Avis, but João was an illegitimate child, so it was incumbent on Lopes to imbue his chronicle with an incontestable authority and, by extension, further legitimate João’s assumption of the reins of power. Lopes’s prologue, which considers the tight alliance between a historian’s naturally affective predispositions and inclinations toward his native land and the familiar matter of a domestic history, implicitly addresses distance and credibility since to be too close to one’s topic can be problematic. Lopes’s prologue stands as one of the first and most compelling theoretical treatments of the chronicler’s office in medieval Iberian historiography.

With the appointment of Zurara as Lopes’s successor, Portuguese historiography took a seaward turn, moving away from the landbound histories of Lopes and his predecessors to focus increasingly on overseas expansion in Africa and beyond. While reports, chronicles, and travel narratives of entirely overland journeys continued to appear, truth and credibility became ineluctably embedded into the practice, culture, and science of high-seas navigation, both in Portugal and Spain. It is important to repeat that Iberian expansionist seafaring was also a relentlessly textual enterprise, with established bureaucracies of secretaries, on-board scribes, and other formal posts producing documents in addition to the individual traveller or adventurer. The pragmatic nature of many early Portuguese writings – such as chronicles or scientific compendia of distant geographies and natural worlds – was in part the result of quests for knowledge as geographic

30 “pelos navios de Baía escrevi sobre as nossas ocupações nesta terra” (Nóbrega, *Cartas do Brasil*, 69).

horizons expanded at a sometimes dizzying pace. The technical details of a nautical voyage could be corroborated and corrected by future iterations of the same voyage, but the work of historical synthesis and reportage was more complex because it necessarily begged the question of reliability and authorial veracity, not to mention the historical contexts and ideologies surrounding its creation. As I have briefly surveyed here, the varying circumstances and objectives of different writers, working in different textual or intellectual traditions, prompted those writers to engage strategies of truth-telling and authentication that went hand-in-hand with oceanic enterprise.

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## 2 Distance and Credibility in Sixteenth-Century Travel Writing

Discovery, Text, and Truth in Varthema, Vespucci, and Pigafetta

*Joan-Pau Rubiés*

### Prologue: The Traveller Who Could Not Be Trusted

Travel writing, not unlike historical writing, was in pre-modern times both a popular source of knowledge about exotic peoples and places, and a focus of scepticism about claims to eyewitnessing, especially in relation to the marvellous and extraordinary that many ancient and medieval geographical genres tended to privilege. This was true within the confines of Latin Christendom but also in other literary contexts, for example in the rich Arabic tradition of travel writing that flourished with particular impetus across the vast Islamic oecumene from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, the European genre, whether in Latin or vernacular languages, was quite limited until the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The challenge for the varied European audiences of a book as exceptional as Marco Polo's *Description of the World* (c.1298), rich in particulars about distant lands in the East, was how to assess plausibility in a text that was translated, altered and adapted in many versions, but which had few alternative sources of verification (and those that existed were not easily accessible). The same could be said of the audiences of Ibn Battuta's *rihla* (756/1355) in Fez and Granada when they were presented with stories about India or China: there existed networks of trade that connected distant Muslim communities with a common ideal of shared religious and legal learning, but unless you happened to communicate with other travellers, or read other books, many particulars were difficult to verify (and in fact verification via books could be misleading, as an unreliable traveller might simply have lifted information from them, as was in fact the case of some portions of Ibn Battuta's account copied from Ibn Jubair). Thus in the manuscript culture of the Middle Ages it was difficult to determine whether the traveller reported something that was entirely accurate, whether he simply repeated fantastic stories of dubious authenticity,

1 On the Arabic genres of travel writing, see Houari Touati, *Islam et Voyage au Moyen Âge* (Seuil: Paris, 2000). For the wider context of Arabic geographical literature: André Miquel, *La Géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu'au milieu du 11e siècle*, 4 vols (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1967–75).

or worse, whether he made things up to augment his fame. Intermediary professional writers like Rustichello of Pisa and Ibn Juzayy of Granada, acting according to the literary conventions of their separate cultural milieux, spent a considerable effort establishing the authority of their exceptional witnesses, because they could not personally verify any of the particulars. Both Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta dictated their accounts and addressed them to courtly and urban audiences, and both Rustichello and Ibn Juzayy began the narratives by asserting the trustworthiness and capacity for observation of each respective traveller and, in effect, constructing for them a legitimate social persona. The Pisan writer, famously writing down what the man he introduced as “a wise and noble citizen of Venice” had reported to him while in a Genoese prison, and composing in the same Italianate French he usually employed for chivalric romances, was keen to point out which things Polo had witnessed personally and which he simply reported from hearsay.<sup>2</sup> Similarly Ibn Juzayy, commissioned by the Marinid Sultan Abu Inan of Morocco, noted that Ibn Battuta was a sheikh learned in the law who had adopted the soundest methods for authenticating his reports and discarded questionable ones.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, both travellers were accused of lying by some of their contemporaries.

As at the turn of the sixteenth century the multifarious European genre of travel writing multiplied its production and its geographical range, and emerged as central to the European culture of printed books, the conditions for establishing and contesting credibility also changed. In particular, a new trend can be observed by which the authority of the traveller could be gradually disciplined, and this, in turn, made travel writing much more authoritative. However, the trend was not apparent to everybody at the same time, and audiences in different contexts reacted differently. It is important to examine the sources of resistance that accompanied the gradual establishment

2 It is worth quoting Rustichello’s prefatory note as found in the oldest fourteenth-century manuscript (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 1116), because it was largely devoted to establishing the traveller’s credibility: “Our book will tell you in an orderly and clear fashion those things reported by Messer Marc Pol, wise and noble citizen of Venice, as he saw them with his own eyes; but there are some things that he has not seen but which he heard from dependable and truthful men. And for this reason, we will set forth the things seen as seen, and the things heard as heard, so that our book is accurate and truthful and free from any falsehood. And everybody who reads this book, or who hears it read aloud, should believe it, because all the things in it are true (*notre livre voç contera por ordre apertement, si come meïsser March Pol, sajes et noble citaiens de Venece, raconte, por ce que a seç taus meïssme il le vit; mes auques hi ni a qu’il ne vit pas mes il l’entendi da homes citables et de verité. Et por ce met{r}eron les chouses veue por veue et l’entendue por entandue, por ce que notre livre soit droit et vertables sanç nulle mensonge; et chascuns que cest livre liroie, ou hoïront, le doivent croire, por ce que toutes sunt chouses vertables*)”. Marco Polo, *Le Devisement dou Monde*, edited by Mario Eusebio and Eugenio Burgio (Venice: Edizioni Ca’Foscari, 2018), 35.

3 Ibn Battuta, *Travels*, ed. H. A. R. Gibb, 4 vols (Cambridge: The Hakluyt Society, 1958–1994), I, 5–7.

of the genre's new authority, because they sometimes involved men of learning and erudition. An interesting example of such a resistance is the German cleric Joannes Boemus (or Hans Böhm, 1485–1535), a chaplain of the Teutonic order in Ulm, and author of one of the most influential books on cultural diversity published in early modern Europe. The *Omnium gentium mores, leges et ritus* (Manners, Laws and Customs of all the Nations), first printed in Augsburg in 1520, was especially popular in Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Italy throughout the sixteenth century.<sup>4</sup> In particular, editions multiplied after 1535, following the death of the author, and for a number of years reprints of the Latin text – occasionally with additional materials – were published almost in an annual succession, in addition to the various translations and adaptations into French, Italian, English, and Castilian, all of which had appeared by 1556.<sup>5</sup>

Boemus offered a compendium of the various customs, ancient and modern, that could be gathered from a vast range of historians and cosmographers, from Herodotus, Diodorus of Sicily, Strabo, Pliny, and Tacitus, to the more recent Vincent of Beauvais, Pope Pius II, and Marcantonio Sabellico. Organized geographically and supported with a copious thematic index, the systematic display of strange customs was meant to help the readers

- 4 For a classic general assessment see Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 131–43. Also Margaret T. Hodgen, “Johann Boemus (fl. 1500): An Early Anthropologist”, *American Anthropologist* 55, no. 2 (1953): 284–94. The most detailed study of Johannes Boemus and his book remains Erich Schmidt, *Deutsche Volkskunde im Zeitalter des Humanismus und der Reformation* (Berlin: Ebering, 1904), 60–107 and 146–58. More recently, Hartmut Kugler, “Boemus, Johannes, Aubanus”, in *Verfasserlexikon: Deutscher Humanismus 1480–1520*, ed. Franz Josef Worstbrock, 3 vols (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), I, 209–17. The most important recent discussions are Klaus A. Vogel, “Cultural Variety in a Renaissance Perspective: Johannes Boemus on the ‘Manners, Laws and Customs of All People’ (1520)”, in *Shifting Cultures: Interaction and Discourse in the Expansion of Europe*, ed. Henriette Bugge and Joan-Pau Rubiés (Münster: Lit, 1995), 17–34; Andreas Motsch, “La collection des moeurs de Johannes Boemus ou la mise en scène du savoir ethnographique”, in *Le Théâtre de la Curiosité*, ed. by Frank Lestringant (Paris: PUPS, 2008), 51–65; Diego Pirillo, “Relativismo culturale e ‘armonia del mondo’: l’enciclopedia etnografica di Johannes Boemus”, in *L’Europa Divisa e i Nuovi Mondi. Per Adriano Prosperi*, ed. Massimo Donattini, Giuseppe Marcocci, and Stefania Pastore, 2 vols (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2011), II, 67–77; C. Philipp E. Nothaft, “The Early History of Man and the Uses of Diodorus in Renaissance Scholarship: From Annius of Viterbo to Johannes Boemus”, in *For the Sake of Learning. Essays in Honor of Anthony Grafton*, ed. Ann Blair and Anja-Silvia Goeing (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 722–28; and Giuseppe Marcocci, *The Globe on Paper. Writing Histories of the World in Renaissance Europe and the Americas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 87–96.
- 5 Thus the Lyon edition of 1535 and those that followed it had a larger impact than the *editio princeps* of 1520. For a list of the various editions see Schmidt, *Deutsche Volkskunde*, 146–47 (albeit incomplete), and for some of the vernacular adaptations see Motsch, “La collection des moeurs”; and Pirillo, “Relativismo culturale”. On the Spanish translation by Támara, see Marcocci, *The Globe*, 100–05.

reflect on the history of the progress of civilization, by contrast with the rude simplicity of the earliest times, and also learn to distinguish those customs that were good and praiseworthy (usually those which agreed with European Christian morality) from those which were dishonest and obscene.<sup>6</sup> Although interested in the classical understanding of a history of civilization from savage origins involving technological and political progress, Boemus sought to integrate this narrative into a religious vision dominated by the theme of the loss of religious and cultural unity after the fall and during the dispersion of mankind. Thus, while accepting that a degree of cultural variety was perfectly natural, the author seems to have been anxious about the dangers posed to mankind by religious diversity, and was also particularly concerned with diverse marriage customs and proper female sexual behaviour, possibly reflecting the moral anxieties of a humanist cleric of his generation.<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly, however, while emphatically positive about the educational value of travel, Boemus was rather sceptical about the reliability of some recent accounts about distant regions written by “vagrants” seeking to excite the public with tall tales. Assuming that actual travel, however profitable, was often hard to undertake, the author’s aim was to gather and organize information found in those books written by grave and trustworthy authors (*ex gravium fidedignissimorum authorum scriptis*), so that *de facto* he relied entirely on classical, humanist, and medieval Latin sources while excluding vernacular accounts about newly discovered lands: these were not, in his judgement, sufficiently authoritative, and their authors did not fit the emblematic image of the wise traveller who, like weather-beaten Ulysses, learnt about the manners of many peoples and cities.<sup>8</sup> One of his primary targets was someone he referred to as Ludovico from Bologna, that is, Ludovico de Varthema, whose extraordinary account of a journey to India had recently become available in a German translation published in the

6 Joannes Boemus, *Omnium Gentium Mores, Leges et Ritus* (Augsburg: Grimm, 1520), “Praefatio ad Lectorem”, [f4r].

7 Nonetheless, as Anthony Grafton has observed, Boemus was not an ethnocentric bigot, because his comparisons could reflect positively on some non-Christian laws and institutions that seemed reasonable, for example Turkish marriages. He also understood that some European customs could be perceived as strange from outside. Anthony Grafton, “Comparisons Compared: A Study in the Early Modern Roots of Cultural History”, in *Regimes of Comparatism: Frameworks of Comparison in History, Religion and Anthropology*, ed. Renaud Gagné, Simon Goldhill, and Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 18–48. He was, in other words, open to some expressions of cultural diversity, although it would be an exaggeration to consider him a relativist. He does not seem to have embraced the Lutheran Reformation, unlike many of his humanist friends such as Andreas Althamer (Pirillo, “Relativismo culturale”, 67; but see also Marcocci, *The Globe*, 90, who suggests that towards the end of his life he did become a Lutheran – I have been unable to verify this).

8 The exclusion involved not only recent accounts of overseas discoveries, but also widely circulated late medieval texts such as Marco Polo’s *Description of the World*.

same city of Augsburg.<sup>9</sup> Boemus explained his reasoning in the prefatory letter to the humanist doctor, and publisher of the volume, Sigismund Grimm, who in fact had reprinted Varthema's book the previous year:<sup>10</sup>

Last year you printed two similar books, one about the peoples of the north, whose author is Matthias de Michau, the other about the peoples of the south by one Ludovicus of Bologna. And you have exhorted me to make available and translate my present book into our German language; quite rightly, because you understand and are an expert about these and other things that have been related about foreign nations (*externis nationibus*). Of course, not from fraudulent vagrants, or from wandering liars (*non ex levibus circulatoribus, non es vagis mendicis*), who in order to be admired and accepted by the populace lie in a most pernicious and shameless way (so that one must not only distrust them, but nearly all other who write or repeat anything of theirs); but from texts written by grave and trustworthy authors.<sup>11</sup>

Boemus, with sufficient delicacy, did not condemn Varthema directly, but the fact that he did not use any of his many relevant observations strongly suggests that the journey of the Italian adventurer had inspired the image of an unreliable vagrant, as opposed to an experienced traveller who clearly belonged to the social elite and, upon returning home, could become a magistrate or a counsellor.

This bookish attitude that privileged authoritative texts over novel accounts, and effectively promoted vicarious travel over adventurous empiricism, helps explain the often-noted paradox that Boemus's text, one of the most important ethnographic compilations of the sixteenth century, included Africa, Asia, and Europe, but made no mention of the New World (indeed, the traditional tripartite division structured the book). This seems surprising

9 The illustrated German translation appeared in 1515, but Boemus seems to have seen the Augsburg edition of 1518, to which he refers in his prefatory letter. There is some hesitancy about the spelling of Varthema's name. The German version had Ludowico Vartomans von Bolonia. He signed both the manuscript he presented to Vittoria Colonna and the original Italian edition of 1510 as Ludovico de Varthema Bolognese, and this was followed by subsequent Italian editions (although a few have Verthema or Barthema). The Latin of 1511 has Ludovicus Patricius Romanus (not an innocent change, as Julius II had recently incorporated Bologna into the Papal States), and the Spanish translation followed this. Here I respect Varthema's original usage (unlike her most recent modern editor Valentina Martino, who instead adopted Vartema).

10 Although the letter to Grimm is dated Ulm, 1 April 1520, the two books Boemus mentions as having appeared "last year" were published in 1518. This might indicate that a previous draft of the letter had been written in 1519.

11 Boemus, *Omnium Gentium*, fol. 2r. Remarkably, the proposed German translation Boemus mentioned was not published, and generations of German readers had access only to the Latin text.



in 1520, by which time not only the sensationalist navigator Amerigo Vespucci, but also humanist writers like Peter Martyr d'Anghiera, had started to publish materials in Latin concerning the Columbian discoveries, often casting doubt on initial idea that the newly discovered lands corresponded to India or Cathay in the oriental extremes of Asia.<sup>12</sup> Contemporary maps also tended to incorporate the new observations of the Portuguese and the Spanish in their eastern and western navigations. No doubt Boemus was not fully aware of all of these publications when completing his work in 1519–20, which suggests some of the limitations of his humanist circles in Ulm.<sup>13</sup> But what is even more symptomatic is that the *Omnium gentium mores* continued to be published decades later, occasionally (notably in the 1556 Spanish version by Francisco Támara) with substantial amplifications concerning the Western Indies, but more often without altering the original emphasis on the traditional tripartite geographical divisions of the ancient world.<sup>14</sup> Thus it seems that the compilation by the armchair scholar that privileged ancient sources or those written by established ecclesiastical or humanist writers had a cultural logic of its own, one with enduring value in sixteenth-century Europe despite its remarkable conservatism when it came to selecting sources of information. It appealed, in particular, to Renaissance cosmographers with an encyclopaedic bent such as Sebastian Münster and his French adapter François de Belleforest. Admittedly, these later authors were more confident than Boemus about the new geographical discoveries of the Spanish and Portuguese, and more sceptical about ancient reports of monstrous races, but nonetheless they continued to rely on his largely anachronistic compilation as a major source of information on cultural diversity.

### **The Problem of Credibility in Sixteenth-Century Travel Narratives and History Writing**

Boemus's attachment to the old geographical divisions of antiquity and his doubts about the value of new narratives can be construed as a conservative bias, and has sometimes been taken to exemplify a supposed "reluctance to accept novelty" in the humanistic culture of Renaissance, primarily geared

12 Peter Martyr conceived the project of writing *De Orbe Novo* for a learned audience of *viros doctos* as early as October 1494, thanks to his position at the court of the Catholic kings Ferdinand and Isabella in Spain, which gave him privileged access to information about the Columbian expeditions. Following the example of classical historians, he organized his books into groups of ten or "decades".

13 Boemus probably also ignored the Northern European editions in Latin of Francanzio da Montalboddo's early collection of "newly discovered countries" from 1507. It is hard to believe that at least some notice of the newly discovered islands across the Western Ocean, or the mainland of Brazil, had failed to reach him, but quite possibly he did not consider authors like Vespucci sufficiently authoritative.

14 Also noteworthy is the 1542 edition from Antwerp, the first to incorporate the Latin account to the circumnavigation of the world, *De Moluccis insulis*, by Maximilian Transylvanus.

towards the recovery of ancient learning. This thesis, whose classic formulation by John Elliott some fifty years ago in terms of the “blunted impact” of the discoveries, continues to be influential, has nonetheless been questioned by more recent authors.<sup>15</sup> While the circulation of news was not homogeneous across Europe, and the true geographical significance of the Columbian encounter could only be appreciated gradually, considering the whole sixteenth century and beyond we have plenty of evidence of the celebration of discovery in print and image, including of course the Spanish historian Francisco López de Gómara’s famous opening statement in his *Historia General de las Indias* (1552) that the discovery of the Indies was “the greatest thing after the creation of the world, excepting the incarnation and death of Him who created it”.<sup>16</sup> By the end of the sixteenth century Columbus, Magellan, and Vespucci had become quasi-mythical figures celebrated across Europe, and their national identity jealously disputed too; in this respect, although in this period there was patriotic tension between Spain and Italy about, for example, the “ownership” of the Genoese Columbus, we must look beyond a simplistic opposition between different national cultural spheres, because in reality Italy and the Iberian world were closely connected politically and by religion, and effectively functioned as complementary spaces in the construction of a “modern” literature of geographical discovery. Through that interaction, and others that communicated southern and northern Europe, the celebration of modern discoveries became both a rhetorical commonplace and a positive identity that could be national, European, Christian, or even cosmopolitan. Indeed, in a period dominated by the idea of a renaissance of arts and letters that first emulated and eventually surpassed the achievements of the ancients, the theme of the advancement of geographical learning helped crystalize the genre of travel writing in the great collections by Ramusio, Richard Hakluyt, and others. In other words, the emergence of an authoritative genre of travel writing throughout the early modern centuries was connected to these multi-layered identities and the political projects that accompanied them, thus superseding the conservatism

- 15 John H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New 1492–1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), argued for a widespread reluctance to “accept the New World into consciousness”, with further nuance in John H. Elliott, “Renaissance Europe and America: A Blunted Impact?” in *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, ed. Fredi Chiappelli (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 11–23; and John H. Elliott, “Final Reflections: The Old World and the New Revisited”, in *America in European Consciousness 1493–1750*, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 395, where he acknowledged that the issue of degree of interest was separate from questions of assimilation and cultural transformation. I offered my revised assessment in Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Travel Writing and Humanistic Culture: A Blunted Impact?” *Journal of Early Modern History* 10, no. 1/2 (2006): 131–68.
- 16 Francisco López de Gómara, *Historia de las Indias (1552)*, ed. Monique Moustapha, Louise Bénat-Tachot, Marie-Cécile Bénassy-Berling, Paul Roche (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2020), “Dedication to Emperor Charles V”, 69.

earlier displayed by Boemus, largely geared towards digesting the historical learning inherited from the classical past.

However, the problem of a potential clash between the questionable sincerity of a personal witness against the authority of established authors whose writings transmitted the learning of the ancient world persisted.<sup>17</sup> In this respect, it may be worth emphasizing the extent to which the authority of the traveller (or the colonial settler) was closely connected to the construction of modern standards of historiography. To return to López de Gómara, possibly the most influential sixteenth-century historian of the discovery and conquest of the Spanish Indies (notwithstanding Phillip II's abrupt prohibition of his work in Spain), it would be hard to fault his sources of information about the conquest of Mexico, as he had at his disposal the archive of his patron Hernán Cortés, including some substantial Franciscan ethnographic works about the Mexica. He also took pains to seek out and interview some conquerors besides Cortés himself. Gómara was however writing from Valladolid, at the heart of Castile, so it was easy for a resentful old conqueror settled in Guatemala, Bernal Díaz de Castillo, to claim that he alone could offer the "true" history of the conquest of New Spain, because he had been at the heart of the events as they unfolded and did not rely on hearsay.<sup>18</sup> His main complaint was that the elegant historian Gómara – a humanist cleric with uncommon rhetorical skill – had placed all of his emphasis on the heroic actions of Cortés, his own patron, given that he had been paid to write by the family (incidentally, this glorification of Cortés was also why the king's Council of the Indies was hostile to the work, as it struggled to consolidate its authority in the viceroyalty and feared the conqueror's alternative source of local power).<sup>19</sup> Bernal Díaz, in turn, with his "plain style", was concerned to restore to the common soldiers who followed Cortés their own place in the epic of conquest, motivated by a deep sense of injustice with the manner in which the Crown of Castile had failed to reward the few surviving "first conquerors" with sufficient numbers of Indians (in the form of *encomiendas*).<sup>20</sup> The resulting blow-by-blow account of the conquest was in many ways dependant on

17 See the classic discussions in Anthony Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Shock of Discovery and the Power of Tradition* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992) and Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

18 Díaz explicitly wrote "como testigo de vista", as an eyewitness, albeit from memory many years later. This important work was only published in Madrid in 1632 with some interpolations by the Mercedarian friar Alonso Remón.

19 In chapter XVIII of his chronicle (Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España*, ed. Guillermo Serés (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 2011), 70–74), Bernal Díaz suddenly interrupted the narrative of his own personal deeds to start a series of recurrent complaints against Gómara and those chroniclers who had followed him. This helps date the book's first draft to the mid-1550s (other documents mention its existence in this period), although it was only completed in 1568, and further revised until the author's death in 1584.

20 The "common soldier" who writes with "plain style" is obviously also the colonial settler fighting for perpetual power over the natives as a "just reward".

Gómara's clarity for its structure, but at many points added further details, often personal; where Gómara had been succinct and to the point, Díaz was expansive and colourful, and took every opportunity to correct the armchair historian, sometimes with obsessive exaggeration. The "true history" tells us many things that Cortés would have liked to hide, and makes for riveting reading, but does this mean that it is entirely reliable, given that it was written from memory more than thirty years after the events described? Modern historians disagree as to the extent to which Bernal Díaz's "personal witnessing" *de facto* became a creative form of remembering. Some have even argued (unconvincingly in my view) that he could not have possibly written the work himself.<sup>21</sup> What is crucial in any case is that the appeal to personal experience, or autopsy, must be recognized as problematic.

If we take a *longue-durée* perspective throughout the early modern centuries, it is possible to argue that the genre of travel writing only became authoritative in European intellectual culture by dealing with the problem of credibility in a manner than had not been possible in previous centuries. Symptomatic of the way systematic engagement with texts could make a difference is Hakluyt's change of attitude towards the book of Sir John Mandeville, now known to be apocryphal. In the 1589 edition of the *Principall Navigations [...] of the English nation*, the Latin version of Mandeville was published as an authentic eyewitness, despite some hesitation.<sup>22</sup> For the second edition of 1598, after editing the narrative of friar Odoric of Pordenone to India and Cathay, Hakluyt apparently concluded that "Mandeville" had simply copied this text (and possibly others), and therefore he substituted the suspicious account with the friar's.<sup>23</sup> His concern with "certain and full discovery of the world" (my emphasis) through the critical edition of travel narratives was not unique, but largely modelled on the previous work by the Venetian Giovanni Battista Ramusio in his landmark collection *Navigazioni et Viaggi*. However, Ramusio's adoption of the same principle of contrasting information had led him to the opposite assessment with reference to another medieval text whose authenticity had, as we have seen, often been questioned, Marco Polo's *Description of the World*. Thanks to Ramusio's ability to bring together and cross-examine many reports of the Oriental Indies, notably those of the Portuguese, it was now quite possible to conclude that Polo was not a

21 Christian Duverger, *Cortés et son double. Enquête sur une mystification* (Paris: Seuil, 2013). Duverger's thesis is ingenious but not compelling. For an informed critique see Hugh Thomas, "Bernal o Cortés", *Letras Libres*, 10 June 2013, [www.letraslibres.com/mexico-espana/bernal-o-cortes](http://www.letraslibres.com/mexico-espana/bernal-o-cortes).

22 Richard Hakluyt, *The Principall Navigations, Voiages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* (London: Bishop, 1589), 77.

23 On the reception of Mandeville, see Rosemary Tzanaki, *Mandeville's Medieval Audiences: A Study on the Reception of the Book of Sir John Mandeville 1371–1550* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) and Ladan Niayesh, ed. *A Knight's Legacy: Mandeville and Mandevillian Lore in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

fabulous storyteller, but rather, Ramusio insisted with a degree of patriotic pride, a pioneer of modern and accurate geographical observation.<sup>24</sup> It is not coincidental that the judgment of these two humanist-educated editors of the sixteenth century about their medieval sources has on the whole stood the test of time. The “scientific” (or perhaps we should say “forensic”) criteria of internal cogency, philological analysis, verification with independent documents or witnesses, and historical coherence that we use today to establish authenticity are not substantially different from those that emerged in the sixteenth century throughout the process of questioning the credibility of particular travellers, although of course the resources that make possible a confident judgement were not stable, but tended to expand with the growth of long-distance travel and the multiplication of travel accounts. In the end the confidence a reader might have that a text is truly authoritative is always relative, not absolute. This is why, even today, some authors seek to argue that Cortés, not Bernal Díaz del Castillo, wrote the *Historia Verdadera de la conquista de Nueva España*, while others still ask – with increasing difficulty – whether Marco Polo ever went to China.<sup>25</sup>

It is therefore crucial to appreciate that the problem of whether travellers could be believed is not simply a modern concern but was acknowledged as important throughout the early modern period, and in fact shaped the evolution of the genre.<sup>26</sup> The English saying “travellers may lie by authority” received many replies already before the end of the sixteenth century, some remarkably thoughtful, such as by the Calvinist pastor Jean de Léry, who noted that some things were indeed novel and extraordinary, and it was important to keep an open mind.<sup>27</sup> His detailed account of the Tupinamba of Brazil naturalized the behaviour of naked cannibals for a sceptical European readership that included Montaigne. In a contested field, therefore, travellers did not simply insist that they were themselves trustworthy, they also questioned the attitude of those who did not wish to believe that which was novel and were, therefore, narrow-minded. Modernity was predicated on acknowledging that the ancients did not know everything, and the theme of geographical discovery was a powerful motif (for example, it was echoed by Francesco Guicciardini when analysing the historical significance of Magellan’s circumnavigation of the world, in one of the most memorable chapters

24 Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Navigazioni e viaggi*, 3 vols (Venice, 1550–59), III, 22. Ramusio emphasized that Polo was an accurate recorder of what he saw despite belonging to a period where “few men were intelligent of that doctrine”, and despite spending so many years surrounded by the “unpolished Tartar nation”.

25 Frances Wood, *Did Marco Polo go to China?* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1995). The rather opportunistic thesis was demolished by, among others, Hans Ulrich Vogel, *Marco Polo Was in China: New Evidence from Currencies, Salts and Revenues* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

26 See especially Daniel Carey, “The Problem of Credibility in Early Modern Travel”, *Renaissance Studies* 33, no. 4 (2019): 524–47.

27 Jean de Léry, *Histoire d’un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil*, ed. Frank Lesfrant (Paris: Libr. Générale française, 1994), 93–95.

of his *History of Italy*).<sup>28</sup> At the same time, apologists for the modern genre rightly claimed that not all travellers were equally reliable – Léry himself was involved in a dispute about authenticity with his contemporary and Catholic rival André Thevet, royal cosmographer in France.<sup>29</sup> Which criteria could be used to determine when scepticism was reasonable, and justified? For example, eyewitnesses, but also the historians who relied on them, had to be disinterested, trustworthy, and intelligent, as emphasized by Charles de Rochefort in his *Natural and Moral History of the Antilles* of 1658.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, as Montaigne had also (previously) noted when discussing the cannibals of Brazil, direct observers with less education might actually be more truthful, because they were less likely to distort a straightforward account of what they saw with their own interpretative biases.<sup>31</sup>

Beyond the recognition of the existence of a rhetorical battleground concerning the reliability of travellers in this period, is there a history to be written of how the criteria that determined credibility were developed in the changing cultural circumstances of the early modern period? My contribution, focused on a number of key examples belonging to the first decades of the sixteenth century, can only hope to offer the first chapter of this story. However, I would argue that it is a chapter that belongs to a particularly explosive moment, one that shaped much of what was to come.

### **Varthema's Social Strategies; or the Invention of the Curious Traveller**

To begin with, let us look more closely at the case of Varthema, whose journey of seven years supposedly lasted from his departure from Venice to Alexandria in 1502 to his return to Italy via Portugal in 1508: can we trust him today, with the contextual knowledge many of contemporaries lacked? There is no doubt that Ludovico had reached India from Muslim lands, travelling, he says, in disguise, and then eventually fleeing from the king of Calicut to join the Portuguese, who welcomed him as a Christian European with valuable information. The literary persona of the “I” witness construed by Varthema in his *Itinerario* is, on the other hand, a flexible device that allows him to adopt many different roles, as a soldier, a trader, a madman, a

28 Francesco Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia*, ed. Silvana Seidel Menchi, 3 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1971), I, 589.

29 For the polemic with Léry, see Frank Lestringant, *André Thevet, cosmographe des derniers Valois* (Geneva: Droz, 1991), 213–16, 236–43.

30 Charles de Rochefort, *Histoire naturelle et morale des îles Antilles de l'Amerique* (Rotterdam: Leers, 1658). As Daniel Carey cleverly observes (“The Problem of Credibility”, 527), the argument was somewhat circular: the historian proclaimed his own personal honesty and experience of the New World as guarantee that his written sources were themselves trustworthy.

31 Michel de Montaigne, “Des Cannibals”, in *Les Essais*, ed. D. Bjaï et al. (Paris: LGF, 2001), 184.

physician, or a spy.<sup>32</sup> In this respect, the eyewitness is also a chameleon, and while his presence in Mecca (forbidden to Christians) is a testimony to the success of his disguise as a Mamluk soldier, an Italian captured as a child and converted to Islam, the suspicion of those around him and his fear of discovery as a European Christian spy provide much of the dramatic tension of the narrative, which at various points becomes an adventure story rather than simply a description of lands and peoples visited. It is hard not to be sceptical of some of the more picaresque and romantic episodes, most famously his account of how he escaped his imprisonment in Yemen by manipulating (but not fulfilling) the sexual desire of an Arab queen for a white man.<sup>33</sup> There are, however, grounds to suspect that Varthema's literary invention goes much deeper, because the chronology and geography of his travels in the interior of Persia and towards the East beyond southern India (all the way to the Malay peninsula, Sumatra, and the Spice Islands) simply makes no sense, and it seems pretty certain that, at least for those regions, he reported as his own observations a great deal of hearsay probably gathered in Kerala.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, offering a careful reconstruction of this constrained chronology and of Varthema's moves in the Middle East, the French historian Jean Aubin even suggested that Varthema did not simply pretend to be a mercenary soldier of Italian origins among Muslims, but was in reality for some years an actual renegade (hence his knowledge of colloquial Arabic), who later changed his mind and opportunistically joined the Portuguese.<sup>35</sup> His account is therefore, to a large extent, unreliable.

32 See my detailed analysis in Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes, 1250–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 125–63.

33 Ludovico de Varthema, *Itinerario*, ed. Valentina Martino (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2011), 283–93.

34 In particular, his trip from Yemen to Persia, India, and beyond to Southeast Asia, needs to be crammed between August 1504, which is the earliest date he could have sailed towards India, and the end of 1505, when he met the Portuguese in Malabar. All the sea journeys would have been constrained by the monsoons. The journey to the interior of Persia all the way to Shiraz and Herat is impossible. It is however clear that Varthema spent quite a few months in Malabar, where he learnt some Malayalam, leaving little time for a journey further East. Remarkably, many modern editors have resisted the obvious conclusion and still try to find ways to make Varthema's journey to Persia and Southeast Asia somewhat authentic, even while admitting that many of the actual dates and distances provided are inaccurate. For the most recent example consider Valentina Martino's efforts to reconstruct an actual journey in Varthema, *Itinerario*, 86–87 and 159–90, where she appeals to the internal complexity of the narrative, and the fact that the traveller did not keep a written record, in order to justify this lack of precision.

35 Jean Aubin, "Deux Chrétiens au Yémen Tahiride", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3rd series 3, no. 1 (1993): 33–52, argues that following his adventures in Yemen, Varthema only left Aden in the summer of 1505, also ruling out his travels in West India (Gujarat and Vijayanagara). He speculates that he may have travelled to India still as a Mamluk mercenary specialized in artillery, sent by the

If we accept that the narrative of the eyewitness is in part genuine, and in part fraudulent, the interesting question is not simply which parts are believable for the modern historian, but rather which literary and para-literary devices he used to construct his authority as a genuine traveller. Back in Italy in the fall of 1508, after seven years abroad, Varthema of course was perfectly aware that he needed to enhance this precarious authority in order to transform his adventurous tale of India – a distant region that by then had become a strategic commercial and religious concern – into something exploitable, that is, something that might allow him to consolidate his social opportunities as a well-travelled “patrician from Bologna”. In reality what he could sell was novel information about the East, and this led directly to adopting the desire “to see the diversity of places and peoples” as his official motivation for travel. It was a theme that conveniently echoed the exploits of the Homeric hero Ulysses *qui mores hominum multorum vidit et urbes* (the verse by Horace was, by then, a humanistic commonplace).<sup>36</sup> Upon his arrival in Italy Varthema was first interviewed, and paid, by the Venetian Senate. His next destination was the Papal States, and it was in Rome where he eventually published his book in 1510.

Despite the references to Ulysses in the preface, in reality the *Itinerario* was, as I have suggested, far more entertaining than erudite. A Portuguese knighthood for services rendered after fleeing from the king of Calicut helped rehabilitate Varthema’s obscure past as a Mamluk mercenary, but quite clearly he did not plan to pursue a military career, let alone any intellectual endeavours. In the light of his lack of an alternative profession, other than as a self-appointed curious traveller who apparently – if we are to take the preface seriously – was thinking about next turning his attention towards exploring the North, it is quite possible that Varthema’s patrician background in Bologna had been exaggerated: we must understand this claim to social status as one that needed to be enhanced by gaining further patronage, which

Sultan of Egypt to help the King of Calicut against the Portuguese. I find these additional hypotheses overly sceptical.

- 36 The theme was made explicit in the book’s preface. It also appears in one of two anonymous sonnets of the one surviving manuscript of the book presented to the eighteen-year old Vittoria Colonna, the daughter of the book’s dedicatee Agnesina of Montefeltro, and then just married to Fernando d’Ávalos, Marquis of Pescara: “Taccia chi dà la palm’al grec’Olysse / fra quei c’han visto stran costum e gente / vento da Ludovico qui presente / e Omer e le fabul che lui scrisse” (Varthema, *Itinerario*, 126). This particular manuscript (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Firenze, Landau Finaly 9) was a luxury product written by the celebrated calligrapher Ludovico of Arrighi, and can be dated 1510, not many months before the *Itinerario* was published in Rome, because Varthema recalls the time he spent in Marino the previous year, in 1509, telling the story of his travels to the two women. In aristocratic circles, the gift of a luxury manuscript was probably more appropriate than a copy of the printed book. There are enough similarities to suggest that the sonnets were composed by the same professional writer who helped Varthema compose the book’s preface, although they were only included in the manuscript.



is precisely what we find him doing by appealing directly to some aristocratic ladies and by becoming familiar with cardinals at the court of pope Julius II. Hence, in 1509 he was in Marino at the palace of the Duque of Tagliacozzo Fabrizio Colonna and his wife Agnesina of Montefeltro, daughter of the former Duke of Urbino Federico da Montefeltro, and it was to her that he dedicated the book. In the dedicatory preface, which he probably had some professional help in writing (given the hint of some popular humanistic themes, otherwise absent in the book), Varthema emphasized the rhetorical themes of scientific curiosity – the verbs are *investigare*, *cognoscere*, *recercare* – as well as the value of direct eyewitnessing (*visivo testimonio*), as opposed to hearsay.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps more crucially, by the very action of choosing a virtuous noblewoman as his dedicatee Varthema also sought to visualize the acquisition of authority by the text and by its author. This offering to the Duchess was precisely the first image the readers of the illustrated German translation of 1515 would see in the book's cover, before being confronted with more exotic, exciting, and potentially disturbing engravings by the artist by Jörg Breu the Elder depicting cannibalism and devil worship in the inside pages.<sup>38</sup> This frontispiece could be seen as a pre-emptive strike by the Augsburg publishers Hans Miller and Sigismund Grimm, to the implicit scepticism concerning unreliable vagabonds expressed by the latter's friend Joannes Boemus a few years later (Figure 2.1).

Despite the combined rhetoric of elite sociability, conventional classical references, and lavish imagery, Varthema and his publishers were not altogether successful in building an unassailable reputation in his own century. A number of Portuguese learned writers, in particular, were explicitly critical. Writing about oriental plants and drugs in Goa, the capital of Portuguese India, the New Christian physician and naturalist García da Orta asserted that Varthema had made many scientific errors concerning the natural products of Persia and Southeast Asia because he had not travelled further East than Calicut and Cochin, and the fact that he was an unreliable witness was confirmed by many Portuguese who had told him that “he went about in the dress of a Moor”, hinting at his condition as a renegade.<sup>39</sup> At the same time in Lisbon the humanist historian João de Barros, who had read Varthema's narrative in the important Latin collection of travel accounts about the “New World” edited by the German humanists Johann Hüttich and Simon Grynaeus, *Novus orbis regionum ac insularum veteribus incognitarum* (Basel,

37 Varthema, *Itinerario*, 224.

38 Through a detailed and sophisticated analysis, Stephanie Leitch has argued that the whole series of engravings by Jörg Breu, not only the title page, also served to authorize the text, offering a visual complement to the narrative standpoint of the eyewitness. See Stephanie Leitch, *Mapping Ethnography in Early Modern Germany: New Worlds in Print Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 101–45.

39 García da Orta, *Coloquios dos simples e drogas da Índia* (Goa: Ioannes De Endem, 1563), fol. 29v–30r. Orta seems to have read the Latin version of the *Itinerario* (or the Spanish that derived from it) rather than the original Italian, and may have misread some terms.

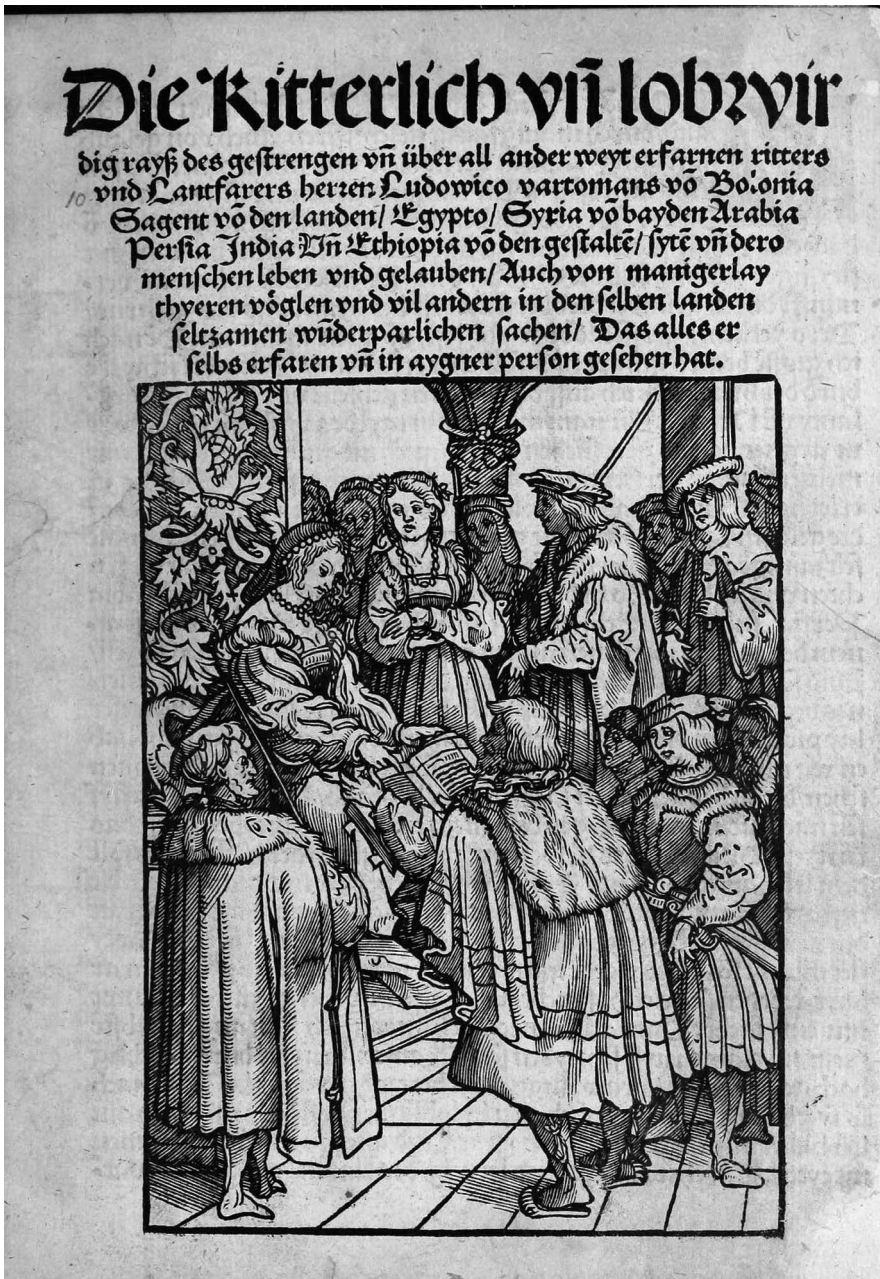


Figure 2.1 Title page of the German translation of Varthema's travel account, illustrated by Jörg Breu, *Die ritterlich und lobwirdig rayss des gestrengen und über all ander weyt erfahren ritters und landtfarers herren Ludowico Vartomans von Bolonia* (Augsburg: Hans Miller, 1515). The public offering of the book to an aristocratic lady helped authorize a text by a man of obscure past who sought to be recognized as a patrician from Bologna. Source: Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

1532), was pointedly cautious in his use of the source: he only reported those events that could be confirmed by Portuguese testimonies – namely those concerning how Varthema joined the Portuguese and offered them important information – but otherwise left the rest, most of the narrative, to “the faith of the author”.<sup>40</sup> Despite the fact that he had never travelled to India, Barros worked as royal factor at the India Office (*Casa da Índia*) in Lisbon, where he amassed a remarkable amount of primary sources, thus becoming the best informed historian about Asia in Europe of his period.<sup>41</sup>

Retrospectively it seems that sixteenth-century Portuguese critics in Lisbon as well as Goa had good reasons to question whether Varthema was entirely trustworthy. However, unlike the case of the armchair ethnologist Boemus, this had little to do with geographical distance, the novelty of the traveller’s observations, or his obscurity: on the contrary, it was their capacity to contrast various sources of information – and in particular their proximity to alternative sources, written and oral, about India and about Varthema – that ultimately enabled them to question the Italian adventurer’s exploitation of the distance between Italy and India to advance his semi-fraudulent tale. In other words, while Boemus’s scepticism was culturally prejudiced, because it relied on traditional written authorities and the uncertainty of the traveller’s socio-cultural standing, Barros and Orta became sceptical from their superior knowledge of the modern historical context.

### **The Letters of Amerigo Vespucci: the Invention of a Commercial Genre**

Even though we have good reasons to question the accuracy of many travel writers who, like Varthema, claimed scientific curiosity as their primary motivation, and their own personal experience and observation as the foundation for their authority, what is certain is the rhetorical importance of such claims. Paradoxically, the role of printing only made the problem more complex, because at the same time that it contributed to fixing a text for a wide readership, it introduced a new agency, with its own commercial and ideological agendas in the development of the genre.

Vespucci’s published letters, the Latin *Mundus Novus* addressed to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de Medici (undated but probably printed in Florence early 1503), and the subsequent *Lettera de Amerigo Vespucci delle isole nuovamente trovate in quattro suoi viaggi* addressed to Piero Soderini (Florence, 1504), provide a case in point, because they appear to have been tampered with, either by Vespucci himself or by a Florentine editor. Thus, they claim more voyages to South America (four in total) than Vespucci is known to have performed from his own manuscript letters (two), and a number of chronological and geographical details seem

40 João de Barros, *Ásia*, vol. 1 (Lisbon: Galharde, 1552), fol. 123r.

41 The *Casa da Índia* managed all the key activities of the Portuguese colonial empire in Asia, including trade, navigation, shipping, and geographical information.

incompatible.<sup>42</sup> By contrast, we can make perfect sense of the three manuscript letters addressed in Tuscan to his patron in Florence Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de Medici (Vespucci was his commercial agent in Seville), dated 1500, 1501, and 1502.<sup>43</sup> Here the navigator appears as a member of the Florentine community in Seville, a man distinguished by his cosmographical expertise and who, as a pilot at the service of the Catholic kings, accompanied Alonso de Ojeda and Juan de la Cosa in their exploration of the Caribbean coast of South America in 1499–1500, looking for a passage towards the East between the mouths of the Amazon and Orinoco rivers.<sup>44</sup>

The following year, Vespucci transferred his services to king Manuel I of Portugal and sailed to the recently discovered Brazil, perhaps as a pilot or cosmographer (he was not the ship's captain).<sup>45</sup> On this occasion, after a chance encounter in the Cape Verde Islands in West Africa with the returning India fleet led by Pedro Alvares Cabral (whose information about the East was the subject of the second of Vespucci's letters, dated June 1501), Vespucci's ship went on to explore the south-eastern coasts of South America, perhaps in an attempt to find a route towards Malacca and Ptolemy's "Taprobana" (which after talking to Cabral's Jewish interpreter Gaspar da India Vespucci identified with Sumatra).<sup>46</sup> The letter describing this second voyage during 1501–1502 was especially important for its astronomical observations of the southern hemisphere, and also for its detailed ethnography of the naked cannibals of southern Brazil in the bay

- 42 For a sophisticated introduction to the complicated Vespuccian question, see the introduction by Luciano Formisano to the Spanish edition: Amerigo Vespucci, *Cartas de Viaje*, ed. Luciano Formisano (Madrid: Alianza, 1986), 9–45. The dispute is not settled, but I consider the analysis by Alberto Magnaghi that prioritizes the unpublished manuscript letters still roughly correct: Alberto Magnaghi, *Amerigo Vespucci: Studio Critico*, 2 vols (Rome: Fratelli Treves, 1924–26). See also Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Amerigo: The Man Who Gave his Name to America* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2007), 108–34, who largely agrees with Formisano.
- 43 Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de Medici was a banker and a younger cousin to Lorenzo "Il Magnifico" (of the senior branch of the family), and had been educated in Florentine humanist circles alongside Vespucci. After 1494 he had come to exercise great political and cultural influence in Florence as part of the Republican party in opposition to Piero de Medici, the exiled heir of Lorenzo il Magnifico.
- 44 Vespucci, however, after landfall in modern Guyana sailed separately. While Ojeda and Juan de la Cosa sailed westward and explored the coast of modern Venezuela, Vespucci travelled south towards modern Brazil.
- 45 It is not clear whether the commander of this important expedition was Gaspar de Lemos, who had brought news to Portugal of the accidental discovery of Brazil with Pedro Alvares Cabral in 1500, or more probably Gonçalo Coelho.
- 46 Although in ancient sources, including Ptolemy, the description and depiction of the island of Taprobana can be associated to modern Sri Lanka, and as such was interpreted by the most Arabic writers and by Marco Polo, Vespucci, Varthema and others in the sixteenth century identified Taprobana with Sumatra, and this view prevailed in some of the most influential sixteenth-century maps, such as those by Ramusio's collaborator Giacomo Gastaldi.

of Rio de Janeiro, later known as the Tupinamba. An educated man (son of a notary) who quoted Ptolemy, Dante, and Petrarch, and one of the first to understand the nature of South America as a distinct continent, Vespucci would eventually re-join the services of Castile and settle in Seville as the chief pilot of the House of Trade (*Casa de Contratación*). He also became a business partner of Columbus, who seems to have trusted him with his affairs.<sup>47</sup>

The first problem with the two accounts that were printed in Florence is that the dates of the two recorded voyages were different from those documented elsewhere. In addition Vespucci improbably claimed that he had already sailed to South America in 1497, which means that he had “discovered” the mainland before Columbus himself. Whether composed by Vespucci himself, seeking to enhance his fame (at the expense of his “friend” and rival Columbus), or by someone acting in his name and using his writings with some creativity, the contradictions in the published letters suggest that authentic materials could be altered in order to serve extraneous purposes, one of which was claiming priority in the discovery of new lands (symptomatically, Vespucci never mentions the captains under whom he served). It might be too simplistic to conclude that only the unpublished letters contain authentic material, because it seems certain that Vespucci had kept a more detailed “book” or journal during his journeys, as he repeatedly claimed, and therefore both the unpublished and the published letters probably shared this common source.<sup>48</sup> Another fragmentary letter written in response to some queries raised by his previous reports among the sceptical patricians of Florence confirms this interpretation, because in his fascinating replies about subjects such as nakedness, climate, and skin colour Vespucci referred to various statements which can be found sometimes in his published and at other times in his unpublished materials.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, it is still the case that the published texts were not entirely accurate, and that their description of Brazil and its inhabitants often departed significantly, in fact and interpretation, from the unpublished letters, whose sober tone is far more plausible. They must therefore be read as a skilful fabrication constructed in Florence from authentic Vespuccian materials. In the case of the *Mundus Novus*, in Latin, the fabricated text was addressed to an international learned elite. This makes it necessary to regard any ethnographic observations not found in the manuscript letters with considerable caution.

Compare his description of the naked cannibals of Brazil in the letter of 1502 addressed to Lorenzo de Pierfrancesco de Medici, based on close observations that, according to Vespucci, lasted 27 days. This was in effect the

47 Fernández-Armesto, *Amerigo*, 188–90.

48 Here I follow Formisano (Vespucci, *Cartas*, “Introducción”).

49 That is, the known manuscript letters to his Medici patron contain some but not all the statements referred to in this later exchange, whose contents on the other hand sometimes coincide with material only found in the apocryphal *Mundus Novus*. This letter, first published in 1937, is known as the Ridolfi fragment. For an edition, see *Il Mondo Nuovo di Amerigo Vespucci: scritti vespucciani e para-vespucciani*, ed. Mario Pozzi (Alessandria: Edizioni dell’ Orso, 1993), 93–100.

first detailed account of the Tupinamba, who were to become the most iconic “savages” of the sixteenth century:

They lack any law or any faith, living according to nature, and have no knowledge of the immortality of the soul. They have no private property among them, because everything is held in common. They have no borders between kingdoms or provinces. They have no king, and obey no one: everybody is his own master. They do not administer justice, which they do not need, because they are not ruled by greed.<sup>50</sup>

And later, on the subject of marriage:

Their marriages are not with a single woman, but with as many as they wish and without much ceremony, we have met a man who has ten women. They are jealous of these [...] They are a very prolific people. They have no heirs, because they lack private goods. When their daughters reach the age to procreate, the first to corrupt them has to be the closest male relative except the father, and afterwards, thus corrupted, they marry them.<sup>51</sup>

The *Mundus Novus*, combining the two passages, has:

They have no clothes, neither of wool, linen or cotton, since they need them not; neither do they have private goods, but all things are held in common. They live together without king or government, and each man is his own master. They take as many women as they please; and *the son copulates with his mother, the brother with his sister, and any man with the first woman he meets*. They dissolve their marriages as often as they please, and observe no sort of law with respect to them. They have no temples, no religion and are not even idolaters. What more can I say? They live according to nature, and may be called Epicureans rather than Stoics [Figure 2.2].<sup>52</sup>

Many other passages attest to the tendency of the published versions to erase the idea that there might be social rules, however strange, among the savages, and to exaggerate the elements of sexual disorder, such as incest, with the implication of bestiality and amorality. Vespucci is often made to become

50 I translate from the Italian in *ibid.*, 87.

51 *Ibid.*, 88.

52 *Ibid.*, 114 (my italics). The Epicureans here represent the pursuit of pleasure without restraint, by contrast with Stoic austerity and self-control: animal nature against the rational rules of natural law or religious morality. Vespucci himself repeated in the so-called Ridolfi fragment that he called these men Epicureans because they lacked private goods, laws, or government, and did not care about gold, something his Florentine critics had found hard to believe.



Figure 2.2 Anonymous engraving from the German translation of Vespucci's Letter to Piero Soderini (*Diß Büchlin saget, wie die zwen durchlüchtigsten Herren Her Fernandus K. zu Castilien und Herr Emanuel K. zu Portugal haben das weyte mör ersuchet und findet vil Insulen unnd ein nüwe Welt ... vormals unbekant*, Strasburg: Johann Grüninger, 1509). This illustrated edition was of a letter originally published in Florence that we know made exaggerated claims or had been tampered with.

Source: Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, A: 447.1 Theol. (5).

the witness to gruesome details, especially in relation to cannibalism. Hence, in the *Mundus Novus*:

Those whom they bring home captives from war they preserve, not to spare their lives, but that they may be slain for food; for they eat one another, the victors the vanquished, and among various kinds of meat human flesh is a common foodstuff with them. We can be sure of this fact because fathers

have been seen to eat their children and wives, and I knew a man, whom I also spoke to, who was reputed to have eaten more than three hundred human bodies.<sup>53</sup> And I remained twenty-seven days in a certain city (*urbe*) where I saw salted human flesh suspended from beams between the houses, just as with us it is the custom to hang bacon and pork. And I will say more: they themselves wonder why we do not eat our enemies and do not use as food their flesh, which they say is very tasty.<sup>54</sup>

Leaving aside that the use of the word “city” for a Tupi village already reveals the hand of the editor or translator, the manuscript letter is more sober:

Those whom they capture [in war] they keep as prisoners, and they keep them as slaves in their homes; if she is female, they sleep with her, and if he is male, they marry them to their daughters. And at certain times, when a demoniac fury takes possession of them, they invite their relatives and all the people, and they place them in front of them – that is the [captured] mother with the children they had from her – and with certain ceremonies they kill them with arrows, and eat them. And they do the same with the male slaves and the children born from them. And this is certain, because we found in their houses human meat being smoked, a great deal of it, and we bought 10 children from them, male and female, whom they had destined for the sacrifice – or better said, the *malefice*. We told them off, but I do not know whether they will amend their ways.<sup>55</sup>

What is clear from this account, as opposed to the published version, is that the Tupis ate their captives and their descendants, rather than simply their own wives and children, and not casually, but by means of collective ceremonies.

The “authentic” Vespucci of the manuscript letters went on to wonder about the origins of such “bestial” custom, and why people who were not ruled by greed or politics would wage war upon their enemies and treat them so cruelly. The reality described – of a naked man who was cruel and bestial, rather than simple and innocent – was in fact a direct challenge to the myth of the Golden Age, which associated lack of private property with a happy life without worries, and which Peter Martyr, largely inspired by Columbus’s promotional rhetoric, had famously evoked in his letters about Hispaniola.<sup>56</sup>

53 In the manuscript letter Vespucci had also met a man who claimed to have had eaten more than two hundred bodies, so in this case the Latin translator simply exaggerated.

54 *Il Mondo Nuovo*, 116.

55 *Ibid.*, 89.

56 It seems likely that by 1502 Vespucci was familiar with some of Columbus’s writings (at some point he claimed that he had been in charge of his books), but less certain that he had read Martyr’s letters, and there is no evidence of a direct polemic between his “Stoic” Golden Age and Vespucci’s “Epicurean” primitive bestiality. In reality, already the Columbian encounter had quickly developed the two contrasting



Interrogated, the natives claimed that it was simply tradition, and that they were moved by a desire for revenge. The point here is not that the report of anthropophagy was false or misleading. Rather the contrary, it was based on a stay of a few weeks in southern Brazil, and despite Vespucci's limited knowledge of the language, many of the ethnographic details coincide with those offered by other travellers who spent long periods in this area later in the century, such as the mercenary captive Hans Staden and the Calvinist pastor Jean de Léry. Our conclusion therefore must be that there was a degree of manipulation, sometimes crude but more often quite subtle, in the transition from the observer's journal notes to the letters he circulated among his friends and patrons, and from those to the printed texts made available by a publisher to a wider readership. No doubt Vespucci was capable of editing and sensationalizing his own account, but it is hard not to see an editorial hand as well, seeking to enhance impact. After Vespucci, the genre of travel writing can rarely be read without taking into consideration the possibility that printers and editors might have shaped materials provided by observers claiming *autopsie*, most often in order to facilitate commercial success.

### **Pigafetta in Southeast Asia: Observations, Hearsay, and the Transformation of the Marvellous**

The fundamental condition for the evolution of the multifarious European genre of travel writing in the intensively creative period between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries was the exponential growth of original narratives, in the context of a navigational revolution that multiplied opportunities for new encounters, facilitated the creation of long-distance colonial empires, and shortened distances. The marvellous, broadly understood as the extraordinary rather than as the magical or fabulous, did not as such disappear from the genre. However, its scope was reduced in the transition from the isolated account, such as those by Marco Polo or Odoric of Pordenone, to the regularly observed. In the same process, the scope for simply reporting hearsay was also reduced. We could therefore say that distance was not simply physical, but also cultural; not simply a question of how long it took to travel to the East Indies, for example, but also how often it was possible to do so, and in what conditions; finally, how much linguistic, ethnographic, and geographical expertise was accumulated within the West European cultural system by means of the flow of information made possible by an expanding network of overseas trading colonies and religious missions.

To illustrate this, let us briefly consider the quality of information provided by Antonio Pigafetta from Vicenza in the narrative of the first circumnavigation of the world, which began to circulate in various versions in French and Italian in

themes of the innocence of the Tainos and the cannibalism of their Carib predators, a duality strongly conditioned by the rhetorical strategies of Columbus himself in order to maintain the patronage of the Catholic Monarchs.

1524 (only a summary of the former was printed in the sixteenth century).<sup>57</sup> Pigafetta, who in 1519 had volunteered to sail with Magellan, was an educated observer who kept a travel journal, and miraculously survived the long and dangerous trip. He excelled, for example, at describing valuable plants like the nutmeg tree from the Moluccas, and also recorded basic vocabularies in various native languages, such as Patagonian, Bisayan or Malay. He was being equally informative when he described a custom from the island of Cebu (in the modern Philippines) that many would have considered bizarre or perhaps even shocking, the use of penile implants (*sagra* or *palang*) by Bisayan men in order to enhance the pleasure of women during sex. As he himself could hardly believe it, he sought to examine them personally:

Old and young have placed across their member, near the head, from one side to the other, a nail made of gold, or perhaps with tin, thick as a goose feather, and at both ends of this metal nail some have like a star with pointed heads, others like the head of a cart nail. Many times I sought to see it both in old and young, because I could not believe it.<sup>58</sup>

In a separate chapter, Pigafetta observed that in Java the men courted the ladies by placing a number of little round bells (*sonagli*) under the skin of their member, and would go below their lover's windows and shake it, so that the women immediately descended and made love in order to enjoy feeling and hearing the little bells inside them.<sup>59</sup>

57 Upon the return of the survivors of Magellan's expedition to Spain in 1522, a number of reports began to circulate, notably the printed account by Maximilian of Transylvania (secretary to Charles V) addressed to the Archbishop of Salzburg, first published in Latin in 1523 as *De Moluccis Insulis*. The most detailed account however was by Pigafetta. This exceptional source was written in Italian c.1523/1524, but has only survived in adapted and summarized versions. One was addressed to Louise of Savoy, mother of the French king Francis I, and eventually published in French in an abridged form sometime after 1526. This truncated version, full of translation errors, was the one best known in the sixteenth century (Ramusio, therefore, published a retranslation into Italian). A fuller edition dedicated in 1524 to Philippe Villiers de l'Isle-Adam remained unpublished, although some manuscripts in French have survived. The closest we have to the lost original of this final version is the Italian manuscript preserved in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, only published in the nineteenth century, which I have used for my quotations: Antonio Pigafetta, *La mia longa et pericolosa navigatione: la prima circumnavigazione del globo: 1519-1522*, ed. Luigi Giovannini (Milan: Edizioni Paoline, 1989). For an attempt to combine the various French and Italian versions see *Le Voyage de Magellan (1519-1522): La relation d'Antonio Pigafetta et autres témoignages*, eds. Xavier de Castro, Jocelyne Hamon, and Luis Filipe Thomaz (Paris: Chandeigne, 2007). Also of value for its critical apparatus is Antonio Pigafetta, *Relazione del Primo Viaggio attorno al Mondo*, ed. Andrea Canova (Padova: Editrice Antenove, 1999).

58 Pigafetta, *La mia longa et pericolosa navigatione*, 131.

59 *Ibid.*, 208.

These observations of peculiar sexual customs were not strictly new, as already in the fifteenth century the Venetian merchant Nicolò Conti, in the account of his Indian travels that he dictated in 1441 to Pope Eugene IV's secretary Poggio Bracciolini (and widely circulated among humanists), had reported a similar use of inserted bells in the city of Ava in Pegu (Burma).<sup>60</sup> He was even invited by some women to undergo an operation in order to increase the size of his penis, which they made fun of, but he refused on the grounds that he was not willing to suffer pain in order to give pleasure to others. Nor was Pigafetta the last one to observe these practices, because as narratives multiplied throughout the century various other contemporary travellers reported the two variants throughout Southeast Asia, and with particular regularity after the Spanish colonized the Philippines.<sup>61</sup> Hence besides the various unpublished accounts of the customs of the Bisayans by *encomenderos* like Miguel de Loarca or the anonymous compiler of the Boxer Codex of circa 1592 (who even provided an illustration), both the Florentine trader Francesco Carletti in his posthumous *Ragionamenti* (1701) and Antonio de Morga in his *Sucesos de la Islas Filipinas* (1609) made the practice known more widely, usually with a note of explicit condemnation.<sup>62</sup> Carletti, interestingly, following in the steps of Pigafetta as a sceptical circumnavigator who did not simply rely on hearsay, sought to see the implants personally, and assured his audience (the account was addressed to the Grand Duke of Tuscany Ferdinand I) that "if I had not seen it, I would not have dared tell your Lordship, not to be taken as a liar".<sup>63</sup>

It would therefore seem that travellers who defined themselves as motivated by curiosity constructed their authority by rejecting hearsay when the information was particularly surprising. However, direct witnessing was not always

60 Poggio Bracciolini, *De l'Inde: Les Voyages en Asie de Niccolò de Conti. De Varietate Fortunae Livre IV*, ed. Michèle Guéret-Laferté (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 102. Their size was of a small hazelnut, and according to Conti as many as twelve were surgically inserted.

61 The practice, with its two main variations, a metal nail across the glans with two heads, sometimes used to subject a ring with stars, or little balls sawn under the skin, was widely reported in this period across Southeast Asia, the former especially on the islands, the latter on the mainland. For a discussion of the contemporary European literature on this custom, see Carmen Nocentelli, *Empires of Love: Europe, Asia and the Making of Early Modern Identity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 35–36.

62 Francesco Carletti, *Ragionamenti di Francesco Carletti Fiorentino sopra le cose da lui vedute ne'suoi viaggi si dell'Indie Occidentali, e Orientali come d'altri paesi* (Florence: Manni, 1701), 148–50. Carletti was in the Philippines in 1596 and offered his report after his return to Florence in 1602. However, his account was only published, heavily edited by Jacopo Carlieri, in 1701. I have used this edition for my quotations. For the same passage in a modern edition of the best manuscript see Francesco Carletti, *Ragionamenti del mio viaggio intorno al mondo*, ed. Adele Dei (Milan: Mursia, 1987), 89.

63 Carletti, *Ragionamenti*, 149. Carletti in fact paid money to some men to have the metal implants shown and explained.

possible. When in the following chapters Pigafetta reported that there were islands near the Moluccas whose natives ate human flesh, another island inhabited by pygmies, who were apparently very affable, and yet another beyond Java – an island called Ocoloro which he himself never reached – where women lived without men and got pregnant from the wind, he was entirely accurate too, in the sense that he was transmitting faithfully what he had been told by an old Malay pilot from Tidore. The same pilot told him about an island where men and women lived underground, ran very fast, wore no clothes and were the size of a cubit (about 46 centimetres), with ears as big as they were tall, so that they used one as a bed and the other and a blanket.<sup>64</sup> Many of these stories may have sounded plausible in the sense that they were not totally unheard of – other travellers in the Indian Ocean, including Marco Polo, reported similar “marvels”, no doubt echoing the oral culture of the ports of Southeast Asia. Pigafetta’s narrative is similar to Marco Polo’s in the way in which it included both those things he had witnessed, and others he had heard about, often distinguishing them. The problem of credibility, therefore, was for the audience to solve. It was only from the perspective of the critical accumulation of contradictory reports that some of Pigafetta’s information could eventually be understood to be “false”, while the account of some forms of cannibalism and of penile implants was confirmed independently and became “true”. The reliability of the traveller was not the primary issue here: rather, as repeated observations confirmed or denied textual authorities that depended on hearsay, many marvels dissolved and were replaced by “facts”. In a cultural sense, the distance had been shortened through the accumulation of reports.

## Conclusion

After considering these various cases, we may need to emphasize that in reality we have to distinguish four different aspects of the problem of credibility: the first one relates directly to the traveller’s honesty – can his (or her) claims to personal witnessing be trusted? Secondly, is the quality of his observations sufficient – how good are his linguistic skills, for example? Third, how reliable are his own sources when he reports hearsay – is, for example, Pigafetta’s Malay pilot simply telling tall tales to a foreigner? Finally, how reliable is any particular text after it has been copied, edited, translated, and printed?

With respect to the first issue, there are seldom any good reasons for a traveller not to claim that his testimony is perfectly honest and authentic, and this was always a commonplace of the genre of travel writing. In the case of the Italians Varthema, Vespucci, and Pigafetta, their own status as members of an educated urban middle class who could read and write (however artificially constructed in the case of Varthema) meant that their observations were invariably dressed in the rhetoric of scientific curiosity, echoing the themes of

64 Pigafetta, *La mia longa e pericolosa navigatione*, 205.

learned humanistic culture. On the other hand, this rhetorical starting point often needed additional authorization, because there could be many reasons for a traveller to exaggerate, to interpret creatively, to be selective, or even to lie, as we have seen in the case of Varthema. Some of these reasons could be personal, like building a career, or claiming originality and priority, an issue which may explain some of Vespucci's more mysterious expeditions; others were commercial, which seems to also have shaped the editing of Vespucci's letters for publication, and perhaps some of Varthema's novella-like episodes. A third source of distortion, which we have not considered here in detail, were political and institutional motivations when adapting information to particular audiences: for example, a conqueror like Cortés, accused of rebellion, had to subtly justify his unilateral actions in Mexico when writing his letters or relations – in theory a descriptive genre - to Charles V. Similarly, the Jesuit letters written from the missions later in the sixteenth century did not simply seek to inform other members of the order and the curious laity, they also had to edify them, emphasizing acts of piety and their hopes of success for example.

Finally, and beyond the more obvious political calculations, rhetorical strategies were often subtly ideological, even unconsciously so, and may have created a bias towards certain kinds of information. We must here consider whether novelty may have been culturally disruptive in some circles – for example, was a humanist cleric like Boemus trying to domesticate cultural variety? But also, from the opposite perspective, was exaggerated exoticism seductive – was a man like Vespucci fascinated by the “Epicurean” lifestyle of the Tupinamba of Brazil? Was Carletti secretly enjoying learning about those Southeast Asian sexual customs he described as diabolical? Did Pigafetta's observation that the Bisayans used penile implants “because their natures were weak” say something about the attitudes of Europeans, who regularly confused technological and military superiority with sexual prowess, believing that local native women preferred them, and whose abuses of the same native women in fact might have led to the surprise attack by the Cebuans on their supposed Christian allies after Magellan's death?<sup>65</sup>

Quite clearly not all travel accounts are identical in the way in which they censored or embellished particular themes. In this respect it may be useful to break down the genre within the same period according to motivation and audience, because what Michele da Cuneo, who joined Columbus for his second voyage, wrote in private to a Genoese friend after returning from the New World could be more explicit and “honest” than what Columbus himself

65 Pigafetta, *La mia longa e pericolosa navigatione*, 131–32. On the reasons why the Europeans were betrayed by their Bisayan Christian allies the jury is out, but the testimony of the Genoese Martino Giudici recorded by Peter Martyr in Spain suggests that the sailors had been sexually abusing native women, and this offended their men “who were jealous” (by contrast Pigafetta's emphasis on the betrayal of a slave interpreter who had been mistreated by the Spanish seems by itself insufficient). For a discussion, see Pigafetta, *Le Voyage*, 410.

wrote when addressing Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand in Spain. Hence Cuneo, in his letter of 1495 to Hieronymo Annari, described without embarrassment how he raped a “very pretty” Carib woman given to him by his good friend in the cabin of a ship, while Columbus avoided such themes and suffused his journal and letters with the themes of religious piety and the promise of gold, in this manner seeking to please both his royal patrons.<sup>66</sup> Thus we need, as part of the history of the genre of travel writing, a history of the cultural mechanisms by which testimonies bearing upon distant novelty were assessed as authentic and authoritative in general and in their particulars. Crucially, as I have shown, this was not simply about judging individuals as honest or mendacious, but also about considering the cultural context for the elaboration, circulation, publication, and reception of texts and images. Between Columbus’s immediate rhetorical needs and the sober assessment of Peter Martyr of Anghiera, an Italian humanist at the court of the Catholic kings who became the principal historian of the discovery of the New World, the interpretative emphasis was transformed, even though for many of his “facts” Peter Martyr relied on the letters and reports by Columbus. It was nonetheless possible for the historian with all his alternative sources – we could say with some additional distance – to doubt that the eyewitness Columbus had actually reached Asia, rather than a new continent.

From the Indies, East and West, via the Iberian Peninsula to Italy, where the reports by Vespucci, Varthema, and Pigafetta were written down and often published, and from Italy on to France, Germany, and England, where many of these works were translated and printed, various distances were crossed – in that respect Europe cannot be treated as a single homogeneous space. However, in the process of crossing distances the texts were also transformed, and new forms of social authorization were sought. As we have seen, these included the possible use of engravings to support the text, a practice which became especially common in Germany, precisely the space more remote from the Indies. Another way of creating an illusion of accuracy was to place the emphasis on cosmographical calculations of latitude and (to the extent that was possible) longitude within the Ptolemaic grid, as Vespucci himself did in his *Mundus Novus*.<sup>67</sup> The whole history of the genre was shaped by the various strategies used to buttress the authority of the curious traveller and to transform reports of the marvellous – increasingly understood as the new, the extraordinary or the monstrous within nature, rather than the

66 For Cuneo’s passage describing the rape of “una Camballa bellissima, la quale il signor armirante mi donò”, see *Italian reports of America 1493–1522: Accounts by contemporary observers*, ed. Geoffrey Symcox et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 177–78. In the same letter Cuneo praised Columbus as a skilful navigator, but also was in no doubt that the search for gold and profit was his true motivation.

67 See Christine R. Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World: Renaissance Encounters with the Strange and the Marvellous* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 47–87, for an insightful discussion of how rhetorically crucial but often illusory this talk of cosmographical precision could be.

miraculous - into truthful observation. In generating credibility, distance may be less important than conditions of production, conditions of reception, and genre conventions. It was widely understood that the principle of "I was there and saw it" could be abused in the search for personal fame, self-justification, or even the bookseller's commercial prospects. However, it could also be scrutinized in the light of other testimonies within the Republic of Letters.

One possibility was for the more educated writer to interrogate the individual traveller – a model example that emerged with force already in the fifteenth century is the manner in which Poggio Bracciolini questioned the testimony of the Venetian merchant Niccolò Conti and other Christian envoys from Central Asia and Ethiopia during the Council of Florence, looking for geographical precision, and also considering possible signs of mendacity. For example, the fact that a Turkish-speaking Nestorian envoy from Central Asia did not ask for money in exchange for providing information was seen as a sign that he was probably honest. Nonetheless, in this case the linguistic barrier proved insurmountable (an Armenian acted as interpreter, but this did not suffice). By contrast, Conti could offer a detailed and cogent account in Italian, even though many of his observations about India, China, and Southeast Asia were (as we have seen) truly surprising.<sup>68</sup>

Poggio's difficulty was that he had few alternative sources. Throughout the sixteenth century the unprecedented density of information available, published or in some cases only available to restricted circles, helped in this task of sorting testimonies into credible and not credible, and identifying obvious plagiarisms. Some particularly well-informed authors and also institutions thus became authoritative, and in turn their prestige generated mechanisms to authorize or challenge further texts. We can include in this category humanist editors of travel accounts like Ramusio and Hakluyt; the official cosmographers and chroniclers connected to imperial institutions such as the *Casa da Índia* in Lisbon or the *Consejo de Indias* in Castile (men like João de Barros, Juan López de Velasco and Antonio de Herrera); or some of the historians of the Jesuit order like Acosta and Maffei, who were able to take advantage of the Society's extraordinary system of production, exchange, and centralization of information in order to produce works of synthesis concerning the West and East Indies of lasting significance.<sup>69</sup>

Other cases remained more ambiguous: the prolific French cosmographer André Thevet, for example, author of the *Cosmographie de Levant* (Lyon, 1554), *Les Singularitez de la France Antarctique* (Paris, 1557), and the *Cosmographie Universelle* (Paris, 1584), all richly illustrated, was without doubt able to access many unique sources of information, and could even claim the status of a witness for a large number of "singularities" in the Levant and in

68 Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology*, 85–123.

69 The Jesuits in fact offer an interesting paradox: often tendentious in their reporting due to their religious zeal and edifying purposes, they nonetheless had privileged access to specialized first-hand information, and a vast network of exchange that facilitated its circulation.

Brazil that allowed him to routinely question ancient writers on the basis of modern experience. However, his reliance on the work of others was excessive, his claims to universal knowledge were widely perceived as exaggerated, and his criteria for interpretation were denounced as dubious. Hence, not surprisingly, his authority was quickly challenged by many of his contemporaries: some of his collaborators and ghost writers, like François de Belleforest, felt cheated of their intellectual work and rebelled against him, targeting Thevet's obviously false claims to having "discovered the whole world" and only relying on his own personal experience;<sup>70</sup> critics such as Martin Fumée (the translator of Gómara into French), and the Protestant pastor and traveller Jean de Léry, both accused him of mendacity and questioned his status as eyewitness in Brazil, that is in "la France Antarctique" (Thevet's ethnography of that region apparently relied on the reports collected by the authorities of the small French colony via interpreters "gone native", since during his sojourn of a few weeks he fell ill and could personally observe very little); Montaigne referred to him as the kind of man who wrote about things he did not know: having been to Palestine, he now thought he could give reports about the rest of the world;<sup>71</sup> Hakluyt, in turn, made him the archetype of an armchair cosmographer whose false erudition and lack of rigour distorted the quality of genuine reports: in his words, the historically useful genre of travel writing (*peregrinationis historia*) was the opposite of "those weary volumes bearing the titles of universal Cosmography which some men that I could name have published as their own, being indeed most truly and unprofitably amassed and hurled together".<sup>72</sup> Sound working methods and clarity of exposition were no less important than the status of a writer either as a direct observer, or as a man of learning – and Thevet had the distinction of failing in these two roles.<sup>73</sup> The problem, therefore, was the man, not the universal project of "a certain and full discovery of the world" that he shared with his contemporaries.<sup>74</sup> Paradoxically it was not the claim to the status of an eyewitness (which could be abused), but a rigorous compiler's broader perspective,

70 For details see Frank Lestringant, "Introduction", xxi–xlili, in André Thevet, *Cosmographie de Levant*, ed. Frank Lestringant (Geneva: Droz, 1985). Similarly, the antiquarian Mathurin Héret complained of lack of recognition for his work of classical erudition on *Les Singularitez de la France Antarctique*. Thevet's reply to his armchair critics was to invent fictional voyages in order to appropriate the observations made by other travellers.

71 Montaigne, "Des Cannibals", 317–18. Montaigne, like Hakluyt, did not name Thevet, but the target was obvious.

72 Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations*, fol. 3v (I modernize the spelling).

73 Thevet's status as royal cosmographer during a period of bitter religious and political conflict stimulated some of these attacks, at a time when France lacked a coherent maritime policy. The issue, however, was ultimately his mendacity and lack of intellectual cogency. For a discussion of Thevet's cosmographical vision and why it became quickly anachronistic, see Frank Lestringant, *Mapping the Renaissance World: The Geographical Imagination in the Age of Discovery* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 9–11 and 17–19.

74 Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations*, fol. 3v.



and the distance it offered from the potentially dubious motivations of an eyewitness that, in the end, gave an armchair editor like Ramusio the authority to identify the modern texts produced by Varthema, Vespucci, and Pigafetta as generally authentic, and include them in his canonical collection.<sup>75</sup> The mechanisms to assess problems of quality of observation, geographical distance, and subjectivity would be refined throughout the early modern centuries, but by the end of the sixteenth century the foundations had been laid out.

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75 Interestingly, however, Ramusio often had to rely on printed editions and experienced some difficulty in finding the best texts, notably in the case of Pigafetta, which (as we noted) he retranslated from the published French summary. For Varthema he sought to correct the original Italian with the Spanish version, in turn derived from the Latin – not necessarily an improvement! For an analysis of his linguistic and editorial choices see Fabio Romanini, "Se fussero più ordinate, e meglio scritte ...": *Giovanni Battista Ramusio correttore ed editore delle "Navigazioni et Viaggi"* (Rome: Viella, 2007), and the extensive study by Fiona Lejosne, *Écrire le Monde depuis Venise au XVIe siècle: Giovanni Battista Ramusio et les Navigazioni et Viaggi* (Geneva: Droz, 2021), especially 293–364.

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### 3 Copies with Wings

## Bridging Distances by Printing the Familiar in the Travel Accounts of Theodore de Bry and Levinus Hulsius

*Stephanie Leitch*

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century printers of European travel literature drew from a steady repertoire of images whose repetition was part of the accrediting mechanism of early modern text technology. Publishers like Theodore de Bry (1527/28–1598) and Levinus Hulsius (1546–1606), whose firms were active between the 1590s and 1630s, employed entrepreneurial marketing schemes that relied on the recycling of earlier motifs that would have been recognizable to consumers. Among the most repeated images were those designed to visualize travellers' encounters with non-Europeans. While perhaps predictably exotic, many of these images became in some respects, more importantly, familiar to their readers and viewers. By recycling images from the classical tradition and costume literature, publishers assimilated unfamiliar peoples into the printed repertoire of familiar tropes. Instead of challenging credulity, however, the particularity of these pirated designs had the effect of both naturalizing peoples of the Americas and bringing them closer to home.

Recent work on the generative role of the copy offers fruitful models for the study of non-original images.<sup>1</sup> The discourse on distance has been explored in recent studies of the commerce of prints between northern European print centres, like Antwerp, and sites of artistic production in the Americas and in Asia. Older scholarly binaries of model and copy that have been used to explain these productions have tended to downgrade the contributions of creators working in Europe's "periphery", assuming both a false distance and proximity between the European print makers and their global interpreters.<sup>2</sup> The studies by Aaron Hyman and Stephanie Porras have instead shed light on the new contexts created by these copies in both the Americas and Asia in which the trappings of print technology negotiated new identities for local

1 See Lisa Pon, *Raphael, Dürer, and Marcantonio Raimondi: Copying and the Italian Renaissance Print* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Amy Powell, "The Errant Image: Rogier van der Weyden's *Deposition from the Cross* and its Copies", *Art History* 29, no. 4 (2016): 540–62; Florike Egmond and Sachiko Kusukawa, "Circulation of Images and Graphic Practices in Renaissance Natural History: The Example of Conrad Gessner", *Gesnerus* 73, no. 1 (2016): 29–72.

2 Indeed the idea of periphery is itself problematic and has been displaced by networks of exchange.

creators, ignited competition, and spurred pictorial invention beyond the devotional orthodoxies they were intended to engender. The two art historians show the copious wanderings of the copies from their original sites of production.<sup>3</sup>

This essay also tracks the prodigious journey made by recycled images, ones whose detours through European travel itineraries prompted a collapse of theoretical distance. My research shows the copy's complicity in epistemological shifts in iconography and geography: it argues that a few critical visual recyclings by early modern publishers made the marvellous both conveniently familiar and near. My examples will show how motifs like Mercury's wings could connect figures across the globe into a standard repertoire, bridging geographic distances between the continents in European travel literature. Sightings of the headless acephali in the Americas likewise collapsed the distance typically associated with their alterity, this time bridging a temporal divide. The drift of shared iconographies in print thus had the effect of collapsing distances by staging new cultural and geographic proximities. The resonance of "recognizable" native Americans with the ancient peoples of Europe and Asia supported fictive genealogies that fuelled Counter-Reformation programmes of evangelization. As recycled images facilitated the dramatizations of these new fictions, they also left their mark on cartography simultaneously being shaped by print productions.

### **Masterminding the Anthology: Printers as Agents**

Theodore de Bry's *Grands Voyages*, printed beginning in 1590, dwarfed the ambitions of earlier published travel accounts. What had not occurred to earlier compilers of travel reports like Giovanni Battista Ramusio and Richard Hakluyt was the idea to illustrate them systematically with images of people.<sup>4</sup> For Liège-born, Frankfurt-based Theodore de Bry, whose publishing programme was a visual one, pictures were part of the master plan. He drew on a rich array of motifs, including illustrations from hastily produced earlier editions, and standardized their images within his workshop's syntax of copper-plate engraving.

De Bry's images connected a wide array of literary and geographic content in order to sell it. By the late sixteenth century, the De Bry printing dynasty

- 3 Aaron M. Hyman, "Inventing Painting: Cristóbal de Villalpando, Juan Correa, and New Spain's Transatlantic Canon", *The Art Bulletin* 99, no. 2 (2017): 102–35; Stephanie Porras, "'St Michael the Arcangel': Spiritual, Visual, and Material Translations from Antwerp to Lima", in *Prints in Translation, 1450–1750: Image, Materiality, Space*, ed. Suzanne Karr Schmidt and Edward H. Wouk, 183–202 (London: Routledge, 2017); Stephanie Porras, "Going Viral? Maerten de Vos's 'St. Michael the Archangel'", *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 66 (2016): 54–78.
- 4 For De Bry and Hakluyt, see Ute Kuhlemann, "Between Reproduction, Invention and Propaganda: Theodore de Bry's Engravings after John White's Watercolours", in *A New World: England's First View of America*, ed. Kim Sloan (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 81.

initiated an ambitious project centred on the idea of travel and whose most distinctive feature was the quantity and quality of its illustrations. While the prodigious output of the shop's engravings challenges a synthetic treatment of their function, suspicions about the uniqueness of De Bry's designs has also diverted art historical treatment preoccupied with originality and invention. Because the *Grands Voyages* transform so many earlier travel accounts that also featured illustrations, they can shine a light on the early modern book trade, as Michiel van Groesen has done.<sup>5</sup> The publisher's role in balancing the rhetorical standards of eyewitnessing with the authenticating function of ethnographic description has been explored by Surekha Davies.<sup>6</sup> Both publishers and mapmakers negotiated the compact between authors and their readers via their reach into an inventory of time-honoured visual traditions.

De Bry's role as a recycler has been acknowledged: while his deliberate citations from contemporary Counter-Reformation iconography might have shored up his anti-Catholic agenda in certain volumes, this does not satisfactorily account for other expedients taken by an ambitious artist with a large workshop, or adequately address the fallout of those choices. De Bry's volumes delivered a corpus of classical visual vocabulary to audiences, as has been explored by Henry Keazor, which may also have assisted both familiarization and visual literacy on the part of readers.<sup>7</sup> We also have to consider the effects of the reception of copies in promoting legibility and recognizability among readers. Building up a repertoire of recognizable images might have been part of printers' plans to educate a generation of readers to become visually astute. This included challenging readers to reflect on the internal machinations of the print medium itself, as we see in Michael Gaudio's work that relates De Bry's logic to the technology of printmaking.<sup>8</sup>

The authority that accrued to the printed page in delivering the reports of exotic peoples emerged from its tendency to standardize iconography and motifs. Some of the authenticating potential of early modern travel images came from the consensus established by collaboration. Instead of diluting an image's credibility, its ability to be repeated was a hallmark of an image's tenacity. Often produced collectively at the outset, images went on to have careers that reflected their interaction and dialogue with other artists and printers over time. In its first appearance, for example, the image of a "winged figure" entered the print repertoire from a watercolour sketch of an Algonquian medicine man labelled *The Flyer* (Figure 3.1).

5 Michiel van Groesen, *The Representations of the Overseas World in the De Bry Collection of Voyages (1590–1634)* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

6 Surekha Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human New Worlds, Maps and Monsters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

7 Henry Keazor, "Theodore De Bry's Images for America", *Print Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (1998): 148.

8 Michael Gaudio, *Engraving the Savage: The New World and Techniques of Civilization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).



Figure 3.1 John White, *The Flyer*, watercolour.  
Source: Courtesy of the British Museum.

The figure was part of a series of other indigenous peoples that John White drafted while in Virginia.<sup>9</sup> As the recording artist who accompanied Thomas Harriot's sojourn in the Americas, White was also a member of Sir Richard Grenville's 1585–86 expedition to Roanoke Island in the north of modern-day North Carolina. The spare backgrounds of many of John White's watercolours reminded viewers of both the format of printed costume literature

9 This album of watercolour drawings preserved today in the British Museum recorded the indigenous peoples of North America, but also the local flora and fauna – it is believed to have been one of several sets of sketches whose production began during Harriot and White's reconnaissance mission to Virginia in 1585 on behalf of the mission's patrons that included Walter Raleigh. See Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Texts, Images, and the Perception of 'Savages' in Early Modern Europe: What We Can Learn from White and Harriot", in *European Visions: American Voices*, ed. Kim Sloan (London: British Museum, 2009), 127.



and sketches of naturalists. Such formal arrangements resonated with the types presented by costume books and even specimens shown in natural histories. Conventions such as profile views, close-ups, and lack of atmospheric effects produced noiseless images that escaped the dilutions associated with style.<sup>10</sup> In ethnographic sketches, such restraint of background noise read as reliable, in some cases, even naturalistic. It could also, as we will see, facilitate the transposition of that content into new pictorial contexts.

For the inaugural volumes of the *Grands Voyages*, Theodore de Bry attempted to source material in primary documents such as John White's watercolours, as well as those of Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues, who had accompanied René de Laudonnière to Florida.<sup>11</sup> De Bry's activity as both a goldsmith and a copper engraver sensitized him to the advantages of including visual testimony that these drawings provided. The engravings he engineered from these drawings inspired a programme of travel narratives shaped around images of indigenous inhabitants. De Bry's reimagining of travel publications as visually driven established the footprint for what became a serial publication.

While as prototypes White's watercolours were spare, the engravings produced from them tended to flesh out settings, backgrounds, landscapes, and habits. The engraving made after White's drawing by De Bry's Leiden-born engraver Gijbert van Veen (1558–1630) (Figure 3.2) was intended for the first of De Bry's volumes of the *Grands Voyages*, based on Thomas Harriot's *Briefe and True Account* (1590). De Bry's reuse of such "eyewitness" sketches for his early engravings (for both Harriot's and for René de Laudonnière's account) has inflated the authenticity associated with his entire visual enterprise in some of the literature on ethnography in the Americas. In fact, De Bry's tendency to source his engravings in the medium of drawings tooled to suggest first-hand encounters was matched by an equal dependence on familiar artistic conventions.

While the classical tradition has been invoked to explain the idealized anatomies of some of De Bry's figures, attributes such as the "wings" of Mercury for the headdress of the Secotan medicine man might actually point us to some real source material for De Bry's knowledge of an antiquity mediated by print.<sup>12</sup> Joan-Pau Rubiés has suggested that Harriot and White's

10 James S. Ackerman, *Distance Points: Essays in Theory and Renaissance Art and Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 186–200, esp. 188. Ackerman discusses the elimination of stylistic variables that such types of drawings achieved. See also Kim Sloan, ed., *A New World: England's First View of America* (London: British Museum, 2007), 67.

11 Van Groesen, *Representations of the Overseas World*, 113. De Bry was in London in 1588–89 to acquire some of these drawings; in consultation with the geographer Richard Hakluyt, De Bry probably met Jacques Le Moyne. For a good summary of De Bry's acquisition of these drawings, see also Sven Trakulhun, "Three Tales of the New World: Nation, Religion and Colonialism in Hakluyt, de Bry and Hulsius", in *Richard Hakluyt and Travel Writing in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Daniel Carey and Claire Jowitt (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 60–63.

12 Keazor, "Theodore De Bry's Images", 132–34.

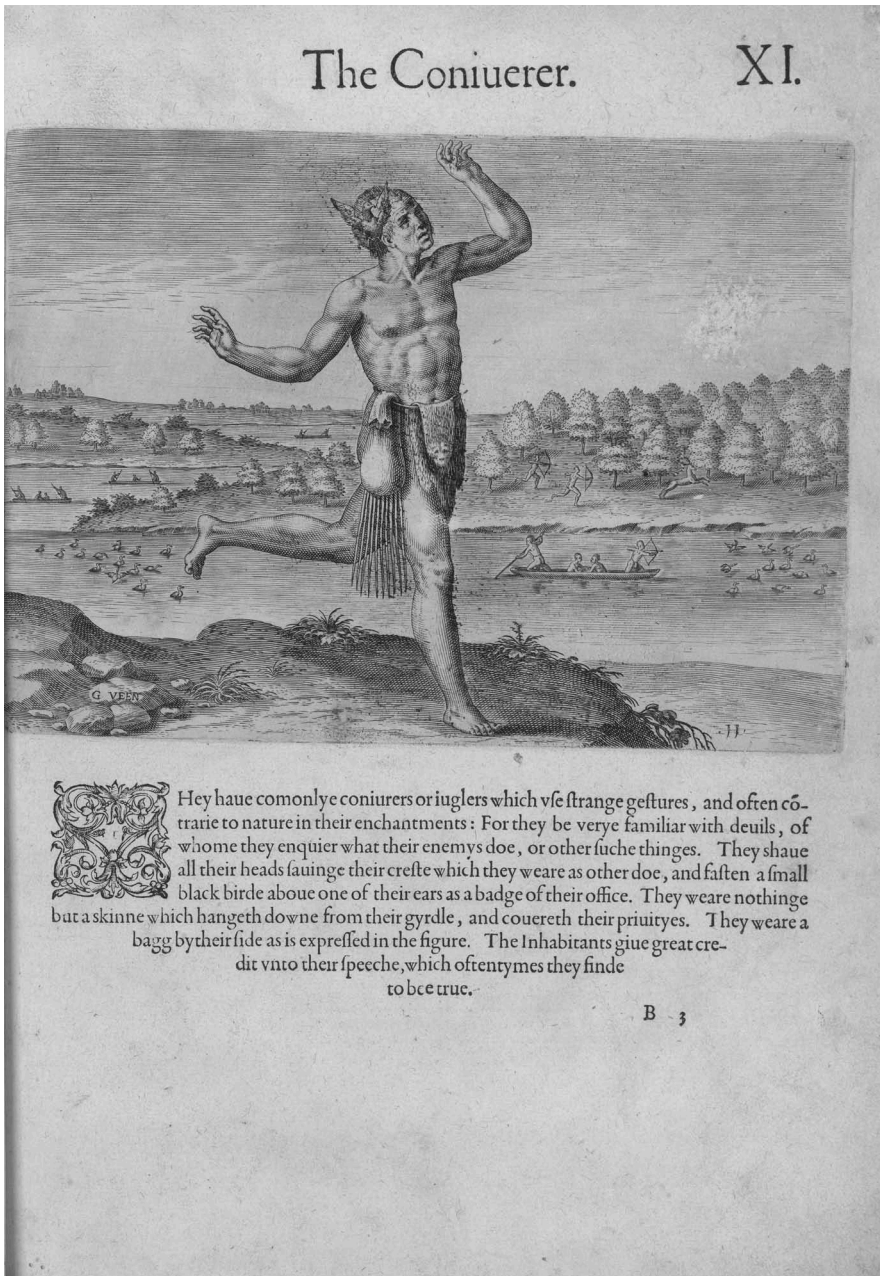


Figure 3.2 Gijsbert van Veen, “The Flyer” in: Thomas Harriot, *A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia: of the commodities and of the nature and manners of the naturall inhabitants* (Frankfurt: De Bry, 1590), plate XI.

Source: Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Providence, RI.

collaborative project in Virginia was one in pursuit of natural historical knowledge, in which ethnographic and antiquarian speculation were entwined parts.<sup>13</sup> Rather than the presumed first-hand nature of White's sketch underscoring the authenticity of De Bry's image, perhaps more important is its debt to other visual traditions, both antiquarian and ethnographic, that improved its portability and facilitated its packaging into other pictorial episodes. Visual borrowings of engravers of the accounts published by De Bry familiarized European audiences with indigenous Americans, even if the truth of those iconographies seemed far-fetched.

Although Van Veen imported the Conjuror's pose and costume from White's *Flyer*, another familiar representation of figures in flight also attended his engraving. The dynamic pose of the *Flyer* recalled period representations of Mercury recently popularized by sculptors active in Florence like Benvenuto Cellini and Giovanni da Bologna, called Giambologna.<sup>14</sup> While the figure's design suggests familiarity with the bronze sculpture of Mercury on the socle of Cellini's *Perseus* (c.1550), and Giambologna's *Mercury* for the Medici fountain from the 1580s, chances are that both White and Van Veen knew in-flight Mercuries better from their familiarity with Flemish prints.

One of these might have been an engraving of Mercury from a series of *Seven Planets*, published by Philips Galle around 1586 after a design by Jacques Jonghelinck (Figure 3.3).<sup>15</sup> With one foot on the socle, this Mercury carries a purse like the one that later reappears in the De Bry volume. His raised second foot already suggests the balance that would become the extended back leg in the airborne Mercury. Just a year later, in 1587, a wash drawing by Jan van der Straet, called Stradanus (Figure 3.4), seems to suggest convulsive motion, as if Mercury were launching from a very hot surface.<sup>16</sup>

13 See Rubiés, "Texts, Images, and the Perception of 'Savages'", 125. Also see the chapters by Florike Egmond, Deborah Harkness, and Karen Reeds in the same volume. For natural history, we can include Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo and Francisco Hernandez.

14 Keazor, "Theodore De Bry's Images", 146ff. Keazor notes De Bry's borrowings from Italian Mannerists.

15 Bert Meijer, "The Re-Emergence of a Sculptor: Eight Lifesize Bronzes by Jacques Jonghelinck", *Oud Holland* 93, no. 2 (1979): 116–35. Jonghelinck's Mercury was made to accompany a set of bronze representations of the planets for the triumphal entry of Alexander Farnese into Antwerp in 1585. The bronzes are today in the Palacio Real in Madrid. According to Meijer, Giambologna's Morgante might have inspired Jonghelinck's Bacchus, a bronze related to the series, and his Mercury might have had as its inspiration Giambologna's bronze Bacchus executed for Lattanzio Cortesi in Florence, c.1560–62. Therefore it is also reasonable to think that Giambologna's Mercury was also part of the equation here for Jonghelinck's Mercury. See p. 131 for the Mercury bronzes. I am grateful to Max Wiringa for his help in tracing the pedigree of Giambologna's Mercury.

16 Museum Plantin Moretus, PK.OT.00574. The date is currently mislabelled on the museum's website (it should read 1587, not 1557).



Figure 3.3 Philips Galle, after a design by Jacques Jonghelinck, *Mercury* (engraving, 1586).

Source: Courtesy of the British Museum.

This type of kinetic movement that inhabited the messenger god seems to have breathed life into the next generation of images in which his movement was more dynamic than strictly vertical, one that suggested dancing rather than flight. This Mercury could have been known to White and Van Veen via the engraved series of the *Seven Planets*, designed by Stradanus, engraved by Jan II Collaert, and published by Philips Galle, a series dated post 1587 on the basis of the signed drawing of Mercury by Stradanus (Figure 3.5).<sup>17</sup> The series was likely invented in Florence, perhaps at the behest of associates of

17 Marjolein Leesberg and Arnout Balis, ed. *The New Hollstein Dutch & Flemish Etchings, Engravings, and Woodcuts, 1450–1700: The Collaert Dynasty*, 33 vols (Ouderkerk aan den IJssel: Sound & Vision, 2005), VI, 30–35.



Figure 3.4 Jan van der Straet, *Winged Mercury on a plinth*, drawing, 131 × 185 mm, PK.OT.00574.

Source: Collectie Stad Antwerpen, Museum Plantin-Moretus.

the *Accademia degli Alterati*, where member Luigi Alamanni had commissioned several series of prints also designed by Stradanus and printed by Galle, such as the *Nova Reperta*, *Vermis Sericus*, and *America Retectio*.<sup>18</sup> The engraving made by Collaert reverses the position of Stradanus's drawing, defines the wings, muscularizes and masculinizes the body, and adds an aureole behind his head.<sup>19</sup>

De Bry's presentation of the *Conjuror* also borrowed format and rhetoric familiar from costume literature (see Figure 3.2) In addition to the figure's

18 Alessandra Baroni and Manfred Sellink, *Stradanus (1523–1605): Court Artist of the Medici* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 126. Lia Markey, *Renaissance Invention: Stradanus's Nova Reperta* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2020).

19 Cécile Kruyfhoofd, *Keuze uit de Vlaamse en Hollandse tekeningen van de Stichting Jean van Caloen* (Loppem: Stichting Jean van Caloen, 1997), nos. 6–7.



*Figure 3.5* Jan II Collaert, after Stradanus, *Mercury in Seven Planets* series, engraving, after 1587.  
Source: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

close cropping against a low horizon, the image’s referential relationship to accompanying text is also typical of costume books in which features of dress are described: “They wear nothing but a skin which hangeth down from their girdle and covers their privates”, and whose texts often bear a unique referential relationship to the image itself: “They wear a bag by their side as is expressed in the figure.”<sup>20</sup> Those details can be seen in the careful attention given to the otter skin, the leather pouch, and a bird perched on the figure’s head. This stuffed bird (perhaps a woodpecker?) affixed to the hair pointed back to Harriot’s claim in the caption that such notables fashion a bird about the ear as a badge of their office; those details made it authentic. But the synergy between Harriot’s text about the medicine man’s accessories and

20 Thomas Harriot, *A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia* (Frankfurt: De Bry, 1590), plate XI.

White's pictorial observations might also have been conditioned by their own exposure to other genres like natural histories and costume books. Certainly informing Harriot's general narrative is natural history, a rhetorical context which Joan-Pau Rubiés sees as motivating the colonial project of Grenville and Sir Walter Raleigh.<sup>21</sup> The peoples depicted were merely a subset of the patrons' desires to map the flora, fauna, and commodities of the land. Unique among early travel and natural historical accounts, however, was the word/image relationship and process in which Harriot composed captions for and around White's images – Harriot's text was expressly invented to accompany White's drawings as a preliminary step in the preparation of engravings for De Bry's printed volume. De Bry's appending of these Latin captions, which were translated into English by Hakluyt, reversed the order and the typical procedure in which artisans were commissioned to make images after pre-existing texts.<sup>22</sup> In fact, the making of the De Bry volume was closer to the process of describing images in costume literature in which text was developed after or in tandem with the prints. De Bry capitalized on images with an ethnographic veneer;<sup>23</sup> he favoured ones in which he recognized the rhetorical and visual trappings familiar from costume book packaging.<sup>24</sup> The format of costume books characterized by low levels of background noise, particularity in dress and accessories, and with a well-perforated quality that allowed elements to be easily removed from the particularities of their settings, made such images especially susceptible to transfer and insertion into new compositions.

Reconciling such particularity within the graphic format of the spare and airtight space of the costume book also permitted those images to travel well into other genres and tableaux. De Bry repackaged White's image of the conjuror into a scene of a ceremonial dance of indigenous Secotans (Figure 3.6). Some of the other figures that animate this assembly of *Dances used at High Feasts* were likewise inspired by John White's drawings. De Bry fluidly altered the motifs he copied from White's drawings, which he seems to have understood as mere prototypes which he could reset into new contexts. In one instance, he removed the maraca held by the figure in White's original watercolour as though it were an interchangeable prop. Significantly, he reversed the figure's orientation from its position in the drawing, resulting in a figure whose pose would more immediately recall Van Veen's *Conjuror* to the reader (see Figure 3.2).

21 Rubiés, "Texts, Images, and the Perception of 'Savages'", 125, 127.

22 Peter C. Mancall, "Richard Hakluyt and the Visual World of Early Modern Travel Narratives", in *Richard Hakluyt and Travel Writing in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Daniel Carey and Claire Jowitt (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 94.

23 Lisa Voigt and Elio Brancaforte, "The Traveling Illustrations of Sixteenth-Century Travel Narratives", *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 129, no. 3 (2014): 365–98. The authors call it "ethnographic specificity".

24 For example, European costume books in manuscript since 1529 and printed editions from c. 1560s. See Christoph Weiditz, *Das Trachtenbuch des Christoph Weiditz*, ed. Theodor Hampe (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1927).

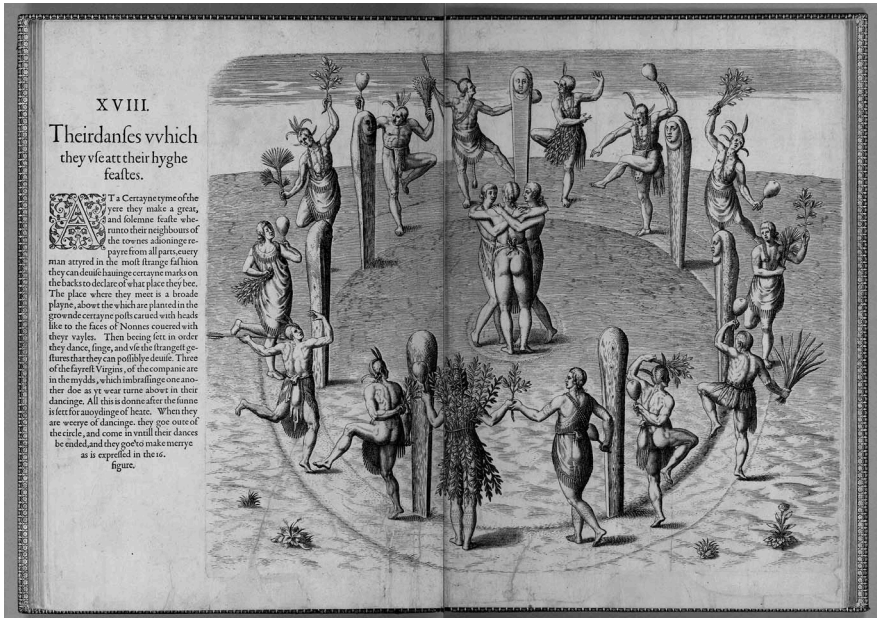


Figure 3.6 Dance of the Secotans, in: Thomas Harriot, *A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia: of the commodities and of the nature and manners of the naturall inhabitants* (Frankfurt: De Bry, 1590), plate XVIII.

Source: Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Providence, RI.

De Bry familiarized his figures through a number of strategies: sometimes through alignment with European standards of modelling, and sometimes via the direct repetition of the figures themselves. He freely poached the exaggerated poses of works of antiquity known through Mannerist prints to magnify the cruelty of Spanish atrocities, or the unusualness of the customs of the Amerindian tribes.<sup>25</sup> Often De Bry's engravings would shore up the strangeness of poses and gestures, something to which he, as a copyist of other mannerist imagery, was alert. Through these transformations, iconography started to shift and new meanings could accrue to an already familiar motif. What read as Mercury's calm and composed balance that gave the impression of weightlessness in Giambologna's fountain sculpture shows us that new meanings can accompany the old iconography. Harriot's caption announces that the *Conjuror's* pose exhibits "strange gestures, and often contrarie to nature in their enchantments: For they be verye familiar with deuils, of whome they enquier what their enmys doe, or other suche things."<sup>26</sup> Indeed, sculptural Mercuries found in Florence attempted to defy gravity and reflected the distortions of the *figura serpentinata* pose. Contrariness to nature

25 Keazor, "Theodore De Bry's Images", 143ff.

26 Harriot, *A briefe and true report*, plate XI.



was part of the experimental attitude of mannerists. Such an artistic ambition matched perfectly with Harriot's response to Secotan religion and ceremonies in general. Harriot was fascinated by some of these customs; but despite his awe, his wish to discipline and contain is palpable. This is in line with the acquisitiveness yet somewhat at odds with the hopes for religious tolerance that underwrote the mission: "some religion they have already, which although it be farre from the truth, yet beyng a[s] it is, there is the hope it may bee the easier and sooner reformed".<sup>27</sup> But after this detour through contortions, a conjuror communing with the devil who became familiar through De Bry engravings ultimately recouped some of that elegance and steered these movements back into the choreography of dance.

Through permutations of the copy, De Bry grounded the flight pattern of this "Mercury" into a more earthbound dance routine. Tamed from the trance-like state of White's *Flyer* who was channelling the gods, De Bry's conjuror appears less exaggerated and less alien when seen as a dancer. Mercury in the sixteenth century had already gone through a series of iconographic transformations: from orator to a messenger with a purse that marked his presence as the patron of merchants and traders. Mercury's journey through De Bry's engraving for Harriot represents the syncretic collapse of the spiritual trance of conjurors with the ritual of dancing.

Perhaps it was De Bry's packaging of the *Flyer* as a participant in the scene of the Secotans dancing that inspired the figure's inclusion in a visual description of a dancer on another continent: Africa. In this account of the Bolognese missionaries Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi and Fortunato Alamandini to the Congo, *Istorica descrizione de' tre' regni Congo, Matamba, et Angola* (Bologna, 1687), another copy of this figure is resurrected as the lead dancer in a group of local musicians in west Africa (Figure 3.7).<sup>28</sup> The image accompanies a text primarily about the variety of musical instruments found in the Congo, using European examples as comparisons. By authenticating the instruments and the plausibility of the text, a specific and particular image of both costume and composition could bridge far flung geographies and elide those distances. Familiar images such as these perhaps even re-organized the content of the text, certainly dictating the "ethnographic" nature of the description of habits and customs.

Thus packaged for transport, familiar images could mute the more exaggerated descriptions of unfamiliar activities (such as Secotan ceremonial trances) and merge with new visual vocabularies. Through the choreography of the Congolese musician, the meaning of Mercury's arabesque shifted in flight: the resulting iconography was also bundled with new truths gained during the detour. In the nineteenth century, the elegant balance of

27 Ibid., 25.

28 Cécile Fromont, *The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 42.

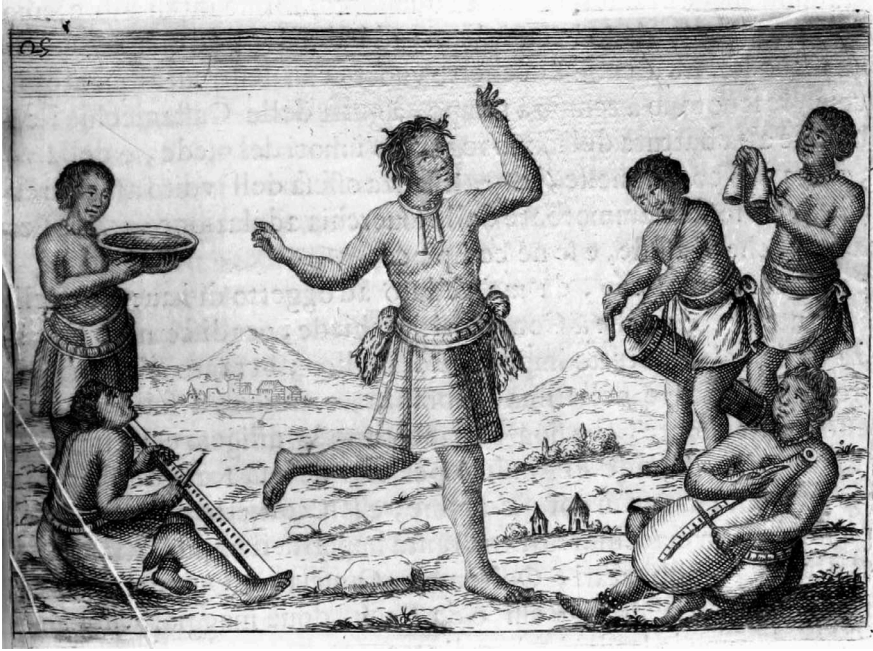


Figure 3.7 Dancers in the Congo, in: Giovanni Cavazzi and Fortunato Almandini, *Istorica Descrizione de' tre' regni Congo, Matamba et Angola: situati nell'Etiopia inferiore occidentale e delle missioni apostoliche esercitateui da religiosi Capuccini* (Bologna: Giacomo Montis, 1687).

Source: Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

Giambologna's *Mercury* was recuperated into one of the most mannered positions in the vocabulary of classical ballet. Carlo de Blasis, the Neapolitan choreographer and ballet master, is credited with formalizing the position of *attitude derrière* in a dance manual of his instructions printed in Milan in 1820.<sup>29</sup> While the figure shown in De Blasis's manual takes his *attitude* most directly from Giambologna's *Mercury*, it is also possible that the dancer's pose reflected the intervention of images in accounts like those of De Bry and Cavazzi that had already tamed Mercury's flight into dance vocabulary. By the nineteenth century, with the intervention of De Blasis's choreography, Mercury would reclaim the lithesome airiness of his original perch atop a gust supplied by the wind god Zephyrus (Figure 3.8). But, before that, the familiar image winged its way into a host of new tableaux like those of Harriot and Cavazzi, paving over geographic and generic differences once critical to

29 Carlo de Blasis, *Traité Élémentaire, Théorique et Pratique de l'art de La Danse* (Milan: Beati and Tenenti, 1820).

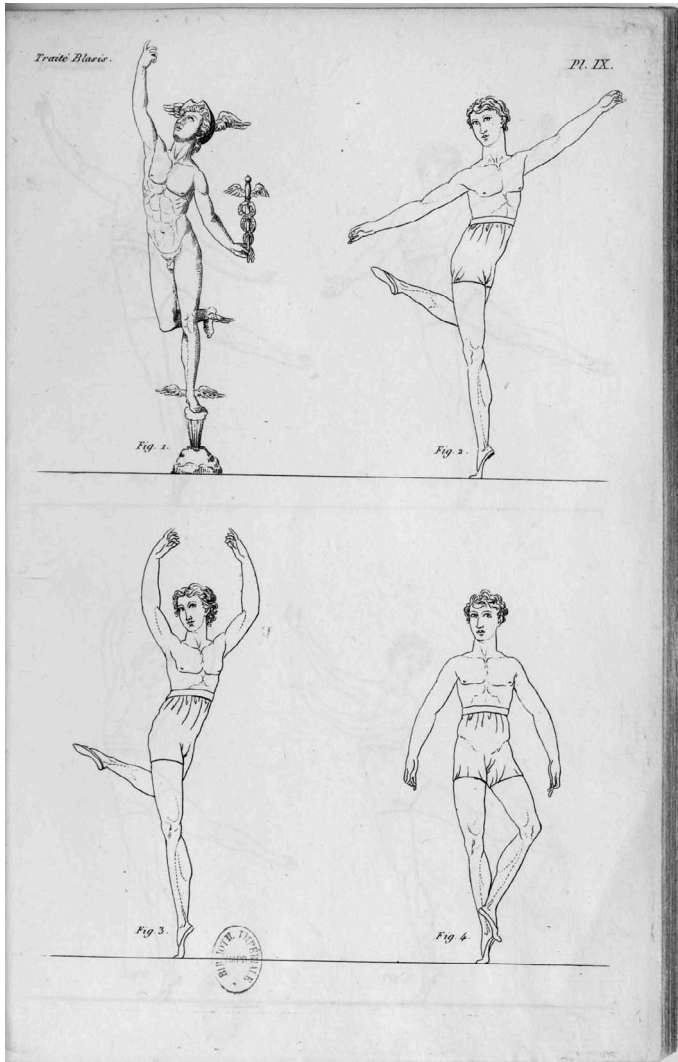


Figure 3.8 Carlo de Blasis, *Traité élémentaire, théorique et pratique de l'art de la danse* (Milan, 1820), Plate IX.

Source: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

narratives of alterity.<sup>30</sup> This manner of visually neutralizing difference through familiar rituals was a way of bringing the truth closer to home.

30 Florike Egmond and Peter Mason, *The Mammoth and the Mouse: Microhistory and Morphology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 110–14, where the authors show the ability of tenacious motifs to transcend both historical time and geographic space.

### Epistemology of Recognition

Through the incorporation of existing visual paradigms, the engravings issued by the De Bry workshop promoted a taste for the recognizable. While purposely avoiding illustrating his texts with monstrous peoples, a still popular visual demographic of early printed travel literature, De Bry did capitalize on a major aspect of their longevity: their recognizability. Whereas the thrilling alterity of the monstrous races had long buoyed publishers' strategies to sell texts, their recognizability within an established taxonomy of known monsters was as critical to their sustainability as their difference. It was this aspect of popular images that De Bry deployed – he selected familiar motifs that spurred recognition and raised sympathy in the reader. That audiences were compelled by familiar content might account for the driving force of fine art publishing campaigns that, according to Peter Parshall, brought thousands of similar-looking Dutch landscape prints to market around 1650.<sup>31</sup> Audiences were starting to favour the recognizable over the imaginary or exotic. The epistemological advantage of using classical anatomies and iconography for ethnographic tableaux was to mask differences and stimulate recognition – and promote that as a strategy for gaining readers' confidence.<sup>32</sup>

Recycling sustainable images was common practice in the busy print shops of early modernity. While a demand for quick turnaround particular to publishers surely drove some of those choices, copying was also sanctioned studio practice in artistic circles and certainly not unique to the printed medium. But repetition of images took on a new dimension in the printing of books, especially ones produced serially, because it enhanced a publisher's ability to create continuity between volumes and diverse narratives. De Bry's penchant for familiar motifs promoted the clarity of his visual narrative and enhanced digestibility; familiar images were the probiotic enzymes for narratives of alterity. The De Bry workshop's aims to inventory and rework popular motifs sometimes superseded his fidelity to the original text, as Michiel van Groesen has shown in the firm's inventions and borrowings from Zacharias Heyns's edition of Barent Jansz's travels, the *Wijdtloopigh verhael* (1600).<sup>33</sup> Sometimes the De Brys would invent motifs or details unsupported by the text; at other

31 Peter Parshall. "Prints as Objects of Consumption in Early Modern Europe", *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28, no. 1 (1998): 30.

32 Stephanie Leitch, *Mapping Ethnography in Early Modern Germany: New Worlds in Print Culture* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Jörg Breu, for instance, modeled some of his inhabitants of South Asia on figure groups in Marcantonio Raimondi's compositions. River gods from Raimondi's *Judgment of Paris*, themselves taken from a Roman frieze, for example, might have inspired Breu's natives of Calicut.

33 Michiel van Groesen, "Patagonian Giants in West Africa? Two Versions of the First Dutch Attempt to Circumnavigate the World", in *Imagining the Americas in Print: Books, Maps and Encounters in the Atlantic World*, ed. Michiel van Groesen (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 37. De Bry's reliance on tried and true motifs extended, per Van Groesen, to modifying the text in order to be able to use an image.

times, the firm would recycle striking images even if they thwarted their readers' ability to discern one geographic setting from another. As much as such confusion might challenge a text's plausibility today, geographic precision was hardly the *sine qua non* of travel accounts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Instead of altering an image of a woman distinguished by a shell necklace and distinctive hairstyle lifted from an inhabitant of Patagonia in Barent Jansz's original account of travels to both West Africa and Patagonia, Johan Theodore de Bry's edition uses a copy of this figure to represent an African woman serving the King of Gabon. This image was recycled again mere pages later for a Patagonian in the same account.<sup>34</sup> Whether for the purposes of promoting the Virginia colony to prospectors, or currying sympathy for Protestant causes, the De Brys reconciled peoples to a baseline of familiar faces and bodies.

It is then instructive to compare the visual strategy of contemporary publishers with whose publications the De Brys' were in dialogue. In the German-speaking market, the books of Levinus Hulsius were chief among these. Active first in Nuremberg and later in Frankfurt, Hulsius's firm published some of the same accounts as the De Brys, such as Sir Walter Raleigh's *Discoverie of Guiana*. Unlike the De Brys' strategy of representing indigenous Guianans with primarily classical bodies, Hulsius was committed to seeding Raleigh's Guiana with headless monsters (Figure 3.9). These visual choices had different repercussions for the master narratives. Hulsius's revival of the monstrous races both dissolved geographic boundaries and spurred the more important epistemological work of underwriting an intercontinental land bridge that could account for their appearance in the Americas.

First published in London in 1596, Walter Raleigh's *Discoverie of Guiana* was at the outset a work that reflected the many literary traditions that served as tributaries to reporting travel in the period. According to Benjamin Schmidt, the text straddled several genres: history, epic, epistolary reportage, advertisement, as well as an account of colonization.<sup>35</sup> While Raleigh's report could by no means be considered primarily a literary excursus about headless men, it did include hearsay sightings of acephali, a race of headless people active in Africa and Asia since antiquity, commonly known as Blemmyae.<sup>36</sup> But it was via Hulsius's edition of Raleigh that the Blemmyae mentioned by Pliny were pictorially relocated from North Africa in the sixteenth century to the Americas.<sup>37</sup>

34 Van Groesen, "Patagonian Giants", 37. In the volume *Neundter und letzter Theil Americae*, see the Gabonese woman at Plate XIX and the Patagonian woman at XXIII.

35 Benjamin Schmidt, "Reading Raleigh's America: Texts, Books, and Readers in the Early Modern Atlantic World", in *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550–1624*, ed. Peter C. Mancall (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2007), 462.

36 Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography*, 192–93. While some of the "evidence" for the Blemmyae circulated in reports by earlier Spanish travelers, Raleigh's account recorded testimony about them by indigenous interpreters.

37 Herodotus had placed them in Libya (see Pliny's *Natural History*, book 7); the Blemmyae were later transplanted to the Americas, perhaps through Columbus's reports; see Egmond and Mason, *Mammoth and the Mouse*, 110. See also Davies,



Figure 3.9 Levinus Hulsius and Walter Raleigh, *Die Fünffte Kurze Wunderbare Beschreibung des Goldreichen Königreichs Guianæ* (Nuremberg: Hulsius/Lochner, 1603), title page.

Source: University of Virginia Library, Sig. A 1612 H.85.

*Renaissance Ethnography*, 188, who suggests that the similar climate conditions of equatorial Africa and Guiana might have inspired Raleigh's conviction that both gold and Blemmyae might have been plentiful there.

Neither the first edition of Raleigh's account of the *Discoverie of Guiana* (1596), nor its appearance in Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* (1598–1600) featured sensational images of the Blemmyae and kept murmurs of the marvelous to a minimum.<sup>38</sup> Mentions of the monsters are scarce in Raleigh's narrative: the text itself only alluded to the acephali in passing, not as beings actually witnessed by Raleigh, but rather as they were reported by indigenous informants.<sup>39</sup>

Given the scarcity of acephali in Raleigh's actual report, we might ask how they achieved such a tenacious foothold in Hulsius's edition. The Blemmyae had, in fact, been alive and well and "living" in Nuremberg since the 1490s. Collected among other marvels in the margins of a world map in Hartmann Schedel's *Weltchronik* (or *Nuremberg Chronicle*), the Blemmyae appeared naked and hairless. Situated in Schedel's chronicle in the second age of the world, they were part of the repertoire of monsters from antique sources, collectively referred to as the "marvels of the East".<sup>40</sup> The *Weltchronik*'s illustrators tried to domesticate the Blemmyae and pictured them lounging with benign props on the world's margins. To late fifteenth-century Nurembergers, the Blemmyae were not remotely menacing: the only gestures they seemed to make were engaging rhetorical ones.<sup>41</sup> But they were certainly historical specimens mired in the distant past. Versions of such monsters from antiquity, however, mixed with more contemporary brethren in mid-sixteenth century publications such as costume literature printed in Paris in the 1560s.<sup>42</sup> This was the publishing environment of closely related genres into which Hulsius's edition of Raleigh surfaced.<sup>43</sup> Straining credulity was not Hulsius's

38 Raleigh himself, in fact, tried to downplay the more speculative parts of his account when his credibility at court was his overriding concern. See Schmidt, "Reading Raleigh's America", 482.

39 Walter Raleigh, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana* (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1968), 71.

40 Rudolf Wittkower, "Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942): 159–97.

41 On gestures, such as the *ad locutio* gesture with which the Nuremberg Blemmye appears, in model books, see Jaya Remond, "Bodies of Knowledge: Movement, Variety and Imagination in a German Renaissance Art Primer", in *Mouvement - Bewegung: Über die dynamischen Potenziale der Kunst*, ed. Andreas Beyer and Guillaume Cassegrain (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2015). See also Ernst Gombrich, "Action and Expression in Western Art", in *The Image and the Eye*, ed. Ernst Gombrich (Oxford: Phaidon, 1982); Matthias Bickenbach, Annina Klappert, and Hedwig Pompe, ed. *Manus Loquens: Medium der Geste – Geste der Medien* (Cologne: DuMont, 2003).

42 Mary Baine Campbell, "The Nude Cyclops in the Costume Book", in *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations*, ed. Timothy S. Jones and David A. Sprunger (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), 298. Campbell argues that the cyclops acquired traits of the acephalus; monsters adopted kinks of others, no longer "types" per se, but "laughed off the map" as individual specimens.

43 On common imagery in genres related to travel narratives, see Stephanie Leitch, "Cosmopolitan Renaissance: Prints in the Age of Exchange", in *The Globalization*

objective; he defended the images in his account on the strength of both ancient and contemporary tradition.<sup>44</sup> Exported now into the Americas, clothed and contemporary acephali from Guiana were christened with a new local name: *Ewaipanoma*.

Filtered through his own reading of the Hondius map and perhaps for an audience already familiar with such monsters, the Nuremberg printer Levinus Hulsius sought an opportunity to profitably resurrect antiquity's acephalitic Blemmyae. Born in Ghent, the multilingual translator and publisher set up a printshop in Nuremberg by 1591.<sup>45</sup> In Nuremberg, Hulsius began to print a series of marine voyages, or *Schiffahrten*, twenty-six in all, a project that he would continue after the relocation of his firm to Frankfurt in 1602.<sup>46</sup> Many of the travel accounts Hulsius printed in Nuremberg were essentially abridged editions of the De Bry workshop's collection of voyages (including those to the Indian Ocean), but in stark contrast to the large-format and text-heavy De Bry productions, these editions are handily packaged and summarily illustrated.

Hulsius's Latin edition of Walter Raleigh's text was printed in Nuremberg in 1599 as volume five of his series; later vernacular editions would follow in German (1601, 1603, 1612).<sup>47</sup> These were brief accounts of Raleigh's journey, told through a visual essay of places and peoples he encountered, presented in small engravings interleaved throughout the book. Elements of most of Hulsius's engravings were sourced in other mostly unrelated publications, including this rendering of an Amazon on the title page (see Figure 3.9). Amazons appear throughout Hulsius's text, but the inspiration for this cover image seems to have emerged from one of the De Bry images: an engraving of a tattooed Pictish woman in the 1590 edition of Thomas Harriot's *Briefe and True Report*.

This Amazon was borrowed from engravings of ancient Picts in the second section of Harriot's account, an appendix to the report called *The True Pictures and Fashions of the People in that Parte of America now called Virginia* – a pictorial catalogue of the appearance of ancient Britons in classical

*of Renaissance Art: A Critical Review*, ed. Daniel Savoy (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Stephanie Leitch, "Visual Images in Travel Writing", in *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, ed. Nandini Das and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

44 Trakulhun, "Three Tales of the New World", 64.

45 Ernst Merkel, "Der Buchhändler Levinus Hulsius, gest. 1606 zu Frankfurt am Main", *Archiv für Frankfurts Geschichte und Kunst* 57 (1980): 12–16. Levinus himself printed eight volumes up to his death in 1606; his widow and sons printed the remaining eighteen. The *Schiffahrten* continued after the firm's second relocation to Oppenheim in 1609, where Levinus's widow and son Esaias continued to maintain a press and run an accounting business for printers.

46 Merkel, "Der Buchhändler Levinus Hulsius", 16. After Hulsius's death, the De Brys effectively managed his series, see Van Groesen, *Representations of the Overseas World*, 346–52.

47 Schmidt ("Reading Raleigh's America", esp. 477–82) considers Hulsius's edition both a picture book of wonders and an *apologia* for Dutch colonization of Spanish imperial possessions.



times, originating in sketches made by John White or Jacques Le Moyne.<sup>48</sup> Hulsius's visual plunder from De Bry's texts was not unusual practice in the early print world, and unlike the infringement of intellectual property that modern viewers are tempted to see here, this type of borrowing was rarely discouraged.<sup>49</sup> Hulsius's editions of the *Schiffahrten* did not skim readership from the volumes emerging from the De Bry workshop. Rather than seeing the De Bry and Hulsius firms as competitors, therefore, we might see their activity as symbiotic and designed to serve diverse markets of readers.<sup>50</sup> In fact, Hulsius's short illustrated pamphlets probably revived interest in Raleigh's account, which saw its greatest circulation in slight vernacular publications in Dutch and German.<sup>51</sup> Such pithy and vernacular marine voyages underwrote the operation of the Hulsius heirs into the mid-seventeenth century, issuing such publications in Frankfurt, Oppenheim, and Hanau. In contrast to De Bry's elegant folios, the Hulsius editions are mostly quarto in size with illustrations interleaved throughout the text that made it more user-friendly and affordable to larger vernacular audiences. Despite the overlap of publishing of common textual accounts, the visual vignettes of the respective programmes of the Hulsius and De Bry volumes are distinct and their illustrations differ radically in content.<sup>52</sup> While the De Brys' pictorial programmes favoured crowded interactions among colonists and indigenous peoples, Hulsius indulged in wide landscapes in which recycled marvels could cavort.

Hulsius's pamphlets turned Raleigh's account into visual panoramas of wonders. The abridged passages and appealing pictures surely improved the portability and digestibility of the text.<sup>53</sup> Between twelve and sixteen pages in length, the Hulsius pamphlets featured several full-page engravings that

48 Rubiés, "Texts, Images, and the Perception of 'Savages'", 127. Rubiés believes the original drawings to be by White, whereas it had earlier been proposed by Hulton that the Picts are copies by White of Le Moyne originals (*A Briefe and True Report*, xii). Richard Hakluyt's captions for these images suggest the possibility of cultural evolution of the Carolina Algonquians; these images were themselves often recycled. See Mancall, "Richard Hakluyt", esp. 94–95.

49 Pon, *Raphael, Dürer, and Marcantonio Raimondi*.

50 See Van Groesen, *Representations of the Overseas World*, 346–52. In fact, at some point after their arrival in Frankfurt, Levinus Hulsius's son Friedrich studied engraving with Johan Theodore de Bry, suggesting a cooperative, if not outright collaborative, relationship until the takeover of the Hulsius firm by the De Brys around 1606. Van Groesen suspects that the vernacular and portable editions of the De Bry volumes that the Hulsius firm was turning out at the time might have amplified their market share, which also would have benefited from the Hulsius firm's distribution network in Central Europe. Even after the move of the Hulsius firm to Frankfurt in the early 1600s, both types of printed formats continued to circulate.

51 From the fact that the German book market could sustain multiple copies of texts but with different illustrations, we can infer an audience of readers with varying levels of literacy and attention spans. See Trakulhun, "Three Tales of the New World", 64.

52 Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography*, 215. See also Van Groesen, *Representations of the Overseas World*, 407. De Bry first printed Raleigh in German and Latin in 1599. Walter Raleigh, *Achter Theil Americae* (Frankfurt: De Bry, 1599).

53 Schmidt, "Reading Raleigh's America", 454–88.

breathed life into the Amazons and Ewaipanoma, basically presenting the marvels minus Raleigh.<sup>54</sup> Such exotic facts overrode the content and indeed the rhetorical modes of Raleigh's original edition.<sup>55</sup> The thrust of Hulsius's publication was to track the resettlement of Amazons, originally from Scythia, and the Blemmyae, originally from Libya, into the Guianan landscape. There, on American soil, Hulsius fleshed out habits, customs, and encounters of Amazons and Ewaipanoma with Raleigh's men.

In Hulsius's hands, Raleigh's report became a pictorial crib sheet for the wonders of Guiana that chronicled his encounters with recognizable acephali and Amazons. Hulsius's engravings expanded their activities and set them into ethnographic tableaux, some reminiscent of costume books (Figure 3.10). Into these familiar settings, Hulsius then introduced Raleigh's revisions to the canon of marvels, such as giving the Ewaipanoma long luxurious hair. While the Plinian Blemmyae were essentially bald, Raleigh endowed the Ewaipanoma with hair that was apparent when seen from the back of the figures: "their eyes in their shoulders, and their mouths in the middle of their breasts, and [...] a long train of haire growth backward between their shoulders".<sup>56</sup> Although largely based on copied motifs, the images of Hulsius's Raleigh also tracked such important pictorial adjustments.

The images drawn from maps were arguably more important to Hulsius than the textual evidence provided by Raleigh's original narrative. The acephalus native to Guiana made its visual debut in the Americas via a map originally engraved by the Amsterdam mapmaker Jodocus Hondius the Elder, first printed in 1598 as *Niewer caerte van het wonderbaer ende goudrijcke landt Guiana*.<sup>57</sup> Despite this brief cameo in the Hondius map, the headless creature would spawn prodigiously in later printings of Raleigh's account by both the Hulsius and De Bry firms. Hulsius bound impressions of this map into his Raleigh editions, highlighting its significance by repeated references to it throughout the brief text. Hondius's map served as a depot of critical data for Hulsius's own engravings of marvellous beings that he scattered throughout the text, copying the Blemmyae, Amazons, and the exotic animals into the Guianan interior.<sup>58</sup> In fact, Hulsius

54 *Ibid.*, 474–77; see note 35 for afterlife of Raleigh's images. Schmidt attributes the later designs associated with Raleigh's account to those originating with Levinus Hulsius. Hulsius's designs were later cribbed for woodcuts in Gillis Joosten Saeghman, *Korte en wonderlijcke beschryving* (Amsterdam: Saeghman, 1663), a pamphlet of the "rare and monstrous races of men that can be found in the kingdom of Guiana".

55 Schmidt situates the imperial rhetoric of Raleigh's agenda within a court context. See Schmidt, "Reading Raleigh's America", 462.

56 Raleigh, *The Discoverie*, 85. Egmond and Mason, *Mammoth and the Mouse*, 121.

57 Hondius [the Elder], *Nieuwe caerte*, in Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Cartes et plans, GE D1437.

58 The Blemmyae may have picked up their bow and arrows from other residents that De Bry had seeded in the Americas about a decade earlier, perhaps even the Virginia Weroans of Harriot's 1590 *A briefe and true report*, which, like the Conjurer, reflected the propensity of De Bry's workshop for showing Amerindian anatomies in *contrapposto* shifts of weight. Attributes such as hunting accessories have inspired the dynamic *contrapposto* in European art since the rediscovery of the Apollo Belvedere.



Figure 3.10 Levinus Hulsius and Walter Raleigh, *Die Fünffte Kurze Wunderbare Beschreibung des Goldreichen Königreichs Guianae* (Nuremberg: Hulsius/Lochner, 1603).

Source: University of Virginia Library, Sig. A 1612 H.85.

seems to have built the bulk of his evidence for the Blemmyae around Hondius's map (Figure 3.11): the creatures on it provided the iconographic source for Hulsius's prints of peoples Raleigh had "encountered".

Recirculating familiar visual sources seems to have been the aim of Hulsius's repackaging: this included both the Hondius map, and perhaps also

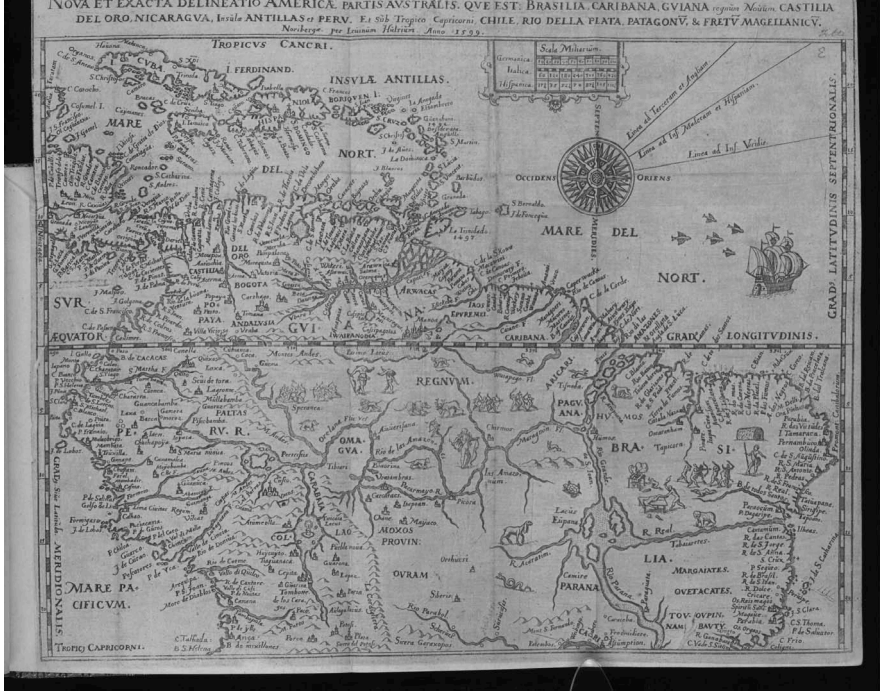


Figure 3.11 Hondius map, in: Levinus Hulsius and Walter Raleigh, *Die Fünffte Kurze Wunderbare Beschreibung des Goldreichen Königreichs Guanae* (Nuremberg: Hulsius/Lochner, 1603).

Source: University of Virginia Library, Sig. A 1612 H.85.

Raleigh’s account of Guiana printed in Amsterdam by Cornelis Claesz in 1598.<sup>59</sup> These slight publications about marine adventures, according to Surckha Davies, herald a new brand of illustrated pamphlets whose text and layout were re-designed to exploit and explain popular images.<sup>60</sup> New passages of text not originating with Raleigh were inserted by the printer to expand on evidence offered by the images. In the last chapter, for instance, Hulsius epitomized earlier accounts of headless people from Pliny, Saint Augustine, Isidore of Seville, André Thevet, and Gonzalo Fernández de

59 Walter Raleigh and Lawrence Keymis. *Waerachtighe ende grondighe beschryvinge van het groot ende goudt-rijck coninckrijk van Guiana* (Amsterdam: Claesz, 1598).

60 This visual abridging was also the project of Cornelis Claesz, who published a similar work out of De Bry’s versions of Las Casas’s *Brevisima relacion* and from Van Linschoten’s *Itinerario*, for example. For Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography*, 210, these editions can be considered as much as inscribed pictures as illustrated texts. She argues that such organization facilitated analytic comparisons of these source documents.

Oviedo. Here we see how the reuse of familiar images could also redirect the concerns of the original text. For instance, copies of Hulsius's engravings later surface in a pamphlet printed in Amsterdam around 1660 marketed by its printer under the subject area of the "Amazon", promising to show the "rare and monstrous races of men that can be found in the kingdom of Guiana" (Figure 3.12).<sup>61</sup> Copies of Hulsius's Blemmyae mushroomed in a commercial ambient in which the authorship of Walter Raleigh became increasingly peripheral to the marketing of the publication. Now, it was images of Blemmyae and Amazons that drove the next generation of short ethnographies of monstrous races.

Tenaciously re-anchored now in the Americas, the acephali would roam throughout the continent and in whose nether reaches they invited new epistemological concerns. Joseph-François Lafitau, an eighteenth-century Jesuit missionary living among the Canadian Iroquois (mostly Mohawk in origin) from 1711 to 1717, sourced his own race of acephali in both visual and verbal reports, including Raleigh's, likely from De Bry or Hulsius.<sup>62</sup> Again, as in Raleigh's account, Lafitau's own testimony came from hearsay delivered by an Iroquois hunter who claimed to have had an encounter with an acephalus in the autumn of 1721. This second-hand report was likely prompted by a steady diet of popular pictures. The author's encounter with an image like that of Hulsius's Ewaipanoma was probably all the provocation that Lafitau needed to transplant the Guianan Ewaipanoma into North America.<sup>63</sup> In fact, it was such pictures that corroborated his thesis about the transmigration of peoples from the ancient world to the Americas.

Lafitau's account, *Moeurs des sauvages américains, comparé aux mœurs des premiers temps*, was printed in Paris in 1724 upon his return from Canada. His memoir was pitched as a comparative ethnographic study of the indigenous peoples encountered in the Americas, framed within a larger comparative analysis of ancient peoples that provided a snapshot of antiquity.<sup>64</sup> His aim was to forge connections between diverse human groups whose receptivity to evangelization could be gauged by their similarities to ancient Europeans. Evidence of such spiritual kinship between ancient and modern peoples had already been presented in the visual analogy that De Bry tacked on as an appendix to Harriot's report in the shape of an excursus on

61 Saeghman, *Korte en wonderlijcke beschryving*. See Schmidt, "Reading Raleigh's America".

62 Joseph-François Lafitau, *Moeurs des Sauvages Amériquains, Comparées aux Mœurs des Premiers Temps*, 2 vols (Paris: Saugrain l'Ainé/Charles-Estienne Hocereau, 1724) I, 59–62. This work was written upon Lafitau's return in 1719–1722. He made trips to Rome to seek protections for the Christian Mohawks against the liquor trade.

63 Lafitau, *Moeurs des Sauvages*, I, 61. On page 62, he discusses this sighting as evidence for the transmigrations of savage peoples, as acephali were in North Africa and Raleigh's sighting convinces him that America and Asia were once joined together.

64 Christian F. Feest, "Father Lafitau as Ethnographer of the Iroquois", *European Review of Native American Studies* 15, no. 2 (2001): 22.

4 Beschrijvinge van de seltfame Wanschepfels.  
 gen gehouden. Hy daer eenige jaren als sy de vreemde Canoen gewaert wierden / vluchtete sy alle Landewaert in. Gewel-traden i. v. van dese Aracouros te lande / onder de welke genoemde Lourits mede was / om eenige so het mogelijk was / te achterhalen / eynelijck aen het water komende / sagen sy'er een op een pael achter een klip staen / die sy van achteren besetteden: dese geen middel van upkomst siende / begeeft hem te water / al dit geselschap valt hem na / en hadde groote moepte eer sy hem bequammen / mits hy gestadigh / als een Zwambis / om en wederom weutelde / en soo machtigh was / dat sy hem qualijck vermeesteren konden / eynelijck dooyt langh woelen af genat / waert hy van haer gebadt / in de Canoe handen en voeten gebonden sijnde / gewoepen / en so gebangelijck worgh geboert / en nabt aen haer woon-plaetsse gekonnen sijnde was daer soo grooten toe-loop van menschen / als oyt getweest was / een pder voor dit Monster verrijcht / en geweligh bewondert zijnde.



Hy was kort van statuer / dick geset / een spanne van malkander / de ooren en vet van lichaem / op de toppe daer pder Menschse de Deck is / stont hem een locke langh swart haps: in 't midden van de booff de nuse / d' ooggen stonden dicht onder de oelen / zijnde klepne pafagien / konden qualijck gesien worden: soo dat alles grouwelijck stont. Als sy tegens den abont arriveerden / was daetelijck

Figure 3.12 Walter Raleigh and Gillis Saeghman, *Korte en wonderlijcke beschryvinge van de seltfame wanschepsels van menschen ... Guianae* (Amsterdam: Saeghman, 1664).

Source: Universiteitsbibliotheek Utrecht, MAG: T qu 230 dl 9 (Rariora).

the ancient Picts. Familiar with prints in both chronicles and travel literature, Lafitau also reached for the visual tradition to corroborate his own evidence for the headless races (Figure 3.13). Bypassing the textual tradition of marvels, which was largely silent about the customs and habits of the Blemmyae, however, Lafitau instead mined sources like Hulsius's engravings that showed them in landscape panoramas and engaged in customary activities. Lafitau's mention of the acephali anchored Raleigh's "Ewaipanoma sighting" in a larger context of references to ancient sources following Hulsius who had also embedded the report of them in a jumble of citations from the secondary literature. Both Hulsius and Lafitau expanded on the ancient sources to derive specific customs for the Blemmyae. Importantly, Hulsius's editions had also provided customs for his Ewaipanoma – the engravings elaborated on hunting customs and the environments in which they lived.

The acephalus described in Lafitau's text found its way into a fold-out illustration included in the bound volume where a race of them were situated among other indigenous American groups. Lafitau's printer sourced these images in various accounts, for instance, Harriot's report of Virginia, René de Laudonnière's report of Florida printed by De Bry, and even took a pair of Tupinamba from Jean de Léry's *Histoire d'un Voyage fait en la terre du Brésil* (1578). The image of the acephalus may also have emerged from echoes of Hondius's map recycled in De Bry, or even from Claesz's Amsterdam edition of Raleigh's mission authored by Lawrence Keymis. Yet the Ewaipanoma had hardly gotten any play in either of these accounts. For instance, in De Bry's account of Raleigh, they were confined to diminutive representation on the map copied from Hondius. The reliance of Lafitau's engravings on formal visual tropes that we have traced through the sketches of John White and costume books extend to the chart of peoples we see here, a holdover from older cartographic and ethnographic visual practices.<sup>65</sup> The display format on which Hulsius relied – the paired front and back views reminiscent of costume books – is perhaps the one that recommended the Blemmyae for inclusion into Lafitau's ethnographic grid. One significant convention of the grid, its comparative potential, shoehorned the participation of the acephalus into cultures, customs, and habits, just like those of the other indigenous Americans Lafitau investigated.<sup>66</sup> The publisher's borrowing of prototypes from a variety of travel itineraries to diverse geographic regions reinforced the method of ethnological comparativism advocated by Lafitau's account.

65 Valerie Traub, "Mapping the Global Body", in *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race, and Empire in Renaissance England*, ed. Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Young, *Early Modern Global South*, 42–57. See also Leitch, "Visual Images".

66 Fredi Chiappelli, ed. *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, 2 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). William Sturtevant locates the sources for engravings made by Lafitau's engraver: this particular one he links to engravings in, perhaps by Jodocus Hondius, for Hulsius's voyage collection. Other sources for humans pictured here are De Bry's volumes on Virginia and Florida, and Brazilians from De Lery's voyage. Lafitau, *Moeurs des Sauvages*, II, 278.



Figure 3.13 Joseph-François Lafitau, *Moeurs des sauvages américains, compare aux mœurs des premiers temps* (Paris: Saugrain, 1724).  
Source: Courtesy of Heidelberg University Library (doi:10.11588/diglit.10366).



Such a formal context for visual comparisons likely prompted Lafitau's extended ethnographic analysis of customs of a race of acephali that he extrapolated from hearsay about a single sighting. In contrast to Raleigh, whose report on the Ewaipanoma was so slim to be virtually negligible, Lafitau extrapolates elaborate customs from the look of the acephalus alone. In a passage describing both customary and aesthetic preferences of the Canadian acephali, Lafitau cites the practice of binding the heads of children to flatten the forehead. This custom could explain the acephalus's lack of a neck (often described as head-below-the-shoulders) as an induced physical deformity and exposes the reader's a misrecognition of this as a state of headlessness.<sup>67</sup>

Whatever the case, these facts have strong bearing of one upon the other, and supposing their truth, they can support the idea of the transmigrations of the barbarian peoples. Because the Acephali formerly inhabited the regions of Africa around the Nile or the Red Sea, according to these reports, today there must be at least two nations [of these acephali], one which is hairy, which Raleigh locates around the Amazon river and in the center of Guiana; and the other which is situated to the northeast of China and Japan, where Asia borders with America. It even seems that it is from there that the [acephalus] supposedly killed by the Iroquois of whom I was just speaking is supposed to have come. This can confirm that America and Asia are joined together – and perhaps it is not so difficult to draw this conclusion. What an immense expanse of land between the regions of the ancient Acephali and the modern ones. One should not believe that these peoples have absolutely no heads, but that they have ones that are extremely depressed [into their torsos], so that they are almost at shoulder level and covered by hair. This can be done artificially, by forcing [down] the heads of infants in the same way that several American [groups] flatten the forehead, temples and nose of their children as soon as they are weaned from the breast of their mothers ...<sup>68</sup>

Lafitau's ethnographic inquiry of the acephali was marshalled into a larger knowledge-making endeavour. Lafitau was indeed sceptical about the proliferation of monsters in the Americas.<sup>69</sup> But he seems to have conceded the truth of them on the basis of his understanding of geography: using evidence of the reappearance of Asian and African acephali in the Americas to support a theory of the transmigration of peoples from those regions to the New World.<sup>70</sup> He

67 Lafitau, *Moeurs des Sauvages*, I, 68.

68 *Ibid.*, 61–63.

69 David Allen Harvey, "Living Antiquity: Lafitau's *Moeurs des Sauvages Américains* and the Religious Roots of the Enlightenment Science of Man", *Journal of the Western Society for French History* 36 (2008): 83.

70 Lafitau, *Moeurs des Sauvages*, I, 67–68; Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 201.

relied on ancient sources to conclude that the Iroquois were descendants of the Spartans and Lycians, and simultaneously acknowledged their resemblances to the Troglodytes of ancient Greece and Blemmyae of North Africa.<sup>71</sup> A sixteenth-century Jesuit, José de Acosta, had proposed that the Amerindians had emerged from Tartary.<sup>72</sup> Such genealogies were motivated by Jesuit ideology that aimed to facilitate evangelization by recognizing and embracing similarities between newly discovered idolaters and the ancient ancestors of Europeans.<sup>73</sup>

Lafitau's words here could confirm the itinerary for Amerindians proposed by Acosta on the strength of similarities in customs that his ethnology sought to cement. Images must have provided some of the justification for those theories of migration. The inclusion of an acephalus familiar from Raleigh's account within a comparative grid also shored up the idea of the acephalus as a demographic, versus just a singular example. When confronted by an image that metonymically implied a race of acephali, the ephemeral report of a single sighting of an acephalus among the Iroquois faded into the background. In the epistemology of recycled pictures, the original image, along with its baggage, assumes pride of place. The inclusion of Raleigh's acephalus within Lafitau's line-up of other indigenous groups ensured the Acephalus's genealogy; like the other customary types pictured, it would acquire the status of a race of peoples. A reliable image within a familiar formal network thus invited an ethnographic analysis of their customs. On the strength of the familiar iconography that once located acephali in Asia, relocated to Guiana by Raleigh, and now living in North America, Lafitau would argue for a common origin of Asians and native Americans. Lafitau's defence of the common origin of Asians and Amerindians essentially rested on familiar images, with only slight remove from the originals.

Thus, repurposed pictures could provide the keystone for new knowledge. A recycled acephalus from Hulsius could resurrect ancient marvels as New World peoples: Lafitau took this image as unmediated evidence. Common illustrations seeded acephali in both places by visual analogy, and this reinforced speculation about their common origins. But could it be that such copies also played a role in geographical speculations about a land bridge between continents? Indeed, claiming the visual kinship of ancient and New World marvels was nothing new, nor were pictures that proposed geographic redundancy. The feathered skirt originally intended for the inhabitants of the Americas, for example, quickly became a must-pack essential for south Asian itineraries.<sup>74</sup> We have already seen how copied images facilitated the bilocation of dancers in the Americas and Africa via De Bry's interpretation of a Mercury-like figure

71 Lafitau, *Moeurs des Sauvages*, II, 201; Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*.

72 Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Comparing Cultures in the Early Modern World: Hierarchies, Genealogies, and the Idea of European Modernity", in *Regimes of Comparatism: Frameworks of Comparison in History, Religion and Anthropology*, ed. Renaud Gagné, Simon Goldhill, and Geoffrey Lloyd (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 144.

73 Feest, "Father Lafitau", 22.

74 Voigt and Brancaforte, "Traveling Illustrations". On visual kinship between America and ancient history, see also MacCormack, "Limits of Understanding".

who winged between Virginia and the Congo. Likewise, another account of travels to West Africa and South America printed by De Bry used for an inhabitant of Gabon an image of a woman that was also duplicated in the account to represent a Patagonian.<sup>75</sup> Readers of both Harriot and Raleigh's accounts were taught to visually compare Amazons to the images of ancient Britons. But in Lafitau, copied images both fuelled cultural comparisons *and* underwrote geographic collapse in the form of the merging of continents.

To the already broad geographic transplantations of figures made by recycled images, Lafitau added another layer of knowledge making, this one in support of a cartographic picture that made the migration of the acephali possible. On the strength of the visual kinship between the ancient Libyan Blemmyae and the acephalus among the contemporary Iroquois, Lafitau could support an argument for a land bridge over which they travelled, or even a theory of continents, now separated by oceans, but once nestled snugly enough for the acephali to roam between them. Lafitau's evidence for geographical proximity via the land bridge was fundamentally pictorial: his assertion about the kindred customs of the Asian and American acephali was a similarity reified by copied images. Thus, the seeding of acephali in both Asia and the Americas happened by way of recycled illustrations – these visual accidents were cemented into facts by texts about common origins, and ones that would ultimately support Lafitau's thesis for the diffusion of peoples between the two continents.<sup>76</sup> To answer the question of how the acephali travelled to the Americas required the creation of a geologic feature that would enable their movement. A land bridge that provided free passage for the Acepahli was a geographic link that could also support the theory of the transmigration of these peoples. Thus, this distance collapsed was literally forged by recycled images.

Cartographic speculation about a land bridge connecting Asia and America was fuelled by a search for the common origins of humankind – a quest that anthropologists would later deploy in service of mapping the evolution of languages and the human genome. But in Lafitau's time, deep archaeology for the fountainhead of the world's peoples was inextricable from the ideological thirst for conversion that spearheaded Jesuit ethnology. Similarities among the customs of diverse cultures could hint at their common origins; kinship of newly discovered pagans with the Europeans of antiquity made Jesuit missionaries hopeful about their prospects for conversion.<sup>77</sup> Jesuit ethnology forged similarities of customs, tastes, and habits among diverse groups in order to establish parity among cultures, and where pagan beliefs were regarded as a temporal phase of universal human development. In the hands of the Jesuits, according

75 Van Groesen, "Patagonian Giants in West Africa", 42.

76 Peter Mason, *Deconstructing America: Representations of the Other* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 107. Lafitau sought a physical explanation for the deformity originating in childhood; result of binding feet or the pregnant mother's imaginings.

77 Rubiés, "Comparing Cultures", 122.

to Joan-Pau Rubiés, ethnology, as a comparative study of cultures, became both a universal history of mankind and a study of human antiquity.<sup>78</sup>

The geographic world picture could thus be redrafted by the epistemic pursuits of antiquarianism. Natural histories like Jose de Acosta's *Historia Natural y moral de las Indias* (1590) had already erected a land bridge that enabled theories about the descent of native Americans from Adam and Eve: "So as there is no reason or experience that doth contradict my conceit and opinion, which is, that the whole earth is united and joined in some part, or at least the one approacheth neere unto the other."<sup>79</sup> Acosta's ideas about human mobility were roughly contemporaneous with early thinking about continental drift present in the concept of nested continents that cartographer Abraham Ortelius outlined in the third edition of the *Thesaurus Geographicus* (1596).<sup>80</sup> Such cartographic notions coupled with transmigration theories proposed by Jesuits in search of cultural similarities might have confirmed Lafitau's suspicions that the acephali had wandered from the Old World into the new one. For Lafitau, a universalist history of the Christian Church required antiquarian scholarship to prove the integrity of the biblical narratives of the Flood and diffusion of races. The recognition of similarities among human groups was essentially a recovery of that lost point of origin. But geography was also a component of such universal histories – perhaps they were mutually informing. Active theories of the transmigration of peoples underwrote that universal history, and in turn, the writing of history had to support the geographic picture of the world that was coming into view. Just as Ortelius's assertion about the contiguous continents was first and foremost a conjecture made on visual evidence – the contours of coastlines that appeared to nest inside each other – so did Jesuit sleuths in search of familiar customs likewise rummage through the pictorial tradition for visual analogies and clues that could support theories of mankind's common origin. Pictures could be good evidence for the cause.

78 *Ibid.*, 123ff; 142ff.

79 *Ibid.*, 143. See also Surekha Davies, "America and Amerindians in Sebastian Münster's 'Cosmographiae Universalis Libri VI' (1550)", *Renaissance Studies* 25, no. 3 (2011): 351–73, 373. See also José de Acosta's *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, ed. Jane E. Mangan (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2002). The Bering Strait was discovered in 1728.

80 Abraham Ortelius, *Thesaurus Geographicus Recognitus et Auctus* (Antwerp: Plantin, 1596). See also Michael Lang, "Histories of Globalization(s)", in *A Companion to Global Historical Thought*, ed. Prasenjit Duara, Viren Murthy, and Andrew Sartori (New York: Wiley & Sons, 2014), 407–08. Ortelius suggested that the Americas were "torn away from Europe and Africa [...] by earthquakes and floods" and went on to say: "The vestiges of the rupture reveal themselves, if someone brings forward a map of the world and considers carefully the coasts of the three [continents]". My thanks to Joost Depuydt for assistance with Ortelius's pursuits. For Ortelius's antiquarian network, see also Tine Meganck, *Erudite Eyes: Friendship, Art and Erudition in the Network of Abraham Ortelius (1527–1598)* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

Given Lafitau's antiquarian and universalist methodology, it should not surprise us that he would also resurrect antiquity's pictorial repertoire. Interesting for our discussion of motifs that winged their way between the continents, both the Blemmyae and Mercury figured into Lafitau's account of the Amerindians. Lafitau's description of the acephalus becomes an excuse to digress into an explanation of the cultural practice of head-shaping, more precisely here, their head-flattening. More important than the acephalus's actual appearance in those passages is *how* acephalism might have been artificially induced by the custom of planing down those heads. Although comparative analysis of cultural practice underwrites Lafitau's entire account, novel about his discussion of the acephali and Mercury is the degree to which his interpretation of customs was informed by images. When he describes practices current among the Iroquois, it is clear in many cases that Lafitau is thinking of Greek and Roman sculpture and images, perhaps not surprising considering that he wrote the bulk of the text in Paris and Rome upon his return from Canada. One of the instances that best illuminates Lafitau's inspiration by such works is his invocation of the messenger Mercury in the context of Iroquois peace ceremonies and commercial encounters. He likens the Iroquois *calumet de paix*, or the peace pipe, to Mercury's caduceus.<sup>81</sup> Lafitau explains the formal similarity of the calumet and caduceus, as well as their role in representing the activity of commerce. While the calumet is a symbol of war and peace, Lafitau stresses that the artefact also mediates at commercial exchanges.<sup>82</sup> Although Lafitau does not invoke Mercury's flight patterns in these passages, nor does his text depict a flying one, it is clear that he has in mind the elegance of the sculpted Mercuries he must have seen around him. The fleet-footed Mercury of sculptures in his milieu, or prints derived from them, probably inspired his descriptions. On either side of the passages that linked the Iroquois calumet to Mercury's caduceus, Lafitau describes the delicate choreography of peace ceremonies and commercial exchanges among the Iroquois almost as if the reader were witnessing a ballet.<sup>83</sup> However "farre from the truth" these customs seemed to the reader, pictures, both visual and mental, made them familiar.

## Conclusion

The visual apparatus of Theodore de Bry's *Grands Voyages* was a critical force for sending images of travel into circulation, subsuming many popular modes of visual address including costume, habits, and the body. Through specificity, localization, the agency of printers' choices, and not least through the appetite they raised for images, important and familiar images of the early modern Americas were created. Trading neither in facts nor fictions, this essay has

81 Lafitau, *Moeurs des sauvages*, II, 325–31.

82 *Ibid.*, 331.

83 *Ibid.*, 324 for the "danse du Calumet".

explored the relative truths of the products of the printing press. Images that arose in this period were indebted both to the lure of antiquity and the persuasion of pictures. Through the various iterations of the Flyer, the Amazon, and the Ewaipanoma, the workshops of the De Bry and Hulsius firms naturalized their otherness and made them familiar ciphers of the travel genre. We have seen that visual expectations about the marvellous were still alive and well in early modern Europe and could still be found embedded in travel writing up until the eighteenth century. But their tenure there was perhaps less a tension between ancient authorities and modern eyewitnesses, and rather about the press's ability to bring the far away closer to home via familiar images.

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## 4 *Multitudo Insularum*

### The Rhetoric of Numbers and the Mapping of the Indies

*Ricardo Padrón*

According to the geographical traditions of medieval *Christianitas* and *Dar al-Salam*, there were innumerable islands in the waters south and east of the *oikoumene*, most of them home to marvels, monsters, desirable commodities, and exotic human populations. This image of the Indies inherited from Antiquity changed over time, and from one author to the next, as news of encounters with insular Southeast Asia reached different centres of knowledge production and intersected with a wide variety of existing discourses. The result was a protean bricolage of legend and lore occasionally peppered with what we now know to have been reliable information, but which would have been difficult to distinguish as such at the time. Some accounts singled out individual islands for description, mentioning only in passing that there were other islands that remained unmentioned or even unknown. Other texts tried to give an impression of the scale of what was omitted by engaging in hyperbole, sometimes even providing a number that was clearly meant to impress. The thirteenth-century Persian geographer Ibn Muhammad al-Qazwini, for example, claimed that there were 1,700 islands in the legendary archipelago of Waq Waq.<sup>1</sup> The Franciscan friar and diplomat Odoric of Pordenone, writing around 1350, put the number of islands off the coast of Mangi at 5,000, as did the spurious travel writer known by the name of John Mandeville, around the same time.<sup>2</sup> The Venetian merchant Marco Polo claimed that there were 7,448 islands in the waters east of Mangi, and 12,000 islands in what we know as the Indian Ocean.<sup>3</sup> The fourteenth-century missionary Friar Jordanus gave a similar figure, claiming that there were “many

1 Gerald Randall Tibbets, *A Study of the Arabic Texts Containing Material on Southeast Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 167.

2 *The Travels of Friar Odoric*, ed. Henry Yule (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 231; Mandeville, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1900), 108, 122, 351.

3 Marco Polo, *The Description of the World*, transl. and ed. Sharon Kinoshita (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2016), 147, 183. Olschki finds Polo’s claim to have consulted the charts of local mariners credible. See Leonardo Olschki, *Marco Polo’s Asia: An Introduction to His “Description of the World” Called “Il Milione”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 32–33.

islands” in the Indies, “more than 10,000 of them inhabited”, and featuring many of the “world’s wonders”.<sup>4</sup>

Some of these numbers found their way onto maps, particularly as late medieval and early modern mapmakers came to see Marco Polo’s *Divisament dou monde* as a reliable source of geographical information rather than a farrago of legends and lies.<sup>5</sup> The first to do so, as far as we know, was Cresques Abraham, the Catalan mapmaker responsible for the so-called Catalan Atlas (c.1375). Among the colorful islands that speckle the waters off the eastern and southern ends of the *oikoumene* we find a legend that reads “In the Sea of the Indies [...] there are seven thousand five hundred and forty-eight islands whose wonders of gold, silver, spices, and precious stones we cannot discuss here.”<sup>6</sup> During the next century, the Venetian mapmakers Fra Mauro and Andrea Bianco included Marco Polo’s number for the islands of the Indies, 12,600, in a legend on their monumental *mappamundi* (c.1450).<sup>7</sup> About forty years later, the German merchant Martin Behaim cited Marco Polo chapter and verse on his *Erdappel* (c.1491): “Marco Polo in the 38th chapter of the 3rd book states that the mariners had verily found in this Indian Ocean more than 12,700 inhabited islands.”<sup>8</sup> Later maps used the smaller of the two Polian numbers without mentioning their source. We find it, for example, on the world map of Johannes Ruysch (1507) and Sebastian Münster’s map of Asia and the Indies (1540).

Nevertheless, there were those who found the numbers difficult to believe. Writing in Florence around 1400, the Dominican friar Domenico Sylvestri shared Marco Polo’s belief that the islands of the Indies were very numerous, but did not cite either of the Venetian’s numbers. He even questioned the accuracy of Odoric’s relatively modest figure.<sup>9</sup> Over a century later, the Milanese humanist Peter Martyr expressed similar misgivings. Writing about Magellan’s encounter with insular Southeast Asia in 1521, Martyr did not think any number greater than 3,000 was worth repeating: “In my opinion

4 Catalani Jordanus, *Mirabilia Descripta: The Wonders of the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 28.

5 Angelo Cattaneo, *Fra Mauro’s Mappa Mundi and Fifteenth-Century Venetian Culture* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 185–225; Surekha Davies, “The Wondrous East in the Renaissance Geographical Imagination: Marco Polo, Fra Mauro and Giovanni Battista Ramusio,” *History and Anthropology* 23, no. 2 (2012): 225–27.

6 “Panel VI – The Cresques Project”, [www.cresquesproject.net/catalan-atlas-legends/panel-vi](http://www.cresquesproject.net/catalan-atlas-legends/panel-vi) (accessed 7 December 2020). Note the slight variation in the number.

7 Piero Falchetta, *Fra Mauro’s World Map: With Commentary and Translations of the Inscriptions* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 191.

8 Ernst Georg Ravenstein, *Martin Behaim: His Life and His Globe* (London: Philip & Son, 1908), 86.

9 José Manuel Montesdeoca, *Los Islarios de la época del humanismo: el De Insulis de Domenico Sylvestri* (San Cristóbal de la Laguna: Universidad de La Laguna, 2004), LXV, 8–9. Sylvestri does not attribute any number at all to Marco Polo, suggesting that he was using a version of the Venetian’s text that did not provide any.

these islands are those concerning which many authors have written, but in different senses; for according to some they should number a thousand, and according to others three thousand or still more.”<sup>10</sup> Even among the mapmakers who gave credence to Marco Polo’s numbers, there seems to have existed some doubt about the credibility of one or the other, since none of the maps mentioned here follow the *Divisament dou monde* in using them both, one for the islands off Africa and India and the other for the islands off Mangi and China. Invariably, they either treat the islands of the Indies as a single archipelago and choose between the two available numbers (Cresques, Fra Mauro, and perhaps Behaim), or they clearly distinguish between two archipelagos, one in the Indian Ocean and one in the western Pacific, but assign a number only to the one farther east (Ruysch and Münster). Other mapmakers share this interest in providing a total number for the islands of the Indies, but favour sources that provide more modest figures, like Ptolemy. This is the case with a nautical chart of the Indies appearing in the so-called Miller Atlas (1519). Clearly, the very idea that the islands of the Indies could number in the many thousands seems to have been as marvellous as tales of dog-headed people, warlike women, or birds so large that they could carry off elephants. While these numbers might have inspired wonder, they also elicited doubt, even among mapmakers eager to make use of them.

Over the course of the sixteenth century, the numbers disappeared, despite the continued credibility of the *Divisament dou monde* and other sources that provided totals of this kind.<sup>11</sup> The one provided for the Indian Ocean sometimes resurfaced, as Portuguese contacts with the Maldivé Islands encountered the same local traditions that had informed Marco Polo. The number may have been derived from the title of the Sultan of the Maldives, which referred to him as lord of the “Twelve Thousand Islands”.<sup>12</sup> In 1552, Fernão Lopes de Castanheda put the number of islands in the Maldivé archipelago at 12,048, on the authority, not of the medieval traveller, but of modern “Moorish” mariners.<sup>13</sup> The figure the Venetian gave for the islands east of Mangi, meanwhile, seems to have disappeared altogether from European cartography not long after it graced Münster’s 1540 map. The disappearance of the numbers and related hyperboles cannot be explained, however, as part of a passage from ignorance to knowledge, from inaccurate fancy to accurate information. After all, it is not as if the mapping of Southeast Asia produced an accurate figure for the total number of islands against which the old numbers could be measured. It is rather that the whole practice of providing

10 Peter Martyr, *De Orbe Novo: The Eight Decades of Peter Martyr*, 2 vols, transl. and ed. Francis Augustus MacNutt (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1912), II, 159–60.

11 On the persistent authority of Marco Polo, see Davies, “The Wondrous East”.

12 See Marco Polo, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, ed. Henry Yule, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1903), II, 425.

13 Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, *História do descobrimento e conquista de Índia pelos Portugueses*, 8 vols (Lisbon: Rollandiana, 1833), IV, 77.

such a figure as a way of generating wonder regarding the size of the Indian archipelago lost its currency. That practice made sense when the islands of the Indies were far-away places to be imagined but hardly ever visited, but it ceased to matter when, over the course of the sixteenth century, the islands became established destinations on the itineraries of commerce and empire. What mattered then was not their total number, but their precise locations, the commodities available on each, and the nature of the inhabitants who produced those commodities. To trace the fate of the numbers is therefore to trace a shift in the priorities that guided the representation of the islands of the Indies, and not just the growing accuracy of those representations. It is also to discover a surprising tendency among certain texts to keep the change at arm's length, to hold on to a traditional vision of the islands, to deliberately relate to them, intellectually and emotionally, in a way that did not answer to the dictates of modern cartographic rationalization.

This chapter traces both of these trends, the shift away from numerical hyperbole and the survival of such hyperbole in a series of texts that arose from the European encounter with insular Southeast Asia over the course of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. That series has been assembled arbitrarily from the vast corpus of maps and writing produced by Europeans of the period in order to describe insular Southeast Asia in word and image. It should not be mistaken for a series of canonical documents established as such by an authoritative historiography on the topic. While it is hard to imagine how some of these documents, particularly the Portuguese nautical charts discussed in the next section, could ever be excluded from such a set, it is also hard to imagine how others, like the pamphlet discussed in the final section, could ever hope to enjoy such authority. Together, however, they provide a series of provocative glimpses into the ways that numerical hyperbole in maps and writing serve to facilitate a certain type of relationship with the geography of insular Southeast Asia, one that values affect over utility or precision. In the first section, we examine the role played by numbers derived from Marco Polo in Portuguese nautical charts from the 1510s, when received ideas about the Indies were first yielding to new knowledge garnered from modern encounters with the region. The second section charts the broad changes that took place in European cartography over the course of the century, generalizing about the ways that new forms of cartographic precision drove the old numbers off European maps of the Southeast Asian archipelago. The final section explores the survival of numerical hyperbole in two Spanish texts about the Philippine Islands, suggesting that old patterns of geographical thought persisted well beyond the consolidation of putatively scientific cartography. A brief conclusion closes the essay by looking at one of the ways that cartography spoke back, suggesting that the tendency to cling to old ways of imagining the islands extended well beyond the two texts we examine.

## Numbering One's Fears

Hesitancy surrounding the use of these numbers appears early in the sixteenth century. Ruysch may have used Marco Polo's number on his map, but his contemporary Martin Waldseemüller did not, even though the visual treatment of the islands off the coast of Asia on his 1507 map of the world suggests that they were vast in number (Figure 4.1). The most interesting case of such hesitancy, however, appears on Portuguese nautical charts from this period. These charts are generally known for their overall accuracy, their attention to detail, and their tendency to resist geographical speculation, so we would not expect them to provide a figure for the total number of islands in an archipelago that remained largely unexplored. Yet this does not mean that they never engaged with inherited notions about the islands



*Figure 4.1* The islands of the Indies are depicted as an innumerable multitude in this detail from Martin Waldseemüller, *Universalis Cosmographia Secundum Ptholomaei Traditionem et Americi Vespucii Aliorumque Lustrationes*. St. Dié, 1507.

Source: Library of Congress, Washington DC.

of the Indies. A 1510 Portuguese chart of the Indian Ocean made by Pedro Reinel, for example, describes a smattering of islands off the coast of India with the following legend, “The grand archipelago which causes great fear, since it is not known unto where these islands go.”<sup>14</sup> The legend makes clear that the islands depicted should not be interpreted as cartographic representations of real islands. They signal the existence of an archipelago that was known to be expansive even if it remained largely unknown, and that extended beyond the frontier of reliably charted space. This piece of geographical information may very well have been derived from or at least confirmed by local sources encountered in India, but it resonated with received ideas about the Indies, and would not have surprised anyone familiar with classical or medieval geography. The only thing missing is an extravagant number designed to impress the reader with the massive size of the archipelago.

A later Portuguese map would correct this omission, but first it is worth lingering on the emotion referenced by the legend on the 1510 chart, which is not wonder, but fear. Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park argue that the two

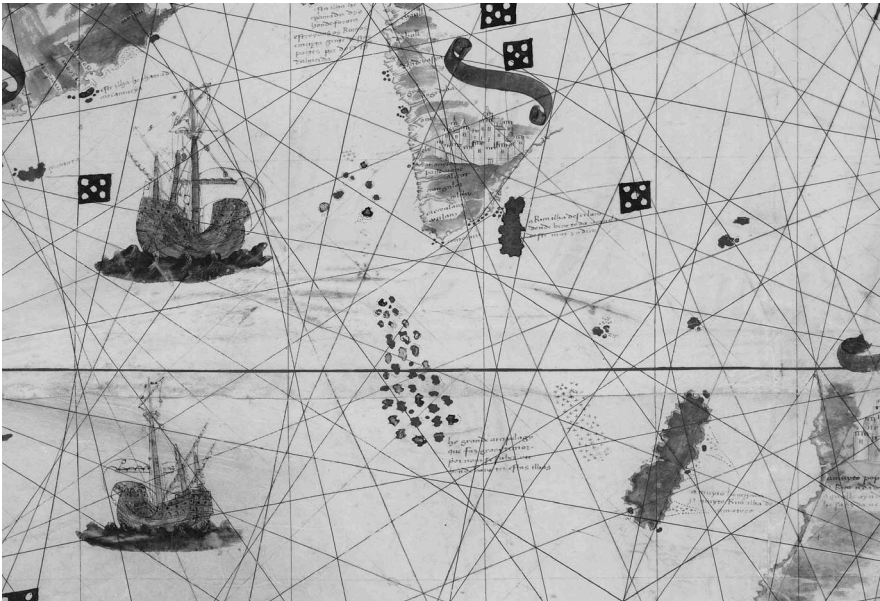


Figure 4.2 Pedro Reinel, Nautical chart of the Indian Ocean, 1510.  
Source: Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 98 Aug 2°.

14 Cited by Luís Filipe Thomaz, “The Image of the Archipelago in Portuguese Cartography of the 16th and Early 17th Centuries”, *Archipel* 49, no. 1 (1995): 84. The chart is held by the Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel and is not available online.

emotions were related, at least in the minds of medieval theologians, who understood them to be physiologically similar reactions to encounters with phenomena that were not readily comprehended.<sup>15</sup> Yet while wonder would lead one to contemplate the phenomenon in dumbstruck admiration, fear would presumably lead one to fight or flee. It is therefore highly significant that Reinel should choose fear over wonder as the emotion triggered by the indefinite extension of the archipelago. It could be the fear of mariners, local or Portuguese, who were afraid of getting lost in the apparently endless archipelago, or it could be the fear of the mapmaker, who found in that infinitude of islands an insurmountable obstacle to his knowledge and art. In either case, the islands are not a marvel to be contemplated, but a hazard to be avoided, or a frontier to be conquered. This may be why they are depicted as a series of dots closely packed within a tear-drop shape. This is a curiously well-bounded figure for a purported infinitude, and may represent an attempt to assert epistemological control over it.

When a figure for the total number of islands made an appearance on a chart from the Miller Atlas (1519), for which Pedro Reinel was at least partly responsible, it served to manage precisely this kind of fear. The Miller Atlas, a gift from Manuel I of Portugal to Francis I of France, was prepared by Pedro Reinel in collaboration with his son Jorge, the distinguished chart maker Lopo Homem, and the artist Gregório Lopes.<sup>16</sup> It attempted to synthesize the recent discoveries of the Portuguese with knowledge derived from other sources, most notably Ptolemy.<sup>17</sup> As a result, the charts in the Miller Atlas differ from the larger body of Portuguese nautical charts in a variety of ways, including the fact that they depict uncharted geographies, including the islands of the Indies. In the Miller Atlas, the smattering of islands on the 1510 chart morphs into two separate archipelagos, one on the chart dedicated to the Indian Ocean and the other on the next chart in the series that features the Strait of Malacca. Unlike the 1510 chart, which maps the islands near India as a monochromatic, compact group of roughly uniform dots, the charts from the atlas map the islands of the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea as two riotous swarms of colourful, amoeba-like islands that proliferate southward with no end in sight. According to Christian Jacob, “the intention is clear: the cartographer wishes to fill and pack the space; the sea is charged with an infinity of islands”,<sup>18</sup> An *infinity* of islands, not a fully

15 Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park. *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone, 1998), 112–13.

16 It is now housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and is available electronically on Gallica, the digital collection of the BNF. The relevant sheets can be found at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b55002605w> (accessed 22 June 2020).

17 On the synthetic nature of the Miller Atlas, see María Fernanda Alegria, et al. “Portuguese Cartography in the Renaissance”, in *The History of Cartography, vol. 3: Cartography in the European Renaissance*, ed. David Woodward and Brian Harley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 986.

18 Christian Jacob, *The Sovereign Map: Theoretical Approaches in Cartography Throughout History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 149.



reconnoitred archipelago over which cartographic mastery had been achieved. These are not the fully individuated islands that one would expect to find on a typical nautical chart, but the anonymous multitude of a medieval *mappa-mundi*.<sup>19</sup> As the second chart itself calls them, they are an awe-inspiring *multitudo insularum*.

The islands in the Indian Ocean are clearly to be feared. A legend warns sailors that they are home to anthropophagi, and to the naturally magnetic lodestone, which can throw a ship's compass awry and even pull the nails out of its hull. The islands of the second chart, argues Jacob, are mysterious and forbidding, if not exactly terrifying. In their curiously recursive shapes he finds an impenetrable labyrinth, a “hermeneute’s hell [...] a space forbidden to navigation”, noting that the six ships that sail the nearby waters all seem to avoid the “compact insular mass” of the archipelago.<sup>20</sup> One might expect

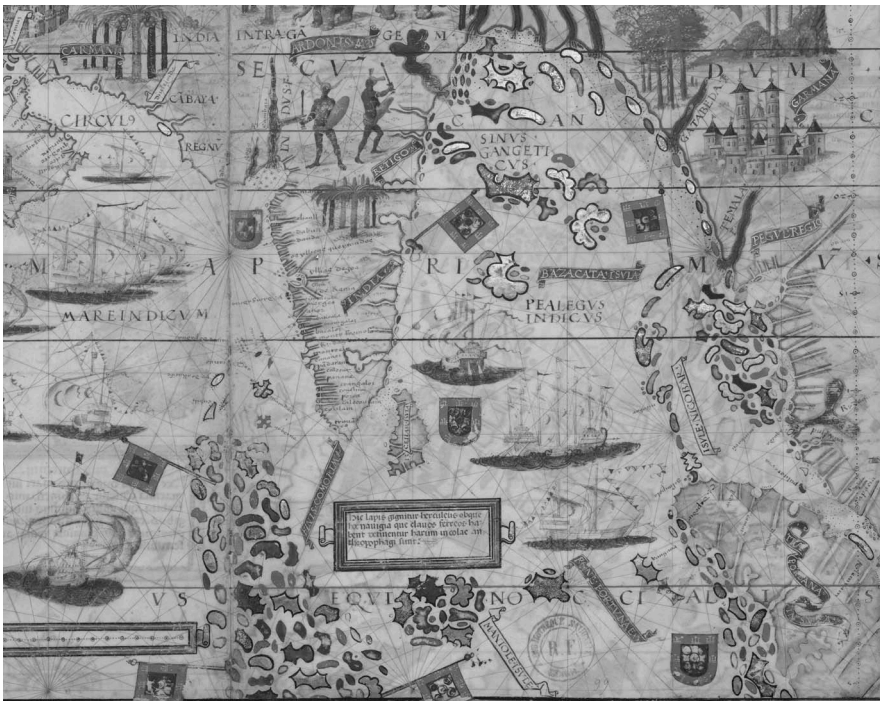


Figure 4.3 Lopo Homem, Pedro and Jorge Reinel, Gregorio Lopes, Nautical chart of the Indian Ocean from the Miller Atlas, 1519.

Source: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

19 Thomas Suárez, *Early Mapping of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Periplus, 1999), 102, compares them to the islands of the Catalan Atlas; Jacob, *The Sovereign Map*, 150, compares them to those of the Beatus *mappamundi*.

20 Jacob, *The Sovereign Map*, 182.



Figure 4.4 The *multitudo insularum* extends southward from Sumatra. Lopo Homem, Pedro and Jorge Reinel, Gregorio Lopes, Nautical chart of the Indies from the Miller Atlas, 1519.

Source: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

these charts to feature what was noticeably lacking from the 1510 chart, an extravagant number, perhaps one of Marco Polo's figures, that would serve to underscore the point that these archipelagoes were so vast as to inspire awe. Yet when a number finally does make an appearance, it is not one of the hyperbolic figures we might expect to have found. In a legend on the second chart, at the northwestern tip of the island identified as "Taprobana", we read: "Before and after [the island of] Taprobana there are a multitude of islands that they say number 1,378."

This number comes from the *Geography* of Claudius Ptolemy, and its appearance on this chart tells us a great deal. First we must understand that the number does not appear in the same place where Ptolemy put it. The Greek cosmographer located the island of Taprobana and the archipelago surrounding it approximately where we would put the island of Sri Lanka, solidly within what we call the Indian Ocean.<sup>21</sup> This is where the number appears on world maps of marked Ptolemaic influence, like that of Henricus Martellus (c.1491) and Martin Waldseemüller (1507).<sup>22</sup> Homem and the Reinels, however, have shifted all of this eastward, attaching the toponym and its accompanying island group to what is clearly the island of Sumatra, in modern-day Indonesia. Second, this displacement of Ptolemy's number allows it to compete with Marco Polo's 7,448 as the proper accounting of the islands southeast of Asia. Insofar as both numbers are exact rather than round, both must have seemed more believable than the rounder alternatives, like Odoric's 5,000, but Ptolemy's number came with a classical pedigree, and as one of the smallest numbers available, was easiest to swallow, particularly among sophisticated readers who doubted the old hyperboles, perhaps because of the influence of Ptolemy himself.<sup>23</sup> This is why Ptolemy's figure of 1,378 appears in a legend that could just as easily have cited Marco Polo's 7,448, colonizing the semi-mythical Indies of medieval travel narrative with the novel cartographic rationality of the Neoptolemaic map.

A unique tension thus obtains between the visual and the numerical rhetoric of the second Miller Atlas chart. As we have seen, the visual rhetoric is exuberant and explosive. It speaks of a *multitudo insularum* that exceeds the limits of available knowledge and perhaps even the possibilities of cartographic representation. A number on the large end of the available spectrum, like Marco

21 Claudius Ptolemy, *The Geography*, transl. and ed. Edward Luther Stevenson (Mineola: Dover, 1991), 159.

22 For the inscription on the Yale version of the Martellus map, see Chet Van Duzer, *Henricus Martellus's World Map at Yale (c. 1491): Multispectral Imaging, Sources, and Influence* (Berlin: Springer, 2018).

23 According to David Henige, modern historians tend to believe exact numbers over round ones. See David P. Henige, *Historical Evidence and Argument* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 192. This may have been true in the past as well, at least in some cases. It might explain why Cresques chooses 7,448 over 12,600 as the proper accounting of the islands of the Indies. It could also explain why Marco Polo's figure of 7,448 outlived the larger, rounder figure on early modern maps.

Polo's 7,448, would have underscored the effects achieved by this visual rhetoric, eliciting wonder or fear at the size of the Indian archipelago, but Ptolemy's relatively modest figure pulls in the opposite direction. Like the clearly delimited teardrop shape of the supposedly limitless archipelago on the 1510 chart, Ptolemy's number corrals the riotous proliferation of the islands within the confines of a manageable quantity, or at least attempts to do so. It does not occasion wonder or fear at the unknown but instead announces that the *multitudo insularum* can indeed be known, that is, that its islands can be enumerated, that they can be mastered, not only cartographically but commercially and politically as well. Hence the series of Portuguese standards that join Ptolemy's number in speaking of that kingdom's desire to rule these decidedly unruly islands. The charts, then, simultaneously reproduce notions about the islands of the Indies inherited from the past and announce the impending obsolescence of those very notions to a world that was learning to conceptualize the Indies in novel ways.

### Banishing Hyperbole

Even as the Reinels drew their charts, the western image of insular Southeast Asia was starting to be remade by the renewal of direct European contact with the region. Already the *Itinerary* of Ludovico de Varthema (1510) had sketched out a vision of the islands of the Indies free of the old monsters and marvels, and even of any attempt, rhetorical or numerical, to allude to the vast size of the archipelago.<sup>24</sup> Varthema's silence regarding the total number of islands was not without precedent in ancient and medieval writing, but during the sixteenth century such silence became part and parcel of the growing skepticism surrounding the marvels of the East. Maximilian Transylvanus, whose 1523 letter *De Moluccis Insulis* provided European readers with the first printed account of the Magellan expedition, mocks the old marvels as "old wives' tales handed down from one author to another without any basis in truth", and studiously avoids giving a number for the total amount of islands in the "extensive archipelago" (*archipelagum quendam ingentem*) visited by the expedition.<sup>25</sup> Antonio Pigafetta's account of the voyage, which appeared in print two years later, reports Magellan's arrival in Southeast Asia by stating "in that place there are many islands, and for this reason they named it the Archipelago of Saint Lazarus, and it lies in 10° of north latitude and 161° longitude from our point of departure",<sup>26</sup> Like Transylvanus, Pigafetta

24 Ludovico de Varthema, *The Itinerary of Ludovico Di Varthema of Bologna from 1502 to 1508*, ed. N. M. Penzer; translated by John W. Jones (London: Argonaut Press, 1928), 83–93.

25 Maximilian Transylvanus, *De Moluccis Insulis itemq[ue] aliis pluribus mira[n]dis, quæ novissima Castellanorum navigatio sereniss. imperatoris Caroli. V. auspicio suscepta, nuper invenit* (Cologne: Cervicornus, 1523), 111, 120.

26 Antonio Pigafetta, *The Voyage of Magellan: The Journal of Antonio Pigafetta*, transl. and ed. Paula Spurlin Paige (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 35.

eschews unverified numbers, in this passage and everywhere else where he could easily slip one in.<sup>27</sup> So, too, do Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo (1548) and Francisco López de Gómara (1552), in their accounts of the Magellan expedition and of subsequent Spanish contacts with insular Southeast Asia. While they might try to impress the reader with the fact that the Magellan expedition encountered a plethora of islands in the waters off Asia (i.e. “They encountered so many islands that they named them the Archipelago”), neither of them engages in hyperbole about the overall size of the island group, nor does either ever provide a figure for the total number of islands.<sup>28</sup>

One might understand the general tendency to abandon numerical hyperbole as evidence that European mapmaking was becoming more empirical, more disciplined, in various senses of the word. The monumental work of João de Barros (1553), however, allows us to provide a more subtle account of what is going on with the numbers that once graced European representations of insular Southeast Asia. Like his Spanish contemporaries Oviedo and Gómara, Barros never provides a figure for the total number of islands in the region, but he *does* engage in the sort of generalizing hyperbole that the two Castilian historians so studiously avoid. In the first of his *Décadas da Asia* (1552), where Barros sets the scene for his history of Portuguese expansion by briefly describing the Indian Ocean basin for the benefit of the reader without ready access to maps, he claims that the “many thousands of islands” east of Malacca were so numerous that they constituted the equivalent of an entire additional continent.<sup>29</sup> Later, in the *Década Terceira* (1563), in his description of the Moluccas he returns to this image of a *multitudo insularum* so large that it spans a good portion of the globe:

Thanks to our voyages [those of the modern Portuguese] we know those parts to be composed of land and sea carved up into many thousands of islands that together constitute a large part of the circuit of the world [...] and in the midst of this great number of islands are the ones called Maluco [...] They lie along that [equinoctial] line more or less three hundred leagues to the east of the city of Malacca, as determined by our

27 Ibid., 112, 131, 132, 138.

28 For Oviedo’s description, see Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *Historia general y natural de las Indias, islas y tierra-firme del Mar Océano*, ed. José Amador de los Ríos, 4 vols (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1851–1855), I, 100–09; Gómara describes the region piecemeal in his narrative of the Magellan expedition. See Francisco López de Gómara, *Historia general de las Indias*, ed. Jorge Gurría Lacroix (Alicante: Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, 1999), chs. 94–97, especially ([www.cervantesvirtual.com](http://www.cervantesvirtual.com), accessed 7 December 2020). The quoted passage appears in Ch. 93. Donald Lach calls these texts the “first comprehensive accounts of the Philippines, Borneo, and the Spiceries”. See Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 3 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965–1993), vol. I-2, 495.

29 João de Barros, *Ásia de Joam de Barros*, 2 vols (Lisbon: Galharde, 1552–1553), I, fol. 91r.

own navigators, and not according to its geographical situation as determined by eclipses and other observations of the conjunction and opposition of other planets like the sun and the moon that we know about for the verification of our tables [i.e. maps]. These five islands lie in a row that stretches north to south, one after the other, along the coast of another larger island [...] which we call Batochina do Moro [...] the other five islands that are alongside this one are all within sight of each other at a distance of twenty-five leagues.<sup>30</sup>

One might be tempted to say that this passage begins with an expansive view of the entire Malay Archipelago, and then zooms in to the Moluccas, but it would be best to resist that temptation. Such a reading would be premised on a particular notion of maps as a singular form of territorial representation that can operate anywhere along an infinite series of possible scales. That particular cartographic ideal, however, was not operative until the nineteenth century, according to Matthew Edney.<sup>31</sup> In the absence of that ideal, the movement in this passage from the general view of the archipelago to the particular account, the Moluccas must be understood as an abrupt shift of representational registers, not a smooth “zoom” that brings details into view. The opening register recalls medieval *mappamundi* or the Miller Atlas charts, figuring the whole archipelago as a dazzling multitude of anonymous islands. It yields to the second, very different register when the passage draws our attention to the Moluccas, and invokes the embodied, hodological perspective of verbal sailing directions, locating the five clove-producing islands along a notional itinerary of travel that extends eastward from Malacca and then southward along the row formed by the islands themselves. Along the way, it alludes to yet another cartographic register, one that relies on latitude and longitude to locate the islands on the surface of a modern map. Barros admits that his notional itinerary is built out of the practical experience of Portuguese sailors, not from maps built using coordinate geometry, but his tone does nothing to undermine our confidence in the accuracy of that sort of mapmaking. The methods are well known, he mentions, suggesting that the islands are on their way to being properly mapped.

The decades following the publication of the *Terceira década da Asia* would witness the publication of a series of maps by Giacomo Gastaldi, Gerhard Mercator, Abraham Ortelius, and Petrus Plancius, among others, that would do precisely what Barros alludes to, plot the islands of the East Indies into the grid of Ptolemaic cartography, although not necessarily using the methods Barros cites.<sup>32</sup> In so doing, they would abandon the rapturous vision of the whole exemplified by the first part of Barros’s passage, and substitute it

30 João de Barros, *Terceira década da Asia* (Lisbon: Galharde, 1563), fol. 132v.

31 Matthew H. Edney, *Cartography: The Ideal and Its History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 166–227.

32 Suárez, *Early Mapping of Southeast Asia*, 130–99.

entirely with the disciplined rationalization of the latter part. The process could be said to culminate in the map of the East Indies that was prepared from Portuguese sources to accompany the *Itinerario* of Jan Huygen van Linschoten (1595) in print. Like the other maps mentioned, it consigns the old *multitudo insularum* to the dustbin, replacing it, according to the map's own title, with what it calls an "exact and accurate delineation" of the East Indies. Although the outlines of certain islands are handled in such a way as to indicate that stretches of their coastlines remain uncharted, the overall effect of the map is one of cartographic mastery.<sup>33</sup> Individual islands, even small ones, are named, clearly delineated, and located within the cartographic grid. Ports are clearly labelled, as are dangerous shallows. As a paratext to Linschoten, with its detailed description of the region and of the routes one could use to access it, this map played a key role in constructing a particular relationship between its reader and the region depicted.<sup>34</sup> Unlike medieval maps meant primarily to nourish the knowledge of stay-at-homes, this one was designed to support efforts to reach the Indies and profit from them. And unlike early Portuguese charts, it presented the islands of the Indies, not as the frightful frontier of secure travel and certain knowledge, but as a fully understood, cartographically rationalized region now open for business.

### The Survival of Numbers and the Persistence of Wonder

It is in the context of this cartographic recreation of the East Indies that I place my last two texts, a pamphlet announcing the conquest of the Philippine Islands by Miguel López de Legazpi and an unfinished history of the Moluccas and the Philippines written by the Augustinian friar Rodrigo Aganduru Moriz. The pamphlet about the conquest of the Philippines appeared in Barcelona in 1566 and seems to have circulated very little.<sup>35</sup> Why it was printed there, and not in Seville or Madrid, remains a mystery, especially since its content is clearly drawn from the letters of relation written by Legazpi, which would have reached the Spanish court by way of the Andalusian port, but would not have passed through the Catalan city. On the face

33 Günter Schilder, *Monumenta Cartographica Neerlandica VII: Cornelis Claesz (c. 1551–1609): Stimulator and Driving Force of Dutch Cartography* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Canaletto, 2003), 223.

34 For the role of Linschoten in the transformation of the episteme, see Arun Saldanha, "The Itineraries of Geography: Jan Huygen van Linschoten's 'Itinerario' and Dutch Expeditions to the Indian Ocean, 1594–1602", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101, no. 1 (2011): 149–77. For more on Linschoten and the maps included with his text, see Schilder, *Monumenta Cartographica Neerlandica VII*, 195–228.

35 Only one copy survived to modern times, and that one has disappeared, although not until after the publication of a facsimile: Carlos Sanz, ed. *Primer documento impreso de la historia de las Islas Filipinas; Relata la expedición de Legazpi, que llegó a Cebú en 1565, estampado en Barcelona el año de 1566* (Madrid: Graficas Yagues, 1958).

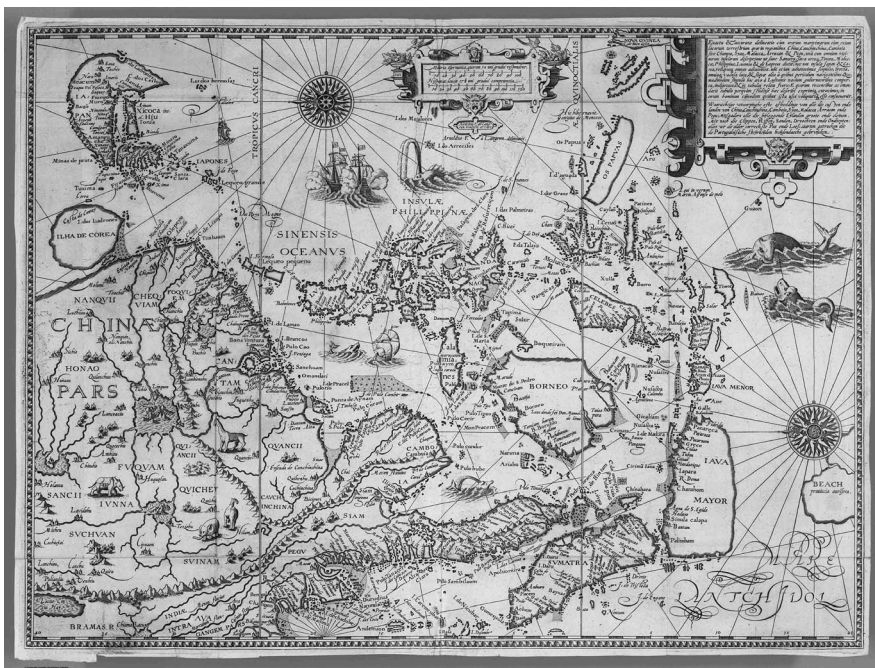


Figure 4.5 One of the most influential charts of the East Indies produced during the sixteenth century. Jan Huygen van Linschoten, *Exacta et accurate delineato ...*, 1595

Source: David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries.

of things, the pamphlet seems to participate in the cartographic recreation of insular Southeast Asia that was already under way. At the outset, the text treats the names “Spicery” and “Philippines” as interchangeable monikers for a single archipelago that forms part of an overall region called “China”,<sup>36</sup> We read that an expedition had sailed from Mexico “to discover the islands of the Spicery, which they call the Philippines after our king”.<sup>37</sup> In this way, the pamphlet echoes the passage from Barros, painting a picture of a single archipelago off the coast of Asia, although the text says nothing about the number of islands involved. As the text advances, it once again echoes Barros by substituting this general image with a more particular cartography based

36 It was not uncommon for speakers of Spanish in the early modern period to use “China” both as a synonym for “East Asia” and as the name of the empire of the Ming. See Gustavo Curiel, “Perception of the Other and the Language of ‘Chinese Mimicry’ in the Decorative Arts of New Spain”, in *Asia & Spanish America: Trans-Pacific Artistic and Cultural Exchange, 1500–1850*, ed. Donna Pierce (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 2009), 20.

37 Patricio Hidalgo Nuchera, *Los primeros de Filipinas: Crónicas de la conquista del Archipiélago de San Lázaro* (Madrid: Miraguano, 1995), 210.



on the experience of practical navigation. It singles out the island of Cebú, where Legazpi established his outpost, and places it 1,700 leagues west of the Mexican port of Navidad, 150 from the Moluccas, “where the spices are”, 200 from China, and 500 from Malacca.<sup>38</sup> In providing these details, the text redefines the geographical terms used at the outset. “China” no longer refers to the overall region, but to the Middle Kingdom proper, and *las Filipinas* are no longer identical with the Spice Islands.

Yet what stands out in this case is not the meager attempt of the pamphlet’s author to map Cebú into geographical space and into the maritime itineraries of global commerce and transpacific empire. Mappable geographical details are actually few and far between. So are descriptions of the sort that had become commonplace in travel writing. We do not even get a description of Cebú, despite the ready availability of information in the Legazpi reports and in printed accounts of the Magellan expedition, like Gómara’s 1552 *Historia general*, to name but one example. Gómara dedicates an entire chapter to Cebú, stating that the island is large, rich, and fertile, that it lies at 10° north latitude, and that it produces gold, ginger, sugar, and porcelain. He says something about the people’s customs, about their king and queen, and about their reliance on coconuts and fish for food, and so forth.<sup>39</sup> The pamphlet, by contrast, goes on as follows, precisely at the juncture where a description of this kind could have appeared:

There are many very large islands in around there, and they are like this one. Among the others is a land so rich in gold that the metal is not held in any esteem, and so much cinnamon that it is burnt as firewood. The people are as reasonable as those of Spain. There is a King that is watched over continuously by one thousand guardsmen and it is said that he is held in such reverence that none of his vassals sees his face except once a year [...] And when he does let himself be seen from year to year, they give him many riches. They are a very skillful people who make brocades and woven silks of many styles. They value the gold given by this king so little that for a handful of cascabels they give three *barchillas* of gold dust (because all their gold is in dust). The men loaded three ships when they returned with so much gold that the king’s fifth came to one million, two hundred thousand ducats [...] There are so many islands, they say seventy-five thousand, eight hundred [...] They have brought on the most recently arrived ship ginger, cinnamon, gold dust, and an *arroba* of rich gold and white shells, gold jewels, wax and other things as signs of what is to be found in that land.<sup>40</sup>

The passage immediately recalls inherited ideas about the Indies. We read tales of bizarre customs that speak of exotic economies in which valuable

38 *Ibid.*, 211.

39 López de Gómara, *Historia general de las Indias*, ch. 94.

40 *Ibid.*

commodities are held in little regard. We hear of a mysterious king both powerful and wealthy and of civilized people who produce coveted luxury goods. The specific source of these details remains unknown – none of them can be found in Legazpi’s *relación* – but they sound all too familiar. It is the old *multitudo insularum* making an appearance once again, in the 1560s. Once again, we are asked to imagine an archipelago in which the scale of the known pales in comparison with the scale of what has yet to be discovered. Marco Polo’s 7,448 undiscovered islands becomes a dazzling 75,800. Like so many other pamphlets, this one trucked in sensationalism when it could just as easily have provided more sober, reliable news. Whether in doing so it reflected the beliefs of its authors, we cannot know. Either way, however, the very existence of the pamphlet speaks of the continued currency of traditional ways of imagining the islands of the Indies. In an attempt to keep those traditional ideas alive, it even engages in what Katherine Eggert has called “disknowledge”, the effort to keep the truth at bay in the service of an often unstated but vitally important purpose.<sup>41</sup>

So, too, does the second text to be considered in this section, the *Historia de las Indias occidentales a Asia adyacentes, llamadas Filipinas*, by Rodrigo Aganduru Moriz. Written in Manila as late as 1621, the text seems designed to supplant the histories of Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola and Antonio de Morga by covering the history of the European encounter with insular Southeast Asia over the course of the entire sixteenth century, and must have been intended for eventual publication in Spain. The surviving manuscript’s narrative never gets past the early 1560s, so it does not cover the Spanish colonization of the Philippines.<sup>42</sup> Unlike the Barcelona pamphlet, this is clearly an erudite work written for a sophisticated audience. Its author, about whom we know little, was a highly capable writer well versed in Scripture and the classics, and capable of advancing detailed arguments about highly technical issues, like the proper location of the line of demarcation between the Spanish and Portuguese hemispheres.<sup>43</sup> When the moment comes, he is capable of carrying out the sort of precise geographical and ethnographical description expected of a learned historian. His chapter describing the Moluccas, for example locates the islands in the absolute space of the Ptolemaic grid, not in the relative space of the traveller:

The principal islands [of the Moluccas] are five, which are laid out north-south. Four of them are situated along the same meridian, and these are Terrenate, Tidore, Motiel and Maquien, while the fifth, which is Bachan, has its meridian slightly towards the west by the Castilian route and by the

41 Katherine Eggert, *Disknowledge Literature, Alchemy, and the End of Humanism in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 2–42.

42 For details about the author’s life, see “Rodrigo Aganduru Moriz”, <http://dbe.rah.es/biografias/19048/rodrigo-aganduru-moriz> (accessed 7 December 2020).

43 Rodrigo de Aganduru Moriz, *Historia general de las Islas Occidentales a la Asia Adyacentes, Llamadas Philipinas*, ed. S. Rayón y Zabalburu, 2 vols (Madrid: Ginesta, 1882), I, 85–105.

Portuguese one, towards the east. It sits at half a degree South, while the first four are scarcely one degree north of the equinoctial line, where we find Terrenate. To the East of the other islands [...] is the island of Batachina.<sup>44</sup>

The rest of the chapter describes the five principal islands in considerable detail, touching on the lifeways of the inhabitants, but emphasizing the properties and commercial value of the clove. The hyperboles come thick and fast, impressing the reader with the sheer quantity of potential wealth that is concentrated in so small a space, but the description makes no attempt to generate wonder at the marvels of a far-away land. The description mentions that the native inhabitants use European-style weapons, handle the harquebus with skill, and will not hesitate to defy a “Castilian captain”,<sup>45</sup> With this off-hand remark, the text collapses the distance between the imagined reader’s metropolitan location and the islands themselves, and acknowledges a whole history of encounter that has constructed the islands as a key destination on the itineraries of European commerce and imperialism.

Aganduru nevertheless departs from the historiographical practice of his day, in that he does not open his text with material of this kind. Where another author might provide a precise prose cartography of the region where his narrative unfolds, Aganduru engages in a purely qualitative description that marvels at the wealth of the islands, insisting that they yield more riches than the rest of the world combined. “In the Torrid Zone, in the uttermost end of Asia, in the South Sea”, he then explains,

it seems that nature sowed so many islands, that there is no number to which they can be reduced. Some are large and some small, as we will explain later, and some have been pacified by the Spanish, as we will relate when we provide a particular topography of them. These are the subject matter of our History.<sup>46</sup>

Like Barros, Aganduru does not provide a total for the number of islands in the archipelago, but rather insists that their number exceeds any possible accounting. Once again, we find ourselves before an infinitude of islands, just as we did on Pedro Reinel’s 1510 chart of the Indian Ocean. The author clearly believes it is his job to describe the islands, to “provide a particular topography of them”, but chooses to set his maps aside for a while, to leave cartographic rationalization for later, and to indulge for a moment in the tantalizing image of the *multitudo insularum*.

This opening strategy cannot be dismissed as empty rhetoric meant to seduce the reader. Elsewhere in the text, Aganduru demonstrates that even during the 1620s, Europeans continued to be interested in the old monsters,

44 Ibid., 11.

45 Ibid., 14.

46 Ibid., 2–3.

however much they had lost faith in the reality of their existence, even in the context of an erudite history like this one. An addendum to the text apparently meant to be inserted into Aganduru's account of the Magellan expedition reviews the various monsters described by Pliny and others, and concludes that the giants are indeed real, as demonstrated by Spanish experience in Patagonia, but that all the others, including those that have only one foot that they use for shade, those without heads, those with ears so large they could be used as blankets, and those who survive entirely on what they smell, are "ridiculous fable".<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, when the text describes the sweet scent of a flowering clove tree, it suggests that if the people who lived off what they could smell had actually existed, they would certainly have thrived on the fragrance of clove trees in bloom.<sup>48</sup> The statement suggests a very different relationship with the old legends than the one inherent in that imperious dismissal. The tone might be described as one of wistful delight. The same could be said about the opening rhapsody to the *multitudo insularum*, that enchanting vision that must be sacrificed to the rigors of cartographic rationality, just like the fables about monstrous races.

## Conclusion

Neither the pamphlet nor the Aganduru history can be said to be far from the truth about the islands of insular Southeast Asia, if by the "truth" we mean up-to-date geographical information about the islands of the Philippines. Both of their authors enjoyed ready access to novel descriptions, even maps, of the East Indies. Aganduru, moreover, actually lived and worked in the Philippines, and was clearly committed to using whatever information he had to fashion his "particular topographies" of individual islands and island groups. Yet both texts keep that modern, rationalized image of the islands of the Indies at arm's length, the pamphlet by ignoring it altogether and the history by postponing its appearance in the text. Both, in this way, exemplify a particular response to the ongoing substitution of the old *multitudo insularum* with a cartographically rationalized image of the Indies. Both speak primarily to readers far from the islands themselves, facilitating an imaginative and affective relationship with the Indies that has little to do with the knowledge necessary to trade with the islands, colonize them, or evangelize them.

There is reason to believe, however, that these texts were not alone in perpetuating these ancient attitudes. One of the things we find in sixteenth-century cartographic literature dedicated to the East Indies is the repeated refrain, "The Moluccas are five in number", We find it all over rationalizing descriptions of the archipelago, eager as they are to name, distinguish, and categorize, and we also see it on banderoles and cartouches gracing maps like those of Ortelius and Plancius. Why do they repeatedly single out this

47 Aganduru Moriz, *Historia general* vol. 2, 181.

48 Aganduru Moriz, *Historia general* vol. 1, 12.



Figure 4.6 A banderole on Ortelius's map of the East Indies advises the reader that the Moluccas are five in number, and provides their names. Detail from Abraham Ortelius, *Indiae Orientalis Insularumque Adiacentium Typus*, 1580.

Source: David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries.

assertion, among the many that could be made about the archipelago? I suggest that it is their way of pushing back against a generalized tendency to see unbridled multiplicity and chaotic *copia* where the author or mapmaker wants to emphasize cartographic mastery. The very existence of this claim, and the evident need to repeat it again and again, speaks of the continued popularity of traditional images of the Indies that valued wonder and other affects over precise, actionable knowledge. Clearly, the old *multitudo insularum* held attractions that no rationalized archipelago could ever hope to match. To remain far from the truth of cartographic rationalization was to remain close to some other truth that was rapidly being banished from an increasingly disenchanting world.

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## 5 Knowledge and Its Opposite

### Antiquity, Parody, and Geographical Distance in Gabriel Rollenhagen's *Four Indian Voyages* (1603)

Johannes Müller

Early modern Europe's geographical literatures have often been addressed as marked by a confrontation of conflicting sets of knowledge. As Anthony Grafton's seminal *New Worlds, Ancient Texts* has reminded us, travel reports and direct observation challenged traditional authorities and established new inventories of geographical knowledge.<sup>1</sup> The rapid increase in available travel literature and global geographical information in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries transformed discourses of global imagination and questioned older accounts of faraway places. Yet older perspectives were not replaced overnight and contradicting sets of knowledge could coexist for decades and sometimes centuries, often in diffuse and ambiguous manifestations.<sup>2</sup> The simultaneity of multiple traditions and forms of knowledge production raises the question of the specific contexts, settings, and media, in which geographical information was mediatized and consumed, and under which circumstances it became obsolete and had to be updated or replaced.

One of the central fault lines in the transformation of global geographical knowledge and its dissemination was the conflicted relationship between the cosmographical traditions that emerged in the fourteenth century and newer travel reports that claimed to be authentic eyewitness reports of foreign regions. In the context of this complex dynamic between cosmographical writing and newly available travel narratives, this chapter examines a satirical-didactical publication project, the so-called *Four Indian Voyages*, first published in 1603 by the Magdeburg emblematicist, poet, and playwright Gabriel Rollenhagen (1583–1619).<sup>3</sup> The compilatory work's rigorous source criticism reflects a crucial intersection point between older cosmographical literature and newer forms

1 Anthony Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts. The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995).

2 Surekha Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human New Worlds, Maps and Monsters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 150–60.

3 The title of the first editions was *Vier Bücher Wunderbarlicher biß daher unerhörter / und ungleublicher Indianischer reysen durch die Luftt / Wasser / Land / Helle / Paradiß / und den Himmel* (Magdeburg: Bötcher, 1603) ("Four Books of Previously Unheard and Incredible Indian Voyages through the Air, through the Sea and over Land, through Hell, Paradise and Heaven"). A second edition of



of knowledge production and it was reissued and expanded several times throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It appeared in at least nine different German editions between 1603 and 1717 and was also translated into Dutch.<sup>4</sup> Even though Rollenhagen was only twenty years old at the time of publication and his project was little more than a first writing exercise for a wider audience, the *Four Indian Voyages* remained popular for at least two centuries and found a readership as diverse as Johannes Kepler, who mentions it in the context of his *Somnium*, or the Grimm brothers, who consulted it for their compilation of *Deutsche Sagen*.<sup>5</sup> The first part of the book contained Rollenhagen's own translation of classical and medieval travel narratives, while the second part consisted of a compilation of forty false propositions about nature, science, and geography or, as he called them, "obvious lies that were nonetheless believed by many older and newer scholars".<sup>6</sup> At the heart of Rollenhagen's project lies the question of truthfulness and credibility, and a central thread that runs through the book is the conflicted relationship between tradition and direct observation. While Rollenhagen is clear about the fictional status of the four translated texts, his discussion of the forty propositions reveals careful epistemological reflections about the value of observation and the question of how observations could be affected or distorted by the subjectivity of the observer and his or her latent assumptions about the world.

Situating the *Four Indian Voyages* in the German book and media landscape of its time, this chapter uses Rollenhagen's example a case study to detect changing attitudes towards older cosmographical traditions and new forms of geographical writing as well the critical reception of marvellous

the work appeared in the same year and under the same title in a cooperation between the Magdeburg publishers Johann Bötcher and Ambrosius Kirchner.

- 4 The total number of the *Four Voyages*' editions must have been even higher. As the Stettin printer David Reichard announced, he had already published four editions of the work by 1614. See Gabriel Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher wunderbarer biß daher unerhörter und ungläublicher Indianischer Reysen [...]*. (Stettin: Reichard 1614), title page. It is therefore reasonable to assume eleven German editions of the full text and at least two of the second part without the translations (see footnote 11). The only known Dutch translation was published in Amsterdam in 1682: Gabriel Rollenhagen, *Wonderbaarlyke en ongelooftelyke reizen, door de lucht, water, land, hel, paradijs, en hemel. Gedaan en beschreven door den grooten Alexander, Gajus Plinius Secundus, den filosooph Lucianus, en den abt St. Brandanus* (Amsterdam: Janssonius, 1682).
- 5 On Kepler as a reader of Rollenhagen, see Arthur B. Evans, "The Origins of Science Fiction Criticism: From Kepler to Wells." *Science Fiction Studies* 26, no. 2 (1999), special issue "A History of Science Fiction Criticism", 165. On Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's use of Rollenhagen, see Marianne Rumpf, "Wie war zu Cölln es doch vordem mit Heinzelmännchen so bequem", *Fabula: Zeitschrift für Erzählforschung* 17, no. 1 (1976), 68.
- 6 Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher* (1603), 200: "Zugabe etlicher wahrhaffter, aber bey vielen alten und neuen Gelehrten glaubwürdiger Lügen". The exact number of these "lies" differs in the various editions. The first edition contained twenty-five main propositions and fifteen sub-questions and the catalogue was expanded in the later editions.

accounts around 1600. Rollenhagen's critical interrogation of traditional knowledge resembles a mode of critical examination that is now most prominently associated with the later empiricist tradition that emerged in the wake of Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* (1620). Some of Rollenhagen's refutations of widespread "Lies" resemble those in Sir Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646), and refer to the same erroneous assumptions, for example the existence of the basilisk and the phoenix and other marvellous animals, even though Rollenhagen tends to draw more radical conclusions than Browne.<sup>7</sup>

Reading Rollenhagen in the line of such epistemological reflections on truth and falsehood reveals an *ex negativo*-engagement with another tradition of knowledge transmission. If we pay attention to the structure and the body of "false" knowledge, the *Four Indian Voyages* also appears as a diatribe against Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia*, a book that embodied and exemplified the sixteenth-century cosmographical tradition in Germany and Europe. In many parts of Rollenhagen's book, the propositions in fact follow the order of the *Cosmographia* and refute their statements about nature and geography.<sup>8</sup> It is the very paradox of the *Four Indian Voyages* that it disseminates "false" knowledge about the world at full length and with relish, only in order to address the truth behind these erroneous assumptions. Preserving and repeating false claims as a form of entertainment, Rollenhagen's work illustrates a tension at the heart of travel accounts and geographical literature of its time: texts were marketed, sold, and read as sensational accounts of a distant world, but they also had to assure their readers of their facticity and credibility. Rollenhagen's case allows for an insightful examination of the contradictory relationship between these two seemingly opposing elements, and reflects the dialectical relationship between the marvellous and the factitious in travel discourses around 1600. As this case illustrates, truth claims did not just eliminate older forms of marvellous imagination, but they also depended on such exotic imaginations of the non-European world, as new knowledge became only productive in the context of the older and often outdated frameworks, be it only *ex negativo*.

### Learning by Lies

Both parts of the *Four Indian Voyages* are concerned with the exposition of "obvious lies" and the four translations in the first part gleefully unmask the

7 See e.g. Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, 6th edition (London: Ekins, 1672), 130–34, 144–49.

8 Sebastian Münster, *Cosmographia. Beschreibung aller Lender durch Sebastianum Munsterum, in welcher begriffen Aller völker, Herrschafften, Stetten und namhafftiger flecken, herkommen: Sitten, gebreüch, ordnung, glauben, secten vnd handtierung, durch die gantze welt, vnd fürnemlich Teutscher nation. Was auch besonders in tedem landt gefunden, vnnd darin beschehen sey. Alles mit figuren vnd schönen landt taflen erkleret, vnd für augen gestellt.* (Basel: Petri, 1544). The most obvious references to Münster are from the fifth and the sixth book.

fictitiousness of the classical and medieval originals. The *Voyages* opens with the fictitious account of Alexander the Great's Indian campaign (327–325 BC), as described in the Pseudo-Alexander letter to Aristotle, and then turns to a selection of texts from Pliny the Elder's *Historia Naturalis*, with a focus on its passages on enigmatic and monstrous human races. The third chapter recounts Lucian of Samosata's *True Story*, a text that is of special significance for Rollenhagen's project as a whole and serves as an intertextual bridge to the added questions section, titled *Wahrhaftige Lügen*, which could be understood as "obvious lies" but also as "truthful lies". While the first two texts in Rollenhagen's compilation were not explicitly marked as fiction – Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* was still regarded a source of information by many early modern readers – Lucian's *True Story* was designed as a satire that mocked the naivety of his Roman audiences who mistook mythical events for contemporary and ancient texts for historical facts.<sup>9</sup> The voyages described in the *True Story* not only include travels to exotic continents and regions but even to outer space, which inspired a wide range of modern science fiction writers.<sup>10</sup> The first part of the *Four Indian Voyages* and the eclectic mix of fantastic accounts ends with the translation of the travels of Saint Brendan, whose textual tradition dated back to the ninth century and which serves Rollenhagen as an illustration of an assumed medieval gullibility.

The second part of the book and its discussion of the forty erroneous statements repeatedly refers back to the four fictional or fictionalized travel accounts of part one. Similar to the form of Laurent Joubert's list of medical errors, first published in 1587, the *Four Indian Voyages* lists errors or "lies" concerning natural history and geography but also touches topics such as history and theology.<sup>11</sup> Rollenhagen's polemical stance against traditional knowledge also borrows from confessional polemics, and popular assumptions and falsehoods are also framed as errors in doctrinal terms. Raised as a devout Lutheran, Rollenhagen polemically claims that legends such as Saint Brendan's travels were commonly believed by medieval Catholics who were misled by their "monks".<sup>12</sup> Rather than reflecting a prefiguration of later enlightenment projects, his critical stance is primarily motivated by his

9 Aristoula Georgiadou and David H. J. Larmour. *Lucian's Science Fiction Novel True Histories. Interpretation and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1998). On the early modern reception of Pliny, see Auge Doody, *Pliny's Encyclopedia. The Reception of the Natural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

10 See e.g. Greg Grewell, "Colonizing the Universe: Science Fictions Then, Now, and in the (Imagined) Future." *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 55, no. 2 (2001): 25–47.

11 See Laurent Joubert, *Erreurs populaires et propos vulgaires touchant la medecine et le regime de sante* (Paris: Claude Micard, 1578).

12 See e.g. Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher* (1603), fol. A4r. Rollenhagen also present Luther as a critic of marvelous ancient accounts and points out that the reformer refused to refer to Biblical animals by their medieval names, and thereby "cleansed" scripture from basilisks and dragons (Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher* [1603], 211)

Protestant outlook, in which traditional authorities can be inoffensively criticized as long as they are associated with the Catholic tradition. In the forty “obvious lies that were nonetheless believed by many older and newer scholars”, Rollenhagen compares widespread misconceptions to the latest available information, often from new travel reports. The list of errors was expanded throughout the seventeenth century and the 1614 edition already contained fifty-nine “lies” and the second part now equalled the first one in length.<sup>13</sup>

These “truthful” or “obvious lies” soon developed their own publication history and in addition to the nine to eleven full editions of the *Voyages*, the catalogues of lies also appeared separately at least twice, in 1640 and 1680. Curiously, the editors and publishers of these separate editions ascribed the work to Rollenhagen’s father, Georg, and expanded and changed the list of the errors and “lies”.<sup>14</sup> These false attributions to Gabriel’s father were most likely a result of Georg Rollenhagen’s lasting popularity, whose rich and diverse oeuvre of satirical epics, plays, and poems overshadowed the work and indeed the memory of his son. However, the influence of the elder Rollenhagen on the *Four Indian Voyages* should also not be underestimated. Gabriel was still a student in Leipzig when the first edition appeared and, as he mentions in his preface, it was his father who encouraged him to translate and publish his texts.<sup>15</sup> Not only the preface but also the list of errors are full of references to Georg Rollenhagen, and all editions contained a dedicatory poem by Georg to Christoph von Dorstadt, a family friend who allowed Gabriel into his private library in order to consult relevant literature for the *Voyages*.<sup>16</sup> In the third edition of his son’s book, published in 1605, Georg also added a short preface to the second part.<sup>17</sup> The oeuvres of the two Rollenhagens are related in many ways, and the question of credibility and

13 Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher* (1614), 131–262. The list of “lies” is divided into twenty-six main errors and thirty-three subpoints.

14 See Georg [sic] Rollenhagen, *Etlicher Warhaffter / aber bey vielen Alten und Newen Gelerten glaubwürdiger Lügen. Unsern lieben Teutsche[n] zur Lehre und kurtzweiliger ergetzung / auß Griechischer und Lateinischer Sprach mit fleiß verdeutschet*. (Hamburg: Bartsch, 1640); Georg [sic] Rollenhagen, *Georgen Rollenhagen Warhaffte Lügen / von Geistlichen und Natürlichen Dingen / oder Beschreibung etlicher warhafftiger / aber bey vielen alten und neuen Scribenten und Gelehrten / Geistlichen und Weltlichen/ ingerissener ausgebreiteten Glaubwürdigen Lügen*. (Wahrenberg: LügenFeind, 1680). Georg [sic] Rollenhagen, *Etlicher Warhaffter [...] Lügen*; Georg [sic] Rollenhagen, *Warhaffte Lügen*. Both the publisher “LügenFeind” (“enemy of lies”) and the indicated place (“Wahrenberg”) of publication of the 1680 edition are obviously fictitious and there is no direct evidence for the identity of the printer or publisher behind the programmatic indication. Like the 1640 and 1680 editions, the last known publication of the *Voyages* from 1717 indicates Georg Rollenhagen as the author of the second part. See Gabriel Rollenhagen, *Indianische Reisen, Wahrhaffte Lügen von Geist- und natürlichen Dingen* (Frankfurt: Nicolai, 1717), unpaginated 2nd title page.

15 Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher* (1603), “Vorrede”, 1–2.

16 *Ibid.*, fol. A2r-A3r.

17 Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher* (1605), 204–05.

the transmission of reliable knowledge are central themes in the works of both. Georg Rollenhagen's *Der post Reutter* ("The postal rider") for example, is a media-critical satire on the credibility and incredibility of printed and oral news.<sup>18</sup> In the form of a dialogue, the text stages a postal rider and his counterpart, "the crippled messenger" ("der hinckende Both"), who embodies the unreliability of circulating information and rumour.

The critical evaluation of information was a theme that connected the works of both Rollenhagens and there is no reason not to take the preface to the *Four Indian Voyages* and the identification of Georg as an important mentor to his son at face value. Originally trained as a theologian, Georg Rollenhagen saw himself as an educator of Magdeburg's youth and served as the head of the town's famous *Gymnasium* for forty-two years.<sup>19</sup> A substantial part of his publishing activities was devoted to textbooks for his students, and despite several calls to prestigious professorships and positions as a preacher and clerical superintendent elsewhere, he remained true to his pedagogical commitment to Magdeburg.<sup>20</sup> His academic interests were wide and diverse and reached from theology to natural history and astronomy, but even though he corresponded with scholars such as Tycho Brahe, most of his publications appeared in German rather than in Latin, and contained prefaces that specifically addressed youthful readers and students.<sup>21</sup> Despite his learned networks and his literary activities, Rollenhagen the Elder primarily saw himself as an educator and in his preface to the second part of the *Voyages'* third edition, he introduces the forty "lies" as examples of the pedagogical methods he used in the upbringing of his own children and the students at the *Gymnasium*.<sup>22</sup> As a learning exercise, he assigned his pupils discussions of such erroneous statements and propositions and admonished them to identify logical errors and fallacies. His son's project needs to be understood in this pedagogical context and the introductory paratexts to the *Voyages* present the

18 [Georg] Rollenhagen, *Der post Reutter*.

19 On Rollenhagen the Elder, see Gerhard Dünnhaupt, "Georg Rollenhagen (1542–1609)", in *Personalbibliographien zu den Drucken des Barock*, 6 vols, ed. Gerhard Dünnhaupt (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1991), V, 3476–3491.

20 Carsten Nahrendorf, *Humanismus in Magdeburg. Das Altstädtische Gymnasium von seiner Gründung bis zur Zerstörung der Stadt (1524–1631)* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 175–76.

21 See e.g. Georg Rollenhagen, *Froschmeuseler. Der Frösch vnd Meuse wunderbare Hoffhaltunge / Der Frölichen / und zur Weißheit / und Regimenten erzogenen Jugend zur anmutigen / aber sehr nützlichen Lehr / aus den alten Poeten und Reimdichtern und in sonderheyt aus der Naturkündiger / aus vieler zahmer und wilder Thiere Natur und eigenschafft / bericht.* (Magdeburg: Gehne, 1595), unpaginated preface. See also Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher* (1605), 204. On Georg Rollenhagen's didactic and pedagogical programme, see Ludger Lieb, "Krieg der Sprichwörter. Zur fragwürdigen Autorität von Erfahrung und Lehre in Georg Rollenhagens Froschmeuseler", in *Tierepik und Tierallegorese. Studien zur Poetologie und historischen Anthropologie vormoderner Literatur*, ed. Bernhard Jahn and Otto Neudeck (Frankfurt: Lang, 2004), 251–77.

22 Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher* (1605), 204.

publication as the result of a training that prepared Gabriel for his critical readings and the sharp refutations of widely-held erroneous assumptions.<sup>23</sup>

One implicit line that runs through the refutation of lies and errors in the *Voyages*' second part is motivated by confessional polemics. In the paratextual comments, Gabriel Rollenhagen does his best to present medieval and ancient travel accounts as integral parts of “backward” Catholic learning and education, including the legendary journey of Saint Brendan. As he writes in his preface:

As impertinently crude and obvious the lies in these aforementioned writings [Pseudo-Alexander, Pliny, and Lucian] might be, the godless and dishonourable monks were not ashamed to impute such Lucianic antics to their innocent saints, to neglect Scripture and instead preach obvious cock and bull stories. [...] A particular example of this can be found in the legend of Saint Brendan.<sup>24</sup>

Even though Rollenhagen greatly exaggerates the degree to which Brendan's legend was mistaken for a factual account, its first German print editions – published between 1476 and 1486 in Augsburg – included the equally fictional epic *Herzog Ernst*, but also the travels of Hans Schiltberger, a fourteenth-century German lesser nobleman, who was taken captive by Ottoman armies and then joined Timur's campaign to India.<sup>25</sup> The account of Brendan's Atlantic travel was thus indeed marketed as part of non-fictional travel compilations and the degrees of fictionality sometimes remained obscure, which gave Rollenhagen the opportunity to depict it as a part of “superstitious” Catholic culture. The later editions, published after 1614, contain even more polemical anti-Catholic broadsides, especially in the “lies” section of the second part.<sup>26</sup> The attacks on the “obvious lies” were not just directed against outdated forms of knowledge but also never overlooked the opportunity to ridicule confessional antagonists. Both Rollenhagens leaned towards the Philippist camp within German Lutheranism that identified itself with the intellectual heritage of Philipp Melancthon, and Georg did not eschew controversies with orthodox Gnesio-Lutherans.<sup>27</sup> Their emphasis on critical

23 Ibid, 205.

24 Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher* (1603), fol. A4r.

25 *Das buch sagt von hertzog Ernten. Auch von dem Schildtberger. Und von den seltzamen wundern so sy erfahren und gesehen habent auf dem meere und auf dem land* (Augsburg: Anton Sorg, 1477). On the publishing history of the German Saint Brendan-account, see Walter Haug, “Brandans Meerfahrt und das Buch der Wunder Gottes”, in *Raumerfahrung - Raumerfindung. Erzählte Welten des Mittelalters zwischen Orient und Okzident*, ed. Laetitia Rimpau and Peter Ihring (Berlin: Akademie, 2005), 44. Rollenhagen based his account on the Latin version of the Basel *Passional*, published in 1517 by Adam Petri. See Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher* (1603), 153.

26 See e.g. Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher* (1614), 225–29.

27 Nahrendorf, *Humanismus in Magdeburg*, 174.

inquiry and scrutiny should not simply be taken for an idiosyncratic form of proto-enlightenment scepticism, but needs to be understood in the context of confessional polemics. The repeated call for a critical mistrust of every claim to truth and knowledge is always attached to the authoritative centrality of Scripture and even though confessional authorities are seldom explicitly mentioned in the *Four Indian Voyages*, the compilation does not hide their Lutheran conviction.

Rollenhagen the Younger demonstrates remarkable skills as an independent and critical reader and interpreter of his sources. Without formulating a clear-cut epistemological theory or method, he approaches the forty propositions with a fundamental mistrust and often seeks to provide alternative explanations for obscure or inexplicable claims. In several passages he explicitly reflects on criteria of credibility and authority, and as he asserts, there are only two fully authoritative and credible sources of knowledge: Scripture and direct observation. His judgment on taking ancient authorities at face value is scathing: neither Aristotle nor Pliny can be relied on without further evidence and they can only be believed if their propositions can be empirically verified. Specific examples from the natural world serve to prove Rollenhagen's point. Discussing Pliny's ideas on the brooding behaviour of ravens and the parents' assumed incapacity of recognizing their offspring after seven days, he writes:

But we are blind, foolish, and mad to believe and preach things that are said or written by others, but in fact contradict the innate nature of all creatures as well our own our own experience.<sup>28</sup>

With regard to the brooding raven, Rollenhagen is surprisingly well-informed on the history of Pliny's reception. As he correctly notes in his annotation to this section, it was the author of the German *De natura rerum* or *Puoch der Natur*, Konrad von Megenberg (1309–74), who relied on Pliny's account and coined the German term “Rabenmutter” (“uncaring mother”). Rollenhagen's radical distrust towards ancient authorities, however, is not restricted to Pliny and his medieval reception but includes the entire canon of classical learning. At the time of the publication of the *Four Indian Voyages*, Gabriel Rollenhagen was enrolled as a law student in Leipzig, and his outlined method of examining evidence and evaluating his sources sometimes echoes his legal training:

We should not ask Aristotle, Pliny or Albertus Magnus about these matters but only trust our own eyes. Where things speak for themselves, there

28 Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher* (1603), 276. With regards to the brooding raven, Rollenhagen is surprisingly well-informed on the history of Pliny's reception. As he correctly notes at the bottom of this page, the author of the German *De natura rerum*, Konrad von Megenberg, relied on Pliny's account and coined the German term “Rabenmutter” (“uncaring mother”).

is no need for words, as the legal scholars say. Speaking and disputing against obvious experience is not wisdom but wilful foolishness.<sup>29</sup>

Applying the Ciceronian dictum “Ubi rerum testimonia adsunt non opus est verbis” (“Where things speak for themselves, there is no need for words”) on the examination of classical authorities, he formulates a position that requires experiential confirmation of every claim to knowledge. While ancient sources cannot be dismissed *per se*, their claims require additional confirmation, be it through immediate observation, obvious experience (“öffentliche erfahrung”) or other credible sources.

### Inverting Cosmography

Rollenhagen’s rigorously critical stance in matters of establishing truth and his stress on “obvious experience”, however, raises the question of how to evaluate information that is only available from second-hand observational accounts. Many of the topics discussed in the forty lies concern phenomena from non-European regions which could not directly be confirmed by Rollenhagen or his German readers. In order to correct erroneous “Indian” accounts, he complemented them with information from newly published travel literature, especially Dutch titles. In the preface to Christoph von Dorstadt, he mentions the rich library of his patron and in particular the collection of travel literature, “not only all the printed maritime voyages of our time [...] but also the marvels from all over the world that have eagerly been collected by the Doctor Paludanus”.<sup>30</sup> In a German context, “all the printed maritime voyages of our time” can only refer to Johan Theodore de Bry’s and Levinus Hulsius’s collections of voyages, but Bernardus Paludanus and Jan Huygen van Linschoten are mentioned by name throughout the book and Rollenhagen regarded them as more trustworthy sources on Asian natural history than most other available accounts.<sup>31</sup> A year after of the *Four Indian Voyages* was published, Rollenhagen moved to Leiden to continue his studies but as his use of sources shows, he was already familiar with the Dutch landscape of learning in 1603, perhaps through Dorstadt.

Paludanus and Van Linschoten are treated with less skepticism than other authors but even here Rollenhagen always stays at a critical distance and never quotes them with explicit approval. Discussing the winter destination of

29 Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher* (1603), 276.

30 *Ibid.*, preface, fol. A4v.

31 Rollenhagen probably also knew Linschoten’s work from the De Bry collection, as the series contained the only known publications of the *Itinerario* that appeared within the German territories. For an exhaustive study on De Bry’s Voyages, see Michiel van Groesen, *The Representations of the Overseas World in the De Bry Collection of Voyages (1590–1634)* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). On the inclusion of Linschoten’s texts, see 118–20; 229–31; 257–58. See also Stephanie Leitch’s chapter on De Bry and Hulsius in this volume.



European storks, he writes that it is “Linschoten’s opinion that they migrate to Java”, but still does not cite Van Linschoten’s observation as an established fact.<sup>32</sup> The scrupulous reading of his sources is guided by Rollenhagen’s critical understanding of “experience” (“erfahrung”). As he states, “erfahrung” is the last instance on which to rely but in his analysis it is also identified as inescapably subjective and dependent on specific contexts as well as on concrete mental and physical circumstances. Discussing the anatomy of elephants and the idea that they lacked knee and hip joints, Rollenhagen stated it was the “experience” of contemporary Spanish and Dutch travellers that these animals indeed had mobile legs just like horses or cattle.<sup>33</sup> This approach allows him to contextualize experience and observation and to offer alternative explanations for otherwise inexplicable phenomena. Discussing the question of why traditional misunderstandings about nature were sometimes confirmed by later first-hand eyewitness accounts, he seeks to formulate an explanation through a critical and contextual reading of such reports. Accounts of basilisks, for example, did not necessarily have to refer to the mythical creatures as described in the classical tradition. Such testimonies could also be the result of an observer’s already existing expectations and the specific individual circumstances at the moment of observation. Discussing eyewitness accounts of an actual basilisk, he writes:

It is very well possible that some lost seafarer came to India or Africa and saw a Calcutta rooster that blew up its neck and hung down its grotesque red nose and then crowed like a rooster. The stranger was obviously astonished and concluded that this was a basilisk and after his return he may have recounted his vision as a marvel to others.<sup>34</sup>

In this way, Rollenhagen deconstructs a whole range of enigmatic and suspicious reports, and subjects them to an almost dialogical analysis in which observations are embedded into the circumstances in which they were recorded and transmitted. His critical readings of eyewitness reports take into account the possibility that some observations have an authentic core. However, they can be distorted by several factors: in the case of the basilisk account, the perception of the stranded seafarer becomes blurred by his immediate astonishment and the first impression of the “Calcutta rooster”. Second, his perception was based on a frame of reference in which basilisks existed but not yet turkeys (“Calcutta roosters”). Third, accounts from far-away places could be distorted by the unreliability of memory as well as the

32 Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher* (1603), 283: “Denn wir wissen / dass auff Laurentii die Störch jehrlich ire jungen aus dem Nest führen / und für Jacobi mit inen davon fliegen / zu der großen Insel Java, wie Johan Huigen meint.”

33 *Ibid.*, 223.

34 *Ibid.*, 210–11. Hereafter, Rollenhagen also suggests a second explanation for accounts of basilisks and mentions interferences between basilisks and poisonous vipers (“aspis”) in several classical sources as well as in the *Septuaginta*. See *Ibid.*, 211.

long and cumbersome journey home. Finally, European audiences expected to hear marvels (“wunderwerck”) from returning travellers.<sup>35</sup> In the light of this critical examination, direct observation is identified as inevitably shaped by a number of communicative, individual, and cultural contexts and preconditions.

Rollenhagen’s attempts to situate observation in individual subjectivity and its dissemination in social interaction bear striking resemblance to Bacon’s (later) *Novum Organum* and its critical analysis of “idols” to which human perception falls prey.<sup>36</sup> Not only individual prejudices and the circumstances in which observations are made are taken into account but also their communication between individuals. In comparison to Thomas Browne’s *Pseudodoxia*, which adheres to Bacon’s approach and aims to bring it into practice, Rollenhagen goes even further: where Browne typically concludes his arguments with a criticism of sources, Rollenhagen speculates on their origin and the ways in which testimonies were informed by affects, emotions, and the failing memory of observers, such as the sailors who claimed to have seen basilisks or dog-headed humans.<sup>37</sup>

The list of enigmatic creatures that are deconstructed in this way is largely derived from Sebastian Münster; for every marvellous creature in the *Cosmographia*, Rollenhagen offers a more credible alternative. Even though he never mentions Münster by name, he follows the order of the *Cosmographia*: his discussion of elephants, winged dragons, and harpies corresponds to the fifth book of the 1544 and 1545 editions, while the discussion of the basilisk, the poisonous snakes, and the monstrous human races is based on the sixth book.<sup>38</sup> Consistently, Rollenhagen suggests the least spectacular explanation for each phenomenon in Münster: Pliny’s monstrous races or cynocephali are identified as “dog-faced apes” or baboons, and dragons as poisonous snakes or lizards. Touching the question of whether such reptiles attack elephants, as described in Münster, he admits that he cannot disprove such claims but is self-confident enough to rule out the existence of winged dragons, as their imagination is most likely the result of medieval depictions of Saint George that are printed into the memory and imagination of Christian travellers.<sup>39</sup> On some occasions, Rollenhagen offers etymological explanations of marvellous accounts and phenomena: he clearly doubts the existence of phoenixes and harpies, and hypothesizes that the belief in these legendary birds could be the result of the misreading of seafaring accounts. “Phoenix” could originally have referred to “Phoenicians”, and since Phoenician seafarers were notorious

35 On the expectations to hear marvellous accounts from travellers, see Julia Schleck, *Telling True Tales of Islamic Lands: Forms of Mediation in English Travel Writing, 1575–1630* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2011), 20–22.

36 Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* (London: John Bill, 1620), 40ff.

37 Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher* (1603), 210–11.

38 *Ibid.*, 222–25; 209–11; Münster, *Cosmographia*, dclcl–dclcli, dclclxxxiii, dccciii.

39 Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher* (1603), 211, 223.

for their ship raids in the ancient Mediterranean, phoenixes might have stood for pirates or personifications of any kind of danger at sea.<sup>40</sup> Seeking to offer a rationalistic re-interpretation of classical sources, he suggests that already in Virgil references to mythical creatures were in fact poetic devices to signify real or abstract dangers that were only later understood as real creatures by medieval readers:

[i]n Virgil, pirates are depicted in the manner of big birds called harpies, with faces like virgins, bellies like ovens that are invulnerable, and hands like bear claws that can destroy, ruin, and take away everything with them. In the *Hortus sanitatis*, however, these harpies are falsely described and referred to as real, natural birds.<sup>41</sup>

Ascribing the physical existence of harpies to the *Ortus Sanitatis*, a fifteenth-century natural encyclopaedia, offers Rollenhagen the opportunity to explain a number of marvellous accounts as based on a misreading of literary sources: not only phoenixes and harpies but also the mythical bird Roc are reduced to poetic personifications that were later misunderstood by superstitious medieval interpreters.<sup>42</sup> The reason that even trained scholars committed such intellectual *faux pas* was due to a blurred understanding of the relationship between poetical speech and historical truth:

It is petty and childish foolishness to mistake such poetry for true histories. It is a miracle that one had not also believed Virgil's *Fama* or Ovid's *Invidia* to be actual strange wondrous women and included them into a postil.<sup>43</sup>

Assuming ancient creatures to be physical animals would be the same as mistaking allegorical figures and poetical personifications for real human beings. Despite Rollenhagen's obvious polemical stance, these analyses indeed invoke a form of stylistic criticism that pays close attention to the interferences between figural and non-figural speech. Such rationalistic re-readings of ancient myths and classical literature are surprisingly similar to what Lorraine Daston and Katherine Parks have called the eighteenth-century "anti-marvelous".<sup>44</sup> Several of the points made by Rollenhagen return in the critical philological approach of the Jesuit Antoine Banier (1673–1741), who tried to de-mythologize classical sources and sought to reconstruct their historical and poetic origins by consistently distinguishing between allegorical and factual speech. Banier, who discusses the same accounts of phoenixes and harpies

40 Ibid., 272, 225.

41 Ibid., 225.

42 Ibid. On harpies, see *Ortus Sanitatis*. (Mainz: Meydenbach, 1491), fol. Yiiiir.

43 Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher* (1603).

44 Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park. *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 329.

and also identifies them as pirates, never refers to Rollenhagen but his analysis bears striking similarities to the approach of the *Four Indian Voyages*.<sup>45</sup>

Another source of knowledge and reliable information discussed in Rollenhagen's book is physical evidence – and even here he urges his readers to be cautious. Material proof can be confirmed by “erfahrung” but it should not be uncritically trusted and it requires careful examination since objects could also have been mistaken for something else or even been wilfully manipulated. According to Rollenhagen, the widespread belief in harpies and griffins was partly due to the circulation of giant bird feet that were collected in cabinets of curiosities. Without further arguments, he identifies these objects as ostrich feet and “griffin claws” as “Indian buffalo horns” that were sold by fraudulent jugglers.<sup>46</sup> As obvious as the evidence of material objects might appear, even here, manipulation or misidentification could not always be ruled out. A possible strategy to verify or refute sensational accounts of the behaviour or appearance of exotic animals, Rollenhagen suggests, would be the observation of live specimens in princely menageries: more and more German princes kept lions, tigers, and other exotic animals, and even bred them in captivity; this trend could also be useful for the study of natural history. Discussing the assumption that lionesses gave birth to dead pups, he refutes such claims on the basis that such occurrences would have certainly been noted in captivity.<sup>47</sup>

Throughout the *Four Indian Voyages* but particularly in the second part, Rollenhagen is pervasively present as the author of his book, and his self-fashioning as a highly sceptical and independent reader and examiner also involves showcasing his polemical and satirical skills. At times he is so convinced of his own critical stance that he does not even bother to present any kind of argument or evidence to make his case. Discussing the idea that tigers can cure their bronchial diseases by eating aniseed, he just dismisses this claim by asking his fellow Magdeburgers if they have ever seen a tiger in their herbal gardens. To prove his intellectual imperturbation and his insusceptibility to exaggerated claims, he cannot help adding that tigers are in fact a form of “wild sighthounds who like to catch rabbits” rather than the miraculous creatures many Europeans imagined.<sup>48</sup> On the notion that storks throw every tenth chick out their nest as a form of tax to the owner of the house where they nest, he only remarks that this is the reason that they are so scarce in Thuringia, where no tenth penny is collected.<sup>49</sup> The medieval account of pelicans feeding their chicks with their own blood, originating

45 Antoine Banier, *La mythologie et les fables expliquées par l'histoire*, 3 vols (Paris: Briasson, 1738–1740) III, 214; 228; Antoine Banier, “Dissertation Sur Les Furies”, in *Memoires De Litterature Tirez Des Registres De L'Academie Royale Des Inscriptions Et Belles-Lettres. Depuis l'année M.DCC.XVIII. jusques & compris l'anne'e M.DCC.XXV* (Amsterdam: François Changuion, 1731), 51–76.

46 Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher* (1603), 272.

47 *Ibid.*, 260.

48 *Ibid.*, 256.

49 *Ibid.*, 259.

from the late-ancient *Physiologus*-tradition, is mentioned without any effort to refute it and only adds that no one has ever seen it: the claim and its allegorical Christian connotation are regarded as too farfetched to be taken seriously in any way.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, the account of a pastor from Berlin who claimed to have found the winter location of storks by attaching little notes to their feet until he received a reply from India is dismissed without further discussion. As obvious as this might seem, accounts of storks that carried messages were not categorically excluded from the realm of possibilities in the world of early seventeenth-century learning. A 1630 treatise on the migration routes of European birds by the poet and naturalist Johann Georg Schwalbach contained an account of a Carthusian monk in Strasbourg who found a message from an Indian tailor at the foot of the stork that nested on the roof of his monastery.<sup>51</sup> Even though Schwalbach was sceptical about this account, he could not rule out the possibility that the note had in fact been carried to Europe from South Asia, and similar stories kept appearing in natural historical literature throughout the seventeenth century.<sup>52</sup>

### Epistemologies of Misinformation

Rollenhagen's radical critique of sensational accounts of the natural world is not so much concerned with nature itself – it is the problem of credibility and transmission of information over time and space that is at the heart of his *Four Indian Voyages*-project. On various occasions, he invokes the notion of the “innate nature of all creatures”, but this concept is not further developed and only serves as an implicit regulative guideline through his reading and the examination of the sources.<sup>53</sup> The nature of creation itself cannot fully be comprehended but the sum of confirmed observations makes anomalies very unlikely, which is often reason enough for Rollenhagen to dismiss them as fables or misunderstandings. Accounts that do not fit into the context of established facts about nature are either written off immediately or require a closer examination of their communicative and perceptual origins. In that regard, the *Four Indian Voyages*' critical examination of lies and errors is primarily concerned with the communicative and epistemological conditions and the transmission of information over temporal and spatial distance.

50 Ibid., 264.

51 Johann Georg Schwalbach, *Dissertatio Physica De Ciconijs, Gruibus & Hirundinibus: quo exeunte Aestate abvolent, & ubi hyement* (Speyer: Baumeister, 1630), 19.

52 See e.g. Johannes Praetorius, *Storchs u. Schwalben Winter-Quartier / Das ist / Eine ungemeyne Vergnügung der curiosen Gemüther / durch einen vollständigen Physikalischen Discurs, von obgedachten Sommer-Boten / wie auch andern unstetlebenden Vögeln und Thieren* (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1676), 43–46. Praetorius was also familiar with Rollenhagen and quotes his skepticism towards the migration routes of storks on page 46.

53 See e.g. Rollenhagen, *Vier Bücher* (1603), 207; 242; 250; 276; 290.

Instead of theorizing nature, Rollenhagen theorizes the value and use of information in a world in which conflicting sets of knowledge could no longer be harmonized and the richness of accounts from distant regions transformed the European imagination of the globe.

In 1603, the title *Vier Bücher wunderbarlicher biß daher unerhörter und ungläublicher Indianischer Reysen* could hardly be misunderstood as an indirect reference to the travel literature that was marketed in Germany at that time.<sup>54</sup> Even though the book contains hardly any authentic travel writing or uses it only to identify misunderstandings and manipulations, the title is also part of the satirical project of the *Voyages*. Marketing the fabulous accounts of pseudo-Alexander or Saint Brendan with references to travel writing urged readers and consumers to call into question what they read and what they accepted as truth. The transition of German geographical writing and book culture that took place around 1600 was also a transition of form, and marked a development from the systematic arrangements of cosmographical knowledge towards collections of subjective and personal eyewitness reports. The rise of travel reports and their mediatization on the book market also illustrates a move towards a continuous fragmentation of knowledge. The amount of facts and observations became too diverse and too multiform to fit into a coherent system of cosmographical order. To be sure, this transformational process took decades, and cosmographical modes of knowledge dissemination were only gradually replaced by newer travel editions. Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia* was reprinted until the late 1620s and it continued to remain a staple ingredient of German private libraries and book collections.<sup>55</sup> However, it could no longer convince readers who were familiar with new accounts that claimed to be direct testimonies of travels to the places described by Münster. The amount of facts and the incompatibility of available accounts did not allow for the representational mode of the cosmographical bird's eye view, and Rollenhagen's implicit diatribe against Münster did not result in an alternative comprehensive system in which the available multitude of natural and geographical facts could be adequately represented. However, the specific topoi and points of debate in the *Four Indian Voyages* are still derived from the genres it deconstructs and ridicules. In its systematic refutation of ancient and sixteenth-century sources, the cosmographical genre lives on *ex negativo*: the lack of a new and more appropriate system finally resulted in an inversion of the cosmographical mode itself.

54 See Wolfgang Neuber, *Fremde Welt im europäischen Horizont. Zur Topik der deutschen Amerika-Reiseberichte der Frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1991), 279; 363.

55 The last known edition of the *Cosmographia* dates from 1628. See Matthew McLean, *The Cosmographia of Sebastian Münster: Describing the World in the Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 175. On Münster in German library catalogues, see Christine R. Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World: Renaissance Encounters with the Strange and Marvelous* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 218.

In his refutation of errors, Rollenhagen always deems the newest and most recent sources the most reliable – older accounts are more likely to be corrupted by time or by distortions that were due to second- or third-hand transmission. Originality, then, enhanced credibility in the eyes of Rollenhagen. However, the preference for the newest and latest travel reports does not so much indicate a form of epistemological optimism in which scholarly progress inevitably leads to objective truth. Paradoxically, it is the very subjectivity of modern first-hand travel narratives that makes them more useful as sources of geography and natural history: even if the recounted observations contain errors or misconstructions, they can be attributed to specific individuals which allows for a thorough analysis of the circumstances under which they occurred. Even if direct observation could never be taken at face value in itself, it is the formal openness and unstructured rawness of travel accounts that make them more valuable sources of information than the systematically ordered cosmographies in which individual traits were no longer recognizable.

Despite his overly complacent self-fashioning as a young but highly independent scholar, Rollenhagen does indeed demonstrate a number of critical techniques that are remarkable for someone of his age and milieu. As a twenty-year-old student in Leipzig, he did not exactly belong to the intellectual avantgarde of his time, at least not in 1603, and he does not formulate a clear-cut epistemological theory or method that could be compared to Francis Bacon's *Organum*. It is therefore unlikely that his methods of critical examination were an individual idiosyncrasy, and his case might serve as an illustration of the registers of source criticism and critical reading that were available in the wider realm of learning in early seventeenth-century Europe.<sup>56</sup> Some of these approaches were more systematically applied in the Age of Enlightenment but as his case shows, they already circulated in the world of education and learning in earlier periods, and at lower levels. Antoine Banier's de-mythologizing reading of the classics and his stylistic criticism that carefully distinguished between allegorical personification and non-figurative speech is not as far from the methodological approach of the *Four Indian Voyages* as the differences in time and social milieu might suggest. Paradoxically, however, Rollenhagen's radical source criticism had little in common with the wider intellectual outlook of such Enlightenment projects – it was the very confessionality of his age and the anti-Catholic suspicions of his social surroundings that shaped the critical framework of Rollenhagen's project. A substantial part of Rollenhagen's rejection of traditional learning

56 Much of the critical skill demonstrated by Rollenhagen go far beyond what Shapin describes in his seminal *A Social History of Truth*. Contrary to Shapin's examples, Rollenhagen dismisses most of the mentioned marvels and wonders categorically and only discussed their possibility if the specific case was supported by strong or even extraordinary evidence. See Steven Shapin, *Social History of Truth. Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 200–02.

and scholarship was his conviction that “tradition” inherently stood for “Catholic tradition”, and it is this anti-Catholic prejudice that allowed him to equate Protestantism with a new quest for truth and fact, and consequently also for observational and experiential forms of knowledge production.

Both as a reader and as a writer, Rollenhagen provides crucial insights into a changing media world and the implications of this change on notions of credibility. His case does not only show how specific types of sources and media genres could be understood around 1600 but it also allows us to set more systematic investigations into the nature of truth and credibility in context. In the didactic method of the *Four Indian Voyages*, the quest for credibility is rhetorically directly attached to its opposite, and it is the very incredibility of the medieval and classical accounts that constitutes the satirical entertainment that is at the heart of this project. If we apply Rollenhagen’s approach to the travel genre in the early seventeenth century, in which sensation and marvel were simultaneously repeated and discredited, this might explain the coexistence of claims to credibility and exotic depictions of the marvellous and incredible. The sensational otherness of the distant world did not just disappear, but it was no longer part of a systematic form of knowledge dissemination. In the form of first-hand accounts, it could be questioned and examined – and it was in this form where it could coexist with claims to truth, knowledge, and established fact.

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## 6 “I Am Giving You as Much as I Have”

### News, Distance, and Credibility in Théophraste Renaudot’s *Gazette*

*Michiel van Groesen*

Credibility has been closely related to news ever since the latter became a staple item of public life. Tension between the two typically arises when either the standard or the perception of credibility deteriorates. In today’s hyperconnected world, this happens mainly for reasons of political partisanship, leading to the rise of “fact-checking” what has “rightly” or “wrongly” been reported. In early modern Europe, political bias and information management by the authorities often led to suspicion as well. But there could be many different reasons for the credibility of news to be strained. Credibility was based on trust, and – even more than is the case today – trust was firmly connected to social status. Truth, in other words, was “a social construction”, meaning that news, as a subcategory of truth, suffered from a lack of credibility if it was reported by someone with insufficient credentials.<sup>1</sup> For many, this constituency of the unreliable included professional news writers who were perceived to be interested in profit before truth. But arguably the most fundamental problem was that news could not easily be checked, especially if it came from afar, and new eyewitness accounts to verify or debunk a report were unlikely to arrive any time soon. By the early seventeenth century, when many European merchants and most Old World governments had begun to cultivate more than a passing interest in Africa and the Americas as well as the Indian Ocean, the credibility of transoceanic news became a pressing concern. Distance, then, and the delay in the information supply that it caused, compounded existing concerns about credibility. Moreover, it left early modern authorities and audiences alike wondering what had happened to information in the weeks or months that had passed between event and report.<sup>2</sup>

- 1 The quotation is from Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 6, who does not apply the social dimensions of truth to the genre of news.
- 2 John J. McCusker, “The Demise of Distance: The Business Press and the Origins of the Information Revolution in the Early Modern Atlantic World”, *American Historical Review* 110, no. 2 (2005): 295–321; Will Slauter, “Forward-Looking Statements: News and Speculation in the Age of the American Revolution”, *Journal of Modern History* 81, no. 4 (2009): 759–92.

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The rise of the printed newspaper in early seventeenth-century Europe, at more or less the same time that the Atlantic world developed into a theatre of perennial warfare, only served to accentuate the ways in which distance could increase the tension between news and credibility.<sup>3</sup> The newspapers, with a weekly periodicity that reflected the rhythm of European postal networks, struggled with the divergent rhythm of the Atlantic Ocean, which delivered news infrequently and irregularly, and generally with a delay of at least six or seven weeks depending on the origins of the transoceanic reports.<sup>4</sup> Different news writers designed different ways of solving this problem. Some, like the Amsterdam newspaper editor Jan van Hilten, cut fresh news into smaller pieces, which would then be presented in consecutive weekly bulletins that suggested a continuous flow of information – a “storyline” – in the hope that by the time his information had run out new ships would have arrived. Others, like the Antwerp newspaper editor Abraham Verhoeven, printed only good news, in his case news that served the geopolitical interests of the Habsburgs’ composite monarchy, and used the delay in his favour by magnifying good news to reach emotionally cathartic proportions.<sup>5</sup> For every European news writer who faced a weekly deadline, however, news from the Atlantic world presented a major challenge.

This chapter focuses on one of the leading news writers of early modern Europe, Théophraste Renaudot (1586–1653), founder of the *Gazette de France*. It explores his coverage of events in the Atlantic world from the establishment of his newspaper in May 1631 until his death in October 1653. Historians of the press in France have traditionally argued that Renaudot, as the unofficial mouthpiece of Cardinal Richelieu’s regime, was the embodiment of partiality – a notion that unequivocally affected credibility as many early modern accounts show.<sup>6</sup> That Renaudot’s coverage was heavily biased is

3 Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know About Itself* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

4 There are three book-length studies which focus on communication in the pre-revolutionary Atlantic world: Ian K. Steele, *The English Atlantic, 1675–1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Renate Pieper, *Die Vermittlung einer Neuen Welt: Amerika im Nachrichtennetz des Habsburgischen Imperiums, 1493–1598* (Mainz: Von Zabern, 2000); Kenneth J. Banks, *Chasing Empire Across the Sea: Communications and the State in the French Atlantic, 1713–1763* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002). None of these books explicitly deals with newspapers, however, or the news culture this new genre created in seventeenth-century Europe.

5 Michiel van Groesen, “(No) News from the Western Front: The Weekly Press of the Low Countries and the Making of Atlantic News”, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 44, no. 3 (2013): 739–60. On newspapers in the Netherlands, see Arthur der Weduwen, *Dutch and Flemish Newspapers of the Seventeenth Century, 1618–1700*. 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2017), with specific sections on Van Hilten in vol. 1, 18–21 and vol. 2, 1–6. On Verhoeven, see Paul Arblaster, *From Ghent to Aix: How They Brought the News in the Habsburg Netherlands, 1550–1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

6 On Renaudot, his *Bureau d’Adresse*, and his newspaper enterprise, see Gilles Feyel, *L’Annonce et la Nouvelle. La presse d’information en France sous l’Ancien*

by all accounts a fair assessment in the context of news that directly related to the interests of the Bourbon monarchy. But most of the time the Atlantic world did not require rigid information management, or an overtly partisan form of reporting. In the years that Renaudot developed into one of Europe's foremost news writers, the Americas occasionally attracted interest in France, but they existed principally in the minds of individual traders in port towns like Dieppe and Le Havre. One eminent historian of the early modern French Caribbean has described the period between 1620 and 1660 as the "frontier era" of the French Atlantic, while another historian characterized the French experience in Canada between 1632 and 1663 as one of "intermittent frustration of hopes deferred".<sup>7</sup> The French *Compagnie des Indes Occidentales* was not founded until 1664. During his lifetime, then, Renaudot was perhaps never entirely neutral, but as I will argue in this chapter, the French position resembling neutrality meant that his Atlantic reporting was considerably more balanced than coverage elsewhere in early modern Europe. Under the dark clouds of information management in Bourbon France, distance – both politically and geographically – made it easier for Renaudot to speak the truth. In fact, if we look at Renaudot's coverage of news stories from the Atlantic world, it is almost as if the *positive* effects of distance on credibility were a major factor in his editorial decision-making.

### **Théophraste Renaudot's *Gazette***

An anonymous engraving that can be dated to the early 1630s presents the relationship between news and credibility in the *Gazette* in a favourable light. Pride of place in the centre of the composition is given to the allegory of Truth (*La Vérité*; identified in the text at the bottom). Lady Truth receives letters containing news and information from a variety of sources and passes them on to a man sitting below her, writing with a quill on a pedestal sporting the representation of Mercury. From his flat nose and the scars from syphilis pockmarking his face, contemporaries might well have recognized the news writer Théophraste Renaudot, the trusted information manager of Cardinal Richelieu. At the extreme left, a pedlar is already on the lookout for susceptible customers. But the news is not quite ready yet. Three aristocratic men on the left appear to be eager to influence the news writer's copy. However, the person who is ideally positioned to hold sway over Renaudot is of

*Régime (1630–1788)* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2000), 9–308; Stéphane Haffémayer, *L'information dans la France du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle: La Gazette de Renaudot de 1647 à 1663* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002); Howard M. Solomon, *Public Welfare, Science and Propaganda in 17<sup>th</sup>-Century France: The Innovations of Théophraste Renaudot* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).

- 7 Philip P. Boucher, *France and the American Tropics to 1700: Tropics of Discontent?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 3; W. J. Eccles, *The French in North America, 1500–1783*, 3rd rev. ed. (Markham: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1998), 65.



Figure 6.1 Allegory of the Gazette, c.1631.  
Source: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

course Richelieu himself, recognizable only by virtue of momentarily taking off his political mask. On the right, some of Renaudot's correspondents are depicted. A nobleman on a horse and a soldier are the first to deliver what appear to be handwritten letters containing the newspaper's staple information to Lady Truth, a fair reflection of the importance of military events for the seventeenth-century press in Europe. Even closer to *La Vérité* is a young boy in the shadows – it is not immediately clear which category he is supposed to represent, perhaps the many anonymous sources that newspapers relied on. Female informants are conspicuously absent altogether, not deemed worthy perhaps to share with respectable newspaper readers what was often considered mere gossip.<sup>8</sup> On the extreme right, the composition is completed by what the text in the margins calls a Christian and a Turk and, most surprisingly perhaps, by a native American man. Barefoot and dressed only in feathers, he does not hold a letter, presumably because he does not know how to write. It is hence unclear if his perspective will make it into the pages of the *Gazette*. Yet his presence among Renaudot's sources is an emphatic reminder that news from far away, even from across the Atlantic Ocean, was a recurring feature in the official newspaper in France.<sup>9</sup>

8 Nadine Akkerman, *Invisible Agents: Women and Espionage in Seventeenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

9 Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes, "Pièce Allégorique de La Gazette", [1631]. See *Estampes relatives à l'Histoire de France léguée en 1863 à la Bibliothèque nationale per M. Michel Hemmin*, ed. Georges Duplessis. 5 vols. (Paris:

The *Gazette de France* was a carefully orchestrated enterprise from the very beginning. Established in May 1631, Renaudot's weekly newspaper appeared under two different titles. The *Nouvelles Ordinaires*, a small quarto of four pages, carried news originating north and west of Paris, the eight-page *Gazette* of the same day brought news from information hubs south and east of the French capital. Although this neat pattern shifted as the years went by, there was always a clear geographical division between the bulletins in the *Nouvelles Ordinaires* and the *Gazette*. From late 1631 onwards, Renaudot enjoyed a monopoly on serial news in France, despite vehement complaints from his erstwhile competitors who asserted that Renaudot "was not so much an author, as a mere translator of reports from Amsterdam, Antwerp, Brussels, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Zurich, Venice, Rome, and other places that arrive in Paris every week".<sup>10</sup> It is difficult to establish just how broadly in France this feeling about Renaudot's credentials was shared. With the steadfast support of Richelieu, however, Renaudot's news agency would thrive for more than two decades, regardless of his many critics. Operating four presses, which made him one of the largest printers in Paris, Renaudot probably produced around 1,200 copies of every issue. Thanks to its many licensed regional editions, in Rouen, Lyon, Bordeaux, and Avignon, the *Gazette* was quickly read throughout the country.<sup>11</sup> In the early 1640s its influence extended also beyond the borders of France, when, during the Catalan Revolt, issues were translated into Catalan and published in Barcelona.<sup>12</sup> The gazetteer's position at the court changed abruptly after the death of Richelieu and Louis XIII in 1642 and 1643 respectively. The new favourite, Jules Mazarin, hired Renaudot's nemesis Gabriel Naudé as his main communication officer. At the same time, however, Mazarin recognized the value of the *Gazette* as well, particularly by the time royal authority came under scrutiny during the Fronde (1648–53).<sup>13</sup>

Renaudot was more than just a news writer. Born a Protestant in Loudun in western France, he followed Richelieu to Paris and converted to Catholicism during the siege of La Rochelle in 1628. His *Bureau d'Adresse*,

Picard, 1877–1884), I, no. 2386. Solomon, *Public Welfare*, 14 also dates the engraving to 1631, the year Renaudot started publishing his weekly newspaper.

- 10 For the legal issues regarding the establishment of the monopoly, see Feyel, *L'Annonce et la Nouvelle*, 131–49, with the quotation on p. 137. On Renaudot's editorial strategies to safeguard his monopoly, see Jean-Pierre Vittu, "Les manipulations éditoriales des premières années de la *Gazette*", in *Les Gazettes Européennes de langue française (XVIIe - XVIIIe siècles)*, ed. Henri Duranton, Claude Labrosse, and Pierre Rézat (Saint-Étienne: Université de Saint-Étienne, 1992), 23–29.
- 11 Gilles Feyel, *La "Gazette" en province à travers ses réimpressions, 1631–1752* (Amsterdam: Holland University Press, 1982), viii–x.
- 12 Henry Ettinghausen, "Pellicer y la prensa de su tiempo", *Janus: Estudios sobre el siglo de oro* 1 (2012), 67.
- 13 Solomon, *Public Welfare*, 152–54; Stéphane Haffemayer, "Mazarin, Information and Communication during the Fronde (1648–1653)", *Media History* 22, no. 3/4 (2016): 386–400.

established the following year, was an employment agency *avant-la-lettre*, and developed into an important meeting place for newcomers as well as intellectuals. The connection between the newspaper editor and the government was a very intimate one. The court provided the gazetteer with royal decrees and other documents which Renaudot was expected to print *verbatim* in Paris and distribute across France in his regional editions.<sup>14</sup> In times of war, Richelieu relied on Renaudot to transmit an officially approved “French” version of events. Undesirable news for the court, evidently, had to be suppressed. Yet both the *Gazette* and the *Nouvelles Ordinaires* – as well as many of the *extraordinaires* that Renaudot published alongside his weekly issues – contained a lot of news that did not immediately affect the policies or the position of France under Louis XIII. This perhaps explains why Renaudot’s newspapers were devoured by readers, despite widespread recognition that they were propaganda tools of the government. As early as July 1633, the famous polymath and avid news reader Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, in Aix-en-Provence, wrote approvingly to his friend Pierre Gassendi in Dignes-Bains that “there is no news that the *Gazette* does not contain”.<sup>15</sup>

Reports on events in the Atlantic world, which featured regularly in both the *Gazette* and the *Nouvelles Ordinaires*, have not been studied in any depth. The American historian Howard Solomon’s short observation about news from the across the ocean in Renaudot’s newspapers is the most extensive assessment by any scholar to-date. Solomon writes:

News from the New World was steady, if not frequent. There were continuing reports of naval battles in “Fernambouc”, for example. These stories were often treated as *extraordinaires* and as fillers. [...] Most often, however, they appeared in the *Gazette* or *Nouvelles Ordinaires*. News of Nouvelle France appeared very infrequently, usually no more than a short statement of an arriving ship from Canada.<sup>16</sup>

At first glance, Solomon’s observations are correct. Arguably the most striking aspect of Renaudot’s Atlantic coverage is that the embryonic French settlements in North America and the Caribbean hardly featured in his newspaper. At the very beginning, in the early 1630s, there were about six or seven bulletins altogether about developments in Canada, with Renaudot effectively trying to lure would-be settlers to *La Nouvelle France* by presenting it as a land of milk and honey. In an *extraordinaire* from December 1634, he invited those who wanted

14 Feyel, *L’Annonce et la Nouvelle*, esp. 16–17, 131–32.

15 Peiresc to Gassendi, 31 July 1633, in Philippe Tamizey de Larroque, *Lettres de Peiresc aux Freres Dupuy*. 7 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1888–1898), IV, 334–35. On the readership of the *Gazette* during Renaudot’s lifetime, see Feyel, *La “Gazette” en province*, 96–98.

16 Solomon, *Public Welfare*, 157. Haffemayer, *L’Information dans la France*, 745, calls news from America “very rare”, but he focuses mainly on credit lines, leading to an underestimation of transatlantic bulletins.



*Figure 6.2* Engraved portrait of Théophraste Renaudot, 1644.  
Source: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

to move to “that good and fertile province of New France, alone or with their family” to come to his *Bureau d'Adresse* for assistance with transport and settlement – precisely the kind of proactive information management that Richelieu would have expected from the gazetteer.<sup>17</sup> That, however, was Renaudot’s last mention of New France for four-and-a-half years, when he published a short bulletin on the arrival of a young Indigenous representative from Canada at the court in Paris in June 1639.<sup>18</sup> Reports on the French Caribbean were equally rare. The principal exception here was an extensive bulletin in February 1638

17 *Extraordinaire*, 20 Dec 1634.

18 *Extraordinaire*, 1 June 1639, calls the envoy “un jeune homme Canadois fils du grand Capitaine de ce país-lá, ainsi nomment-ils leur Seigneur”. Solomon, *Public Welfare*, 151, mentions the death of a certain Pere Joseph, whose correspondence



concerning the activities of the *Compagnie des îles de l'Amérique* in Guadeloupe.<sup>19</sup> After initially describing French encounters with the local Caribs, labelled “savages” by Renaudot as soon as the cross-cultural relationship soured, this report, too, ended with a plea for more French settlers. This time, plainly, Renaudot did not tell the whole story. His tales of natural abundance obscured the fact that many of the initial party of colonists had died from disease and starvation. Evidently Richelieu had instructed him to rally support for the colony, with only modest success.<sup>20</sup> Caribbean communications in the *Gazette* briefly peaked in the early 1640s, but then rapidly became just as sporadic as news from New France.

### News, Geopolitical Distance, and the Emergence of Credibility

The main American storyline that attracted Renaudot’s interest, and that generated a substantial number of bulletins throughout his lifetime, was the war over northeast Brazil between forces of the Dutch West India Company and the Habsburg monarchy. It was by all accounts the major geopolitical conflict in the Atlantic world in the second quarter of the seventeenth century. The war in Brazil was essentially an overseas chapter of the Eighty Years’ War between the Dutch Republic and Spain (1568–1648), but it also intersected with the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48) and played an important role in newly emerging conflicts like the First Anglo-Dutch War (1652–54). Midway through, in 1640, the Portuguese Restoration completely changed the conflict’s geopolitical complexion. No longer were the Dutch fighting their arch-enemy Spain; instead, in Portugal, they were now facing a country itself locked in war with the Habsburgs. The States-General and the Bragança monarchy concluded a Ten Years’ Truce (1641–51), but far away from the corridors of European diplomacy, a planters’ revolt erupted against the Dutch colonial regime, tacitly supported by the monarchy in Lisbon. The guerrilla conflict reached its climax in 1648, when Luso-Brazilian forces narrowly defeated the Dutch near the village of Guararapes. As a result of all these twists and turns, the war in Pernambuco was one of the most heavily covered news stories in print media across Europe – a conflict in which everyone, directly or indirectly, seemed to have a stake.<sup>21</sup>

19 *Gazette*, 26 Feb. 1638. See Boucher, *France and the American Tropics*, 72–77.

20 On the difficult early years of the French settlement at Guadeloupe, and Renaudot’s propaganda, see Éric Roulet, *La Compagnie des îles de l'Amérique, 1635–1651: Une entreprise coloniale au XVIIe siècle* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2017), 400–01; Christian Schnakenbourg, “Note sur les origines de l’industrie sucrière en Guadeloupe au XVIIe siècle (1640–1670)”, *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer* 55 (1968): 267–315.

21 Michiel van Groesen, *Amsterdam’s Atlantic: Print Culture and the Making of Dutch Brazil* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); Wim Klooster, *The Dutch Moment: War, Trade, and Settlement in the Seventeenth-Century Atlantic World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).

When the war commenced in February 1630 with the Dutch invasion of Olinda and Recife, well-informed news readers in France immediately realized the bigger geopolitical implications of news from the Americas and were keen to hear more. Peiresc, in Aix, wrote to his friend Pierre Dupuy in Paris on 16 June that

after waiting for a long time without receiving any letters from you, I now received three messages at the same time, of 2 April, 10 and 20 May, accompanied by many wonderful curiosities, even the report from Pernambuco that the bulletins from Barcelona kept a secret for as long as they could.<sup>22</sup>

Two weeks earlier, Peiresc had learned of the Dutch invasion of Brazil for the first time according to his correspondence, a little more than three months after it had happened.<sup>23</sup> The Bourbon court, however, opted to monitor the conflict in the South Atlantic from a distance. The war erupted at a delicate moment in European diplomacy. The Spanish king Philip IV, on the advice of his aunt Isabella, governess of the Southern Netherlands, had just started secret peace talks with the Dutch rebels – a development that, if successful, could have a vast impact on the political equilibrium in Europe. Richelieu must have instantly recognized that Dutch aggression in Brazil would jeopardize a possible armistice, and this indeed turned out to be the case on two occasions in the early 1630s.<sup>24</sup>

Renaudot was aware of the conflict's geopolitical implications from the very start, which more or less coincided with the first publication of his weekly *Gazette* on 30 May 1631. His first bulletin from Brazil ("*De Fernambouc, le 12 Avril 1631*") appeared on 20 June of the same year, and already in the next few weeks several more bulletins would follow. As long as the government stayed on the fence with regard to Habsburg-Dutch hostilities in the Americas, the news writer was able to cover developments in Brazil without any obvious interference from Richelieu. A survey of Renaudot's bulletins demonstrates that between 1631 and 1640, when the West India Company was gradually expanding its influence in northeast Brazil at the expense of the Habsburgs, more than 71% of all Atlantic coverage in the *Gazette* originated from Brazil.<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to note that there is a marked upturn in the intensity of Renaudot's coverage after the Franco-Dutch alliance of 1635, when Richelieu finally broke Catholic ranks and joined the anti-Spanish bloc.

22 Peiresc to Dupuy, 16 June 1630, in Tamizey de Larroque, *Lettres de Peiresc*, II, 246. Barcelona was one of Peiresc's regular sources of information.

23 Peiresc to Dupuy, 3 June 1630, in Tamizey de Larroque, *Lettres de Peiresc*, II, 245.

24 Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic and the Hispanic World, 1606–1661* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 223–47. Despite the secretive nature of the truce talks, foreign media reported in detail about the importance of Brazil for the peace process, see Johannes Müller, "Globalizing the Thirty Years' War: Early German Newspapers and Their Geopolitical Perspective on the Atlantic World", *German History* 38, no. 4 (2020): 560–61.

25 The percentages in this paragraph are based on word counts.

In 1635, 1636, and 1637, 85%, 94%, and 94% of Renaudot's transoceanic reporting respectively came from Brazil, despite the fact that events south of the equator were by no means more newsworthy than in previous years. In spite of Richelieu's coalition with the Dutch, however, the nature of Renaudot's Atlantic coverage did not markedly change. In the next decade, when the Portuguese restoration dramatically changed Europe's political perspective on Brazil, the conflict retained its urgency in Renaudot's Parisian workshop. Not only were events in Pernambuco still responsible for a healthy 60% of the *Gazette's* Atlantic coverage, other major developments the newspaper covered with interest, such as the Dutch takeover (1641) and Portuguese recapture (1648) of Angola, were intimately connected to the main storyline from Brazil. Only after the defeat of Dutch forces in 1648 did the narrative gradually disappear from the *Gazette*. In the early 1650s Renaudot shifted his Atlantic interest towards English colonial exploits, first in Virginia and later in the Caribbean.

When we compare Renaudot's coverage of the war in Brazil with coverage in the newspapers in Amsterdam and on the Iberian peninsula, it is sobering to discover that reporting in the *Gazette* was infinitely more balanced than in the Dutch Republic, Spain or Portugal. This is already clear when we focus on the date and credit lines above Renaudot's Atlantic bulletins. In the early stages of the conflict, when the West India Company was in the ascendancy, the preeminence of the Amsterdam newspapers became visible in the *Gazette's* credit lines, but Renaudot made a conscious effort to provide French readers with a complete narrative. In 1632, thirteen reports on Atlantic developments from Amsterdam were counterbalanced by nine American bulletins from Madrid. Given the contrast between the open "discussion culture" in the United Provinces and the more secretive information market south of the Pyrenees, this was no mean feat for a news writer situated in Paris.<sup>26</sup> As the conflict in Brazil continued in the 1630s and into the 1640s, Renaudot attempted and often succeeded in establishing a numerical balance in his reporting, with as many bulletins originating from Madrid or Lisbon every year as he had received from Amsterdam. If Renaudot's readers did indeed read every report, and made an effort similar to that of the gazetteer, they could get a relatively balanced idea of what was going on across the ocean. The different "national" media, after all, which were in all likelihood the sources of most of Renaudot's bulletins, usually focused on different Atlantic

26 On the discussion culture in the Dutch Republic, see Willem Frijhoff and Marijke Spies, *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective: 1650, Hard-Won Unity* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2004), 220–25. On news culture in Habsburg Spain under Philip IV, see Javier Díaz Noci, "La circulación de noticias en la España del Barroco", in *La aparición del periodismo en Europa: Comunicación y propaganda en el Barroco*, ed. Carmen Espejo Cala and Roger Chartier (Madrid: Pons, 2012), 207–43. On news from the Americas in seventeenth-century Spain specifically, see Arthur Weststeijn, "Empire in Fragments: Transatlantic News and Print Media in the Iberian World, c. 1600–40", *Renaissance Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (2021): 528–70.

storylines – or presented different perspectives on the same storyline, displaying as they did a preference for good news or good news likely to arrive in the near future. Hence the Amsterdam reports in Renaudot's newspapers followed the narrative of Dutch progress in Brazil, whereas the bulletins from Madrid covered stories about how the Spanish monarchy continued to focus on protecting the treasure fleet that was vital for their war effort in Europe.

Renaudot added to the impression of balanced coverage by writing monthly commentaries in which he summarized recent developments, merging the perspectives from the two warring parties into a survey of the state of affairs in the Atlantic world that readers could use as a platform to interpret fresh information that was likely to follow. "Of the three famous bays of Brazil, that is Paraiba, All Saints, and Pernambuco", he commenced his Atlantic digest in February 1632,

the Dutch are indisputably masters of the latter, from where they continue to resist the Portuguese and the Brazilian *naturels*: by all accounts with little hope of arranging a peace. For this reason they begin to launch every military action they can think of from there, and in response, the Spaniards have equipped a fleet of 60 sails in all their ports, both for retaking this bay from the Dutch if they can, and for serving as protection for the treasure fleet which they expect to arrive in May.<sup>27</sup>

Unlike other early modern newspapers, the *Gazette* thus combined the latest news with a sense of reflection – an editorial strategy that may have served to enhance Renaudot's credibility. His balanced judgement as an editor, facilitated by the Bourbon monarchy's nominal neutrality in this Atlantic conflict, then, meant that European readers who were interested in having a complete picture of the situation in Brazil were better off reading Renaudot's *Gazette* than, for example, the cherished newspapers from Amsterdam which were intrinsically more biased in their Atlantic coverage. Neutrality, in other words, as a metaphorical or geopolitical form of distance, could lead to a more credible form of news reporting, especially when a prolonged conflict like the war in Brazil ultimately did provide readers with the means to verify earlier coverage. Although this may perhaps seem all too apparent – the first casualty when war comes is truth, after all – the tendency of scholars in Atlantic history and the history of news to study the early modern era along imperial and linguistic lines respectively has obscured the interpretative benefits of a transnational approach for too long, despite concerted rhetoric to the contrary.

### **News, Geographical Distance, and the Problem of Credibility**

Alongside geopolitical or political distance, there was of course also the pressing problem of geographical distance, which led to delay and, more generally, unpredictability over when fresh information would arrive. The absence of

<sup>27</sup> *Gazette*, 4 Feb. 1632.

confirmation in turn could lead to anxiety among early modern readers about the credibility of news reports. Another striking element of Renaudot's coverage of events across the Atlantic Ocean is that he was the only news writer in seventeenth-century Europe who explicitly, and repeatedly, mentioned the related problems of distance and delay that were inherent to transatlantic news. At times this even led him to question the news value of his own reports. In February 1638, for example, he explained that he used news from the Americas to "fill the void of the winter season", when there was little or no news from European battlefields.<sup>28</sup> In July 1642, he wrote that "developments in the "other world" (*l'autre monde*) do not allow for them being news in this one here, because they are not even from this month".<sup>29</sup> A related concern, for Renaudot and other newspaper editors alike, was the infrequent arrival of Atlantic news, but again the Parisian news writer was the only one to mention this to his readers: "We rarely receive extensive news from those faraway climes", he wrote apologetically in March 1648, "even though their affairs are nevertheless of some consequence".<sup>30</sup>

In an *extraordinaire* of the same day, Renaudot went even further, emphasizing France's (and hence his own) nonalignment in the Luso-Dutch conflict over Brazil, before once again reflecting on the problems that he faced regarding the delay of information:

I take no part in their differences, France having hitherto been neutral, although it has tried, and still does, to bring them to agreement and common sense: I do not contribute anything here that is my own other than my quill, which for you describes the news I have recently received from those coasts, more or less fresh given the distance of those places.<sup>31</sup>

Six months later, he explained that "the remoteness of the New World, & the inconstancy of the sea do not allow for news bulletins to arrive as regularly as from other places, I am giving you as much as I have: Their rarity also makes me hope that they will be more agreeable to you".<sup>32</sup> In this way, alluding to the perceived exotic character of the Americas, Renaudot not only used geographical distance as a rhetorical ploy to turn the infrequency of bulletins from the Atlantic world into a reason to publish transoceanic news extensively when it did arrive, and to draw attention to it, but he also systematically thematized the distance between Pernambuco and Paris as an

28 *Gazette*, 26 Feb. 1638.

29 *Gazette*, 15 July 1642.

30 *Gazette*, 20 Mar 1648.

31 *Extraordinaire*, 20 Mar 1648. France actively mediated between the warring parties, and gradually came to lean towards the Portuguese viewpoint that peace would be beneficial for all parties, not least France. See Evaldo Cabral de Mello, *De Braziliaanse affaire: Portugal, de Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden en Noord-Oost Brazilië, 1641–1669* (Zutphen: Walburg, 2005), 64–68.

32 *Extraordinaire*, 3 Sept 1648, 1185.

instrument to emphasize to readers how hard he worked to bring them news of the latest developments. This – the simple insistence on editorial diligence – was one of the most basic strategies of constructing credibility in European print culture, and once again distance, in this case of the geographical kind, provided Renaudot with the perfect rhetorical toolkit.

The British scholar Neil Kenny has argued that early modern newspapers were composite texts, which by default contained a multiplicity of voices.<sup>33</sup> Renaudot's other strategy of attaining credibility was to use this idiosyncratic element of the genre in his favour by allowing eyewitnesses to speak in the *Gazette*. In an Atlantic context, this implied that he would devote column inches not only to the voices of European military commanders, but also to those of enslaved Africans and native Americans, more or less as the engraving of Lady Truth from the early 1630s suggested. Once again, he did this ever so explicitly. In his extensive *extraordinaire* of September 1648, which reported on the decisive victory of Portuguese troops in Brazil, he started off his news report by reminding readers of previous bulletins by stating that:

You have already heard talk about a battle between the Portuguese rebels and the Dutch before Recife. But because the relation that has reached us has been imperfect, I will here give you the various dispositions and alignments, which explain to you the motives behind the manoeuvres and the state of affairs in that land.<sup>34</sup>

Once again Renaudot reflected on the quality of news, in this case its “imperfect” nature, and offered to improve its credibility with a careful editorial adjustment. This was the opening segment of an extended bulletin that comprised four letters, representing as many different viewpoints on the war in Pernambuco. The structure of the report was chronological, going back in time to the weeks before the decisive battle of Guararapes. The first letter, written to rebellious groups in the Brazilian interior fifteen days before the military encounter, represented the perspective of the Dutch colonial regime. The letter highlighted “enormous excesses that have been committed against our [Dutch] nation during the uprising in Pernambuco”, despite the enduring attempts of the councillors in Recife, the directors of the West India Company in Amsterdam, and the States-General in The Hague to do what was best for all the inhabitants of the captaincy. This included not only the sending of auxiliary troops to Brazil, but also the instruction to “exercise

33 Neil Kenny, “La France, si curieuse de nouveautez: Le concept composite de ‘curiosité’ aux débuts de la presse périodique en France (1631–1633)”, in “*D’une fantastique bigarrure*”: *Le texte composite à la Renaissance*, ed. Jean-Raymond Fanlo (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000), 289. See also Will Slauter, “The Paragraph as Information Technology: How News Traveled in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World”, *Annales HSS* 67, no. 2 (2012): 253–78.

34 *Extraordinaire*, 3 Sept 1648, 1185, with references to reports on the war in *extraordinaires* from 20 March and 3 June 1648.

clemency one last time, to avoid the spilling of blood". In order to do so, the letter claimed, the councillors issued a pardon to the Portuguese sugar planters and to everyone who had joined their revolt. If the rebels did not accept this offer within ten days, however, the Dutch would do all in their power (and that of their indigenous allies) to force them into obedience.<sup>35</sup>

The letter was signed by the High Council of Recife and dated 2 April 1648, thus invoking the authority of regular (government) correspondence that readers of Renaudot's newspaper were familiar with. Throughout the lengthy *extraordinaire*, Renaudot would continue to use direct speech to give additional credibility to his report. After concluding the first letter representing the perspective of the Dutch administrators in Recife, Renaudot placed himself in the foreground by connecting this first letter to the other three. Just how exactly the gazetteer had obtained the letters is unclear, but he certainly made the most of the information that, given its generally pro-Bragança tone, had probably reached him from Lisbon. Renaudot explained that the Portuguese rebels did not want to cede anything to the Dutch, either by the pen or by the sword, and that the written warning had resulted in three different responses, also in the form of public letters. The first one was written by Henrique Dias, *Gouverneur des Negres*, who had joined the revolt against the West India Company, the second by Filipe Camarão, captain-general of the indigenous Potiguar forces who also fought on the side of the Portuguese, and finally the third by André Vidal de Negreiros and João Fernandes Vieira, the commanders of the colonial army. Together they represented the *Gazette de France's* "hybridized" perspective of the Portuguese rebels, to echo Serge Gruzinski, but with distinctive ethnic voices.<sup>36</sup>

Henrique Dias must have been one of the first Americans of African descent to go on record in a European newspaper. He was probably a former slave, who had gained recognition for his forceful resistance against the Dutch takeover of Pernambuco in the 1630s. He received several royal favours, as well as an appointment as governor of a regiment of black men in the service of the Habsburg monarchy, a position that he retained under João IV after the Portuguese Restoration.<sup>37</sup> His regiment played an important role in the narrow victory at Guararapes, which explains why Renaudot included his perspective in his *extraordinaire*. Dias's letter was much more concise than the Dutch one preceding it. It is unclear if, and to what extent, the letter's contents were edited – by the Portuguese, by Renaudot or by both – but from the text Dias came across as a raucous fighter, opening his letter with the observation that "With weapons in hand, letters like the ones your Lordships [the Dutch] have sent to us are no longer required". This observation was followed

35 Ibid., 1186.

36 Serge Gruzinski, *The Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 31.

37 Hebe Mattos, "'Black Troops' and Hierarchies of Color in the Portuguese Atlantic World: The Case of Henrique Dias and His Black Regiment", *Luso-Brazilian Review* 45, no. 1 (2008): 6–29.

by several implicit and explicit threats aimed at the Dutch councillors. At one point, Dias contrasted the lives of his own soldiers “who as you know are not rich, and who care not so much about dying” with the lives of the Dutch “about whom I am not so sure once they leave their fortresses”. Dias concluded his letter by reminding the Dutch of their “irreverent attack on the images of God and the Saints at the church of Igarapu, which justifiably leads me to conclude that those who cannot live in peace with man, effectively wage war against God himself”.<sup>38</sup> The invocation of iconoclasm in Brazil must have instilled some sympathy among Renaudot’s mainly Catholic readership for the former slave’s bellicose rhetoric.

Next up was the second man whose agency was probably not evident for readers of Renaudot’s *extraordinaire*, the Potiguar leader Filipe Camarão. Like Dias, Camarão had fought on the side of the Portuguese from the very beginning. His troops had suffered heavy defeats at the hands of the Dutch in the early 1630s, but despite these losses he had continued his resistance. When the revolt broke out, the Potiguars once again sided with the Portuguese.<sup>39</sup> The letter appears to have served a similar purpose as the one by Dias. Camarão explained that he did not care for the rhetoric of the Dutch, that he wanted to fight, and that “apart from a soldier’s valour and courage, I am driven forward strongly by my Christian zeal. It is this zeal”, he continued, “that obliges me to defeat you”, once again citing the misdeeds the Dutch had done to “the images of God and the Saints in the churches”.<sup>40</sup> Renaudot neglected to inform his readers about Camarão’s death in the final stages of the battle that ensued; perhaps he simply did not (or not yet) know.<sup>41</sup> In comparison to his assessment in 1638 of the inhabitants of Guadeloupe as treacherous “savages”, however, the transcription of the Potiguar leader’s letter in his *extraordinaire* ten years later represented a significantly different approach to the potential geopolitical influence of indigenous Americans. The simple fact that the Caribs at Guadeloupe had stood in the way of French interests whereas the Potiguars in Pernambuco took up arms against the Dutch may of course go a long way towards explaining this discrepancy.

The final say in Renaudot’s *extraordinaire* was reserved for the Portuguese commanders André Vidal and João Fernandes Vieira. The two men had helped to initiate the war against the Dutch in 1645, and would see it through to the end eight-and-a-half years later.<sup>42</sup> Their letter was as long as the previous three combined, and that Renaudot printed it last reflected not only the chronology of writing but also the gazetteer’s desire for a rhetorical climax. No

38 *Extraordinaire*, 3 Sept 1648, 1187–88.

39 Mark Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms, Partners in Trade: Dutch-Indigenous Alliances in the Atlantic World* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 140–41, 150–55, 175–78.

40 *Extraordinaire*, 3 Sept 1648, 1188–89.

41 Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms*, 176–78.

42 On Vieira’s duplicity, his leadership of the revolt, and his anti-Dutch rhetoric, see Klooster, *The Dutch Moment*, 78; Cabral de Mello, *De Braziliaanse affaire*, 52–55. On Vidal’s often merciless conduct, see Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms*, 174.



matter how brave and how zealous the black and native American regiments might have been, Renaudot and his French readers probably regarded their contribution as pointless without the military leadership of the Portuguese. It is significant in this context that the final letter of the four offered little new information, and that many of the claims made by Vidal and Vieira echoed those of Dias and Camarão, thus adding credence to the previous two testimonies. The cruelties performed by Dutch soldiers in Brazil, the iconoclastic campaigns in Igarauçu and elsewhere, and the eagerness to end the oppression by going to war all featured again. “Our forces are so great”, the two commanders wrote, “that there is no need to turn ourselves into the slaves of those we want to vanquish very soon”, and they warned the Dutch councillors that they would employ “the same rigours that your Lordships would perform onto us”.<sup>43</sup>

After setting out the different perspectives on the eve of the battle – the Dutch on one side, the Afro-Brazilians, Potiguars, and Portuguese on the other – Renaudot proceeded by recounting how the military encounter had unfolded, summarizing events from December 1647 to May 1648 when news of the battle’s outcome boarded from the Americas for Europe. When describing the arrival of Dutch troops in Recife in March, after a long transatlantic voyage which had left many dead, he reminded his readers of the hardships Europeans had to undergo in the Americas. “When the soldiers disembarked they stayed in Recife for a month to freshen up, if that is what you would call drinking half-salted water, because there is nothing else” – a brutally honest description of Dutch Brazil that was far removed from earlier promotional stories in the *Gazette* about the French Caribbean. The focus of the bulletin lay on events in April, when the battle took place. Renaudot, probably following Portuguese reports, described the numerical imbalance on the eve of the battle, with 6,000 men on the Dutch side against 2,000 Portuguese who were “resolute either to die on the spot or to leave triumphantly”.<sup>44</sup>

In Renaudot’s description of the battle, all four letter writers of the first section of the *extraordinaire* featured. The military commander on the Dutch side, the German Sigismund von Schoppe, survived despite receiving musket wounds to the head and the knee. On the Portuguese side, André Vidal survived a scare too, with his horse being killed by a cannonball. Henrique Dias and Filipe Camarão, in the words of Renaudot, “did everything that could be expected because of their courage, ceding to no-one”. Reading the bulletin against the grain reveals occasional yet ever so obvious European prejudices against Dias in particular, whose troops behaved particularly mercilessly, “pardonning not even the women”. Later on in the heat of battle, Dias’s soldiers “had left their position in battle”, perhaps leaving readers with the idea that cross-cultural alliances were not always reliable after all.<sup>45</sup> The *extraordinaire* on developments at Guararapes was the longest single text on the

43 *Extraordinaire*, 3 Sept 1648, 1189–92.

44 *Ibid.*, 1193.

45 *Ibid.*, 1195.

Atlantic world to appear in the *Gazette* during Renaudot's lifetime. Like so many lengthy transoceanic bulletins at the end of a news cycle, it had climactic qualities, but it also highlighted how authors and readers shared a responsibility for making sense of what happened beyond the horizon and thus could not be checked. Renaudot used an extensive bulletin containing a multiplicity of voices as a strategy to pass on part of the problem of credibility to his readers, who were left with four different accounts and had to establish which version they, as knowledgeable readers of news from distant shores, trusted the most.

## Conclusion

French historians of the early modern press have collectively criticized Théophraste Renaudot for being a mere mouthpiece of the Bourbon court in the 1630s and early 1640s. It has resulted in an image of Renaudot as arguably the most compliant news writer of early modern Europe. This may well be very true when we look at his coverage of developments that immediately affected Richelieu's domestic agenda or foreign policy, but it is not the whole story. In this chapter I have used the case of colonial warfare in Brazil to demonstrate that both political and geographical distance brought considerable improvement to the quality of the *Gazette's* reporting. Such bulletins probably enhanced Renaudot's credibility among contemporaries, which in turn explains why so many people continued to read and (presumably) rate his newspaper. Renaudot's position of neutrality in the war over Brazil between the Dutch West India Company and the Habsburg monarchy – and later the restored Bragança monarchy in Lisbon – meant that his coverage of the war was infinitely more balanced than reporting in Amsterdam, Madrid or Lisbon. Renaudot made a considerable effort to numerically balance bulletins from the Dutch Republic with reports from the Iberian Peninsula, and used the limited paratextual space he had created for himself in the *Gazette* to explain the problem of geographical distance to his customers, and use it to his advantage rhetorically. Distance, in other words, in the context of Renaudot's role as the mouthpiece of Richelieu, served as a form of liberation. It facilitated credibility – and reveals what a dedicated news writer Renaudot could be. Presenting his efforts to provide information in a favourable light, then, as was done in the image of *La Vérité*, makes sense. When examining his transatlantic reports in the 1630s and 1640s, Lady Truth would have been proud.

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# 7 The Many Lives of African–European Treaties

*Christina Brauner*

On 2 January 1671, a French ship arrived on the Gold Coast (today's Ghana), mooring at the shores of the “kingdom” of Eguafó.<sup>1</sup> What followed was an encounter on the fringes of the European diplomatic world, at least if we follow the journal of *capitaine* Louis de Hally: A French delegation went ashore, greetings and ceremonial courtesies were exchanged, food and drinks shared, gun salutes fired, and music played. Finally, everyone was assembled in the courtyard of the town governor's house and the Eguafó brought out a written document, a treaty made by “one called Ventety” (“un nommé Ventety”).<sup>2</sup> It referred to an agreement concluded with an earlier French expedition headed by a certain Gerard van Tets in 1667.<sup>3</sup> Writing in 1671, *capitaine* De Hally not only got the name slightly wrong but seems to have been confronted with the treaty itself for the first time – this, at least, is the impression his journal conveys.

- 1 For an analysis of concepts such as “kingdom” or “republic” used to describe African polities in early modern European sources, see Christina Brauner, *Kompanien, Könige and caboceers. Interkulturelle Diplomatie an Gold- und Sklavenküste, 17.–18. Jahrhundert* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2015), 83–162; cf. also Herman Bennett, *African Kings and Black Slaves: Sovereignty and Dispossession in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), esp. 1–7, 32–51.
- 2 Gérard Chouin, ed., *Colbert et la Guinée: Le voyage en Guinée de Louis de Hally et Louis Ancelin de Gëmozac (1670–1671)* (Saint-Maur-des-Fossés: Sépia, 2011), 61–62. On the seventeenth-century Eguafó, see Gérard Chouin, *Eguafó: un royaume africain “au coeur français” (1637–1688): Mutations socio-économiques et politique européenne d'un État de la Côte de l'Or (Ghana) au XVIIe siècles* (Paris: Afrera Éditions, 1998); Christopher DeCorse and Sam Spiers, “A Tale of Two Polities: Socio-Political Transformation on the Gold Coast in the Atlantic World”, *Australasian Historical Archaeology* 27 (2009): 29–42; Sam Spiers, “The Eguafó Polity. Between the Traders and Raiders”, in *Power and Landscape in Atlantic West Africa: Archaeological Perspectives*, ed. Akinwumi Ogundiran and J. Cameron Monroe, 115–41 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- 3 Treaty between the CIO and Amossy, “king” of Eguafó, 15 March 1667, Archives d'Outre-Mer (hereafter ANOM), Aix-en-Provence, C6/27bis. On the earlier expedition, see Nize Isabel de Moraes and Guy Thilmans, “Villault de Bellefond sur la côte occidentale d'Afrique: Les deux premières campagnes de l'Europe (1666–1671)”, *Bulletin de l'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (BIFAN)*, Série B 38, no. 2 (1976), esp. 291ff.

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The 1667 treaty established a permanent alliance between the “King” of Eguafó and the French *Compagnie des Indes Occidentales* (CIO). It also involved a transfer of land and gave the French access to the local gold mines, in exchange for a certain sum of money and the promise, on the part of the French, to re-introduce regular trade and, most importantly, establish a factory. The French alliance was part of the Eguafó strategy to oppose Dutch claims to monopoly.<sup>4</sup> The Dutch *West-Indische Compagnie* (WIC), with its regional headquarters in the neighbouring town of Elmina, had earlier attempted to obtain exclusive settlement rights in Eguafó, equally by means of a treaty. Dating from 1641, this treaty with the Dutch is the first written agreement with a ruler of Eguafó or at least the oldest one preserved in a European archive.<sup>5</sup> Treaty-making, thus, was part and parcel of a cross-cultural diplomatic practice in a complex political landscape, a landscape that was characterized by increasingly entangled conflicts with different and changing coalitions between different European and African parties.<sup>6</sup>

The encounter in Eguafó in January 1671 was obviously no “first encounter”, as stories of ships arriving at seemingly exotic shores may easily suggest. It took place in a region which could look back on two centuries of cross-cultural interaction: a world of trade, diplomacy, and occasional missionary ventures, a world in which the European presence was limited to the coast and a few strongholds and weather-battered houses, dependent on local hosts and landlords for food, trade, and protection, a world of slavery as well as courtly encounters.<sup>7</sup> The story runs counter, to an extent, to still widespread stereotypes of African–European relations, with African elites using treaties for their own political agenda in the face of French information

4 Chouin, *Eguafó*, 13.

5 Only a copy of the treaty has been preserved. It includes a comment by the scribe or compiler that the original this copy was made from had been found without date and unsigned; Nationaal Archief, The Hague (hereafter NA), NBKG 222, 44–45. So far, I have located eight treaties concluded between the Dutch and the Eguafó until 1704. The third European company active in the region, the English Royal African Company, also entered into written agreements with the “Kingdom”. None of these Anglo-Eguafó treaties, however, have been preserved, so we can only rely on references in the Company’s local correspondence. See, for instance, the account by William Cross, 8 December 1686, in *The English in West Africa: The Local Correspondence of the Royal African Company of England, 1681–1699* (Fontes Historiae Africae, N.S.), 3 vols., ed. Robin Law (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998–2007) II, no. 206, 97–98.

6 With regard to Eguafó, such an entanglement of conflicts can be observed above all in the case of the so-called “Komenda Wars”. See the lucid study by Robin Law, “The Komenda Wars, 1694–1700: A Revised Narrative”, *History in Africa* 34 (2007): 133–68.

7 For a recent synthesis see Toby Green, *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019); and the earlier yet still important study by Kwame Yeboa Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600–1720: A Study of the African Reaction to European Trade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

mismanagement.<sup>8</sup> It also demonstrates that promises by treaties did not necessarily come true. At the same time, it shows that both Africans and Europeans nonetheless used them and believed in them as means to their respective ends. When De Hally and his men appeared on the scene in 1671, four years had passed since the conclusion of the French–Eguafo treaty – and nothing had happened. This seems to have been precisely the reason why the Eguafo produced their copy of the document during a public gathering. They used it as a reminder of the earlier French promise and demanded that De Hally would reconfirm the agreement – which he did by signing the treaty once more.<sup>9</sup>

The fate of the re-signed treaty is unknown. Maybe it was among the documents or “tittres” reportedly destroyed in a local war during the 1680s.<sup>10</sup> What remains today is a copy of the French–Eguafo treaty which has been located in the French *Archives d’Outre-Mer* in Aix-en-Provence. This document is not the French original with the parties’ signatures but a copy of a copy confirmed by Pieter Padthuijzen, an Amsterdam notary who specialized in long-distance trade and was often working for the city’s Sephardic community.<sup>11</sup> At the time when he copied and confirmed the Eguafo treaty, Padthuijzen was busy drawing up and validating several legal documents relating to the conflict that broke out on the French expedition’s return to Europe (or, more precisely, to Amsterdam) in August 1667. Revolving around trading rights in West Africa, it would soon come to reach the States-General, the ambassadors of both countries, and the French court.<sup>12</sup> In these debates, a copy of the Eguafo treaty could come in

8 There is also evidence of contemporary complaints that African–European treaties could not be found when, in 1699, the archives of the *Secretariat d’État de la Marine* were re-ordered and relocated to a depot at the *Place des Victoires*. See e. g. Pierre Clairambault to [Pontchartrain], 4 September 1699, Archives Nationales, Paris (AN), Fonds de la Marine, B8/1, fol. 15r–16r. This “confusion” might be caused by the unclear division of record-keeping labour between the newly installed *Secretariat d’État de la Marine* and the respective companies responsible for treaty-making on the ground. See Etienne Taillemite, “Les Archives et les archivistes de la Marine des origines à 1870”, *Bibliothèque de l’École des chartes* 127 (1969): 27–86.

9 Chouin, *Colbert*, 61–62.

10 Mémoire du Sieur du Casse, ANOM, DFC, XVI, Mémoires, no. 4, 21–22.

11 Treaty between the CIO and Amossy, “king” of Eguafo, 15 March 1667, ANOM, C6/27bis. Given Padthuijzen’s connection to the Luso-Jewish merchant community, we may assume that he was also capable to procure translations from the Portuguese.

12 I could not find any trace of the treaty in Padthuijzen’s registers. For documents referring to the French expedition and its conflict with the WIC and Dutch authorities, see e.g., the attestation over the insinuation of a protest by Nicholas Villault de Bellefond against the WIC, 26 Dec 1667, Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Notarieel Archief, Pieter Padthuijzen, 2896A, 719–21. For an outline of the conflict, see de Moraes and Thilmans, “Villault de Bellefond”: 257–99.

handy, not only to bolster French claims but also to question Dutch pre-  
 tence at monopoly.

While the encounter in Eguafó is a noteworthy one, to be sure, it is not  
 unique: it is one episode in a longer history of treaty-making and treaty-using  
 in Eguafó and in early modern West Africa in general. Above all, it hints at  
 what I suggest might be called the many lives of African–European treaties:  
 situated at the intersection of cross-cultural translation and colonial discourse,  
 they could partake in negotiations of power relations both within the contact  
 zone and in the metropolis. Not least, the story from Eguafó demonstrates  
 that the problem of credibility applies to treaties in a twofold sense: on the  
 one hand, treaties are used as evidence to establish legal claims; they are part  
 of the colonial archive, both in a literal and a metaphorical sense. On the  
 other hand, treaties are performative acts of contracting trust in a specific site,  
 tied to mutual assumptions if not of truthfulness, at least of a certain reli-  
 ability between the parties involved – albeit not necessarily successful ones.

The wide variety of topics and regulations covered by respective treaties  
 speaks to the different contexts in which treaty-making could occur. Treaty-  
 making was by no means limited to “high diplomacy” of war and peace but  
 could concern various issues and problems that life in the contact zone  
 brought about: military alliances and mutual assistance, trading rights, trans-  
 fer of land and rights of sovereignty, fishing rights and toll regulations, peace  
 settlements, obligatory “gifts” or “prestations” and even questions of guilt  
 and punishment for very specific crimes. The earliest surviving treaty involv-  
 ing the kingdom of Eguafó, concluded with Dutch *directeur-generaal* Jacob  
 Ruychaver in 1641, for instance involved an assertion of exclusive settlement  
 rights, the fixation of regular “presents” or “customs” for the Eguafó elites  
 and the promise on the part of the Dutch not to meddle with the Eguafó’s  
 conflict with the neighbouring polities of Adom and Kormantin. Further-  
 more, the treaty undertook to settle a specific case of debt and regulated a  
 conflict that had broken out between Elmina slaves and the Eguafó inhabi-  
 tants, forbidding the practice of *panyarring* or *panjaeren*, that is seizing people  
 or goods as “pawns” for debts or crimes committed (from Portuguese *pen-  
 horár*) – a common practice on the coast, employed both by European and  
 African actors against both European and African actors.<sup>13</sup> Such a mixture of  
 different topics and different levels of normative ordering is typical for treaty-  
 making on the early modern Gold Coast – and it is maybe rather with regard  
 to the more mundane regulations that treaties could actually assume some-  
 thing like practical efficacy for everyday life on the coast. The sweeping  
 assertion of exclusive settlement rights, by contrast, usually did not. After all,  
 the French treaty of 1667 and the establishment of an English trading post

13 See Brauner, *Kompanien*, 519–33. As *panyarring* is based on notions of “collec-  
 tive accountability” (“to panyar someone/something on someone’s head” is the  
 local expression), its study can provide insights in how actors conceptualized  
 groups and belonging.



during the 1670s both occurred in direct contravention to the Dutch-Eguafo treaty and its assertion of such rights.<sup>14</sup>

Cross-cultural diplomacy in general, particularly in the wake of what is usually referred to as “European expansion” since the fifteenth century, has increasingly drawn interdisciplinary attention.<sup>15</sup> Work on Sub-Saharan Africa within this context, though, has long remained scarce but, more recently, the number of studies has started to grow.<sup>16</sup> Equally, treaty-making in contact zones has increasingly come into the focus of scholarship: Numerous studies have paved the way to a more nuanced understanding of the role of international law in the context of empire, colonialism, and cross-cultural interaction.<sup>17</sup>

Still, the debate on treaties has long been caught in a kind of stalemate, revolving around the question of whether treaties were either instruments of empire or expressions of indigenous agency. This stalemate is, not least, shaped by the divergent examples different scholars use as paradigmatic: taking issue with Saliha Belmessous’s understanding of treaties as “alternatives to conquest and war”, Martine van Ittersum, for instance, has emphasized “treaty-making” itself was intertwined with warfare and expansion. She discusses the case of the Banda Islands as an appalling example of this “toxic combination”.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, warfare and treaty-making are certainly

- 14 Treaty between the WIC and the “king” of Eguafo, 1641, NA, NBKG 222, 44–45.
- 15 See, for example, Nadine Amsler, Henrietta Harrison, and Christian Windler, ed. “Transformations of Intercultural Diplomacies: Comparative Views on Asia and Europe (1700 to 1850)”. Special Issue of the *International History Review* 41, no. 5 (2019): 941–1107; Zoltan Biedermann, Anne Gerritsen, and Giorgio Riello, ed., *Global Gifts: The Material Culture of Diplomacy in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
- 16 See, for instance, Rémi Dewièrè, “‘Ismaël pria Osman de luy donner quelques Chrestiens’: Gift Exchanges and Economic Reciprocity in Trans-Saharan Diplomacy (Sixteenth–Seventeenth Centuries)”, *Diplomatica* 2, no. 2 (2020): 223–47 and Verena Krebs, *Medieval Ethiopian Kingship, Craft and Diplomacy with Latin Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).
- 17 See e.g. Saliha Belmessous, “The Paradox of an Empire by Treaty”, in *Empire by Treaty: Negotiating European Expansion, 1600–1900*, ed. Saliha Belmessous (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1–18; Saliha Belmessous ed., *Native Claims: Indigenous Law against Empire, 1500–1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Jeffrey Glover, *Paper Sovereigns: Anglo-Native Treaties and the Law of Nations, 1604–1664* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford, *Rage for Order: The British Empire and the Origins of International Law, 1800–1850* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2017); Edward Keene, “The Treaty-Making Revolution of the Nineteenth Century”, *The International History Review* 34, no. 3 (2012): 475–500; Jörg Fisch, *Die europäische Expansion und das Völkerrecht. Die Auseinandersetzungen um den Status der überseeischen Gebiete vom 15. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1984).
- 18 See Martine van Ittersum, “Empire by Treaty? The Role of Written Documents in European Overseas Expansion, 1500–1800”, In *The Dutch and English East India Companies: Diplomacy, Trade and Violence in Early Modern Asia*, ed. Adam Clulow and Tristan Mostert, 153–78 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), quotations at 156 and 161.

no alternatives. However, treaty-making takes place under different conditions. In order to avoid presupposing asymmetries in the first place as conferred, for instance, by the term “colonial treaty”, we need to account for the unevenness of power relations in different early modern places and the varying limits of European claims. Comparative studies, attending to specific contexts and respective contemporary legal and political understandings, could help to gain a more comprehensive view here.<sup>19</sup>

This chapter focuses on treaties concluded between European trading companies and rulers and elites in coastal West Africa. It attempts to take their “many lives” seriously and situate them between the contact zone and the colonial archive. I suggest that this can best be achieved by analysing treaty practices, discussing both the making of treaties and their *Wirkungsgeschichte* (that is, approximately, their reception history). Such a procedure requires a careful consideration of the different ways and forms in which such treaties manifested themselves: as material objects, connected to ritualized practices of treaty-making and to ongoing demonstrative usages, as texts with a certain history of interpretation and transmission, and as “mere” references in legal posturing.

The first part of this chapter takes the material record of African–European treaties today as a vantage point to explore treaties in the colonial archive. It demonstrates how the record is shaped by historical usages and analyses practices of transmission and copying. The second part examines treaty practices within the contact zone. By focusing, above all, on signing and oath-taking as procedures of authorization, I discuss the role of translation in establishing trust in cross-cultural interaction. In doing this, I mainly draw on material from the archives of the Dutch and French trading companies.

### **Treaties as Objects of Knowledge: Collections, Copies, and Contested Interpretations**

The very attempt to locate African–European treaties today is in itself already conditioned by historical treaty practices and the organization of the archival record. There are no special editions dedicated to these agreements before 1800 along the lines of the *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*. Nor are they part of the more comprehensive treaty collections edited from the late seventeenth century onwards, such as Dumont’s *Corps Universel*. Such circumstances have certainly contributed to the neglect of these sources in historical and legal scholarship. At the same time, this very exclusion itself bears witness to the shifting boundaries of international law and its increasingly exclusive character – both within early modern times and in modern

19 Cf. Mamadou Hébié, “The Role of the Agreements Concluded with Local Political Entities in the Course of French Colonial Expansion in West Africa”, *British Yearbook of International Law* 85 (2015): 21–89 and Saliha Belmessous, “What is a Colonial Treaty? Questioning the Visible and the Invisible in European and Non-European Legal Negotiations”, *Comparative Legal History* 10 (2022): 137–71, also drawing attention to unequal treaties among European powers.

scholarship.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the practice of treaty-making pinpoints the paradoxical mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in international law, as Edward Keene has astutely argued. Moving on into the nineteenth century, he has shown that “extra-European treaty-making accounts for a substantial part of the total level of treaty-making”, with treaties between Europeans and African rulers contributing decisively to the upsurge in the 1880s. However, these treaties do not mark an entry into “international society” but were instrumental in erasing “any trace of international personality” of the respective African parties. His observations demonstrate once more that we have to pay close attention to different types of treaties and their “afterlives”.<sup>21</sup>

The place where we find African–European treaties today is more often than not determined by how interested contemporaries attempted to organize the record. This is particularly true in the case of the Dutch records preserved in the Nationaal Archief (The Hague) while the files of the French companies have even been subjected to recent re-ordering. One of the earliest surviving treaties from the records of the Dutch West India Company can serve as an illustrative example here: concluded with the Fante in 1624, it dates back to the time when the Dutch were primarily concerned with ousting their Iberian enemies from West African shores. Consequently, in those days, treaties were mainly agreements of alliance, attempts to secure local military assistance desperately needed in order to attack the Portuguese strongholds at Elmina, Axim and so on.<sup>22</sup> The Fante, a powerful polity located to the east of the then-Portuguese fortress São Jorge da Mina (“Elmina”), were important for all Dutch stratagems, providing valuable information and troops. Help from the polities of Fante and Asebu proved to be decisive when in 1637 a combined Dutch–African force attacked the Portuguese headquarters on the coast for the third time and finally succeeded in conquering the fortress.<sup>23</sup>

20 For an in-depth study of early modern treaty collections, see Benjamin Durst, *Archive des Völkerrechts: Gedruckte Sammlungen europäischer Mächteverträge in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016). The exclusion of African treaties from such collections can also be interpreted in terms of an increasingly exclusive definition of sovereignty and international society. Such a view has been advanced, among others, by Charles Henry Alexandrowicz, *The Law of Nations in Global History*, ed. David Armitage and Jennifer Pitts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). For a discussion of how colonial governance shapes the “accessibility” of the archive see Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), esp. 8–14.

21 Keene, “Treaty-Making Revolution”, esp. 483f. and 490ff.

22 Treaty concluded by the WIC with the “king” of Fante and his party (copy), 31 March 1624, NA, NBKG 222, fol. 314v–15r and a second copy NA, VWIS 1162, 519. This was presumably the treaty “in onderhandeling” according to a report that reached the States-General in October 1624, alongside news about the conclusion of two other treaties with Asebu and Accra (which have not been preserved); *Resolutien der Staten-Generaal*, 14 October 1624.

23 Henk den Heijer, “Het ‘groot desseyn’ en de aanval op Elmina in 1625”, in *Geweld in de West: Een militaire geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Atlantische*

At least two copies of the 1624 Fante treaty, and numerous references to it, have survived in the WIC records. This already demonstrates that it was not only read as an agreement of alliance linked to a specific political situation. On the contrary, by following its paper trail in the archive, we can trace how it was employed as an argument in different contexts. As early as the 1640s and 1650s, this and similar agreements were used to claim rights of both sovereignty and possession. A manuscript copy of the Fante treaty, for example, bears the title “Act of Transfer by those of Fantijn, at the time when a certain Ambro was Braffo, made of their shoreline in favour of the General Chartered Company”, thus suggesting a land transfer – which the text of the treaty does not actually cover.<sup>24</sup> Yet, it was precisely a claim to possession and sovereignty that *directeur-generaal* Johan Valckenburgh tried to advance by referring to the Fante treaty in 1663, in order to oppose the establishment of an English factory in the Fante town of Anishan.<sup>25</sup>

Interestingly, Valckenburgh was also the one who initiated the first encompassing collection of treaties and other legal documents pertaining to the Gold Coast in the 1660s – and it is this very collection in which the manuscript copy of the Fante treaty with the “creative title” survives.<sup>26</sup> Given the important role African–European treaties played in the disputes Valckenburgh was engaged in with the English but also with the Swedish and Danish African companies, the use-value of this collection becomes immediately apparent. In such diplomatic conflicts, references to treaties were widely employed and accepted as evidence and reliable proof, yet equally also subject to interested reading if not outright manipulation.

Yet treaties also allowed for a critical evaluation of claims to monopoly and sovereignty – at least when they were accessible to potential opponents.<sup>27</sup> Disseminating knowledge about treaties and providing access to respective documents could, thus, be a double-edged sword. With regard to the African–European treaties, we find that attacks on Dutch claims often drew on detailed knowledge of the WIC’s position on the coast. Some Danish and Brandenburg pamphlets quoted or even printed treaties concluded by the

*wereld, 1600–1800*, ed. Henk den Heijer, Victor Enthoven, and Han Jordaan (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 217–43; Wim Klooster, *The Dutch Moment: War, Trade, and Settlement in the Seventeenth-Century Atlantic World*. (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2016) esp. pp. 39–45. On alliances and military assistance in the Dutch Atlantic see Mark Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms, Partners in Trade: Dutch–Indigenous Alliances in the Atlantic World, 1595–1674* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), with ch. 6 on the Gold Coast.

24 NA, NBKG 222, fol. 314v–15r.

25 Johan Valckenburgh to John Stoaks, 12 September 1663, National Archives, Kew, CO 1/17, no. 77, fol. 197r–200v: fol. 198v.

26 NA, NBKG 222.

27 Lauren Benton and Benjamin Straumann, “Acquiring Empire by Law. From Roman Doctrine to Early Modern European Practice”, *Law and History Review* 28, no. 1 (2010): esp. 1, 12, and 29.

WIC in order to defeat Dutch claims – indeed, these count among the earliest printed versions of African–European treaties known so far.<sup>28</sup>

A particular object of such attacks were Dutch attempts at bolstering their assumed sovereignty over the whole Guinea coast by alluding both to cession by treaty and to their “right of conquest”.<sup>29</sup> A 1665 Danish pamphlet, for example, pointed out the contradiction in such a combination of cession and conquest with blistering sarcasm worthy of Ciceronian rhetoric – indeed, the text sported a Ciceronian motto about the ability of truth to defend itself.<sup>30</sup> Neither treaties nor conquest, the authors argued, could legitimate the Dutch claim to sovereignty over the Guinea coast.<sup>31</sup> On the contrary, the Dutch themselves were obliged to pay tribute to the respective African rulers – as respective treaties prove.

It is sufficiently known to the whole world that, in Africa and in particular on the Guinea coast, different kings rule today, amongst whom there is the King of *Commendo* [Eguafo], the King of *Fetu*, the King of *Sabouw* [Asebu], the King of *Fantyn* [Fante], the King of *Acraa*, the King of *Arda* [Allada], and many others; among whom there is no one who does not reign absolutely in his land against which no Dutchman may stir. And the *Westindische Compagnie*, furthermore and even more importantly, has to give her monthly contributions to the kings, in whose lands she has castles, forts or lodges and engages in trade, in order to be tolerated there. What a wonderful *Superiority!* What a great *Preeminence!* Which she has in common with the humblest peasants in Europe.<sup>32</sup>

Here, literal readings of treaty texts are weaponized alongside what is proclaimed to be universally established knowledge of Africa to disprove Dutch claims and highly selective interpretation. While calling upon “the whole world” as a witness should be read an attempt at authorization rather than as a proof of public knowledge, the specificities given, especially the details about the treaty-texts themselves, hint at transfers of information between the different companies. On the part of the WIC, such transfers came on rather an involuntary basis: knowledge about coastal politics and possibly copies of treaties travelled with former WIC employees recruited by other trading

28 See the treaties printed in the annex of a Brandenburg pamphlet: *Deductie* [c.1686/87]; a copy is preserved in NA, VWIS 1166.

29 For a more extensive discussion see Brauner, *Kompanien*, 411–33. Lauren Benton, “Possessing Empire: Iberian Claims and Interpolity Law” in *Native Claims*, ed. Belmessous, 32–34.

30 *Veritas omnia ingenia [...]: Afgedrongen en Welgefondeerde Tegen-Bericht Der Conincklycke Deensche Geoctroyeerde Affricaansche Guineesche [...] opgerichte Compagnie* (Glückstadt: Kock, 1665).

31 *Ibid.*, 31ff.

32 *Ibid.*, 32 [italics as given in the original].

companies. This transfer of knowledge and networks can be studied, for instance, in the spectacular yet paradigmatic case of Hendrick Caerlof: born on the German Baltic coast and first employed by the WIC in 1637, Caerlof ended his career having worked for four different trading companies.<sup>33</sup>

Treaties, thus, could also be employed against empire. This reinforces the overall impression that the legal validity of the African–European treaties as such seems to be generally acknowledged in early modern Europe – or, at least, not cast in doubt beyond the generalized mistrust expressed against the validity of treaties in general. Such scepticism has accompanied discourses on diplomacy and international law since the later Middle Ages, albeit with varying prominence and intensity.<sup>34</sup> Some explicit comparisons between African–European agreements and intra-European treaty-making aimed at this generalized mistrust. In 1788, Paul Erdmann Isert, Prussia-born surgeon working for the Danish West India Company, commented on the conclusion of peace-treaties on the Guinea coast and the way oath-taking was used therein:

It would be desirable if the act of swearing an oath was considered binding, then we would not be exposed to as much strife as we often are. But it is the case here just as it is with most contracts in Europe – oaths last as long as they are to the Europeans’ own advantage, and when that ends they change their minds, just as the Blacks do here.<sup>35</sup>

- 33 Henk den Heijer, “Een dienaar van veele heeren. De atlantische carriere van Hendrik Caerlof”, in *Het verre gezicht: Politieke en culturele relaties tussen Nederland en Azie, Afrika en Amerika*, ed. Jan Thomas Lindblad and Alicia Schrikker (Franeker: Wijnen, 2011), 162–80. On the “multi-” or “transnational” character of trading companies and related questions of identity, see also Antje Flüchter, “Identität in einer transkulturellen Gemeinschaft? ‘Deutsche’ in der Vereinigte Oost-Indische Compagnie”, in *Identität und Krise? Zur Deutung vor-moderner Selbst-, Welt- und Fremderfahrungen*, ed. Christoph Dartmann and Carla Meyer, (Münster: Rhema, 2007), 155–86; and Felicia Gottmann, “Prussia All at Sea? The Emden-based East India Companies and the Challenges of Transnational Enterprise in the Eighteenth Century”, *Journal of World History* 31, no. 3 (2020): 539–66.
- 34 On trust in medieval and early modern discourses about treaty-making within Europe, see Georg Jostkleigrew, “Vom Umgang mit Verträgen: Probleme diplomatischer Verbindlichkeit und ihrer Erforschung”, in *Der Bruch des Vertrags: Die Verbindlichkeit spätmittelalterlicher Diplomatie und ihre Grenzen*, ed. Georg Jostkleigrew (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2018), 9–39; Michael Jucker, “Trust and Mistrust in Letters: Late Medieval Diplomacy and Its Communication Practices”, in *Strategies of Writing: Studies on Text and Trust in the Middle Ages*, ed. Petra Schulte, Marco Mostert, and Irene van Renswoude (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 213–36; David Armitage, “Treaties in Danger? Contemporary Crises of International Order in Historical Perspective”, *Ricerche di storia politica* 24, no. 2 (2021): 141–55. See also Arthur Weststeijn, “Love is Not Enough: Treaties in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Expansion”, in *Empire by Treaty*, ed. Belmessous, 19–44.
- 35 *Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade: Paul Erdmann Isert’s Journey to Guinea and the Caribbean Islands in Columbia*, ed. and transl. Selena Axelrod Winsnes (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2007), 173.

In contrast to this generalized mistrust, apparently irrespective of distance and difference, there were sometimes also contestations of a specific African–European treaty and its validity. Such contestations were less directed towards the “fulfilment” of the respective treaty obligations but mostly concerned with the identity of the respective partners and signatories.<sup>36</sup> Evidently, treaty-making depended on knowledge about the local political landscape, the structure of political authority, and ongoing conflicts and development – and while such knowledge could sometimes also be precarious closer to home, it was certainly difficult to come by with regard to treaty partners from afar (for both European and African actors, to be sure). In the case of Fante, for example, it was precisely the context of treaty-making that led to contemporary discussion about local political structure and authority among and within the English and French companies. In the mid-eighteenth century, the question whether Fante could be understood as a “republic” with a collective body of decision-making at the top of the political hierarchy or rather as a “kingdom” with one single ruler was of very practical importance when it came to the making of a treaty – who was to sign it? Who had to agree or at least to be present during negotiations? In such situations, political strategies as well as cultural difference, potential misunderstandings, and the limits of knowledge transmission within the European trading companies were at play.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, discussion about the validity of the treaties could also be provoked by the legal standing of the contracting party on the European side. As we have seen, treaty-making in early modern West Africa was mainly undertaken by European trading companies, whose status in international law was not always clear. To understand trading companies as economic *and* political actors, we need to historicize the very categories of “state”, “corporation”, and above all “sovereignty”. Recent historiography has demonstrated that governance was no accidental activity of trading companies but an essential characteristic of their specific “corporate sovereignty”.<sup>38</sup>

36 Such arguments directed towards number and identity of the African parties involved can be found in the Brandenburg *Deductie, opgesteldt by de Churfurstelijcke Brandenburghsche Africaensche Compagnie* [...], (s.l. 1686/87, 5–6; see for further discussion Brauner, *Kompanien*, 477ff).

37 Christina Brauner, “Beim ‘König’ von Anomabo. Audienzen an der westafrikanischen Goldküste als Schauplatz afrikanischer Politik und europäischer Konkurrenz (1751/2)”, in *Die Audienz: Ritualisierter Kulturkontakt in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Peter Burschel and Christine Vogel (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2014), 269–310.

38 See Philip J. Stern, “‘A Politie of Civill & Military Power’: Political Thought and the Late Seventeenth-Century Foundations of the East India Company-State”, *Journal of British Studies* 47, no. 2 (2008), 253–83; Philip J. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Arthur Weststeijn, “The VOC as a Company-State. Debating Seventeenth-Century Dutch Colonial Expansion”, *Itinerario* 38, no. 1 (2014): 13–34; Andrew Phillips and J. C. Sharman, *Outsourcing Empire: How Company-States made the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

Looking at the companies' treaty-making activities and the diplomatic debates that surrounded these can also help to sharpen such a historicizing approach further. Tracing the "many lives" of treaties in contemporary intra-European conflicts draws attention to the contested character of company sovereignty within contemporary politics: while it is certainly true that modern distinctions between public and private, public and economic do not apply to early modern contexts, it is equally true that such distinctions (albeit in different configurations) did exist – and that these played an important role in contemporary debates. In short, the trading companies were involved in what one may call "boundary-work" in the political and diplomatic field. In the case of the Scandinavian companies, for example, the Dutch side occasionally took to denying them any kind of "international" status, treating their representatives as mere private traders and interlopers. Similarly, the relation between trading company and sovereign could serve as an "exit strategy" for the governments involved.<sup>39</sup> In such cases, the very definition of a treaty (in the sense of contemporary international law) could be subject to controversy.

Having established the place of African–European treaties in the colonial archive and in the diplomatic contestations at the day, let us finally turn to the materiality of surviving treaty documents themselves. The picture is far from homogeneous: some treaties have survived as large-sized sheets with decorative initials written on parchment, others come in a regularly sized paper formats, and yet others simply as entries within a journal which recorded all sorts of proceedings. A striking commonality, however, are the marks and signatures almost all these treaties bear. In line with the critical attention to the identity of treaty partners outlined above, the classification and identification of these marks as well as their number were evidently considered to be of great significance: in many documents, every single mark was labelled and/or numbered. In certain cases, a comparison of the number of the respective signatories was turned into an argument for the greater validity of the treaty in question.<sup>40</sup>

In the process of copying, such marks were sometimes re-created with great care, though with different techniques. Whereas the surviving copy of the Eguafu treaty merely names the existence of the marks and signatories, thus turning them into referential signs, other examples demonstrate a keen attention to the form of the marks themselves. For instance, the 1642 treaty between the WIC and the *caboccers* of Axim survives in three copies – one original, one manuscript copy, and one printed copy – which allow us to trace how the marks were transformed from handwriting into print (see Figures 7.1–7.3).<sup>41</sup>

39 Brauner, *Kompanien*, 458ff. on such strategies in diplomatic conflicts within Europe.

40 See *Deductie*, 5f. This argument is reinforced by the respective treaty texts with lists of signatories provided in the annex, ready for comparison (*ibid.*, 12, 14). For a discussion of marks in Anglo-Indian treaty-making see Glover, *Paper Sovereigns*, 181ff. and 198ff.

41 Treaty between the *caboccers* of Axim and the WIC, 17 Febr 1642, NA, OWIC 12 (original with signatures of the respective parties); NA, Staten-Generaal, Loketkas, Zweden 38 (copy, c.1662); the printed copy is included in *Deductie*, 21–22.



Interestingly, this attention to the visual form does not only apply to the marks but at least in two cases also to the signatures of the European representatives, as the example of the treaty between the WIC and the king of Asebu demonstrates (see Figures 7.4–7.5).<sup>42</sup> This points to the fact that there were also different approaches to signatures, signing, and marking within early modern Europe, beyond the much too simple dichotomy of literacy and illiteracy, of letters and “mere” signs and symbols (see Figure 7.4).<sup>43</sup> The treaty texts regularly mention and describe the act of signing and record oaths or depositions authenticating the signatures and marks. The 1624 Fante treaty, for instance, mentions both an “authorizing signature” of the king and an act of “swearing to our Gods”.<sup>44</sup> Obviously, it is not sufficient to analyse treaties as written documents only, as the next section will demonstrate in greater detail.

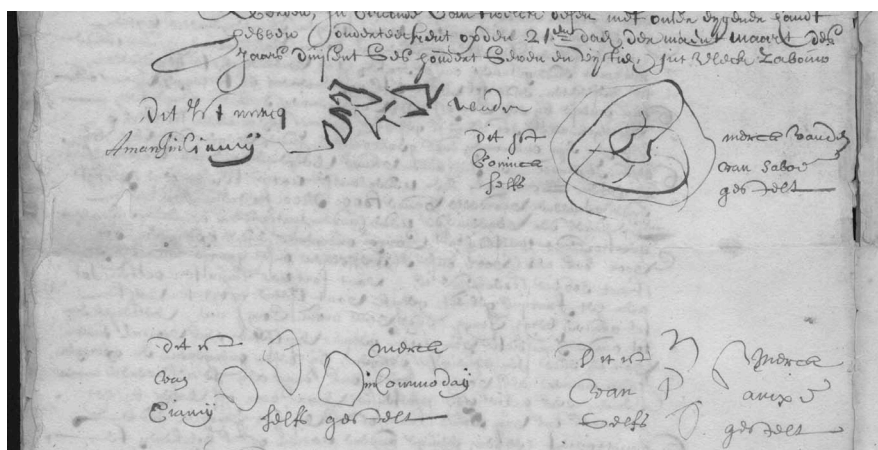


Figure 7.1 Treaty between the WIC and the “King” of Asebu (21 March 1657): Asebu marks (original).

Source: Nationaal Archief, Oude West-Indische Compagnie (Oude WIC), 1621–1674 (1711), nummer archiefinventaris 1.05.01.01, inventarisnummer 12.

42 Treaty between the WIC and the “king” and *caboceers* of Asebu, 21 March 1657, NA, OWIC 12, 58–60 (original with signatures of the respective parties); NA, NBKG 222, 193–94 (copy); NA, OWIC 13A, 312–16 (copy); NA, Staten-Generaal, Loketkas Zweden 38 (copy).

43 Reiner Prass, “Das Kreuz mit den Unterschriften: Von der Alphabetisierung zur Schriftkultur”, *Historische Anthropologie* 9 (2001): 384–404.

44 “aúthoriseerende handteekeninge ende doet daar af blyk met eede ende besweeringe aan onze Goden”; treaty between the WIC and the “King” or Braffo of Fante, 31 March 1624, NA, NBKG 222, fol. 314v–15r (original); NA, VWIS 1162, 519. Other treaties alluded to their content being read aloud and translated, see, e.g., the treaty between the WIC and the “king” of Eguafo, 1659. Oaths authenticating signatures can be found in the WIC treaties with the “king” of Asebu, 17 February 1688, NA, VWIS 1163 or TWIC 122, 40–41 (copy), and with the “king”, Dey and Tianin of Fetu, 30 June 1688, NA, TWIC 122, fol. 37r-v.

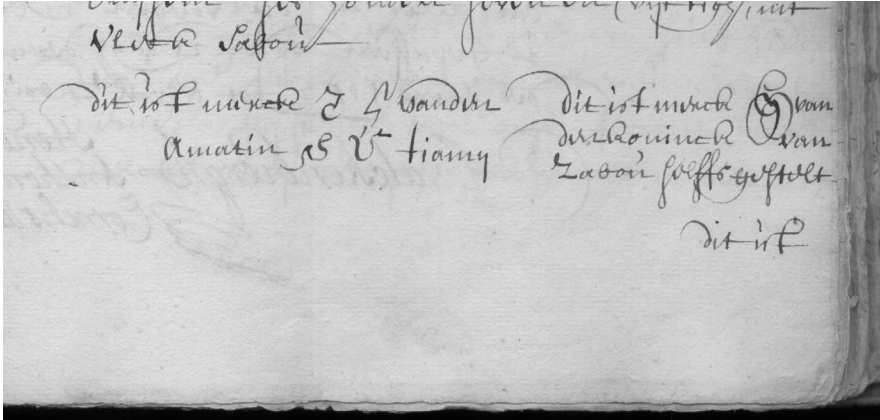


Figure 7.2 Treaty between the WIC and the “King” of Asebu (21 March 1657): Asebu marks (Copy, Valckenburgh’s collection, 1660s).

Source: Nationaal Archief, Oude West-Indische Compagnie (Oude WIC), 1621–1674 (1711), nummer archiefinventaris 1.05.01.01, inventarisnummer 13A, 315.

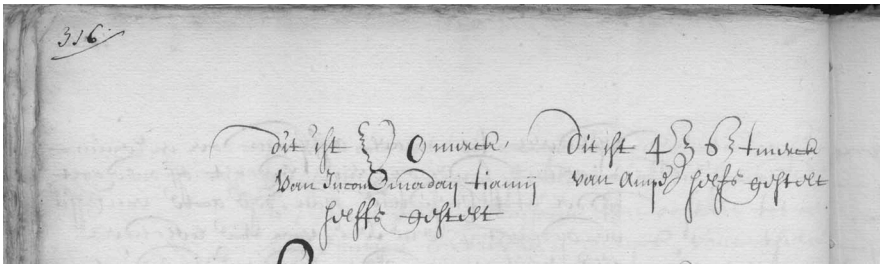


Figure 7.3 Treaty between the WIC and the “King” of Asebu (21 March 1657): Asebu marks (Copy, Valckenburgh’s collection, 1660s).

Source: Nationaal Archief, Oude West-Indische Compagnie (Oude WIC), 1621–1674 (1711), nummer archiefinventaris 1.05.01.01, inventarisnummer 13A, 316.

### Treaty-Making: Writing, Oaths, and Transculturation

The encounter in Eguafó not only hints at the existence of a lost African archive but also at a certain proficiency in handling written documents among local elites.<sup>45</sup>

45 In one of the few studies dedicated to the topic, though, treaty-making in early modern West Africa is conceptualized as a two-part business, encompassing a European writing-based part and an African ritual-based one; Heinz Duchhardt, “Europäisch-afrikanische Rechtsbeziehungen in der Epoche des ‘Vorkolonialismus’”, *Saeculum* 36 (1985): 373. On the relation of writing and ritual see Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, *Rituale* (Historische Einführungen, XVI) (Frankfurt: Campus, 2013), 229–34; Christoph Dartmann, “Peace Treaties in Italian City

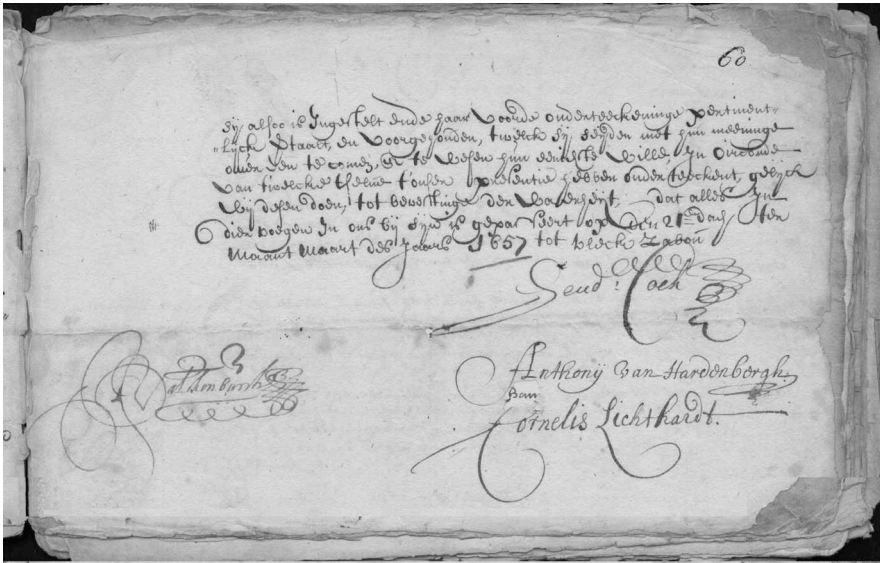


Figure 7.4 Treaty between the WIC and the “King” of Asebu (21 March 1657): European signatures (original).

Source: Nationaal Archief, Oude West-Indische Compagnie (Oude WIC), 1621–1674 (1711), nummer archiefinventaris 1.05.01.01, inventarisnummer 12.

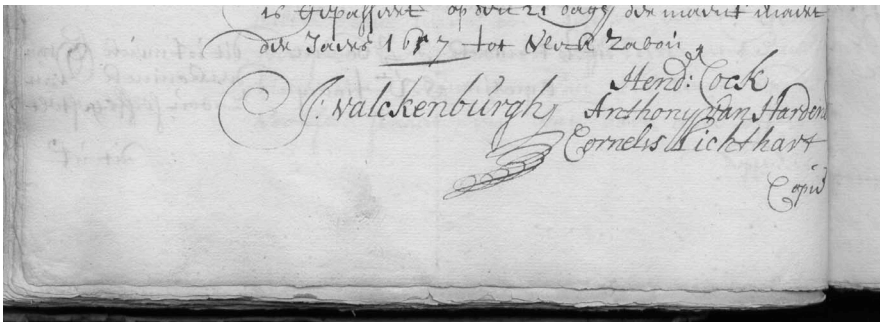


Figure 7.5 Treaty between the WIC and the “King” of Asebu (21 March 1657): European signatures (copy, Valckenburgh’s collection, 1660s).

Source: Nationaal Archief, Oude West-Indische Compagnie (Oude WIC), 1621–1674 (1711), nummer archiefinventaris 1.05.01.01, inventarisnummer 13A, 316.

Such proficiency was not necessarily tied to literacy. Showing the treaty and demanding yet another signature points to knowledge about the meaning of treaties and respective procedures of authentication. Using written documents in such a “demonstrative manner”, as part of symbolic practices was not a specific feature of contact zones – as, for instance, Simon Teuscher’s insightful analysis of how rural communities in late medieval Switzerland kept and used deeds and charters vividly illustrates.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, studying interferences of orality, writing, and ritual can open up interesting comparative perspectives between European and African history.<sup>47</sup>

West African elites did not simply use treaties and other written documents they received. As the so-called “neutrality treaty” of Ouidah from 1703 shows, local elites sometimes explicitly instigated acts of writing to secure and validate agreements.<sup>48</sup> A thriving hub of the transatlantic slave trade, especially from the last decades of the seventeenth century onwards, the port of Ouidah (in today’s Benin) was frequented by traders from many different European nations and housed Dutch, French, English, and

Communes: Public Interaction and Written Record”, in *Strategies of Writing*, ed. Schulte, Mostert, and Renswoude, 253–62, and the contributions in Tracey A. Sowerby and Joanna Craigwood, ed., *Cultures of Diplomacy and Literary Writing in the Early Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

- 46 Simon Teuscher, *Lords’ Rights and Peasant Stories: Writing and the Formation of Tradition in the Later Middle Ages*, transl. Philip Grace (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). For a plea to move beyond the “Manichean vision of written culture” and the dichotomy of literacy/orality see Adrien Delmas, “Introduction: The Written Word and the World”, in *Written Culture in a Colonial Context: Africa and the Americas 1500–1900*, ed. Adrien Delmas and Nigel Penn (Brill: Leiden, 2012), esp. xx–xxii. Köhler’s suggestion to study contracts in terms of a “Kulturtechnik” might offer a possible way out of such dilemmas: Sigrid Köhler, “Versprechen vor dem Vertrag – Vertrag ohne Versprechen: Recht als Kulturtechnik der Verbindlichkeit um 1800 (Lafontaine, Kleist, Goethe)”, in *Geschäfte und Liebesschwüre: Verbindlichkeit von Versprechen in Recht und Literatur*, ed. Gregor Albers, Joachim Harst, and Katharina Kaesling (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2021).
- 47 A similar plea for critical comparison has been advanced by Anne Haour, *Rulers, Warriors, Traders, Clerics: The Central Sahel and the North Sea, 800–1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), esp. 129–40, with a clear stance against evolutionist comparison (3ff.). An even broader temporal framework was suggested in a thought-provoking article by Elwert and Georg Elwert and Michael Giesecke, “Literacy and Emancipation: The Literacy Process in Two Cultural Revolutionary Movements (16th Century Germany and 20th Century Bénin)”, *Development and Change* 14 (1983).
- 48 This treaty has so far only been mentioned in passing in the respective literature: see Robin Law, *Ouidah. The Social History of a West African Slaving “Port”, 1727–1892* (Athens, GA: Ohio University Press, 2004), 214–15 and 147ff.; Gordon Davies, *The Royal African Company* (London: Longmans, Green, 1957), 274. The treaty has survived in two copies: NA, TWIC 98, 345–47 (copy); Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Voyage du Chevalier des Marchais en Guinée, isles voisines et à Cayenne, Fait en 1725, 1726 & 1727*, II (Paris: Prault, 1730), 109–13.

Portuguese factories.<sup>49</sup> This constellation frequently gave rise to conflicts which the “neutrality” treaty was set to contain: It obliged European traders to refrain from hostilities against each other and to keep peace among themselves – even at times when there were wars within Christendom. At least one employee of the French trading company was expelled from Ouidah in 1714 on the grounds of having violated the articles of neutrality.<sup>50</sup> Equally, the WIC officials on the coast took the conquest of Ouidah by Dahomey in 1727 as a clear sign of the end of this neutrality as they did not have any obligations towards the new sovereign.<sup>51</sup>

A closer look at the surviving copies of this treaty provides not only insights in procedures of authorization employed but also, even if tentatively, in local understandings of treaties. The two known copies of the “Neutrality treaty” (manuscript and print, respectively) are similar with respect to their content but bear different dates and names of signatories. While this might undermine their trustworthiness at first sight, I would argue that the differing versions mirror a specific practice of signing, or rather re-signing. Such a practice of re-signing is stipulated by the treaty itself: “That all captains in this roadstead and arriving ashore have to sign these articles before they be allowed to take up trade”.<sup>52</sup> The two copies can thus be read as representing two different moments of the treaty being re-signed. Such re-signing of agreements point to a specific take on signatures as procedures of authorization. It may hint at an understanding of the treaty as an inter-personal arrangement between individuals rather than as an institutional multilateral agreement, with the signatories acting as representatives for a community,

49 See Law, *Ouidah*, for the most comprehensive account so far. Both the powerful position of the Hueda court and its politics of appropriating “foreign” goods and practices have also been demonstrated by historical archaeologists and with reference to material culture; e.g. see Kenneth G. Kelly, “Using Historically Informed Archaeology: Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Hueda/European Interaction on the Coast of Bénin”, *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 4, no. 3/4 (1997): 353–66; Neil L. Norman, “Hueda (Whydah) Country and Town: Archaeological Perspectives on the Rise and Collapse of an African Atlantic Kingdom”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 42, no. 3 (2009): 387–410; and Roberto Zaugg, “The King’s Chinese Spittoon: Global Commodities, Court Culture, and Vodun in the Kingdoms of Hueda and Dahomey (Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries)”, *Annales HSS* 73, no. 1 (2018): 115–53.

50 Law, *Ouidah*, 36–37; for a broader view on the politics towards Europeans at the Slave Coast see Robin Law, “‘Here Is No Resisting the Country’: The Realities of Power in Afro-European Relations on the West African ‘Slave Coast’”, *Itinerario* 18, no. 2 (1994): 50–64.

51 Albert van Dantzig, *Les Hollandais sur la Côte de Guinée à l’Époque de l’Essor de l’Ashanti et du Dahomey, 1680–1740* (Paris: Société Française d’Histoire des Outre-Mers, 1980), 225–26.

52 The clause features as the second article in the Dutch manuscript version: NA, TWIC 98, 345–47 (copy). In the French version, the respective clause can be found in article 3.

company, or even a whole country. A treaty, in this understanding, appear less as a completed act, as a concluded agreement but rather ongoing activity of contracting trust.

In cases like this, it seems plausible to assume that African elites read treaties in terms of inter-personal relations.<sup>53</sup> However, one should be cautious about generalizing conclusions. The example of the re-signed Eguafó treaty, for instance, hints at some kind of trans-personal interpretation by the respective African party. As we have seen, the Eguafó held a group of strangers arriving at their shore responsible for an earlier agreement – by identifying them as being “French”. Being “French” was by no means a straightforward affair given that the employees of the French company – as those of most trading companies at the day – were a transnational group. Once more, the usage of symbols and signs, and above all flags, was of decisive importance: flags were flown from European ships as a means of identification from afar and were used as mark of possession at trading outposts at the coast.<sup>54</sup>

Exploring treaties in terms of treaty practices shows how contracting trust was intimately connected to processes of transculturation and translation. A particularly intriguing case in point is the practice of oath-taking, arguably the most important procedure of validation and authorization in treaty-making.<sup>55</sup> Among early modern Europeans, it was usually assumed that oaths were a universal phenomenon and every group had an oath or a form of “provisional self-curse”.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the wording of some treaties follows such a universal vision of oaths:

53 Indeed, the trans-personal character of political treaties was a comparatively recent development within European legal culture as well, intimately connected to the process of state-building and the formation of international law. See Randall Lesaffer, “Peace Treaties from Lodi to Westphalia”, in *Peace Treaties and International Law in European History. From the Late Middle Ages to World War One*, ed. Randall Lesaffer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), esp. 17ff.

54 For a more extensive analysis of using and debating flags and their various meanings in West Africa, see Brauner, “Beim ‘König’ von Anomabo”, 296–304 and Brauner, *Kompanien*, 322–23 and 531. For the curious comparison between national differences among Europeans and divisions among Africans on the coast allegedly drawn by Eguafó elites in the context of a succession crisis, see also Klaas Ratelband, ed., *Vijf dagregisters van het kasteel São Jorge da Mina (Elmina) aan de Goudkust, 1645–1647* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1953), 24 (entry 9 March 1645).

55 See Brauner, *Kompanien*, 490–517. The understanding of oaths as “provisional self-curse” is cited by John Spurr as “common knowledge” also for early modern laypeople; John Spurr, “The Profane History of Early Modern Oaths”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 11 (2001): 38.

56 Heinhard Steiger, for instance, interprets the recognition of foreign oaths as a recognition of foreign “legality” (“Rechtlichkeit”): Steiger, “Recht zwischen Asien und Europa”, 291. For cross-cultural oath-taking in different settings see Kenneth Bilby, “Swearing by the Past, Swearing to the Future: Sacred Oaths, Alliances, and Treaties among the Guianese and Jamaican Maroons”, *Ethnohistory* 44, no. 4 (1997), and Miles Ogborn, “The Power of Speech: Orality, Oaths and Evidence in the British Atlantic World, 1650–1800”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36 (2011).

And of all the premised conditions we the two parties do bind ourselves to the mutual observance in the presence and in the name of the omnipotent God of Truth and Justice, and the avenger of Perfidy, and we have hereunto set our hands.<sup>57</sup>

This formula seems to echo contemporary legal treatises which tried to locate oath-taking within the sphere of natural law, relying on the assumption of “necessary transcendence” shared by all human beings.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, it gives us little information as to how such an oath was actually performed. Other treaty texts, in contrast, explicitly highlight the specificity of oath forms involved. In place of one oath of seemingly universal character, these treaties refer to combinations of different oath forms. Oath-taking could involve gods and God at the same time, with European traders consuming “oath drinks” prepared by local “fetish priests” and non-Christian African princes swearing on Bibles – evidently a rather pragmatic take on questions of religious truth in an age otherwise rife with confessional conflict and theological controversy.

A number of treaties concluded by the Dutch WIC, for instance, use the phrase “het nuttigen van juramenten”, literally “the consuming of oaths”. While this expression can regularly be found in company records and other writings emerging from the WIC’s African factories, it might have left readers back home in Amsterdam puzzled. Other treaty texts, by contrast, seek to avoid such irritation at home and employ, for instance, rather vague but familiarizing expressions like “their greatest oath” – even when reports from other sources confirm that in these cases, too, all parties, African and European alike, participated in “oath drinking”.<sup>59</sup> The treaty texts are obviously neither a transparent nor an unequivocal record of what happened. Rather, we need to understand them both as product *and* object of multi-layered translation processes. Even if in varying degrees, African–European treaties aimed at contracting trust among the parties involved *and* at achieving validity in the eyes of distant readers.

Conveying information and, more specifically, valid treaties from West Africa was not only a problem of geographical but also of cultural distance. Translation was necessary both within the and between the contact zone and the outside world. Indeed, some sort of translation could be involved when company employees wrote their reports for their superiors back home. In 1760, this very situation prompted the Danish merchant Ludewig Ferdinand Rømer to discuss what he called the “custom of the coast”. Rømer explained:

57 This formula is used in at least two treaties concluded at the Bissagos islands (in today’s Guinea-Bissau): treaty with the “Kings of Ghinala and the Rio Grande”, 3 August 1792, TNA, PRO 30/8/363 (Chatham Papers), fol. 28–29 and treaty with the “Kings of Canaboe” (Bulama Island), 29 June 1792, TNA, PRO 30/8/363, fol. 26–27.

58 See Spurr: “Profane History”: 41–43, esp. the quotation on 42.

59 *Brandenburg Sources for West African History, 1680–1700*, ed. Adam Jones, (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1985), 57–58 and 249ff. On Europeans participating in “fetish-oaths” see also *Letters on West Africa*, 173.

The [company] staff on the Coast often use such forms of expression (namely to *penjare* during a *palabre*) and other Negro-Portuguese terms in their reports to their superiors here, as well as to those in England and Holland. I do not know if the English and Dutch directors understand their staff on the Coast, but I know that we here ought to compile a dictionary of Negro-Portuguese and Danish in order to make the reports which come from the Guinea coast intelligible.<sup>60</sup>

What Rømer calls here “custom of the custom” resonates with the characteristics of a contact zone as a space shaped by transculturation. Such processes were obviously not restricted to language. Indeed, the seemingly “African” practice of “oath-drinking” was influenced by the influx of European goods: according to contemporary descriptions, oath potions contained ingredients such as brandy and other imported alcoholic beverages from the sixteenth century onwards. Indeed, as Emmanuel Akyeampong has demonstrated, such beverages were frequently employed as a spiritual means of communication at the time (and to this day).<sup>61</sup>

Turning back to the question of translation, we can interpret the different modes of representing “strange” oaths in terms of different strategies: for the sake of typology, we could distinguish a strategy of foreignization, staging the possible unintelligibility of something and turning it into a possible sign of authenticity (as in the curious “consuming of oaths”), from a strategy of “domestication” which seeks to erase “foreign” elements and establish credibility through resemblance and recognizability (as is the case with a wording such as “their greatest oath”). According to Lawrence Venuti, who coined the distinction in his *The Translator’s Invisibility* (1995), “foreignization” and “domestication” differ, above all, in how they make the act of translation itself visible or not.<sup>62</sup>

Which strategy is applied seems to depend on the specific textual context, as the example of the 1683 Brandenburg treaty with the *caboceers* of Cape Three Points demonstrates. While the treaty text uses the expression “their greatest oath” as what one may call a “domesticated” formula, the travelogue published later on by the head of the Brandenburg delegation indulges in an exoticizing narrative of “fetish oaths”. It provides some puzzling

60 Ludewig Ferdinand Rømer, *A Reliable Account of the Gold Coast of Guinea (1760)*, ed. and transl. Selena Axelrod Winsnes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 164–65.

61 On social usages of imported alcohol and spiritual meanings ascribed to it see Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change: A Social History of Alcohol in Ghana, c. 1800 to Recent Times* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996). Brandy mentioned as ingredient, e.g. by *Letters on West Africa*, 173, and Christian Monrad, *A Description of the Guinea Coast and its Inhabitants*, transl. Selena Axelrod Winsnes (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2009), 53ff.

62 See Giuseppe Palumbo, *Key Terms in Translation Studies* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 38–39 and 48–49 and Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).



details about an oath potion made from a mixture of brandy and gunpowder and proposals of a marriage alliance.<sup>63</sup> These two diverging accounts of the Brandenburg treaty demonstrate clearly that we cannot judge the choice of strategies in terms of “authenticity”. Nor can such a choice be reduced to a question of knowledge (or of ethics, as Venuti himself suggests).<sup>64</sup> Both “the domestic” and “the foreign” are inherently relational categories, connected to specific viewpoints and expectations. Precisely *because* a “foreignizing” translation is set to deliberately break certain expectations it has to presuppose them in the first place – and can thereby, if only in the worst case scenario, contribute to the reproduction of stereotypes and even outright “exoticization”. Staging untranslatability can be as much an interested act as staging translatability.<sup>65</sup>

We may add yet another layer to the problem when we turn to the question of translation in the practice of oath-taking itself – after all, oaths were usually speech acts, although frequently combined with nonverbal symbolical acts.<sup>66</sup> In 1702, for instance, it was on occasion of an oath ceremony that Dutch *directeur-generaal* Willem de la Palma felt prompted to make an effort to translate Christianity itself. At stake was nothing less than a “general peace” on the coast. For this purpose, numerous African princes and grandees, among them once again the ruler of Eguafó, had been assembled in the Dutch headquarters at Elmina for the solemn conclusion of a respective agreement.<sup>67</sup> This involved shared meals, the exchange of presents, the signing of a multilateral treaty, and the swearing of oaths both according to local fashion and on the Bible. In his report to his superiors back home, de la Palma pointed out that he had taken great pains to explain the meaning of the Bible oath. He had expounded to the African princes:

that this Bible was a Holy Scripture according to which heaven and earth were governed, that it contained the promise of well-being and blessing

63 See Brauner, *Kompanien*, 495–96.

64 See Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility*, and Silvia Kadiu, *Reflexive Translation Studies: Translation as Critical Reflection* (London: UCL Press, 2019), 23–38 for a critical assessment of Venuti’s “foreignizing approach”.

65 See also Christina Brauner, “Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood. Stories of Misunderstandings, Concepts of Culture and the Process of European Expansion”, in: *Chaos in the Contact Zone: Unpredictability, Improvisation and the Struggle for Control*, ed. Stephanie Wodianka (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017), 81–108.

66 See Miles Ogborn, “The Power of Speech”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36 (2011): 109–25. esp. 111–14, who defines oaths as “embodied, localised and particularised verbal performances that enacted power-laden identities and transformed social relationships”. On oaths as speech acts on specific “conditions of felicity” see also Spurr, “Profane History”, 44–47, with a first reflection on the relation between literacy and oath-taking at 46f.

67 Treaty between the “kings” of Eguafó, Fetu and Asebu and the “heads” (“opperhoofden”) of Twifo, Cabesterra, Abrambu, Fante and Adom, 3 Aug 1702, NA, TWIC 98, fol. 14r–15r.

for all those who acted in a just and righteous manner in the observance of treaties and alliances and [also], by contrast, all kinds of punishment and condemnation [for] those who would first break the bond that was created in this very instance between us.<sup>68</sup>

Only recently appointed *directeur-generaal* at the time, de la Palma was eager to stage himself as a shrewd manager of coastal affairs. Describing the “crash course in Christianity” and all the other efforts he had undertaken to establish peace on the conflict-ridden coast, was a strategy of authorization in itself. Not least, de la Palma’s insistence that the oath had not only be performed but understood through translation lives up to Protestant anxieties about “mere” rituals.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, African parties were increasingly obliged to swear on the Bible, often next to an oath “according to their own fashion”. What this swearing on the Bible actually looked like is hard to say, as any further information about gestures, utterances etc. is scarce. A rare example, although from a rather commonplace context, that is, an oath sworn during criminal proceedings in Elmina in 1782, provides us with some insights into the ambiguities of this practice.<sup>69</sup> Prosecuting a case of manslaughter, the Dutch authorities examined two witnesses. To validate their statements, these witnesses, named Tekyi and Quaon, were required to take an oath. We learn as a matter of course that this oath was performed by swearing on the Bible in their own language. The journal recording the proceedings provides these “actual words” which “the Negroes speak when they swear on the Bible” – in translation (of the translation given): “if that what I have said was not true then this Book (on which they slap with their hand) or Jan Compan (by this term they mean God) must kill me”<sup>70</sup>

68 De la Palma to the Presidentale Camer, 25 September 1702, NA, TWIC 98, fol. 2v. For a recent study of the role of religion in the WIC’s global enterprise see Danny L. Noorlander, *Heaven’s Wrath: The Protestant Reformation and the Dutch West India Company in the Atlantic World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

69 On the importance of oath-drinking for life at the coast in general see also Ty M. Reese, “Controlling the Company: The Structures of Fante-British Relations on the Gold Coast, 1750–1821”, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, no. 1 (2013): 109ff. For jurisdiction and cross-cultural litigation in the Dutch settlements on the Gold Coast, see Natalie Everts, “Cherchez la Femme: Gender-Related Issues in Eighteenth-Century Elmina”, *Itinerario* 20, no. 1 (1996): 45–57; Henk den Heijer, “Met bewillinghe van de swarte partij: Nederlands recht op de Goudkust in de zeventiende eeuw”, *Pro Memorie* 5, no. 2 (2003): 350–63; Harvey M. Feinberg, “Palaver on the Gold Coast: Elmina-Dutch Cooperation during the Eighteenth Century”, in *Palaver: European Interference in African Dispute Settlement*, ed. René Baesjou and Robert Ross (Leiden: Afrika-Studiecentrum 1979), 11–20.

70 NA, TWIC 522, proceedings against Quamena Assefoura, entry 8 May 1782; brackets as given in the original.

The quotation represents, once more, a multi-layered translation. Firstly, we learn that even in a mundane context such as an administrative record of a criminal case, translating God was evidently considered both a necessity and a challenge. Striking, though by no means unique, is the translation of “God” with the term “Jan Compan” or “Commae”, an expression used in the local *lingua da costa* and derived from the Akan (Twi) term *Nyame* or *Nyankopɔn*. The wording itself and its usage to designate a supreme Creator God and to translate Christian concepts of God is documented since the sixteenth century at least.<sup>71</sup> For early modern Dutch speakers, the term “Jan Compan”, however, would also have resonated with the expression “Jan Company”, usually employed to designate trading companies (above all, the VOC). The scribe seems to have been wary of this potential confusion and therefore provided an explanation of the specific meaning in a West African context – once more a hint of the complex configurations of difference between the contact zone and the metropolis. Interestingly, within the document quoted, “Jan Compan” is the only instance where the original wording is retained and the process of translation is made visible.

So, did these African witnesses swear a Christian oath in 1782, then? Of course, we do not know whether the journal provides a true rendering of what was said or fell victim to mistranslation, be it by intent or accident. Nor do we know how the witnesses themselves perceived what they said, what handling a book meant to them, and whether this really contributed to their sticking to the truth in their testimony (if they stuck to it at all). Still, the idea that emerges here once again is not only a belief in the translatability of truth but also in truth achieved through translation – and a belief in the power of ritual against all odds.

## **Conclusion**

In early modern West Africa and Europe alike, treaties could be different things to different people – and, needless to say, there were also very different kinds of treaties. Analysing African–European treaties as documents in the colonial archive on the one hand and as acts intended to contract trust locally on the other hand helps to re-situate the treaties at the intersection between the contact zone and the metropolis. In European diplomatic conflicts, treaties were regularly employed as legal evidence, even if to different ends. Looking at the material records demonstrates how the place of the treaties within the archive was shaped by this use-value. The validity of African–European treaties seems to have been conceived along the lines of treaties in general; in those rare instances when a specific treaty was contested, respective doubts were related to precarious knowledge about local political organization and the identity of treaty partners. The careful attention to marks

71 See e.g. *German Sources for West African History, 1599–1669*, ed. Adam Jones (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1983), 174ff.; 176, n.156.

and signs, not least when copying treaties, seems to be one strategy to counter such doubts and ensure the validity of treaties as evidence for legal claims.

As the encounter in Eguafó reveals, there was not only a colonial archive. Shifting the focus from treaty documents to treaty practices demonstrates that treaty-making was part and parcel of processes of translation and transculturation. In some cases, such as the “Neutrality treaty” of Ouidah, African elites did not only participate in treaty-making but actually instigated written agreements. Discussing signatures and oaths as two somewhat contrary examples, we can observe how hybrid practices of authorization emerge – precisely because of the need to contract trust in both worlds. While such a “custom of the coast” was apparently shared widely by the different actors within the contact zone, it presented a challenge in communication with the headquarters of the trading companies in Europe. Outlining different strategies of translation employed here, I argue that staging translatability and untranslatability can both serve to achieve credibility.

African–European treaty-making cannot simply be explained as a tool of European empire-building only – even though it was certainly used for this purpose, sometimes even against the literal meaning of a treaty text. But to interpret this cross-cultural legal practice as merely and exclusively determined by European imperialism is an approach prone to taking European claims to dominance at face-value, thereby discounting African agency. A re-affirmation of this agency can only happen by means of an analysis that is not based on a presupposition of colonial asymmetries. We should attempt to conceive African–European treaty-making and the conflicts connected to it not in terms of clear-cut roles – cunning manipulation on one side, cultural misunderstanding on the other – but allow all parties involved their share of both misunderstandings and political strategy.<sup>72</sup>

And yet, the very materiality of the record demonstrates that our approach to this history remains inextricably linked to politics of the archive and practices of memory. But how does precisely the kind of history that did not gain entry into the records shape, and indeed condition, the stories we tell? As historians we have to keep in mind that for every story told, for every object exhibited, and for every document stored in an archive, there are countless others that have not survived the passage of time for manifold reasons. In this sense, the brief glimpse at the “archive” in Eguafó may also serve as a reminder that we need to think about that which does not exist anymore.<sup>73</sup>

Questioning how writing practices and the formation of archives influences record-keeping and reflecting upon unequal representation of past actors and

72 See the thought-provoking critique in Bennett, *African Kings*, 6. Situating his study “‘after postcoloniality’”, Bennett argues for “the primacy of politics [...] in mediating the earliest contact between Africans and Europeans” (13–14).

73 See Martin Dusinberre, “Japan, Global History, and the Great Silence”, *History Workshop Journal* 83 (2017): 130–50 with the important distinction between “silence” and the “act of silencing” (132). For a reflection on different ways of being “unwritten” see Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 3ff.

actions in the historical record might be one step. But thinking about absence and material records of the past presents a challenge that goes beyond traditional source criticism. Among others, it leads on to questioning the status of writing itself in defining “history” and distinguishing it from “prehistory”. This fundamental difference persists until today – less so in explicit statements and definitions, perhaps, but no less powerful in the guise of institutional divides and disciplinary identities. Exploring the many lives of African–European treaties, situated at the interstices of the dynamic early modern world and an allegedly static pre-colonial past, can thus lead us to a re-consideration of the definition of history and historical truth itself.<sup>74</sup>

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74 See the insightful comment by Akin Ogundiran, “The End of Prehistory? An Africanist Comment”, *American Historical Review* 118, no. 3 (2013): 788–801.

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# 8 Joseph Williamson and the Information Order of the Early English Empire

*Nicholas Popper*

This chapter investigates how practices of information management structured the ways that the early English empire perceived and operated in the world. As it argues, the dependence on specific technologies – in particular the paper technologies of letters, archives, and notebooks – to grasp distant and obscure events led administrators like Secretary of State Joseph Williamson (1633–1701) to acquire massive volumes of written material. Such collections furnished the substance of their political knowledge, and they sought to apprehend newly received texts by coordinating them with other materials they held. The result was an aspirationally globalizing system anchored in an imperial centre that generated knowledge and prepared for action by re-contextualizing the reports it received amid centralized information resources.<sup>1</sup>

- 1 For other works on the epistemological impact of administration and paperwork on the British empire, see Ian K. Steele, *The English Atlantic, 1675–1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Miles Ogborn, *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Asheesh Kapur Siddique, “Paperwork, Governance, and the Archive in the British Empire during the Age of Revolutions” (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2016); Asheesh Kapur Siddique, “Governance through Documents: The Board of Trade, its Archive, and the Imperial Constitution of the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World”, *Journal of British Studies* 59, no. 2 (2020): 264–90; Dan Beaver, “Sovereignty by the Book: English Corporations, Atlantic Plantations, and Literate Order, 1557–1650”, in *Connecting Centre and Locality: Political Communication in Early Modern England*, ed. Chris R. Kyle and Jason Peacey (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 157–73. For other European empires, see Kenneth J. Banks, *Chasing Empire Across the Sea: Communications and the State in the French Atlantic, 1713–1763* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002); Markus Friedrich, “Government and Information-Management in Early Modern Europe: The Case of the Society of Jesus (1540–1773)”, *Journal of Early Modern History* 12, no. 6 (2008): 539–63; Sylvia Sellers-Garcia, *Distance and Documents at the Spanish Empire’s Periphery* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); Arndt Bredecke, *The Empirical Empire: Spanish Colonial Rule and the Politics of Knowledge* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016); Marie Houlemmare, “Seeing the Empire through Lists and Charts: French Colonial Records in the Eighteenth Century”, *Journal of Early Modern History* 22,

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The practices of producing knowledge in this system diverged sharply from those typically associated with the news networks of the early modern world, in which the perceived credibility of correspondents and informants was of the utmost concern.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, this system did not rely on individuals' trustworthiness or the veracity of their accounts, and those whose news proved mistaken were not devalued as a result.<sup>3</sup> The emphasis was rather on churning material through the system, and credibility was a quality of information attached to specific claims that aligned with other reports.

The perspective and practices of power wielders in Whitehall were distinct from those of other localities through the empire, even though many of the practices were shared. But examining the vantage point of imperial knowledge also reveals how its prefiguring of viable knowledge marginalized local specificities and voices. While credibility – or at least credulity – was granted to virtually all the reports from participants in the imperial network of knowledge, few outside of established channels had means to enter that network. Information management practices, I argue, created but also narrowed an imperial perspective by centralizing, integrating, and exploiting knowledge from, paradoxically, an overwhelming body of information drawn from a tightly limited network.<sup>4</sup>

no. 5 (2018): 371–91; Maria M. Portuondo, *Secret Science: Spanish Cosmography and the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Geoffrey Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). The English began to develop a complex imperial administration more than a century after the Spanish, but its construction appears to have borrowed little specifically from the traditions of Spanish administration, instead drawing – much as the French did – on contemporary practices of knowledge production.

2 This stance often generalizes from Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Ian Atherton, “‘The Itch Grown a Disease’: Manuscript Transmission of News in the Seventeenth Century”, in *News, Newspaper, and Society in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Joad Raymond (London: Cass, 1999), 39–65; David Randall, “Joseph Mead, Novellante: News, Sociability and Credibility in Early Stuart England”, *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006): 293–312; Julia Schleck, “‘Fair and Balanced’ News from the Continent: English Newsbook Readers and the Thirty Years’ War”, *Prose Studies* 29, no. 3 (2007): 323–35. For the relationship between news and credibility, see Michiel van Groesen’s chapter in this volume.

3 For this lack of concern in several intellectual venues, see Noah Millstone, “Designed for Collection: Early Modern News and the Production of History”, *Media History* 23, no. 2 (2017): 177–98; Dániel Margócsy, “Certain Fakes and Uncertain Facts: Jan Jonston and the Question of Truth in Religion and Natural History”, in *Fakes!? Hoaxes, Counterfeits and Deception in Early Modern Science*, ed. Marco Beretta and Maria Conforti (Sagamore Beach MA: Science History Publications, 2014), 190–225; Nicholas Popper, “The Sudden Death of the Burning Salamander: Reading Experiment and the Transformation of Natural History in Early Modern Europe”, *Erudition and the Republic of Letters* 1 (2016): 464–90. See also Johannes Müller’s chapter in this volume for an early seventeenth-century perspective on knowledge and credibility.

4 For similar cases in other colonial settings, see Kathryn Burns, *Into the Archive: Writing and Power in Colonial Peru* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India*

In what follows, I first analyse an exemplary instance of Williamson seeking to coordinate action at a distance, emphasizing how central the navigation and exploitation of information management and communication possibilities were to the action. I then situate the techniques and methods used in this case within Williamson's broader practices of producing political knowledge, before concluding by elaborating on the consequences of this system for the vision of the world and of empire that early modern figures translated into and out of their studies and archives.

### **How to Orchestrate a Perfectly Legitimate Transfer of Power**

The Treaty of Madrid signed by England and Spain in 1670 rendered Governor of Jamaica Thomas Modyford a liability. Modyford was known to succour the pirates – in particular the notorious Henry Morgan – who had long terrorized Spanish galleons. Because Morgan's continuing presence threatened the two realms' newfound comity, Modyford had to be not only replaced but punished.<sup>5</sup>

Orchestrating Modyford's removal largely fell to then Under-Secretary of State Joseph Williamson.<sup>6</sup> This entailed a seemingly straightforward administrative task: the commission which installed Modyford in 1664 would be revoked and a new governor – Modyford's rival Thomas Lynch, who had

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Matthew Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); and Marisa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

- 5 For essential works on early English Jamaica more broadly, see Richard Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 149–87; Stephen Saunders Webb, *The Governor's General: The English Army and the Definition of Empire, 1569–1681* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 151–326; Carla Gardina Pestana, "Early English Jamaica without Pirates", *William and Mary Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (2014): 321–60; Abigail Swingen, *Competing Visions of Empire: Labor, Slavery, and the Origins of the British Atlantic Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); Kathryn Anne Walker, "An English Empire of Law Plantation Councils and the Atlantic Origins of the Imperial Constitution" (Unpublished PhD-dissertation, New York University, 2016); Carla Gardina Pestana, *The English Conquest of Jamaica: Oliver Cromwell's Bid for Empire* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 2017); and James Robertson, "Making Jamaica English: Priorities and Processes", in *Caribbean Colonization and Cultural Interaction in the Long Seventeenth Century*, ed. Lou H. Roper (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2018), 105–17.
- 6 For Williamson, see Alan Marshall, *Intelligence and Espionage in the Reign of Charles II, 1660–1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Alan Marshall, "Sir Joseph Williamson and the Conduct of Administration in Restoration England", *Historical Research* 69 (1996): 18–41; Alexandre Tessier, *Réseaux diplomatiques et République des Lettres: Les correspondants de Sir Joseph Williamson (1660–1680)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2015); Nicholas Popper, *The Specter of the Archive: Political Practice and the Information State in Early Modern Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2024), ch. 6.

served as acting governor in 1663–64 – appointed in his place.<sup>7</sup> Secretary of State Henry Bennet, 1st Earl of Arlington, had often relied on Williamson to manage such Caribbean affairs.<sup>8</sup> And Williamson was familiar with the central actors; he was first introduced to Lynch likely in 1662 as a conduit for delivering Arlington’s letters to Modyford, and the two had recently corresponded when Lynch wrote to Williamson on his way to the Siege of Crete.<sup>9</sup> Williamson was familiar with Modyford too, for he had drafted the letter from the crown informing Modyford of his appointment as governor in 1664 and prepared Modyford’s commission by revising “instructions & other dispatches necessary for that employment” solicited from the previous governor, Thomas Hickman-Windsor.<sup>10</sup> Once Modyford was in place, Williamson often mediated his correspondence with Arlington, drafting letters from the secretary and the crown to send to Jamaica and docketing and summarizing those arriving from there.<sup>11</sup>

Williamson quickly moved to produce the formal papers for Lynch’s appointment after the treaty’s ratification; even before he received an order from the Council at the beginning of October to “prepare a commission and instructions”, he edited a draft of an appropriate commission.<sup>12</sup> As with Modyford’s, generating this official government instrument entailed combining the texts of pre-existing versions with new conditions received through instructions and letters from the Council, Arlington, and other high-ranking government officials.

But the process abruptly halted upon receipt of letters from Modyford which disapproved of the Anglo-Spanish peace and reported that it was too late to recall pirates he had licensed before he had received news of the treaty. For Williamson and Arlington, such intemperate letters provoked concern that Modyford would resist replacement. This concern was particularly acute, because Modyford was well known to have the support of Jamaica’s planters as well as its pirates, and the colony was uniquely fractious and ill-disposed

7 For this episode, see Webb, *The Governor’s General*, 249–53. For Lynch’s and Modyford’s approaches to Jamaica’s settlement and piracy, see Mark Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570–1740* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 102–43; and Swingen, *Competing Visions*, 56–81.

8 Shortly after gaining the role of Undersecretary in 1662, for example, Williamson was docketing and summarizing Arlington’s correspondence with Governor of Barbados Francis Willoughby and then drafting responses for Charles II. For some examples, The National Archives (henceforth TNA), Kew, CO 1/17, no. 89; TNA CO 1/18, nos. 1, 8, 9.

9 TNA CO 1/16, no. 37; TNA SP 99/46, fol. 284r–285v.

10 TNA CO 1/18, no. 8. Windsor informed Williamson that they had been delivered to Arlington, from whom Williamson retrieved them. TNA CO 1/18, no. 9. TNA CO 1/18, no. 7 for the draft of the letter; CO 1/18, no. 10 for Williamson’s notes taken from Windsor’s commission used to structure Modyford’s, and then CO 1/18, nos. 21, 22 for Williamson’s drafts of the commission with his revisions.

11 For example, see TNA CO 1/18, nos. 72, 82, 83.

12 For the Council order, See CO 1/25, no. 74; for the corrected commission, see CO 1/25, no. 64.

towards royal intervention in its affairs.<sup>13</sup> Modyford himself had kept the crown reminded of this; as he wrote to Arlington a week before the Treaty of Madrid's ratification but two months after its agreement:

merchants have further buzzed in ye People's ears, that his Majesty [...] may impose what taxes he pleaseth on the native commodities of this place [...] because it was conquered at ye charge of ye state, & so no consent of ye free-holders necessary [...] that we shal live under as arbitrary government, which your Lordshipp well knows how much English men abhorre.<sup>14</sup>

Reading threat – likely justifiably – into Modyford's report, Williamson and Arlington feared that mishandling Modyford's ouster might provoke rebellion.

Accordingly, in early January 1671, Williamson compiled and revised a draft of the packet for Lynch containing instructions, his commission, a revocation of Modyford's commission, and a cipher.<sup>15</sup> But though it was the ideal time of year for sailing, the operation tarried. In early March, the operation finally lurched into action, as Lynch and the ship the *Assistance* finally gathered at Deal Castle in Kent.<sup>16</sup> When he had finalized texts of the required materials, Williamson sent the official packet to his correspondent the postmaster Richard Watts at Deal on 15 March to pass to Lynch.<sup>17</sup> Though the expedition was then held up by contrary winds and a re-flaring of Lynch's chronic gout, it finally put to sea the first week of April.<sup>18</sup>

Right before the *Assistance's* departure, Williamson slipped into Lynch's packet additional secret instructions from both Arlington and James, Duke of York – the future James II of England – to be consulted only if Modyford did in fact resist removal. Arlington's made clear that Modyford had “committed many depredations and hostilities” against Spain, and accordingly Modyford should “be made Prisoner under a strong and safe guard, to be by them

13 As Richard Dunn put it, “of all the English Caribbean colonies in the seventeenth century, Jamaica was by far the most boisterous and disorderly” (*Sugar and Slaves*, 149). For a more sympathetic view of Modyford's administration, see John A. Coakley, “Jamaica's Private Seafarers: Politics and Violence in a Seventeenth-Century English Colony”, in *The Golden Age of Piracy: The Rise, Fall, and Enduring Popularity of Pirates*, ed. David Head (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 32–49.

14 TNA CO 138/1, fol. 54r.

15 For these materials, see TNA CO 1/25, no. 106, 107; TNA CO 1/26, no. 1; and TNA SP 29/287/1, fol. 33r–v.

16 For late February newsletters reporting that they were about to embark for Jamaica, see SP 29/287/2, fol. 130. For more drafts, see TNA CO 1/26, no. 27.

17 For these materials, see TNA CO 1/26, no. 14; TNA CO 389/4, fol. 37r; and the draft in Williamson's hand TNA CO 1/26, no. 41. For Watts' letter of receipt see TNA SP 29/288, fol. 173r.

18 TNA SP 29/288, fols. 5r, 27r, 19r.

brought to our person here in England to answer to what shall be objected against him". Lynch should then "publish and proclayme it to the whole island" why such action was taken and offer "free pardon & indemnity to all such as have been partakers with him in the said attempt upon condition that they quietly submit to your authority".<sup>19</sup> York's instructions were even more clear about the danger Modyford presented. The captain of *The Assistance* should not disembark until Lynch had "executed our pleasure in the seizure" of Modyford. "Should any accident befall the person of the said Sr Thomas Lynch", his instructions continued, or if "he finde opposition & resistance whether in possessing himself of the government of the said Island, or in attempting to seize" Modyford, Lynch was to direct the captain to use "his utmost force" to subdue him, "particularly by burning, sinking, & destroying the privateers that shall in any sort assist or countenance the Island in such their opposition to our command".<sup>20</sup>

These instructions prepared Lynch for the possibility of resistance, but left to Lynch's discretion how to capture Modyford. Though the voyage itself could not be kept under cloak of secrecy – indeed, contemporary newsletters tracked it closely – the success of the secret purpose of the venture rested on Modyford's continued ignorance that he faced imprisonment upon his return to England.<sup>21</sup> But the council had cause for nervousness, as letters sent by James Modyford – Thomas's younger brother and secretary – testify, which irritatedly surmised that the slowing trickle of communication from Whitehall indicated growing metropolitan suspicion.<sup>22</sup> And when – perhaps in response to reports of Morgan's sack of Panama City in January 1671 – the council imprisoned Thomas's son Charles in the Tower of London in mid-May as surety against Thomas's rebellion, it became public knowledge that Modyford was viewed as a traitor. This meant that Lynch – who, crucially, had not been informed of the imprisonment – was not only concealing his secret instructions, but was now unknowingly racing to reach Jamaica before news of the Modyfords' fall did.

Lynch kept Williamson updated while at sea, pleading for communication from Williamson in turn. During a stopover in Madeira, he wrote to Williamson, "Pray Sir doe not forget you promised to wryte often & largely to mee, my Lordships direccions are my North Star & compass."<sup>23</sup> Shortly after his arrival at Jamaica in late June, he wrote again, reassuring Williamson that he had kept his instructions secret, save "I could not let two oportunityes pass without once telling 'Mr Williamson I am & ought to be his servant."<sup>24</sup> And he again begged for Williamson to send "direction & [...] letters, which for

19 TNA SP 44/24, fols. 49r–50v.

20 TNA SP 44/24, fol. 48r–v.

21 For the newsletters, see TNA SP 29/291, fols. 49r–50v, TNA SP 29/292, fols. 27r, 43r–44v, 221r.

22 TNA CO 1/26, nos. 47, 49.

23 TNA SP 89/11, fol. 122v.

24 TNA CO 1/27, no. 7. Suspicion may have been raised because Williamson's brother was evidently on the *Assistance*. TNA CO 1/27, no. 24.

Gods sake let me have frequently, if not for myne yet for ye publique sake whom I know you love".<sup>25</sup> Williamson, however, did not send letters, likely concerned that insecure channels of communication might inadvertently reveal to Modyford the danger he faced.

As this suggests, Williamson and Lynch shared a recognition of the need to mediate distance in order to act in concert. But they diverged in the practices they preferred. Williamson's extensive and protracted preparations were designed to provide Lynch – through a single secure line of transmission – with a clear set of directives including limited but appropriate scope for improvisation. The problems of distance, in this approach, were countered by resolution to adhere to a strict set of actions determined at the outset from a centralized command with no scope for alteration.<sup>26</sup> Lynch, by contrast, preferred frequent correspondence, assurance, and guidance, which he repeatedly requested as his movements brought him into circumstances distinct from those for which he felt prepared. For Lynch, the initial preparations were useful but insufficiently comprehensive given changes introduced during the venture; for Williamson, any potential value of ongoing communication was curbed by the insecurity of articulating sensitive information through additional figures over extended channels of communication. Even as they sought to work in concert, that is, distance created the fundamental tension compromising the coherence of any knowledge or action.

The problems of coordinating action at a distance continued to dominate Lynch's mission. To be sure, Lynch's initial landing in Jamaica suggested that fears of an uprising had been overblown. Though "the people seem not pleased" when Lynch read his commission and Modyford's revocation, Modyford himself received news of his dismissal with equanimity.<sup>27</sup> And though the population was wary of Lynch, he also reported: "Here is noe feare of any disobedience for I have been received with abundance of civility & joy from the Generall & People."<sup>28</sup> Modyford's response would be corroborated by Williamson's informant Richard Browne, a ship's surgeon whom Lynch would appoint Clerk of the Market under pressure from Williamson.<sup>29</sup>

25 TNA CO 1/27, no. 7. For similar earlier pleadings from Jamaican officials, see Carla Gardina Pestana, "State Formation from the Vantage of Early English Jamaica: The Neglect of Edward Doyley", *Journal of British Studies* 56, no. 3 (2017): 483–505.

26 Similarly, see William Bulman, "The Practice of Politics: The English Civil War and the 'Resolution' of Henrietta Maria and Charles I", *Past & Present* 206 (2010): 43–79.

27 British Library (hereafter BL) Add. MS 11410, fol. 180r.

28 TNA CO 1/27, no. 7.

29 TNA CO 1/27, no. 6, which states that "Sir Thomas Linch arrived here about 12 dayes sence and was very well received by the old Governors and the people, Sir Thomas Linch since his coming have bin much troubled with ye gout, the old Governor visits him very often", and makes no mention of regime change. For Browne's request, see TNA CO 1/23, no. 76; for his appointment see TNA CO 1/27, no. 23.



Lynch accordingly refrained from detaining Modyford, rather suggesting that the deposed governor return to England voluntarily.

But over a month after Lynch's arrival, the situation altered dramatically, and neglect to update Lynch with knowledge of Modyford's son Charles's imprisonment was the catalyst. In early August, Lynch reported, there arrived "Advices, by a Bristoll Man (which by great luck & Art I suppressed) that Mr [Charles] Modyford was secured in the Tower, which made mee mortally apprehend his [Thomas's] Escape".<sup>30</sup> Upon hearing the news, Lynch hastily installed guards throughout the ports to prevent spread of the information and quickly designed a subterfuge to seize Modyford, luring him onto *The Assistance* with the promise of a special message from the king. Only when Modyford was aboard did Lynch finally divulge the Secret Commission in the presence of an assembled guard, who imprisoned Modyford on the ship. Lynch later admonished Williamson that "I had lyke to have miscaryed by not being advised of Charles Modyford's apprehension. For Gods sake tell me (for ye future) when I doe ill, & direct me how to doe well."<sup>31</sup>

As Lynch read his documents to the Jamaican Council in the following days, he felt obliged to rationalize his deceit by saying he could neither have expected Modyford to surrender voluntarily nor risked armed encounter in Port Royal.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, the need for trepidation had been confirmed, for Lynch reported that "I have heard, two have sworn, that had they known my intentions, they would have cut my throat."<sup>33</sup> For the next few days, he treated Modyford with "all the civility & respecte imaginable, to palliate his misfortune", but Modyford's mood darkened when, two days after his imprisonment, he and his followers finally learned of Charles Modyford's imprisonment from another packet ship.<sup>34</sup> Lynch remained so wary of potential rebellion that, though Modyford's oldest son, Thomas, fell gravely ill, Lynch would not let him leave *The Assistance* to visit, squandering much local goodwill.<sup>35</sup>

Finally ensconced as governor, Lynch sent a packet to Arlington containing his account of the transition, a description of Jamaica, minutes from the Council, and depositions concerning Spanish attacks. News of Modyford's capture preceded his return to England, which helped prepare Charles's release, though the crown's lingering anger and distrust led to Thomas's imprisonment for two years in the Tower.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, though secure as

30 TNA CO 1/27, no. 22.

31 TNA CO 1/27, no. 23.

32 Oral communication was of course critical to the functioning of empire. For the changing rules surrounding this discourse, see Miles Ogborn, "The Power of Speech: Orality, Oaths and Evidence in the British Atlantic World, 1650–1800", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geography* 36 (2011): 109–25.

33 For the reading in of the documents, see TNA CO 140/1, fols. 225r–31v.

34 TNA CO 1/27, no. 22.

35 TNA CO 1/27, no. 25. Browne, predictably, praised Lynch's handling of the situation. CO 1/27, no 4.

36 TNA SP 29/293, fols. 1r–5r.

governor, Lynch's blindsiding continued to rankle, and he complained again in October to Williamson that he had "never had a sillable from Whitehall since I saw it through, the securing C[harles] M[odyford] might have ruined me, If I had not accidentally had advise of it before his father".<sup>37</sup>

Soon after, however, Lynch resumed collaboration with Williamson; the council had likely been waiting for news of the venture's success – which arrived in September – before writing. As he had during Modyford's tenure, Williamson drafted and edited letters from the crown or Secretary Arlington to Lynch, and his notes and corrections in their correspondence indicate that he mediated it by highlighting important points, providing summaries, and inserting clarifications. He also sent to Lynch news gazettes that his secretariat compiled and distributed, and news in Lynch's letters was incorporated into these reports.<sup>38</sup> Even after the pirate faction capitalized on public dissatisfaction with the Restoration regime's failures in the Third Anglo-Dutch War and out-maneuvred Lynch in 1674 – his governorship revoked and given to Henry Morgan, who appointed Thomas Modyford as Chief Justice – Williamson relied on Lynch for Jamaican information.

Most notably, Williamson relied on Lynch's account of Jamaican taxation when bringing to the Council the possibility of imposing Poyning's Law on the colony in 1677.<sup>39</sup> The Council ultimately pursued this goal, precipitating a crisis would intensify in subsequent months. But the Council meeting quickly turned to other issues while waiting for word from Virginia, where troops – the Council did not yet know – had recently arrived to find Bacon's Rebellion already quieted. In that case no less than Lynch's, the Council confronted a jagged informational and communicational terrain. Power and knowledge could be hopefully crystallized and bundled into texts that crisscrossed the Atlantic's waters. But the problems of gaining and exploiting knowledge at a distance were endemic, mitigated but not eliminated by orchestrating the authority of formal documents and by flowing correspondence which was pervaded by gaps, insecurity, delays, and uncertainty.

37 TNA CO 1/27, no. 38.

38 For news from Lynch see TNA SP 29/374, fol. 358r; TNA SP 29/375, fol. 190r; TNA SP 29/385, fol. 95r-v.

39 For example, for a Council meeting in 1677 during the discussions concerning the Jamaican assembly's role in determining customs rates that would lead to the failed effort to impose Poyning's Law, Williamson consulted with Lynch: "In his time the Island distinguished betweene the differents of the Kings revenue: 1 the escheats Rents &c" collected by a farmer for £150–200 annually, and "voluntary contributions by the people of Jamaica for the use of the Government. This the people of Island look upon as theirs, & thus they are to name the officer", TNA SP 29/366, fol. 147r. For more instances of the Council consulting Lynch around this time, see Walker, "An English Empire of Law", 102–03.

## Williamson's Career through Practice

Williamson's deployment of information resources and strategies to install Lynch as governor show him confronting a signature problem for (though one not unique to) the early English empire: how to gather and coordinate information from across the globe to secure England's precarious colonial holdings. And while the networks of communication concerning all crown dominions incorporated dozens of figures receiving, modifying, summarizing, excerpting, correlating, and dispatching paperwork across the globe, there was nobody quite like Williamson.<sup>40</sup> His remit was not limited to Jamaica, and he played the same role not only for Barbados, Virginia, and New England, but for Britain and Europe as well. Indeed, throughout his period of political favour from 1660 to his fall in 1679, Williamson served as a hub orchestrating and absorbing England's global information networks, charged with coordinating a fragile information architecture to produce knowledge about the world that would best enable English control of it.<sup>41</sup>

Though scholars have overlooked Williamson's significance for England's nascent Atlantic empire, his role was especially important because the Council of Trade's halting existence and subordination to the Privy Council meant that no single office or institution was consistently responsible for overseeing England's colonial ventures through this period. Despite his lack of official standing in these bodies until 1674, Williamson's career trajectory embroiled him in their work.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, he directed both the resources of his offices and his personal networks and connections towards facilitating imperial knowledge.<sup>43</sup> The collective labour of Williamson and his clerks blurred the line between public and private, as he frequently directed clerks to work that lay outside their formal offices and provided them with access to materials he had acquired through personal and private connections.

Williamson was ideally suited to the role of information manager, for his rise had been predicated on information extraction and collection. After years of royalist exile on the continent during England's interregnum – during which time he notably translated Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* into Dutch –

40 See most similarly Jacob Soll, *The Information Master: Jean-Baptiste Colbert's Secret State Intelligence System* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009). Note also Banks's distinction between the "information elite" and the traditional elite (Banks, *Chasing Empire*, 184–94).

41 This section is heavily informed throughout by Tessier, *Réseaux diplomatiques*.

42 For example, in January 1673, Williamson communicated a letter from Lynch to the Council of Trade (SP TNA 29/332, fol. 54r).

43 The Council of Foreign Plantations established by Charles II at the Restoration quickly lost influence and by 1664 the Privy Council exercised responsibility for most of its functions. The council, still dominated by Privy Councilors, was renovated in 1670 and 1672, and then in 1675 was re-formed as the Committee of Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, which periodically declined and was invigorated until it was replaced in 1696 by a more permanent and independent Council of Foreign Trade and Plantations.

he returned to a quiet academic life in Oxford.<sup>44</sup> But not long after the Restoration, Charles II appointed him Under-Secretary of State and then Keeper of the State Paper Office, the institutional predecessor to today's National Archives in Kew. The circumstances under which Williamson inherited these offices were demanding. His initial task required collecting the records, journals, papers and more that had been produced by two decades of government exercised outside of royal authority – a problem exacerbated not only by wartime conditions and lack of centralization, but because the holders of such materials often destroyed, hid, or lied about materials that they feared would incriminate them. To rectify this problem, Williamson obtained warrants to search for such materials, employed informers, and conducted extensive interviews and interrogations, taking assiduous notes and compiling lists of where the previous regime's records alit.

Though Williamson's initial relationship with Arlington was frosty, the two developed a highly functional partnership. As Charles II's regime stabilized, Williamson turned his practices towards other offices and institutions in crown governance – compiling collections of extracts on the chancery and treasury, for example, and obtaining transcriptions of the entry books of such offices used to register their activities. He out-manoeuvred several competitors to obtain the office of Postmaster General in 1667, giving him unparalleled oversight of the realm's communications, while also placing under his control a mechanism for his own. His general competence led to his appointment as Clerk of the Privy Council in 1672. He was, as noted above, also integral to Arlington's participation in the Council of Trade over this period, managing the secretary's foreign correspondence and maintaining the resources to facilitate Arlington's grasp of events abroad.

Williamson's efforts to reconstruct Interregnum governance and enhance his understanding and control of Charles II's regime foreground the practices he deployed to make visible that which was distant or obscured: inscription, collection, and organization. As the scale of his work grew, Williamson increasingly relied on collaborative labour. Williamson mobilized his own body of clerks – primarily through the State Paper Office but through his other offices as well – to undertake for him the functions he performed for Arlington. His own textual handiwork was part of a broader corporate operation of information management under his purview. When he was appointed plenipotentiary to the Congress of Cologne in 1673, the whirl of activity shifted into high gear, as he had his secretaries construct dozens of books collecting treaties, compiling evidence of dynastic precedence, and elaborating genealogies of diplomats for his use. At the same time they maintained his information networks and control over his offices during his absence.

44 Francis Bacon, *Nieuwen Atlas ofte Beschrijvinge van het noytmeer gevonden Eydlandt van Bensalem*, translated by Joseph Williamson. Dordrecht: Andriesz, 1656; see Tessier, *Réseaux diplomatiques*, 71–72.

When Arlington was forced into retirement shortly after Williamson's return in 1674, Williamson was elevated to Secretary of State and Privy Councillor, and he was placed on the reconstituted Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations in 1675. Despite the fall of Arlington in 1674, the latter half of the 1670s was the high-water mark of Williamson's career, and the relentless pace of his writing, collection, and management only accelerated. But he fell in 1679 during the frenzy of the Popish Plot, brought down for his scepticism towards Titus Oates's allegations of Catholic conspiracy that likely reflected a conviction that his informants would have revealed evidence of Oates's claim had they been true. The pretext provoking Williamson's demise, moreover, was that he had signed an order excusing Irish Catholic officers from the Test Act, which he claimed he had done while overwhelmed by secretarial paperwork.<sup>45</sup> Williamson's downfall, ironically, was a product of his success as information manager, for it marked the breaking point of his ability to elicit and manage volumes of information that had enabled his rise.

### **Williamson's World**

For almost two decades, Williamson was thus poised at the epicentre of a buzzing information machine which delivered a constant flow of paper into his purview. This paper constituted the terrain in which he operated, for it furnished the sources and created the boundaries of political knowledge that in turn shaped his political action.<sup>46</sup>

Foremost among Williamson's resources was his massive correspondence, which reflected his use of the techniques of inscription, collection, and organization to reconstruct knowledge of his present.<sup>47</sup> As his career advanced, his growing network of diplomats, consuls, aspiring administrators, spies, ship captains, informers, and correspondents supplied him with a ceaseless surge

45 For this context, see J. P. Kenyon, *The Popish Plot* (London: Heinemann, 1972); and now Victor Stater, *Hoax: The Catholic Plot that Never Was* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022).

46 For the most similar study of paper technologies as producing the imperial view of its dominion, see Houlemare, "Seeing the Empire". For the social production of political knowledge in early modern England, see Nicholas Popper, "An Information State for Elizabethan England", *Journal of Modern History* 90, no. 3 (2018): 503–35.

47 For letter-writing in early modern Britain and the British Atlantic, see James Daybell and Peter Hinds, ed. *Material Readings of Early Modern Culture: Texts and Social Practices, 1580–1730* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); James Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-Writing, 1512–1635* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Lindsay O'Neill, *The Opened Letter: Networking in the Early Modern British World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); James Daybell and Andrew Gordon, ed. *Cultures of Correspondence in Early Modern Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

of news, rumour, and gossip concerning matters ranging from European diplomacy to reputed miracles in obscure Welsh villages. From this body of correspondents, Williamson yielded an enormous epistolary corpus: a recent survey estimates its intake at around at least 18,000 and probably at least 23,000 letters for his years of political activity, a number which dwarfs the archive of even those contemporaries famous for their correspondence such as Oldenburg, Leibniz, and Peiresc.<sup>48</sup>

The majority of letters addressed to Williamson came from slightly more than 200 figures with whom he maintained regular communication for stretches.<sup>49</sup> This group predominantly consisted of diplomats, consuls, and compensated informants, but there were distinctions among the profiles of his correspondents for different locales. While he maintained brisk correspondence with many locals permanently resident in continental Europe, the missives he received directly from Jamaica came only from appointed officials or from Browne, who had started as a local informant at the Sussex port of Aldeburgh before relocating to Jamaica. Williamson, that is, did not nurture the expansion of channels of communication to entrenched local figures in the Caribbean or on the North American mainland; for all the volume of his correspondence, it coursed only through limited conduits.<sup>50</sup>

Williamson did receive fragments of information through other channels. Through unknown means, most strikingly, he acquired the earliest known map of Port Royal in 1667.<sup>51</sup> He had begun receiving scattered reports of events in Jamaica from correspondents in Britain and Europe from 1655 at the latest, and the letters he received from officials in Boston, Barbados, and other Atlantic world locales contained news and rumours of the island.<sup>52</sup> These typically reported vessels' arrivals and departures, but as much as cocoa or sugar, boats supplied the commodity of news. For Jamaica, this mostly entailed accounts of Spanish and French machinations and local factional strife, reflecting and at times exaggerating the volatility of the situation, such as when Williamson received a letter from Watts in 1667 about "a letter from a merchant in Middleburrow directed to a merchant in Dover assuring him it was there strongly reported the Spanyards had entred on Jamaica & possess themselves of it & massacred men women & children of the English".<sup>53</sup>

48 Tessier, *Réseaux diplomatiques*, 185. Note that this estimate, furthermore, likely constitutes an understatement, as it does not include most of Williamson's colonial correspondence.

49 *Ibid.*, 217.

50 For a comparison of Williamson's colonial network with those of his successors', see Popper, *Specter of the Archive*, epilogue.

51 Veronika Vernier, "Maps for Intelligence Gathering? Rediscovered Seventeenth-Century Manuscript Maps from The Queen's College, Oxford", *Imago Mundi* 63, no. 1 (2011): 76–87.

52 TNA SP 18/101, fol. 87r.

53 TNA SP 29/196, fol. 136r.

Such tangled chains of mediation were the norm, and the inaccuracy of this report not atypical as well. As this suggests, Williamson's reliance on epistolary communications posed considerable challenges. Despite the effort Williamson directed towards accruing knowledge of the island, the materials he elicited and collected still amounted to periodic reports of what was often professedly gossip, delivered by a few individuals self-interested to the point of unreliability through complex chains of mediation, on few sheets of paper highly susceptible to water damage or loss, whose tempo of transmission took months under the best of circumstances. And each letter reflected ephemeral moments that might no longer obtain; Williamson was, for example, still receiving letters from Modyford written in the role of governor long after Lynch's appointment.<sup>54</sup> Every new missive, rather than simply filling in gaps of knowledge, might be immediately obsolete or simultaneously create new questions, reinforcing or even exacerbating the problems it intended to solve. To be sure, having this correspondence was preferable to ignorance, but rather than furnishing Williamson with unimpeachable knowledge, it demanded a complex regime of assessment.

All these problems were widely acknowledged, and several features were shared across Williamson's correspondence that reflect letter writers' efforts to ameliorate them. First, much space was devoted to describing conditions of communication – when previous letters had been sent and received; what news had been collected and what not; if weather, shipwreck, or other factors had caused delays. The news items Williamson received about Jamaica were typically prefaced by lengthy statements of provenance such as that in Watts's letter above. Secondly, many of Williamson's correspondents included enclosures, transcriptions or abstracts of other documents, their missives constituting hybrid reports of multiple spaces and times. Finally, the narratives of the letters were descriptive but disconnected reportage of masses of items accumulated through various means and reported succinctly to Williamson. Military preparations and manoeuvres, diplomatic negotiations and court politics, and ship departures and arrivals were most common, but because his correspondents could not be certain of how Williamson would assess the trustworthiness and usability of their news, they reported a wide range of information of potential interest without judging its credibility or significance.

On the other hand, statements reflecting anxieties concerning credibility and trustworthiness which scholars have often seen as essential to the functioning of early modern communication networks were almost completely absent. News items that proved mistaken were infrequently defended or explained, and correspondents rarely if ever emphasized their social standing or the veracity of their reports; more often they claimed humbly to communicate only what they encountered, suggesting an unwillingness to invoke their credibility lest by

54 The decision to replace Modyford with Lynch was made in September 1670; Williamson received a letter from James Modyford in his capacity as Thomas's secretary in July 1671 (TNA CO 1/26, no. 49).

doing so they imperilled it. Most correspondents seem to have conceived and presented themselves as vehicles of information with the assumption that Williamson's office would decide how best to make sense of their missives.

Indeed, the practice of Williamson's office was far more directed towards managing information on its own than gauging the credibility of its interlocutors. This was a complex endeavour. Assessing the veracity and utility of such missives required cutting through snarls of mediation, delay, rumour, conjecture, error, and misdirection. Letters were assessed less by evaluating the writer's credit than by correlating them with other texts that might be stored in the State Paper Office, Williamson's secretarial office, his household study, or other depositories.

In these spaces, Williamson accumulated massive resources to help structure and shape his ability to make sense of the reports he received.<sup>55</sup> The letters he received joined a welter of other paperwork – printed and manuscript newssheets, policy papers, collections of charters and treaties, printed treatises, reading notes, minutes from meetings – with which he and his clerks struggled to fix knowledge of a relentlessly protean world. Williamson and his clerks were constantly recording, inscribing, and noting in order to manage and preserve their own experience. Williamson was an assiduous producer and preserver of daybooks – notebooks in which he transcribed, for example, useful extracts from readings, noteworthy pieces of information, postal intervals, and minutes from meetings and discussions as he encountered them in writing or conversation over the course of his days.<sup>56</sup> His surviving notes on Council of Trade meetings document the flurry of information presented in such meetings – drawn from letters, oral reports, consultation of documents, and any number of other streams – as discussion spun from matters concerning Suriname to Barbados to Newfoundland.<sup>57</sup>

From this unceasing correspondence, collection, and inscription Williamson accumulated an unprecedented volume of materials in his offices and spaces.<sup>58</sup>

55 For the strategies used to confront the problem of self-induced information overload, see Noel Malcolm, "Thomas Harrison and his 'Ark of Studies': An Episode in the History of the Organization of Knowledge", *The Seventeenth Century* 19, no. 2 (2004): 196–232; Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

56 See for example, TNA SP 29/87; TNA 29/319a.

57 TNA CO 324/3.

58 For archives in early modern Britain, see Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters, and Alexandra Walsham, ed. *The Social History of the Archive; Record Keeping in Early Modern Europe*, Past & Present Supplement 11, 2016; Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters, and Alexandra Walsham, *Archives and Information in the Early Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). For continental archives see Randolph Head, "Knowing Like a State: The Transformation of Political Knowledge in Swiss Archives, 1450–1770", *Journal of Modern History* 75, no. 4 (2003): 745–82; Filippo De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Randolph Head, ed. "Archival Knowledge Cultures in Europe, 1400–1900", Special issue of *Archival Science* 10 (2010); Soll, *The Information Master*; John Rule and Ben Trotter, *A World of Paper: Louis XIV, Colbert de Torcy, and the Rise of the*



It is worth emphasizing the sheer size of his collection. At some point between 1682 and his death in 1701, he deposited his collections in the State Paper Office, of which he was still the keeper until his death. Likely because of their imposing scale, his materials were not integrated into the pre-existing categories but kept discrete, though dispersed through several areas of the office rooms. On three presses in the main room containing fifteen shelves lay forty-four volumes of records, fourteen books concerning admiralty matters, nine volumes of newsletters or extracts, twenty-one ceremonial volumes concerning precedence and appropriate styles of address, twenty-one volumes concerning law, forty-one volumes collecting the materials produced through diplomatic negotiations, and twenty-three *relazioni*. These shelves also came to hold smaller though not inconsiderable collections of materials concerning ecclesiastical matters, genealogies, grants, the royal household, parliament, proclamations, the signet office. And they held other items too; Williamson had not bound up significant portions of his archive, and his successor John Tucker tabulated over 180 additional bundles on these shelves, only a third of which he perceived as maintaining thematic continuities, and only six of which he calendared before giving up in frustration.<sup>59</sup>

Still, only a limited portion of Williamson's archive fit on these presses. One overflow room held additional items such as ten entries on ecclesiastical matters, sixteen on admiralty, almost fifty items on Ireland, twenty-seven volumes of letters, twenty-two on military matters, twenty-six on parliament, fifty-four on trade, twenty-five on treaties, and smaller ones on commissions, caveats, warrants and other themes. And even this did not come close to exhausting the enormity of Williamson's collection; another overflow room was devoted to almost three hundred volumes of treaties, commissions, instructions, letters, notes, advices, and materials concerning foreign negotiations.

The scale of his collection, while making possible his unusual command of domestic and international politics, required another of Williamson's unique skills: management. This was fundamentally a material problem, one of finding and organizing papers amid papers, and it demanded a material set of solutions. His secretariat's efforts to abstract, summarize, synthesize, and reassemble the vast oceans of paper they collected reflect a creativity and openness to experimentation parallel to the techniques devised by contemporary natural philosophers.<sup>60</sup> Williamson's particular management of

*Information State* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014); Filippo De Vivo, Andrea Guidi, and Alessandro Silvestri, "Archival Transformations in Early Modern European History", Special issue of *European History Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (2016): 421–589; and Randolph Head, *Making Archives in Early Modern Europe: Proof, Information, and Political Record-Keeping, 1400–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

59 The description of Williamson's deposit has been gleaned from Tucker's catalogue, BL Lansdowne MS 1051, fols. 64v–78v.

60 It is worth noting that Williamson was president of the Royal Society towards the end of this period, whose members likewise brought reams of information into

Jamaican information is again paradigmatic, for it shows him using various techniques to facilitate the consultation and contextualization of the texts he collected. These included organizing spaces to bring thematically coherent materials together, modifying received materials to enhance their efficient deployment, and overseeing the production of new texts that might aid navigation of the information landscape he elicited and confronted.

Williamson and his clerks sought to store received materials in ways that would facilitate comparison and correlation. The integration of Jamaican materials into larger archives reveal various logics of recontextualization that he and his clerks could deploy to make sense of what they received. For example in 1675 he recorded that in his secretary's office he bundled Jamaican materials in the category of Trade, Plantations, and Tangier, highlighting its economic and commercial role.<sup>61</sup> When transferred to the State Paper Office, by contrast, these were deposited amid collections on "The Government of Ireland, Dunkirk. Tangier. Jamaica. Virginia Rebellion. Warr with Holland. Barbados. Admiralty. Sovereignty of ye Seas",<sup>62</sup> a grouping which foregrounded Jamaica's geopolitical and imperial significance.

Such methods of storage aspired to unify particular groupings of texts. Descending down one level of organization, a similar mode of establishing order entailed compiling correspondence with individuals or groups of related correspondents in discrete bundles which might be bound together later. Sometime after 1665, for example, one of Williamson's clerks inscribed on a letter from Thomas Modyford, "Carry to Hampton Court all Sir. Thos. Modyford's late letters, and all relating to Barbadoes, which Mr. Williamson had order to lay together."<sup>63</sup> This compiling reflected common practice. As Tucker later recorded, the State Paper Office's shelves devoted to "Trade and Foreign Plantations" contained numerous collections related to Jamaica; one was devoted to James Modyford's letters, for example, while others contained the letters of Windsor and Charles Littleton during their governorships of Jamaica, the letters of Lynch, Morgan, and others, and documents related to Thomas Modyford from 1670. Several other ones were categorized as devoted to Jamaican trade and affairs.<sup>64</sup>

The practice of compilation was frequently directed towards official documents as well as correspondence. For example, at some point likely around 1672, Williamson's clerks bound together a collection of copies of commissions, instructions, and other documents relevant to plantations from 1661–72 including, for example, multiple copies of instructions and commissions to Windsor, Modyford, Edward Morgan, and Lynch, as well as Williamson's

existence and devised textual methods to reveal patterns that would otherwise remain obscure. See Richard Yeo, *Notebooks, Virtuosi, and Early Modern Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

61 TNA SP 9/157, back matter.

62 Bodleian Library, Tanner MS 271, fol. 55v.

63 TNA CO 1/19, fol. 157v.

64 BL Lansdowne MS 1051, fol. 72rv.

notes on the governors of the plantations and several surveys of Jamaica. Williamson inscribed topical headings for documents periodically throughout the volume. Similarly, he also helped pen a table of contents inserted at the end of the volume; these two elements were designed to facilitate quick skimming and perhaps later cataloguing.<sup>65</sup>

Williamson relied heavily on such paratextual measures to manage his workflow. Towards this end, Williamson converted his State Paper Office clerks into a complex text processing organism responsible for summarizing, abstracting, and filtering the materials that came to him to emphasize significant elements and facilitate immediate usage. The clerks assiduously docketed letters and policy papers, indorsed them with topical headings and brief summaries, added marginal annotations, and mediated Williamson's interaction with his correspondence, much as he had for Arlington.

Williamson and his clerks similarly created reference and finding aids to facilitate their navigation not just of letters, but of all their texts, which often spanned a miscellany of topics. For example, the daybook he maintained for Privy Council meetings covered considerable ground, ranging across naval, diplomatic, commercial, and many other matters, and accordingly he had a clerk equip it with a table of contents.<sup>66</sup> His offices were rife with such materials, and Williamson himself created copious catalogues, indices, and tables mapping the contents of individual volumes and of his archives to ease their consultation.

Other texts sought to condense and distil rather than to navigate the holdings of the archive. For example, Williamson possessed a number of systematic, methodical descriptions of locales elaborating their geography, population, flora, fauna, political structures, and more which resembled the empirical overviews of states known as the *artes apodemicae*.<sup>67</sup> These descriptions were particularly valued, and throughout the Restoration, the Privy Council demanded such answers to "heads of inquiries" structured according to the *artes apodemicae* from colonial officials at times of regime turnover or when seeking to gain further grasp over uncertain circumstances.<sup>68</sup> Williamson had several for Jamaica, including one by Lynch produced or collected around 1661 when he had received his first official Jamaican appointment (as provost-marshal), whose categories were Jamaica's situation, form, diseases, harbours, plantations, towns, forts, commodities, flora and fauna, weather, soil, material for building, and

65 TNA CO 324/1.

66 TNA SP 29/366, end matter.

67 See Justin Stagl, "The Methodising of Travel in the 16th Century: A Tale of Three Cities", *History and Anthropology* 4, no. 2 (1990): 303–38; Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Instructions for Travellers: Teaching the Eye to See", *History and Anthropology* 9, no. 2/3 (1996): 139–90.

68 For an example of a specific set of heads, see the letter sent from the Lords of the Trade and Plantations to Sir William Berkeley, Governor of Virginia in 1676, TNA CO 1/36, fols. 80r–82. These were sent to at least seven colonies (TNA CO 5/723, 23–26).

number of the English. He also possessed a similar one produced by Modyford's younger brother James in 1663.<sup>69</sup>

Both archival catalogues and systematic surveys were produced through reading, observation, notetaking, and synthesis. Williamson's office deployed these practices to consolidate dispersed information in other ways too. His office produced many thematic, purpose-built digests excerpting extracts from letters, treaties, and other paperwork, which were intended to solve the problem that related information was often scattered across bundles and locations, and that the physical structures of the office did not easily facilitate, for example, the comparison of Lynch's correspondence with the report on Jamaica nestled in a newsletter from Kent. These digests addressed this problem by providing a unified space for brief extracts from an array of sources.<sup>70</sup> Williamson's office produced a large number of such reference books, as their malleable underlying method could be directed towards nearly any

69 See in particular the version published of Lynch's published by Richard Blome in 1678, which exists in multiple manuscript copies (Williamson's was TNA CO 324/1, fols. 135r–82v, see also Huntington Library HM 57346, fols. 75r–92v; BL Harley MS 3361). See also the enclosure from Lynch's letter to Arlington shortly after arriving in Jamaica in 1671 documenting the authority, offices, and officeholders of the island (TNA CO 1/27, no. 22 and TNA CO 138/2, fols. 6r–38v). In December he wrote that he still intended to send a map and report on population numbers but that these took longer to compile. CO 1/27, no. 57. For James Modyford's, owned by Williamson, see CO 324/1, fols. 253r–58v, BL Add. MS 11410, fols. 151r–57v and HEH HM 57346, fols. 135r–146v; Thomas Modyford provided one upon his return to England in 1671 (CO 138/1, fols. 96–119) answering the Council's inquiries. Indeed these were often guided by specific inquiries from the Council; see for example Edward Cranfield's 1675 "Observations on the present state of Jamaica, being answers to 21 queries, drawn out of his Majesty's Instructions" (TNA CO 138/2, fols. 108r–121v); and the one produced under Governor Vaughan in 1676 (TNA CO 138/2, fols. 44r–96v; National Library of Jamaica, MS 159). Numerous remain, similarly provoked by specific council inquiries, for other colonial locales in this period as well. While many were frequently produced by individuals for their official capacities, because of their perceived importance others hoped that their production of them would exhibit suitability for employment. This might account for Lynch's initial text and, for example, the 1672 request to Williamson for patronage from one Thomas Bromhall, who had accompanied Lynch to Jamaica, for having "almost perfected a Description History & Present State of this Island" (TNA CO 1/29, no. 4). See also Portuondo, *Secret Science*, for such instruments in the Spanish empire.

70 One exemplary specimen, in Williamson's hand, is a little digest of extracts concerning trade. It had alphabetical tabs to ease consultation, and inside were inscribed tidbits under B like "Barbadoes contains 100,000 acres of land, lades 10,000 tonne of shipping yearly. Land worth 10 l per acre, woodland 20 l per acre. There are 13 Parishes", followed by customs rates and a report that "They use sugar as common measure in lieu of money". This was followed by "Acres in Barbados (there are says Major Scott in his new survey 173 thousand acres)", These notebooks, it should be stressed, were eclectic rather than rigidly instrumental; the subsequent notes read "Baccalao: A Fish so called from ye Islands neare Newfoundland Canaga where taken, &c", and "Bogars (in Transylvania) ie thee Barons of that Country", TNA SP 9/28, fol. 18v–19r.

theme – he produced versions in his own hand for geographic units like Spain and France, institutions like Parliament and the exchequer, document classes like Tower records and treaties, as well as arcane subjects like ambassador's genealogies.

The practice underlying these texts reveals how Williamson navigated his archive to explore the world. To produce them, Williamson decontextualized extracts from their source and re-contextualized them adjacent to other related material in a bespoke volume.<sup>71</sup> Sometimes he transcribed the extract directly into the notebook, other times the process was mediated by notes in day-books which might then be copied or cut and pasted in to his digests. But only very occasionally did he note the original source for the extract, far more frequently allowing the snippet to stand on its own as an independent, un-sourced unit of information. And this further highlights the economy of knowledge making at the heart of Williamson's system, which did not prioritize individual credibility and trustworthiness but instead was oriented towards coordinating thematic groupings within his massive archive, whose scope and architecture only he fully comprehended.<sup>72</sup>

As these digests suggest, the scope of Williamson's archive provoked the proliferation of texts in the form of reference guides – an endless cycle of inscription, archivization, and organization, in which provenance and source was elided in favour of comparing and integrating discrete particulars of information. That they constituted new inscriptions shades into Williamson's final expertise: generation and distribution of the products of his recombinatory textual cosmos. Williamson and his clerks used his materials to construct packets of instructions, treaties, policy papers, and more that he supplied for ambassadors and diplomats, much as he had for Lynch. These were not merely to enhance diplomatic practice abroad, but were part of the administrative and political process. Williamson's notes from Council meetings reveal them as suffused with texts brought to anchor discussions, much as the packet of Modyford's letters delivered to Hampton Court was likely intended to shape discussion with the crown about colonial policy. For example, on 16 October 1674, the Council first heard a report drawn from a letter from Saint Kitts, followed by an assessment of the settlement of Barbados with a description of its governance, customs, and revenues – noting that its laws uniquely remained in force provided the crown did not disagree, as opposed to Jamaica and other plantations where they lapsed after two years unless certified by the crown – and finally a note on how Lord Willoughby had persuaded Barbadian planters to agree to its customs rate on the condition that they held their land in free socage, with an instruction to consult the

71 Blair, *Too Much to Know*.

72 For similar instances of massive collections only being navigable by their creators, see William H. Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995); and Soll, *The Information Master*.

relevant Act.<sup>73</sup> Each discussion was likely stimulated by notes or bundles – formal acts, correspondence, notes on revenues – brought to the meeting.

Political practice thus hinged on the compilation of information materials held elsewhere as spurs to policy and action. Recombining texts, as well as document collection, was also essential to government functioning; as products assembled from synthesizing materials in his archives, for example, the commissions to the Lord Governors integrated sentences instead of documents. This reflected standard procedure, as Williamson typically effected his frequent drafting of commissions, patents, warrants, and more by editing examples found in formularies on the basis of instructions and warrants received from the crown, Arlington, the Privy Council, and other authoritative bodies.

Such practices were not restricted to the construction of official documents, as the practices underlying the composition of these commissions closely resemble those generating the newsletters that Williamson had his office produce.<sup>74</sup> From the early 1660s Williamson exercised considerable control over the domain of manuscript and printed newsletters that had spread throughout England.<sup>75</sup> By 1662 Williamson was seeking to assert control over the circulation of news domestically, and by November 1665 he founded a state paper, first titled the *Oxford Gazette* and then the *London Gazette*, whose goal was to control a chaotic media landscape through its monopoly on printed news. At the same time, he continued to supply favoured correspondents – including Lynch as well as officials, customs officers, postmasters, spies, and informants throughout the realm – with manuscript newsletters. These were highly valued; in 1672 Secretary to the Council of Trade Benjamin Worsley refrained from sending Lynch news, explaining that “it would bee but an indiscretion in mee to judge I can adde anything that is material, Williamson being soe much a Master as hee is of all sorts of Intelligence, and having sent it you as it riseth weekly”.<sup>76</sup> Both Williamson’s newsletters and his *Gazette* consisted predominantly of correspondence or other newsletters sent to his office, extracted and re-synthesized by the same process of filtering that underlay his production of digests.<sup>77</sup> These circulars were thus products of his secretariat in

73 TNA CO 324/3, fol. 18r–20v.

74 For news more broadly, see Brendan Dooley and Sabrina A. Baron, ed. *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2001); Joad Raymond and Noah Moxham, ed. *News Networks in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

75 For Williamson in this context, see Peter Fraser, *The Intelligence of the Secretaries of State and their Monopoly of Licensed News, 1660–1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956); Jason Peacey, “My Friend the Gazetier: Diplomacy and News in Seventeenth-Century Europe”, in *News Networks in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Joad Raymond and Noah Moxham (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 420–42; and Jason Peacey, “Managing Dutch Advices: Abraham Casteleyn and the English Government, 1660–1681”, *Media History* 22, no. 3/4 (2016): 421–37.

76 TNA CO 1/29, no. 51.

77 Fraser, *The Intelligence*, 29.

collaboration with an expansive network of both international and domestic correspondents. No less striking is that once disseminated, the newsletters entered into systems of exchange between these figures and other diplomats and news-gatherers abroad; their circulation stimulated continuing delivery of news to Williamson's office, where it was subject to filtration and re-flow.

In short, Williamson's secretarial archive was not a terminal but a node, the site where all the networks came into contact and, through the fragmenting technique of note-taking, formed new assemblages. It stimulated the generation and propagation of particular observations recorded throughout the world, and their communication to a centre where they were available for management and manipulation. And above all, it embodied the perspective Williamson strove to attain, one which surveyed the world and smoothed out its discontinuities – the distances produced by the diversity of times and places in which meaningful evidence was generated – by consolidating paperwork in new inscriptions that digested and mapped not only his archive but the globe itself. The world was inscribed in the texts he elicited. But his archival practices aspired to reduce proliferating inscriptions from chaos to order, to create new configurations that might meet exigent need or create knowledge applicable for unforetold future circumstances, and to illuminate the distant or occluded. Through the collaboration of network and archive, Williamson projected the globe through his study.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, I will situate Williamson's practices of producing knowledge at several registers within a broader imperial and informational context. First, the remarkable volume of material flowing to Williamson's hands provoked him to organize the archive as a site of collaborative, material knowledge production. For him, this entailed constantly recontextualizing particulars within the vast information resources already at his disposal. The process constituted the foundation of his practice of knowledge production.

Williamson's system drew on previous administrative practices and scholarly traditions, but its scale, dynamism, integration with other offices, and flexibility were distinctive. Like that of his contemporary Jean-Baptiste Colbert – whose similarly transformative information infrastructure in France reflected more influence from mercantile traditions – the specific architecture Williamson designed for information management did not outlast his ascendancy.<sup>78</sup> But the many clerks and secretaries he had trained in his various offices – including William Blathwayt, William Bridgeman, John Ellis, Robert

78 Soll, *The Information Master*. Colbert's system fell with his death; Williamson's went into abeyance after his fall from grace. Williamson certainly profited to some degree from his offices, but his financial security had been ensured by his 1679 marriage to Catherine Stewart, Baroness Clifton, who was at the time perhaps the wealthiest woman in England.

Yard, and others – adapted his emphasis on collection, correspondence, archivization, and comparison in their new offices, spreading the practices and ethos of Williamson’s information order throughout the institutions and households responsible for England’s crown and imperial governance. The partnership Williamson devised between the offices of the Secretary of State and the State Paper Office dissolved; the mode of knowledge making it embodied permeated the developing English state.

The epistemological consequences of Williamson’s system persisted as well. Knowing Jamaica in his system entailed suspending it within a web of information and relations that was ineluctably geopolitical. The formation of knowledge entailed aggregation of particulars specifically related to it, but they arrived from and were then recontextualized by a set of practices that flattened distance and difference. No place, from this perspective, could ever be provincialized or divested of its interrelations, because it was always reported on and subsequently interpreted in a way structured for the perspective of the centre. Each space within Britain’s nascent empire and indeed the world beyond was always, at the level of information, a global artifact formed in Williamson’s archive.

Credibility, as traditionally conceived as authority invested in individuals on the basis of status or experience, was almost entirely absent here. Snippets were clipped and circulated promiscuously. Williamson’s digests rarely cited their sources, nor did his newssheets. Seemingly privileged correspondents like Lynch were trusted, until they were not. What guaranteed the efficacy of any claim to fact about the world was less its purveyor than its concordance with the nascent imperial archive, whether it reinforced or contradicted other pieces of information. The archive rather than the persona was the site of accreditation, and the imperial epistemology one of process and practice rather than relation. And because the archive was also always in flux, each particular bit of news was always susceptible to re-evaluation. Consider the alleged Spanish massacre in Jamaica that Watts reported in 1667: despite the fact that it had not happened, Watts continued to correspond with Williamson regularly for over a decade after. Similarly it did not evidently matter that both Lynch and Modyford repeatedly proved unreliable; they were nonetheless given multiple tenures as governor and treated as valued informants. Correspondents provided information; Williamson evaluated and perhaps used it.

Credibility, however, worked in another way. The possibilities for recognizing patterns in the world were determined by the paperwork, correspondents, and categories Williamson invoked, for they, like a refracting lens, directed his gaze to some phenomena and away from others. His dependence on inscription, above all, meant that he was reliant on those from whom he received communications. But this did not make them credible. Rather, their credibility allowed them to write in the first place, but did not assign them veracity. In its effort to reduce the world to inscription, furthermore, Williamson’s system foreclosed the possibility of participation from many and the capacity of the regime to see what it did not already value. It was a way of perceiving and establishing control over the globe, but in translating the world into the archive where he could see it, it inexorably created a distorted world anew.



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## 9 Emotions as Guide to Untrustworthiness

### John Lockman's Struggle with What He Could Not Check\*

*Renate Dürr*

In the early modern period, all knowledge derived from long-distance communication was knowledge that one could not check personally. This was the case for accounts about faraway places in the world as much as for the results of experiments conducted by members of various learned societies. In the end, as the history of science has shown time and again, all scientific endeavours had to deal with this challenge.<sup>1</sup> In response, early modern intellectuals developed a nuanced set of elements to replace the direct testimony of eyewitnesses. Among the most important of these was establishing the reputation of the author, and following specific narrative strategies when presenting new results or information. But how to deal with this knowledge when it was provided by an untrustworthy agent? What if the information, in some way, explicitly contradicted commonly held truths – for instance by inserting miracle stories into their accounts? In eighteenth-century Europe, many scholars dealing with Jesuit accounts from all over the world found themselves facing this problem. Obviously, not all of them had a problem with Jesuit knowledge. The German polymath Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), for one, wrote long lists of questions he hoped Jesuits would be able to answer.<sup>2</sup> Others, however, were convinced that Jesuit treatises were inherently problematic. Throughout the eighteenth century, a growing number of enlightened scholars agreed that one had to be careful with the information propagated by Jesuits. To many enlightened scholars the Jesuits had become the most untrustworthy people in the world – evil and manipulative.<sup>3</sup> The reproach of manipulation implied that Jesuit knowledge was not just “raw information” about

\* A slightly different version of this chapter appeared in Fokko Jan Dijksterhuis, ed. *Regulating Knowledge in an Entangled World* (London: Routledge, 2022).

1 Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

2 James Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 1997), 46; Florence C. Hsia, *Sojourners in a Strange Land: Jesuits and Their Scientific Missions in Late Imperial China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 132.

3 Christine Vogel, *Der Untergang der Gesellschaft Jesu als europäisches Medienerignis (1758–1773): Publizistische Debatten im Spannungsfeld von Aufklärung und Gegenaufklärung* (Mainz: Zabern, 2006); Jeffrey D. Burson and Jonathan Wright,

regions in the world nobody else had yet reached, but that it was already “cooked knowledge”, to use a well-known phrase from Claude Lévi-Strauss, which would always also transport a Jesuit worldview – a worldview one should avoid falling for.<sup>4</sup>

In times of fake news and uncertainties all over the world, it is no coincidence that scholars have also begun to think about the other side of knowledge: knowledge as “contested belief” for instance, or “precarious knowledge”, which is sometimes summarized as the “history of ignorance”.<sup>5</sup> All of these approaches underline that knowledge production depends on specific actors and the interests and beliefs they hold. As such, these approaches have also been very helpful to address the limits of knowledge production; its fragility and the precariousness of knowledge, which always runs the risk of being lost, forgotten, or destroyed. All the same, the underlying model of knowledge for the actors as well as for scholars researching them is that it is either accepted or contested. “Precarious knowledge” is true to those who believe in it, and false to everyone else. In this chapter, I would like to think about yet another type of knowledge, which could be called dangerous knowledge. Unlike the concept of “precarious knowledge” this knowledge is simultaneously accepted *and* contested by the same people. This knowledge is dangerous precisely because it is knowledge one depends on without being able to verify or refute it. The underlying problem can perhaps be compared to the daily challenge of a secret service agent who knows that they can never really trust their sources.<sup>6</sup> For instance, in an article on spy networks in Elizabethan England, Michael Kempe calls this knowledge “suspicious knowledge”.<sup>7</sup> John Lockman (1698–1771), who is at the centre of this chapter, at some point named Jesuit knowledge “occult Knowledge”.<sup>8</sup> In the preface to

ed., *The Jesuit Suppression in Global Context: Causes, Events and Consequences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

- 4 Peter Burke, *What is the History of Knowledge?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 6.
- 5 Martin Mulsow, *Prekäres Wissen – Eine andere Ideengeschichte der Frühen Neuzeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2012); Cornel Zwierlein, *The Dark Side of Knowledge: Histories of Ignorance, 1400 to 1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Roy Dilley and Thomas G. Kirsch, ed., *Regimes of Ignorance: Anthropological Perspectives on the Production and Reproduction of Non-Knowledge* (New York: Berghahn, 2015); Renate Dürr ed., *Threatened Knowledge: Practices of Knowing and Ignoring from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2021); Peter Burke, *Ignorance. A Global History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023).
- 6 Ioanna Iordanou, “Regulating the Transfer of Secret Knowledge in the Early Modern World: Ciphers as Tools of Management in Renaissance Venice”, in *Regulating Knowledge in an Entangled World*, ed. Fokko Jan Dijksterhuis (London: Routledge, 2022); Nadine Akkerman, *Invisible Agents: Women and Espionage in Seventeenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), ch. 2.
- 7 Michael Kempe, “Burn after Reading: Verschlüsseltes Wissen und Spionagenetzwerke im elisabethanischen England”, *Historische Zeitschrift* 296, no. 2 (2013), 354–79.
- 8 John Lockman, *Travels of the Jesuits, into Various Parts of the World: Compiled from their Letters. Now first attempted in English*. 2 vols. (London: Noon, 1743), II, 204.

the first volume of translations, Lockman reflected at length on the way he dealt with this dangerous knowledge at his disposal. Reading the Jesuits, he explained, necessitated a very active and highly emotional way of gauging truth in stories. In what follows, I will try to reconstruct the way he would read such Jesuit reports, and how he assessed the dangerous knowledge they contained. In so doing, I will analyse Lockman's reading practices, and the way he attested to the reliability (or lack thereof) of a text. In other words: my focus will be on reading and translating as an emotional practice.<sup>9</sup>

This chapter focuses on John Lockman's translation of the first ten volumes of the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, which he published in 1743 under the innocuous title *Travels of the Jesuits, into Various Parts of the World: Compiled from their Letters*.<sup>10</sup> Although he had planned to publish five volumes, he finished only the first two. Together, they contain 48 letters, treatises or prefaces from the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, and five other travelogues Lockman found interesting, although they were not written by Jesuits and had not been published in the original French collection.<sup>11</sup> He omitted seventeen texts, always making sure to tell the reader when he did so and why – mostly because he thought them too similar to a previous text. Despite his strong anti-Jesuit attitude, Lockman was convinced of the importance of presenting the entire account as a way of doing justice to the author. Time and again, he stressed, he would avoid just publishing extracts, unlike “Several eminent Authors, of different Nations, [who] have had Recourse to the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, as a Storehouse.”<sup>12</sup> Instead, he mostly translated the long treatises fully and carefully, without cherry-picking those passages that drew his ire. In so doing, he was acutely aware that the danger of being manipulated by the Jesuits also grew.<sup>13</sup>

9 Renate Dürr and Ulrike Strasser, “Wissensgenerierung als emotionale Praktik: Ethnographisches Schreiben und emotionalisiertes Lesen in Joseph Stöckleins S.J. ‘Neuem Welt-Bott’”, *Historische Anthropologie* 28, no. 2 (2020): 354–78.

10 Lockman, *Travels*: first edition: 1743; second edition: 1763, third edition: 1787; for the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, see André Rétif, “Brève histoire des ‘Lettres édifiantes et curieuses’”, *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 7 (1951): 37–50; Adrien Paschoud, *Le monde amérindien au miroir des Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

11 Lockman, *Travels*, 1743, I, 279–308; 308–47; 408–20; *ibid.*, II, 126–40; 140–59 (pp. 140–59 are taken from Jean-Baptiste Du Halde et al., *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses écrites des missions étrangères*. 34 vols, Paris, 1703–1776), IV.

12 Lockman, *Travels*, I, 1743, Preface, xix–xx.

13 If he shortened, Lockman mostly told the reader explicitly, for instance *Travels*, I, 1743, 447; II, 437. Sometimes he even explained why he kept the whole narrative although he disagreed with its content: “I would not have translated this idle Story above, had it not been for what follows”; similarly: 373: “I thought proper to insert this Miracle, as our Jesuit is pleased to term it, as being of a very singular kind. [...] So silly a Story might be palm'd to good Purpose, upon a Parcel of ignorant Heathens; but to imagine that the European of Sense and Education would give the least Credit to it, must be as absurd as the Incident itself” (*ibid.*, 392; similarly: *ibid.*, 444 and II, 410, 412, 422). In some cases, though, he

In the following, I will begin by reconstructing the process of reading and assessing information as visible in the annotations to Lockman's translations. Then, I will study two very different examples of dangerous knowledge visible in his work. On the one hand, the letters from the remote region of the Moxos will provide an example for the type of knowledge one could hardly check for accuracy.<sup>14</sup> The Jesuits, after all, were the first European people travelling these frontier areas in the Andes, and practically remained the sole purveyors of information on the region for decades. The second example is a famous sixty-page letter by Jean Venant Bouchet (1655–1732) on religions on the Indian subcontinent, originally published in 1711.<sup>15</sup> This letter was intended to be part of an ongoing discussion on whether or not Indian religions had discernible Jewish and Christian roots. It did not even attempt to hide its apologetic intentions. Based on these examples, I will finally draw some broader conclusions on regulating dangerous knowledge as a mode of *censura* during the European Enlightenment.

### Lockman's Antidote: Emotions and the "Tête-à-Tête" of Opinions

Although John Lockman has been nearly forgotten in historical research, he was well-known and well-regarded among the Enlightenment scholars of the eighteenth century.<sup>16</sup> To give only a few examples: together with Thomas Birch he took it upon himself to promote the English edition of Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, published in 1734 – an edition for which he had also translated many articles.<sup>17</sup> Apart from that, he translated more than twenty books from French into English, amongst them several works by Voltaire and some volumes of the *Cérémonies et Coutumes Religieuses* by Bernard Picart and Jean-Frédéric Bernard.<sup>18</sup> Lockman was also famous for his cooperation with William Boyce and Georg Friedrich Händel, for whom he wrote the text of some oratorios, and particularly for his poems and

shortens without telling the reader, for instance with regard to a letter by P. Martin on Jean Venant Bouchet: I, 452–78. See: Francis X. Clooney, *Fr. Bouchet's India: An 18<sup>th</sup> Century Jesuit's Encounter with Hinduism* (Chennai: Satya Nilayam, 2005), 30, note 15.

14 Lockman, *Travels*, I, 1743, 93–101; II, 160–97, 437–68.

15 Lockman, *Travels*, II, 1743, 240–77.

16 Gordon Goodwin, "Lockman, John", in *Dictionary of National Biography*, XXXIV (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1885–1900); James Sambrook, "Lockman, John", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), XXXIV, 258; Patrick Lee, "The Unexamined Premise: Voltaire, John Lockman, and the Myth of the English Letters", in *Voltaire's Lettres Philosophiques. Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 12 (2001): 246–49; Giovanni Tarantino, "A 'Protestant' Approach to Colonization as Envisaged in John Lockman's *Martyrology* (1760)", in Susan Broomhall and Sarah Finn, ed. *Violence and Emotions in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge 2015), 190–92.

17 British Library, Add MS 4254, fol. 101r; Add MS 4312.

18 Bernard Picart, *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Several Nations of the World*, 7 vols (London: Prevost, 1731–1739).



ballads.<sup>19</sup> Finally, in 1750, he became secretary to the *Free British Fishery Society*, a typical Enlightenment project aimed at promoting economic relief for the poor while simultaneously strengthening British maritime power.<sup>20</sup> All the same, Lockman never went to university.

Even for a man of his time, Lockman's aversion to the Jesuits was strong. In the course of a fierce libel case, for instance, he called Lemuel Dole Nelme, his colleague at the *Free British Fishery Society*, a Jesuit on nearly every single page.<sup>21</sup> This was not for any overtly religious reason: both parties had accused one another of misappropriating 50 pounds from the Society. Nelme blamed Lockman, and Lockman defended himself by calling the Society's accountant a "little", "dapper", "double-tongued" Jesuit, who was telling "monstrous Untruth", culminating in Lockman's description of his opponent as "a low, venal, dirty Reptile" and a "viper".<sup>22</sup> Here, as so often, Lockman used the viper metaphor as an invective against the Jesuits, even if Nelme was a fish merchant at the London Exchange Alley and certainly not a Jesuit of all people.<sup>23</sup> Another telling example of this is Lockman's martyrology, written only shortly after the *Travels of the Jesuits* albeit published much later.<sup>24</sup> In this worldview, the Jesuits were the worst evil in the world, and an embodiment of the anti-Christ because of the way they concealed their true intentions. "Thrice happy Great-Britain, which has long since purged itself of those noxious vipers!", Lockman exclaimed at the end of one of his chapters.<sup>25</sup>

As Lockman knew, one needs an antidote against the poison of the vipers. He explained this in his long preface to the *Travels of the Jesuits*:

But as Matters stand, no one, I presume, will wonder that an English Protestant, who endeavors to give an accurate Version of [the Jesuits'] Missions, without disguising a single Circumstance; should as a Lover of

- 19 For Lockman's role in promoting modernity and the British Empire, see Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies; 1680–1780* (New York: Guilford, 1998), 143.
- 20 British Library, Add MS 15154; Add 15155; Add MS 15159; Add MS 15160; Bob Harris, "American Idols: Empire, War and The Middling Ranks in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain", *Past & Present* 150, no. 1 (1996), 115.
- 21 John Lockman, *A Proper Answer to a Vile, Anonymous Libel: Written by L.D.N. Chiefly against John Lockman, Secretary to the Society of the Free British Fishery* (London: For the booksellers), 1753., 4, 5, 8, 10, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 24, 25.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 6, 17, 24.
- 23 He is mostly known for his essay on the origin of languages: Lemuel Dole Nelme, *An Essay towards an Investigation of the Origin and Elements of Language and Letters* (London: Leacroft, 1772).
- 24 John Lockman, *A History of the Cruel Sufferings of the Protestants, and Others, by Popish Persecutions, in various Countries* (London: Clarke, 1760).
- 25 Lockman, *History*, 1763, 326; see also Renate Dürr, "'The Shepherd's Boy in the Fable' – Zum Umgang mit dem gefährlichen Wissen der Jesuiten in der Aufklärung", in *Transfer, Begegnung, Skandalon? Neue Perspektiven auf die Jesuitenmissionen in Spanisch-Amerika*, ed. Esther Schmid Heer, Nikolaus Klein and Paul Oberholzer (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2019), 171–94.

Truth, of Mankind, and of his native country, present an Antidote along with it.<sup>26</sup>

To Lockman, this antidote consisted of lengthy commentaries of five pages or more with which Lockman attempted to place words, interpretations or results in a new, more acceptable light. In so doing, Lockman inserted himself into a specific enlightened way of debating and scepticism which he might have come across while translating articles from Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique* and Picart's *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses*.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the way Lockman administered his cures also allows historians to peek over his shoulder to watch him work.

According to Lockman, the effects of his antidote would occur in two "phases".<sup>28</sup> Firstly, it was important to give free rein to one's own emotions. Apparently, Lockman trusted his own emotional outbursts. As he explains, he always did his utmost to treat these Jesuit texts in a fair and balanced manner, but at times found it impossible to restrain his "indignation". In those cases, he needed to express his feelings in writing:

'tis only on certain Occasions which raised such an Indignation in me as I could not possibly conceal. Having a natural Aversion to Hypocrisy in every Shape, and a strong Inclination to speak my Thoughts at all Times when I presume it necessary; I could not forbear venturing them on Paper, whenever I supposed an Imposition glaring, or even suspicious.<sup>29</sup>

In other words, Lockman trusted the emotions he felt while engaging with the text. It is possible that Lockman here harkened back to an ancient rhetorical model, according to which, in the words of Irene van Renswoude, "emotions, and in particular the emotion 'indignation', was considered a tool of assessment to distinguish true from false arguments".<sup>30</sup> It was thought that emotions could not be manipulated, and that their unprompted, unplanned rise might indicate an underlying truth. In this way, they might have acted like Lockman's "natural aversions" which showed him when Jesuit texts were wrong if not manipulative. Catholics and Protestants were still influenced by a common Christian interpretation of the Aristotelian theory of affects, which

26 Lockman, *Travels*, I, 1743, Preface, xiii-xiv.

27 Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 94-121; Joan-Pau Rubiés, "From Christian Apologetics to Deism: Libertine Readings of Hinduism, 1650-1730", in *God in the Enlightenment*, ed. William J. Bulman and Robert G. Ingram (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 124; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Europe's India Words, People, Empires, 1500-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 114.

28 Lockman, *Travels*, I, 1743, Preface, xiii-xiv.

29 *Ibid.*, Preface, xiv-xv.

30 Irene van Renswoude, "Crass Insults: Ad hominem Attacks and Rhetorical Conventions", in *Das Christentum im frühen Europa: Diskurse – Tendenzen – Entscheidungen*, ed. Uta Heil (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 184.

emphasized that God made his works known through feelings – albeit primarily fear and joy.<sup>31</sup> To Lockman, emphasizing the spontaneous nature of his writings thus served to counteract the calculated manipulation in the Jesuit texts. Time and again, Lockman wrote that a thought or argument simply occurred to him because a “fictitious these [...] puts me in Mind of a Relation publishe’d in one of our News-Papers some Years since”.<sup>32</sup> All the same, the cross-references underpinning such commentaries demonstrate that such footnotes were not written down impulsively, but that they were put in the service of an equally carefully orchestrated counterargument.<sup>33</sup>

In the preface to his translation, Lockman confessed that his indignation sometimes got so overwhelming that he was all but forced to take recourse to irony.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, he would usually engage with this dangerous knowledge by seeking out philosophical counterarguments. This second phase of administering antidote was what Lockman referred to as a *tête-à-tête* of opinions.<sup>35</sup> This concept invokes the idea of a meeting of minds in a familiar setting. Emotions play an important role here as well. Lockman himself described the satisfaction he would feel when drafting his commentaries:

Desirous of instructing myself, and delighted with the Articles I was compiling, my Pen slid along sensibly, and frequently took in more than I at first designed, as Men who set out for a pleasurable Airing, are often invited to wander much farther than they at first intended to go. Again, some of these Notes will, perhaps, betray the Familiarity of a tête-à-tête, and appear not writ with the Regard which ought always to be shown the Public. I must crave their Indulgence on this Occasion. Wrapt in my Subject, I sometimes imagined I was writing only for myself, or for an intimate Friend.<sup>36</sup>

By presenting it in this way, the encounter with the dangerous knowledge of the Jesuits was turned into an enjoyable educational programme, which proved irresistible to Lockman. Once again, he conjures an image of a spontaneous exchange of ideas, during which the expression of emotions served to

31 Catherine Newmark, *Passion – Affekt – Gefühl. Philosophische Theorien der Emotionen zwischen Aristoteles und Kant* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2008), 76–80; Renate Dürr, “Laienprophetien: Zur Emotionalisierung politischer Phantasien im 17. Jahrhundert”, in *Performing Emotions: interdisziplinäre Perspektiven auf das Verhältnis von Politik und Emotion in der Frühen Neuzeit und in der Moderne*, ed. Claudia Jarzebowski and Anne Kwaschik (Göttingen: V&R, 2013), 21–24.

32 Lockman, *Travels*, I, 1743, 251; similarly: II, 59.

33 For instance, Lockman (*Travels*, I, 1743, 94) explains he would talk more on cannibalism in another comment.

34 Lockman, *Travels*, I, 1743, Preface, xvii; for example: “Excellent this! As tho’ the Spaniards had a right to kill the Natives, in Case they opposed their settling among them” (*ibid.*, 413).

35 *Ibid.*, Preface, xviii.

36 *Ibid.*

alleviate mistrust and raise confidence in one's own position. This rhetorical conceit has three important consequences. Firstly, it replaces the previously suspicious stance on Jesuit self-representation, including their alleged lies and manipulations, with the "familiarity" of a conversation among friends or even lovers. There is no shouting during a *tête-à-tête*. Nobody calls each other names, and plenty of room is given to contrary opinions. Secondly, the juxtaposition between Jesuit and anti-Jesuit positions not only gives the discourse an air of objectivity, but also makes it an exercise in self-reflection. Lockman had thus far described himself as an aloof translator, eager to see justice done to the texts and their authors, but here he suddenly becomes an author himself: "my pen", "instructing myself", "writing for myself", "wrapt in my Subject". This however implies that the hitherto "objective", external position actually reflects Lockman's own personal struggle: a struggle to establish a truth that was so important to him that he understood it as a political programme.<sup>37</sup> Thirdly, Lockman emphasizes once again that dangerous knowledge may be rendered harmless if one opts neither to believe it straight away, nor to dismiss it outright, but instead to debate it with an open mind. The *tête-à-tête* of opinions is thus more than a mere metaphor. It is a tool to envisage real and imagined conversations that were meant to be so realistic that Lockman even went so far as to preface a comment in a footnote with the cautious "If I might be allowed to add a Word or two".<sup>38</sup>

By reading this exchange of viewpoints, readers become eyewitnesses and, consequently, they would serve as the arbiters, presented with the task to authenticate the knowledge generated through debate. In certain passages, Lockman even went so far as to include his audience in the performative process of the debate: "The Reader may remember what was quoted from [François] Bernier, on this Head, a little above."<sup>39</sup> A similar effect is created by the many dates and times added into the commentary. Time and again, Lockman would note exactly when he had translated and commented on a certain text: "I write this in 1741", he wrote at a certain point – and note how he renders this in the present tense.<sup>40</sup> Another time, Lockman would specifically mention that he finally had maps "now before me".<sup>41</sup> This immediacy, finally, also allows us to watch as Lockman discovered his mistakes and corrected them. For instance, while working on reports about Ethiopia, he mentions on page 341 that he had not been aware of two important travel accounts while he was composing his commentaries on pages 236, 244 and 337.<sup>42</sup> Only four pages separated the old, erroneous knowledge from these new insights.<sup>43</sup> Lockman saw this not as a

37 *Ibid.*; Dedication to Arthur Onslow; see also: Dürr, "The Shepherd's Boy".

38 Lockman, *Travels*, I, 1743, 307.

39 *Ibid.*, II, 1743, 273.

40 *Ibid.*, I, 1743, 378.

41 *Ibid.*, II, 1743, 61.

42 *Ibid.*, I, 1743, 341–42.

43 This passage shows that books were often printed piece by piece in the early modern period; see Grafton, "Rhetoric and Divination in Erasmus' Edition of

reason to revisit what he had previously written, but to underline once again that the reader was in a direct and open dialogue with the texts presented. And this dialogue was spurred forward by new encounters and new insights: “I did not meet with [the two travelogues] till after the Sheets [...] were gone to Press”.<sup>44</sup>

To Lockman, encountering a book was like meeting an acquaintance. Both could be consulted whenever he was unsure about something, such as when a “Gentleman of my Acquaintance, who resided some Years at Canton” confirmed to Lockman that the information the Jesuits provided about the size of cities in China was more or less correct.<sup>45</sup> With an “English Gentleman, who was a considerable Time in the Spanish West-Indies” he spoke about the treatment of indigenous peoples by the Spanish, learning, among others, “that the Spaniards treat the Americans, with much greater Lenity, then our Countrymen”.<sup>46</sup> The assertion that people in Ethiopia were brown-skinned instead of black, which Lockman apparently found hard to believe, was indeed contradicted by “all Travellers I have met with” – leading to the question of exactly how many of those travellers had really gone to Ethiopia.<sup>47</sup> The pattern that emerges is that Lockman, whenever he was in doubt, left his desk to question and debate the experts he knew. He never failed to mention that these acquaintances were well-travelled “English Gentlemen”, signalling that their social status, the mores they represented, and especially their role as eyewitnesses lent an extra layer of credibility to the accounts of the Jesuits.

As a rule, Lockman’s footnotes were meant to spare his readers the long searches for necessary background information, so they tended to consist of lengthy excerpts from relevant books.<sup>48</sup> On the one hand, Lockman quoted works that explicitly dealt with the Jesuits, their activities, and their self-promotion. To that end, the key witnesses were usually Jansenists and their writings, such as Antoine Arnauld’s *La morale pratique des Jésuites*, Blaise Pascal’s *Lettres provinciales*, or an English translation of a treatise, issued in Paris, about the Chinese Rites controversies, with the telling title *The new Gospel of the Jesuits, compared with the old one of Jesus Christ*.<sup>49</sup> Another

Jerome: Ancient and Modern Ways to Save Dangerous, Vulnerable Texts”, in *Threatened Knowledge: Practices of Knowing and Ignoring From the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Renate Dürr (London: Routledge, 2022).

44 Lockman, *Travels*, I, 1743, 341–42: “I did not meet with them till after the Sheets [...] were gone to Press, otherwise I should have altered a few of the Notes, particularly that, pag. 236, and 337, relating to the Nile, from Father Lobo, and that pag. 244, where ’tis observed that the Abyssinians acknowledge but two Sacraments.”

45 *Ibid.*, 55; similarly: 151.

46 Lockman, *Travels*, II, 1743, 168.

47 Lockman, *Travels*, I, 1743, 230.

48 *Ibid.*, Preface, xviii.

49 Antoine Arnauld, *La morale pratique des Jésuites* (Cologne: Quentel, 1669); Louis de Montalte [Blaise Pascal], *Lettres écrites par Louis de Montalte à un Provincial de ses amis et aux R.R. Pères Jésuites* (Cologne: De la Vallée, 1657).

important source for Lockman were travelogues and geographical treatises – the more recent, the better. This purported direct usage of books and the safe knowledge they contained showed that Lockman saw value in using the very newest publications he could find, so as to better assess the dangerous knowledge of the Jesuits. In that sense, the complete absence of geographical literature from Antiquity is all the more striking.<sup>50</sup> Instead, Lockman uses travel accounts published in the 1720s and 1730s – hot off the press, by the standards of the time. Among these recent works featured books published in London, such as his own translation of *The Religious Ceremonies of all Nations* by Picart and Bernard, published in 1731; a translation of medieval Arabic travelogues on Asia, edited by Abbé Renaudot and published in 1733; John Atkins, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brazil and the West Indies*, published in 1735; and Thomas Salmon, *Modern History or the present state of nations* from 1739. Additional recent works used by Lockman include Benoît de Maillet, *Description de l'Égypte*, published in Paris in 1735, or the *Histoire du Christianisme d'Ethiopie et d'Armenie* by Matyrin Veyssière La Croze, published in 1739. To these recent publications were added a number of Jesuit descriptions of China, most notably the one by Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, *Description Geographique, Historique, Chronologique, Politique, et Physique de l'Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie*, which appeared as a four-volume series in Paris in 1735.<sup>51</sup>

Using these travelogues, Lockman checked the Jesuit reports for accuracy regarding their statements on cities, landscapes, or the everyday life of the local populace. Nevertheless, the first step to this process was always to verify the routes taken by the missionaries as precisely as possible. Most prominently, Lockman used an atlas by Herman Moll, which had also appeared quite recently and which covered the entire known world.<sup>52</sup> He looked up every single location mentioned, which gave him enormous satisfaction whenever he was successful.<sup>53</sup> It was a lot of work, as the indigenous place names were rendered in a curious French notation in the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, which made it difficult to compare them with the English maps at his disposal. In order to do so, Lockman would therefore attempt to reconstruct the French “sounds” using English spelling.<sup>54</sup> Should this not yield the desired result, Lockman would give the French spelling in a footnote as

50 Throughout Lockman's translations, I have only been able to find one reference to a classical work, namely the then-current English translation of Horace's *Odes and Satyres*; Lockman, *Travels*, II, 1743, 212.

51 Lockman, *Travels*, II, 1743, 306, 329–36.

52 Lockman does not specify which edition he used. See Herman Moll, *The World Described: or A New and Correct Sett of Maps* (London: Bowles, 1730); Herman Moll, *Atlas Minor: or a new and curious Set of Sixty two Maps* (London: Bowles, 1732).

53 Lockman, *Travels*, I, 1743, Preface, VII: “To this I would add (had it not been a Satisfaction which infinitely overpaid the Trouble I might be at on this Occasion) my setting the several Maps before me; and accompanying, as it were, the Fathers perpetually in their Peregrinations, both by Sea and Land.”

54 *Ibid.*, I, 1743, Preface, VII.

well.<sup>55</sup> In the process, he documented not only his attention to even the smallest of details while translating, but also emphasized once again the newsworthiness of the information, some of which had not even made it to the most recent atlases. Lockman employed a similar strategy for concepts he did not know, and which had not yet found their way into French dictionaries, for example when he translated the word “Damiers” with “Boobies, (which are birds)”, adding: “I have not found this Word in Any of my Dictionaries; but I believe the Interpretation I have given of it is right.”<sup>56</sup>

Given that the Jesuits would often report on regions about which even the newest maps contained only scanty information, one of Lockman’s challenges was to make plausible the distances as well as the latitudes and longitudes logged, so as to retain some indication about the locations described.<sup>57</sup> For instance, he had to deal with an island to the North of Madagascar, “not specified in Moll’s Maps, nor mentioned in any Travels I have met with”.<sup>58</sup> Sometimes he too lost track of things, such as when a letter about a naval voyage to China mentions that the company rested on an island called “Polahre”. Lockman almost took “this to be Pooleron”, but did not “find it to agree very well with the Course our Jesuit was steering”.<sup>59</sup> In other cases, he would simply explain to his readers that “I don’t meet with this Name [...] in our Maps”, drawing attention to the parallels that existed between his imaginary travels, and the way he, as a translator, checked the information given in the maps at his disposal.<sup>60</sup> This was an important addition to the imagined conversations with books and acquaintances in his commentaries: imagining a journey was given a central place in the assessment of dangerous knowledge.

But what could Lockman do when neither a comparison with other books, nor a conversation with other travellers or even a reconciliation with known maps helped put this knowledge in the picture? In some cases, Lockman would take recourse to his own experiences. Even if he lived almost his whole life in London, Lockman did spend some time in France in the year 1741.<sup>61</sup> During this time, he showed himself to be an inquisitive investigator, who described church decorations, commented on intra-Catholic quarrels, and observed the tenacity of mendicants with wide-eyed wonder.<sup>62</sup> Despite his anti-Catholic attitude, he opened himself up to new experiences: he dined with Jesuits and Benedictines, wrote about “a friend of mine (a Roman Catholic)”,<sup>63</sup> and attended Catholic Mass several times:

55 *Ibid.*, 57, similarly: 248, 261, 263, 272; II, 20, 220.

56 *Ibid.*, I, 1743, 113, similarly: 116, 203, 209.

57 *Ibid.*, 51, 174, 192, 202, 205; II, 44, 161, 174.

58 *Ibid.*, I, 1743, 160, similarly: 162; II, 7.

59 *Ibid.*, I, 1743, 117, similarly: 194, 207, 228.

60 *Ibid.*, 266, similarly: II, 192.

61 *Ibid.*, I, 1743, 372; II, 127.

62 *Ibid.*, II, 1743, 108; 182; 333; 470.

63 *Ibid.*, 182; 365; 495.

Being at Mass, one Sunday, at the great Carthusians in Paris, some of the Fathers or Brothers, did not only strike their Heads against the Ground; but lay a considerable Time upon their Bellies, in two Lines; a Sight that is not a little odd to an Englishman.<sup>64</sup>

Through these experiences in Paris, Lockman was able to contextualize descriptions of Catholic practices in China – in the process making those same practices in Paris seem more exotic. In some cases, he used his own knowledge to explicitly authenticate reports which he could not otherwise confirm, such as when he reflected on Chinese commercial practice by comparing it with its French counterpart. “Seeing (when at Paris) the Keys of the River Seine there, [...] I considered the Kingdom of France in much the same Light (in Miniature) as this Father does China”.<sup>65</sup> Sometimes he even took explicit recourse to the scientific panacea of casting himself as an eyewitness: when comparing the European practice of bloodletting to the ascetic practices of combatting fevers in India, he would for example write that “I myself have been often an Eye-witness” to this.<sup>66</sup>

What we see here, then, is the extent to which reading about experiences in exotic locations became inextricably bound up with one’s own background. It was not just that the process of reading itself became an emotional experience *per se*, because the narratives written by the missionaries already contained many different emotions. Oftentimes, we read exciting accounts about the boundary experiences they found themselves in on their travels: shipwrecks from which they narrowly escaped with their lives, dealing with endless tropical rains, or living through wars and persecutions. The adventures of these missionaries thus also created a sense of fear and excitement, but also of accomplishment; a sense of desolation, but also of faith in God. Reading, to Lockman, helped to relive all these experiences, including the emotions that accompanied one on their journey. As he candidly writes in the dedication of his second book:

Led by the FATHERS, o’er th’Atlantic fly,  
 Whilst circling Months shew only Waves and Sky:  
 Amaz’d, see Lightnings flash; hear Thunders roul;  
 See Ocean gape as to th’Antartic Pole:  
 View distant Shipwrecks; hear th’expiring Groan;  
 Then land in Regions, barbarous and unknown.<sup>67</sup>

64 *Ibid.*, 327.

65 *Ibid.*, 303.

66 *Ibid.*, 362.

67 *Ibid.*, Dedication “To A Great Lady”, 2.



### Debating Dangerous Knowledge: The Perspective of the Other

Thanks to all these comments added, and the commentaries to these comments, the *Travels of the Jesuits* took the form of a dialogue as well. The layout already shows how Lockman considered all his options and attempted to render the dangerous knowledge harmless using the power of contextualization. Many pages show how the “antidote” simply overwhelms the potential poison of the Jesuit vipers through its sheer volume. In what follows, I will offer an interpretation of two such imaginary debates: first, the way Lockman engaged with three interconnected letters about the Moxos region, and second, the debate about Jewish or Christian roots of the religions in India. The first of these cases concerns a region about which Europeans knew practically nothing, meaning that Lockman was not able to confirm his information by using other reports. Here, Lockman’s fear of being manipulated by the Jesuits shaped his commentaries; therefore, in these letters, his comments deal with the Society of Jesus especially. In contrast, the second case, a well-known letter about religious practices in India, had become a central building block for the conceptualization of the divine during the Enlightenment, which made it a debated issue indeed – and Lockman knew he would enhance one side with his footnotes at the expense of the other.

The comments to the letters about the Moxos, who lived in nowadays Bolivia, make clear that Lockman’s vocal advocacy for immediacy does not mean he always wrote down his comments spontaneously. Instead, the comments show careful planning and have their own internal logic.<sup>68</sup> The comments to the first translated letter on the Moxos put the Jesuits themselves in the centre of the *tête-à-tête* of opinions.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, Lockman specifies that the descriptions of cannibalism by Stanislaus Arlet will be the subject of a later footnote.<sup>70</sup> The longest comment to this letter was prompted by the statement that Jesuits had come to the Moxos to teach Christianity and serve the Lord.<sup>71</sup> As “antidote” to this appraisal, Lockman cites two anecdotes from Antoine Arnauld’s *Morale pratique*, written in 1669, which are supposed to have happened more or less in the same geographic area.<sup>72</sup> In the first of these, the Jesuits were accused of not properly continuing the education of the populace after their conversion. It is even suggested that this neglect led to a rebellion against the Jesuits. The second story is about envy amongst the Jesuits themselves. This is illustrated using the example of the Jesuit Mendiola, who was accused of having left the order to marry an indigenous woman.<sup>73</sup> In a subsequent note, also taken from the *Morale*

68 For more details, see Dürr, “The Shepherd’s Boy”, 186–91.

69 Lockman, *Travels*, I, 1743, 93–101.

70 *Ibid.*, 94.

71 *Ibid.*, 95–97.

72 Arnauld, *La morale pratique*.

73 Lockman, *Travels*, I, 1743, 96. In other footnotes to this text, Lockman asserts that Jesuits played up to local populations and refers to excerpts from Arnauld to make this claim.

*pratique*, Lockman explains that the Jesuits would always do their best to ingratiate themselves with local populations, and even went so far as to forge letters to facilitate that process.<sup>74</sup> Comments such as these fit perfectly with the ideas presented in Lockman's martyrology, mentioned at the start of this chapter: as far as Lockman was concerned, Jesuits were untrustworthy, self-centred, and manipulative.

The second translated letter on the Moxos, written by Father Nyel in 1705, also gave Lockman the occasion to engage with the Jesuits themselves.<sup>75</sup> This time, the focus is on their theology, and the longest comment is about the idea that Jesuits liked to take confession often.<sup>76</sup> Quoting a lengthy passage from the *Lettres Provinciales* by Blaise Pascal, Lockman treats his readers to a conversation between a Jansenist and a Jesuit, during which the latter – according to Pascal – shamelessly declared that Jesuits always find a way to absolve anyone of their sins.<sup>77</sup> They get away with this, the text goes on, because they would explain away the circumstances surrounding a sin or a crime in such minute detail that every transgression ends up seeming relatively insignificant. This leads Lockman, on the one hand, to take a strong position against such practices: “If the Jesuits who went to propagate the *Christian Religion* among the *Moxos*, allowed of the *Maxims* above ascribed to the Society, their Arrival must have been a Curse to that People, instead of a Blessing”.<sup>78</sup> On the other hand, the “if” in that sentence demonstrates that Lockman was not quite sure of Pascal's interpretation. Perhaps this can be explained with the main argument about Jesuit confessional practice that is made in the letter. It is emphasized that the Jesuits did not require penance from the sinners, but only personal self-reflection.<sup>79</sup> Given that Lockman, himself an English Protestant, cites these passages from the *Lettres Provinciales*, the anti-Jesuit sentiments contained within might have ultimately missed their mark, because Protestants within the Church of England did not practice the private confession or penance alluded to by Pascal. This of course raises the question why Lockman chose this topic out of all the possibilities to criticize Jesuit theology, but he himself clarifies this right at the beginning of his comment, when he writes by distancing himself from Jansenist argumentation: “The Enemies of the Jesuits accuse them of sometimes dispensing this Sacrament” [i.e. confession], adding in brackets: “as it is called by the Romanists”.<sup>80</sup>

74 *Ibid.*, 97. In the last footnote to Arlet's letter, Lockman states that Jesuits imposed on the indigenous people by distributing devotional pictures which of course affected them profoundly, *ibid.*, 101.

75 *Ibid.*, II, 1743, 160–97.

76 *Ibid.*, 162–66.

77 Montalte, *Lettres écrites*, Lettre X.

78 Lockman, *Travels*, II, 1743, 165 (italics in the original).

79 *Ibid.*, II, 1743, 162.

80 *Ibid.*

Yet another point of criticism is addressed when Lockman comments on the abbreviated description of the life and death of the Jesuit missionary Cyprian Baraza, which was the third translated text with information on the Moxos region and culture in Lockman's compilation.<sup>81</sup> Lockman here decidedly succumbs to several types of cultural relativism at once. For example, he compared the never ending rains and the mosquitoes that plague the Llanos de Moxos with similarly horrible weather conditions – and similarly uneducated inhabitants – in Lincolnshire or Somersetshire.<sup>82</sup> The body paint and decorations of the Moxos, conversely, reminded Lockman of the make-up worn by certain women in Paris.<sup>83</sup> All this culminates in a discussion of prejudices held by travellers, and specifically by Jesuits, *vis-à-vis* peoples like the Moxos: “I believe Travellers, and especially the Jesuits, often represent these un-enlightened Nations as much more ignorant than they are in reality.”<sup>84</sup> Using a plethora of quotations from the *Essais* by Michel de Montaigne published in the 1580s, Lockman argues that people have a tendency to describe other cultures in negative terms for the simple reason that they were different from their own culture. He then goes on to compare European law to that encountered elsewhere, and also contrasts the conceptions of power and rulership in the various regions in a way that is decidedly critical towards European thoughts and behaviours.<sup>85</sup> Echoing Montaigne, Lockman thus expresses his dislike of the Jesuit idea that “[they] shou'd first make 'em Men, before [the Moxos] cou'd be *Christians*”.<sup>86</sup> All these comments lead Lockman towards the previously announced engagement with the supposed cannibalism of the Moxos: an argument prompted by the assertion of the original report, that the Moxos “have made themselves formidable to all other Nations, by their native Fierceness, and the barbarous Custom they have of eating Man's Flesh”.<sup>87</sup> In an emotional reaction to this claim, Lockman quotes long passages from a travelogue by John Atkins, a ship's doctor and personal acquaintance of Lockman.<sup>88</sup> According to Atkins, the idea that cannibalism was so often ascribed to people in many newly discovered regions mostly reflected the fears and ignorance of many Europeans, while also lending a sense of adventure to their voyage into the unknown – which could in turn be useful to make their travels and safe return appear all the more wondrous, or to legitimize future conquests and expropriations.<sup>89</sup> This rendered all supposed eyewitness accounts inherently useless, along with more

81 *Ibid.*, 437–68.

82 *Ibid.*, 438, 441–42.

83 *Ibid.*, 445.

84 *Ibid.*, 441.

85 *Ibid.*, 442.

86 *Ibid.*, 451 (*italics in the original*).

87 *Ibid.*, 458.

88 John Atkins, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brazil and the West Indies* (London: Ward and Chandler, 1735); Lockman, *Travels*, II, 1743, 461.

89 *Ibid.*, II, 1743, 459.

“empirical” evidence: bones which supposedly indicated the existence of cannibalism more often than not belonged to monkeys or apes.<sup>90</sup> All things considered, Lockman emphasized, following Atkins, the practice of anthropophagy was so contrary to human nature that it was all but impossible to assume it really existed – except maybe during famines or to combat the threat of starvation on European ships as they travelled across the globe.<sup>91</sup> Juxtaposing these Jesuit letters with anti-Jesuit representations of similar phenomena thus moved from a critique of the Jesuits, their morals, and their theology, to a reflection on the way one should treat different cultures in general. The problem did not lie exclusively with Jesuit errors in judgement, but with those committed by all Europeans: a conclusion that was the direct result of Lockman’s process of dialogic learning.

Lockman needed all the “antidote” he could get to deal with possible manipulations in the letters from the Moxos region, simply because the Jesuits were nearly the only ones to report from the vast savannas northwest of Santa Cruz. Jesuit treatises in my second example, meanwhile, were deceptive for wholly different reasons. This example concerns the way arguments were constructed during a debate that was central to the early Enlightenment period: the question of whether or not polytheistic practices of faith should be understood as religious. Scholars nowadays recognize how this debate within European scholarship has affected and limited Western understanding about Buddhism, (neo-)Confucianism or Hinduism, even going as far as to claim that concepts like Hinduism were in many ways a nineteenth-century invention.<sup>92</sup> It should thus be remembered that the Jesuit treatise on Hindu practices in question, and all its translations, are part of an Orientalist discourse, as proposed by Edward Said – including those instances where questions or answers by Brahman philosophers are quoted.<sup>93</sup> In any case, the French Jesuit Jean Venant Bouchet started his enquiries by stating that his “design” was “to prove, that the Indians borrowed their Religion from the Books of Moses and the Prophets”.<sup>94</sup> With that one statement, Bouchet placed himself on the side of those who interpreted the practices of the people in India as religious practices, and also on the side of those who would emphasize similarities between Hindu and Western monotheist practices.

90 *Ibid.*, 461.

91 *Ibid.*

92 For the European discussion on Indian religions see: Will Sweetman, *Mapping Hinduism: “Hinduism” and the Study of Indian Religions, 1600–1776* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002); Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes, 1250–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 308–48; Joan-Pau Rubiés, “From Christian Apologetics to Deism: Libertine Readings of Hinduism”, in *God in the Enlightenment*, ed. William J. Bulman and Robert J. Ingram (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Subrahmanyam, *Europe’s India*.

93 See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). See also the prudent approach by Subrahmanyam, *Europe’s India*, XV–XVI.

94 Lockman, *Travels*, II, 1743, 241.

What was at stake, from a European perspective, was not only the presence of and competition between European powers in Asia, or the contest between Franciscan and Jesuit missionaries, or even the rivalry between the Catholic and Protestant missions in India, but also the question of what constituted the essence of religion more generally. After all, if one defines polytheistic “idolatry” as religion, it becomes possible to compare the practices and fundamentals of various such religions. Recognizing this, in turn, became one of the foundational ideas of the deistic and natural theological approach to religion during the European Enlightenment. Specifically, early Enlightenment thinkers assumed that the idea of a single creator God, combined with a central set of commonly accepted morals and virtues, connected all the world’s religions.<sup>95</sup> A second assumption was that all extant religions were degenerated versions of a single primeval religion – with the various forms of religion indicating various degrees of degeneracy.<sup>96</sup>

This was a theme close to the Jesuits’ own interests. The question of whether Confucian, Buddhist or Hindu practices could be interpreted as being “religious” directly affected their missionary methods.<sup>97</sup> Accommodation to local customs was fundamental to Jesuit proselytizing methods in India and China, to the extent that they ended up provoking the Chinese and Malabar Rites controversies within the Catholic Church, which ended with the Jesuits conceding defeat.<sup>98</sup> Starting in the late sixteenth century, most Jesuits operating in Asia were of the opinion that the traditional rites they encountered – such as ancestor worship – were compatible with the Christian faith, and could be continued after baptism provided they did not contain any explicit religious connotations. Around the year 1600, they would therefore stress the essentially “atheist” nature of (neo-)Confucianism and Hinduism in India and China. Several decades later, many Jesuits rejected these ideas. Their accommodation strategy increasingly began to be based on the search for potentially Christian elements in Hindu and Buddhist practices and imagery. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Jesuits thus did not have a clear, unambiguous answer to the question of whether Indian polytheistic rituals could be described as a religion or not. Nevertheless, all their positions should be read as arguments in the Chinese and Malabar Rites Controversies that

95 Ellen Judy Wilson and Peter Hanns Reill, “Deism”, in *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, ed. Alan Charles Kors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Thijs Weststeijn, “Spinoza Sinicus: An Asian Paragraph in the History of the Radical Enlightenment”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68, no. 4 (2007): 537–61; Martin Mulrow, “Joseph-François Lafitau und die Entdeckung der Religions- und Kulturvergleiche”, in *Götterbilder und Götzendiener in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Maria Effinger and Claudia Logemann (Heidelberg: Winter, 1992).

96 Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and Its Enemies, 1660–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Rubiés, “From Christian Apologetics to Deism”.

97 Renate Dürr, “Akkomodation und Wissenstransfer”, *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 44, no. 3 (2017): 487–509.

98 Županov and Fabre, *The Rites Controversies*.

divided European scholars and religious authorities. This in turn means they were highly biased in themselves. Against this background, it stands to reason that the treatises composed by Jesuits about religious practices in China and India were thus read with great caution by European scholars.

Letters from India and China feature prominently in the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, especially in the first ten volumes translated by Lockman. Among these are several letters and reports by the French Jesuit Jean Venant Bouchet.<sup>99</sup> Some of Bouchet's treatises about India had gone through various editions and translations in Europe, including his letter to Pierre-Daniel Huet, the erstwhile bishop of Avranches. It was first published in 1711, in the ninth volume of the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* and translated into English almost immediately.<sup>100</sup> Some years later, it was added to Picart and Bernard's compilation *Cérémonies et Coutumes Religieuses*.<sup>101</sup> In 1726, it was translated into German for the *Neue Welt-Bott*.<sup>102</sup> Finally, John Lockman was responsible for two further translations, first as part of the English translations of the *Cérémonies et Coutumes Religieuses*, which appeared in 1734, and subsequently for his translation of the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* from 1743.<sup>103</sup> In most cases, the treatise was printed without abbreviation. Even self-professed deists like Jean-Frédéric Bernard agreed with some of the fundamental propositions formulated by Bouchet. Whereas other reports from India, written by a number of Protestant observers, received additional comments, Bouchet's treatise remained untouched, and indeed was the final text before Bernard's own summary of religion in India.<sup>104</sup> John Lockman, on the other hand, composed an extensive commentary, which increased the length of Bouchet's text by about a third. Before studying Lockman's comments to Bouchet's treatise, it is necessary to briefly summarize the ideas of this influential text.

99 On Bouchet, see Clooney, *Fr. Bouchet's India*, 1–4.

100 Du Halde, *Lettres édifiantes*, 1–60; *The Travels of Several Learned Missioners of the Society of Jesus, into Divers Parts of the Archipelago, India, China, and America* (London: Gosling, 1714).

101 Bernard Picart, *Cérémonies et Coutumes Religieuses*, 9 vols (Amsterdam: Bernard, 1723–1743) VI, 100–08.

102 Joseph Stöcklein, *Der Neue Welt-Bott*, 5 vols (Augsburg: Philips, Martins, and Veith, 1726–1760), I, no. 118, 84–90.

103 Picart, *Cérémonies*, VI, 100–08; for the similarities of the two translations see: David J. A. Clines, "In Search of the Indian Job", *Vetus Testamentum* 33, no. 4 (1983), 398–418, there 403 fn.16.

104 See on the reports on India in the *Cérémonies et Coutumes Religieuses*: Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt (ed.), *The Book That Changed Europe: Picart and Bernard's Religious Ceremonies of the World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Carlo Ginzburg, "Provincializing the World: Europeans, Indians, Jews (1704)", *Postcolonial Studies* 14, no. 2 (2011), 135–150; Rubiés, "Christian Apologetics"; Subrahmanyam, *Europe's India*, 103–143.

Initially, Jean Venant Bouchet was a vocal opponent of Hindu “idolatry”. For instance, in letters written shortly after his arrival in India, he proudly described how he had provoked conflicts with Brahmins.<sup>105</sup> Commenting on writings about the destruction of pagodas or “idols”, Lockman in turn wrote: “Some Persons would say, what Business had the Jesuit [i.e. Bouchet] to leave his Native Country, and sail to another so many thousand Miles distant from it, there to disturb the Natives in their Possessions?”<sup>106</sup> As the years progressed, however, Bouchet’s opinion started to change, partly in response to his own experiences with Indian religious practices, and partly because of his encounters with the bigoted members of the papal investigative commission who visited India during the so-called Malabar Rites Controversy. Bouchet subsequently took the name of an Indian renunciant, adopted an ascetic lifestyle, and diligently practised the Lotus position.<sup>107</sup> He even went so far as to reconcile the belief in reincarnation with Christian ideas about the afterlife, although even he had his limits. For instance, Bouchet refused to accept the idea that animals possessed a soul, thereby quoting René Descartes – of all people – when he tried to convince a Brahman of the absurdity of this idea. The Brahman responded indignantly, prompting Bouchet to grumble in turn: “I realized that one ought not even in jest propose to Indians the systems of the modern philosophers.”<sup>108</sup>

Bouchet’s deliberations in his letter to Huet started from the statement that most Indians “are not so absurd as to give into Atheism”.<sup>109</sup> Instead, he assumed that “they entertain a tolerably just Idea of the Deity, tho’ depraved and vitiated by the Worship of Idols”.<sup>110</sup> Thus, the approach taken by Bouchet is first of all a historical one, based on the idea that he was dealing with a degenerate version of a monotheistic past. The majority of his subsequent treatise is aimed at finding traces of an underlying “ancient truth” in the religious practices he encountered in India.<sup>111</sup> In order to prove this, Bouchet goes in search of common ground between Hinduism and Christianity.

Bouchet opened his argumentation by positing that the Indians actually were monotheistic. They distinguished between one single God and three forces or sub-deities, of which *Bruma* represented creation; *Wistnou*, preservation; and *Routeren*, destruction. Following from these assumptions, Bouchet goes on to find numerous parallels between Indian traditions and the stories of the Old Testament. For instance, he found that in the Indian creation myth, the first man is also created from clay, and mention is made of Paradise as the Garden of

105 Clooney, *Fr. Bouchet’s India*, 1–8.

106 Lockman, *Travels*, I, 1743, 477; see also Clooney, *Fr. Bouchet’s India*, 32–33.

107 Clooney, *Fr. Bouchet’s India*, 2.

108 Quotation in Clooney, *Fr. Bouchet’s India*, 63.

109 Lockman, *Travels*, II, 1743, 242; summaries of the letter can be found in: Clooney, *Fr. Bouchet’s India*, 46–54; Hunt, Jacob, and Mijnhardt, *The Book That Changed Europe*, 227–29; Sweetman, *Mapping Hinduism*, 138–39.

110 Lockman, *Travels*, II, 1743, 243.

111 *Ibid.*, 247.

Eden. There are Indian tales about a Deluge, including a figure that, according to Bouchet, appeared similar to Noah. Abraham, by a similar logic, has a clear parallel in Brahma, as shown already by the similarity in their names and those of their respective wives Sarah and Sarasvadi (especially since *Vadi* simply means “wife/woman”). Bouchet was aware of the limits of his comparisons: “I very possibly [...] may have expatiated too much on the Conformity between the Doctrine of the Indians and that of the Israelites”, he writes, before immediately continuing to describe further similarities – this time between Indian religions and Christianity.<sup>112</sup> Among these are an equivalent to the Trinity represented by the three “sub-deities”, the adoption of confessional practices, as well as the fact that (the Christian) God has become incarnate several times, which has a parallel in the belief in reincarnation, albeit in a limited fashion.<sup>113</sup>

Lockman was unable to leave Bouchet’s letter uncommented as Bernard had done. The reason for that probably was the appearance of Thomas Salmon’s multi-volume *Modern History or the Present State of Nation* in 1739.<sup>114</sup> In Chapter 11 of the first volume Salmon summarized Bouchet’s treatise, and eventually dismissed it because “none of our own people, or the Portuguese, or the Dutch” would “ever have made this observation of the history of the Bramins” – even if he later qualifies this by stating that: “Thus much is true, the Indians do acknowledge one supreme God.”<sup>115</sup> Lockman quotes Salmon’s comments about Bouchet in full, and adds for his part that Protestants, too, hailing from different nations across Europe, had made observations similar to those of Bouchet – often even long before the arrival of the Jesuits. Lockman’s chief witnesses in this regard were the travelogues by the English chaplain Henry Lord, who travelled to Surat from 1624 to 1629, and the Dutch cleric Abraham Rogerius – both of whom were also featured in the *Cérémonies et Coutumes Religieuses*. Moreover, the *Voyages* by the French doctor François Bernier are quoted extensively, as is the account by the Italian traveller Pietro della Valle. Although Lockman was usually interested in the most recent travel reports, all these texts go back to the seventeenth century; Henry Lord’s book even appeared as early as 1630. The main ingredient to this antidote thus consisted quite simply of denying the Jesuits the credit for their “discovery”. But Lockman goes one step further when he compares Bouchet’s description of Indian religious practices with Thomas Hyde’s *Historia Religionis veterum Persarum*, which appeared in 1700 but which, he assumes, must have remained under Salmon’s radar.<sup>116</sup>

112 *Ibid.*, 272.

113 Francis X. Clooney, “Jesuit Intellectual Practice in Early Modernity: The Pan-Asian Argument against Rebirth”, in *The Jesuits and Globalization: Historical Legacies and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Thomas F. Banchoff and José Casanova (Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 2016).

114 Thomas Salmon, *Modern History, Or, The Present State of All Nations*, 3 vols (London: Longman, 1739), I, ch. XI on India.

115 *Ibid.*, 273.

116 Thomas Hyde, *Historia Religionis veterum Persarum* (Oxford: s.n., 1700); Lockman, *Travels*, II, 1743, 259–60.



Hyde had shown that the ancient Persian religion already demonstrated lots of commonalities with Judaism. And because India bordered directly on Persia, it was thus just as likely that this was how Jewish influences had reached the sub-continent. In a short summary of the relevant chapters from Hyde's work, Lockman locates exactly the same similarities that Bouchet had found between Judaism and Hinduism, as well as the link to the narratives of the Old Testament and the Gospel: "The Gospel (according to Dr. Hyde, and several learned Persians) inform us, that the Birth of Christ was revealed to the Persians."<sup>117</sup> Lockman conceded that these hypotheses were on shaky ground, as it would be difficult to say anything with certainty about such ancient religions, "and that we are frequently obliged to grope our Way, at random, and in the dark". Lockman finds certainty in his emotional response. After all, to him it was really "very pleasant" that two intellectuals of the calibre of Dr. Hyde and Mr. Lord had reached such similar conclusions to the ones drawn by the Jesuit missionary Jean Venant Bouchet, even if the similarities between Jesuit and non-Jesuit descriptions of Indian religions must have been uncanny to both groups involved.<sup>118</sup> The pleasure Lockman felt while discovering these similarities reassured him of their verisimilitude. Thus, once again, emotions functioned like signposts to what was right or wrong to this Enlightened intellectual.

### **Conclusion: Regulating Dangerous Knowledge as a Mode of Enlightened *Censura***

The idea behind John Lockman's "antidote" to the dangerous knowledge presented by the Jesuits is a very emotional one. It invokes images of protection against snakes, of a fight to the death against a strong and dangerous enemy – not least because snakes tend to be hidden and are often noticed too late. Poisonous snakes can ruin even the most idyllic situations, as they are usually encountered during day trips which Lockman himself had described as "pleasurable airings". The choice of this particular vocabulary thus already indicates that reading and translating Jesuit texts was a highly emotional process for the staunchly anti-Jesuit Enlightenment scholar. Lockman was convinced that he had to regulate the dangerous knowledge he encountered, so as to render it harmless. The study on Lockman thus provides an exemplary case of assessment as a highly emotional way of reading. As Lockman explained clearly in his prologue, his sense of indignation helped him identify the passages he mistrusted. Lockman, in other words, did not hide the emotional stimulus of his responses. Quite the contrary: to him, this was a *conditio sine qua non* for his *tête-à-tête* of opinions, which he considered to be a fair and balanced way of providing a platform for different points-of-view. Indignation gave way to satisfaction and inner peace, initial distrust strengthened the faith in one's own convictions, and doubt became certainty.

117 Lockman, *Travels*, II, 1743, 260.

118 Weststeijn, "Spinoza Sinicus", 553–56.

Put bluntly: dangerous knowledge turned into *knowledge*. Emotions, to Lockman, therefore were not an undesirable byproduct of knowledge. On the contrary, the production of knowledge required these emotions.

Even if Lockman's own emotions played a central role in steering his assessments, the *tête-à-tête* of opinions was primarily meant for his intended audience – in this case enlightened public intellectuals in England. Lockman made his readers an integral part of his imaginative reconstructions of his subjects' voyages, and his imagined conversations with experts and the books they had written. In doing so, they stood witness to his assessment of information. The concept of "imagination" might help clarify the importance of subjectivity within this process of knowledge production because it underlines how much the acquisition of knowledge is based on one's own imagination, after all. The recourse to imaginative talks and travels characterized and structured Lockman's entire work, from the page layout to the vocabulary used to introduce his readers to the books, maps, and experts he consulted while assessing the information he translated. These imaginative dialogues were the "antidote" to the alleged poison of the Jesuits. By directly addressing the readers, Lockman included them into the *tête-à-tête* of opinions and required them also to practice changing their own perspectives regularly, as this was a cornerstone of Lockman's commentaries.

First and foremost, Jesuit perspectives were juxtaposed with those of their opponents, such as when Lockman referred to Jansenist writings or engendered understanding for the position of some Buddhists. Second, Lockman subjected anti-Jesuit viewpoints to the same process, as we have seen in his footnotes to reports on the Moxos. Thereby, he nuanced his own opinions by furnishing an opinion to counter a counter-opinion. Third, Lockman used this method to defend Bouchet's treatise on the similarities between Hinduism and Judaism against the criticism from English Protestants. This is striking, as Bouchet had composed his work as part of the Malabar Rites Controversy, during which Protestants tended to follow the Pope's lead by criticizing Jesuit ideas about accommodation to local customs. In fact, the very search for structural similarities between the different religions proved to be a common interest between Enlightenment thinkers and Jesuits to a much greater extent than either would dare to admit.<sup>119</sup> Studying suspicion towards knowledge thereby might become a key to understanding the Enlightenment.

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119 See also Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Jesuits and the Enlightenment", in *The Oxford Handbook of the Jesuits*, ed. Ines G. Županov (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 855–90.

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# Epilogue

## Getting Closer to the Truth?

*Miles Ogborn*

In 1719, in Barbados, the island's governor, Robert Lowther, had a lot to say to the Grand Jury about truth and lies, and what it meant to "speak falsely":

We are tied to one another only by Speech, our Understanding being directed by no other way than that of words, he who speaks falsely betrays the public Society: It is the only Instrument whereby we impart our thoughts, it is the Interpreter of our Souls; if we are deprived of it, we are no longer tied to, nor know one another; if it deceives us, it breaks all our Correspondence & dissolves the bond of our Policy.<sup>1</sup>

Lowther was certainly concerned with the ways in which those who spread slanders "make truth difficult to be known by those who have been seduced and prepossessed by them".<sup>2</sup> In part, his concern was a very local one. The governor's thoughts on truth emerged within his long-running conflict with the Tory clergyman William Gordon, whom he was accusing of high treason for what he saw as slanderous attacks on himself and his administration. However, early modern Caribbean politics were never simply local. Gordon's attack on Lowther was understood by the governor and his supporters as part of an ongoing Jacobite campaign of "Sedition & Rebellion" against church and state, particularly when Gordon preached a sermon on the day Lowther had "appointed to be Observed for the happy Suppression of the late unnatural Rebellion" that "seemed to be only Calculated to Distract and Poison the minds of the Congregation & to ridicule the Solemnity of the Day".<sup>3</sup>

In addition, these concerns about truth and lies could not remain locally circumscribed because both Gordon and Lowther knew that establishing their version of the truth meant using means that would engage the audiences on both sides of the Atlantic that were involved in their dispute. Lowther was

1 Barbados Public Library, Lucas Transcripts of the Barbados Council Minutes (hereafter LT), vol. 14, 212.

2 Ibid.

3 LT, vol. 13, 395. See Miles Ogborn, *The Freedom of Speech: Talk and Slavery in the Anglo-Caribbean World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 71–72.

keen to demonstrate that the anonymous pamphlet entitled *A Representation of the Miserable State of Barbadoes, Under the Arbitrary and Corrupt Administration of His Excellency, Robert Lowther, Esq* had been written, and then printed and published in London in 1719, by Gordon, and “great numbers of the said Libellous Pamphlets have been imported into [Barbados], & industriously dispersed over this Island & elsewhere”.<sup>4</sup> To do so he had depositions taken in London in May 1719 from the Temple Bar publisher, Bernard Lintott; the printer, in St. Martin’s Ludgate, James Roberts; the compositor, George Wells; and the printer’s servant, Humphrey Skelton. Together they affirmed on oath before the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London that Gordon had brought in a manuscript for printing; made numerous corrections to the proofs, including removing his name from the title page; had the final work delivered to his lodgings; and accepted the bill via his black “Servant”.<sup>5</sup>

Their depositions spoke to its distribution as well as its production. Lintott said that Gordon told him to remove his name as author because “he published the said book for those Gentlemen whose names appear at page 13”, where were listed eight of Lowther’s opponents who had sent the manuscript to the king and Privy Council. He also affirmed that Gordon had ordered a hundred copies “sticht in marble Paper & gilt on the Leaves for himself to distribute among his friends”, told him that he had sent copies to the Duke of Argyle and Lord Sunderland, and asked Lintott to advertise it in the newspapers.<sup>6</sup> Other copies, as Lowther complained, were sent to Barbados. To publicly refute Gordon’s charges, the island’s council agreed that the “Declaration” the governor had sent to the Privy Council in response should “be forthwith published in the Bridge Town by Beat of Drum” by the Provost Marshal, and then eleven “exact copies” made to be dispatched to each parish to be read out by the ministers of each parish church “with a Distinct & Audible Voice” after divine service on Sunday 18 October 1719.<sup>7</sup> Yet Gordon was not finished. As well as arguing that the congregations paid little attention to Lowther’s words as spoken by the churchmen, he had a “paper writing” fixed to each church door for everyone to see. This refuted the governor’s refutation.<sup>8</sup> In turn, led by the governor, the island’s council declared *A Representation of the Miserable State of Barbadoes* to be “false, scandalous and seditious” and the paper to be “Impudent, false & Malicious”, and had them both burned by the common hangman.<sup>9</sup> Yet, it is certain that not everyone in either Britain or Barbados took that to be the truth or the end of the matter.

This quite particular conflict over truth, credibility, and distance – who in Barbados or London would believe the political, economic, and religious

4 LT, vol. 13, 376.

5 LT, vol. 14, 7–11.

6 *Ibid.*, 8.

7 LT, vol. 13, 435.

8 *The Barbadoes Packet*, 25.

9 LT, vol. 13, 516 and 520.

claims and counterclaims of the governor and his opponents – signals some of the key issues that arise in this volume. First, I want to discuss the changing significance of media and, in particular, the continual interdependence of many different forms of print, script, and speech (as well as images), as evidenced in the Barbados council’s discussion of Gordon’s handwritten response to Lowther’s vocalized refutation of the pamphlet Gordon had printed in London. Second, I want to examine the changing historical geography of communication in its simplest sense – where was connected to where-else, and how? – signalled by the facility with which printed pages, handwritten letters and depositions, as well, no doubt, as rumours, gossip, slander, and lies crisscrossed the Atlantic in the early eighteenth century. Finally, I want to examine the credibility criteria for different sorts of truth – Lowther’s tyranny and corruption, or Gordon’s untrustworthiness and sedition – to pose some questions about the different sorts of truths, and ways of establishing them, that were at work in the early modern world.

As many of the chapters in this volume point out, media matters to these questions of credibility and distance. In accord with early modern historical scholarship in general, this is not an argument about the qualities of print, or the universalized characteristics of “print culture”, in opposition to those of a preceding manuscript culture based on handwritten texts.<sup>10</sup> Even where printing provided more fixity to texts that had previously (and no doubt still) circulated in manuscript – such as Mandeville’s *Travels*, Marco Polo’s *Description of the World*, or the voyages of St Brendan – and opened those texts up to a wider readership, this was as likely to bring them – and other printed works – into question, as what could now be assumed to be the same text could be scrutinized by a wider and more differentiated readership. In addition, as Joan-Pau Rubiés points out, printing also introduced other agents between authors and readers. These publishers, booksellers, and translators were assumed to have their own commercial, (geo)political, and religious agendas, posing further questions of the reliability of transmission and the credibility of texts. Thus, as Stephanie Leitch shows in the case of Theodore de Bry and Levinus Hulsius’s collections of travels, printing – and particularly the commercial imperatives of their printshops – generated a process of the replication and sharing of images between printers and texts. This served both to connect the antique and the exotic, and to generalize the imagery of the exotic across contexts. As a result, flying shaman figures and feathered skirts appeared in texts about both the Americas and Africa, and

10 The literature here is vast, but see Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, “An Unacknowledged Revolution Revisited”, *American Historical Review* 107, no. 1 (2002): 87–105; and Adrian Johns, “How to Acknowledge a Revolution”, *American Historical Review* 107, no. 1 (2002): 106–25.



the Blemmyæ – monstrous figures with their faces in their chests – relocated from North Africa to South America.

What is most striking is the variety of forms and genres, in both script and print, through which information about far-flung places was communicated to and within early modern Europe. As the chapters show, each made their own claims to credibility – to truth-telling – and each would have been read in ways shaped by their paratextual apparatus, genre conventions, and modes of production and distribution. Thus, Josiah Blackmore demonstrates that early Portuguese accounts of Africa appeared both as the seafarer’s *roteiro* (or “rutter”), its observations framed by the facts of location, weather, and wind speed and direction, and as *folhetos*, ephemeral pamphlets that would be expected to contain tales of marvels and wonders. In turn, Ricardo Padrón traces the answer to the question of how many islands were in the East Indies – a numberless multitude of wondrous places or a few thousand known locations – across a range of texts, maps, and globes. He suggests that the answer depended upon genre and readership – the invocation of wonder or the illusion of control – rather than being a process of progressive rationalization. Other chapters present examples as diverse as satirical deliberations on knowledge, early news gazettes, manuscript letters written to the imperial centre, and Anglican translations of Jesuits’ accounts of India, China, and South America. European readers and viewers faced with the task of knowing the world were, therefore, confronted with a complex problem of comparison and judgement which required, as both Rubiés shows for sixteenth-century Italian travel texts and Johannes Müller shows for Gabriel Rollenhagen’s attempt to defrock Catholic travel-liars in his *Four Indian Voyages* (1603), a range of epistemological skills – differentiating textual forms, asking questions about subjectivity, examining processes of transmission – characteristic of later forms of scholarship.

Yet the image of the solitary forensic reader sorting truth from fiction among a multiplicity of texts, even if only for themselves, was as much a construction of the surviving archive of global geographical knowledge as was the travelling eyewitness. As Müller shows, Gabriel Rollenhagen’s interpretative strategies owed a great deal to his father Georg, and Portuguese *folhetos* would have been part of collective oral cultures of storytelling rather than individualized reading. Establishing the credibility of texts about far-away places was undertaken within interpretative communities. Thus, as Renate Dürr shows, the English author John Lockman staged his sceptical interrogation of Jesuit travel tales in the mid-eighteenth century as an Enlightened conversation, a tête-à-tête, or open debate, among friends, which would sift truth from the inevitable deceptions of “the most untrustworthy people in the world”. Yet such collective forms of deliberation were themselves epistemological strategies that had to be devised, developed, and agreed upon. While dealing with very different sorts of texts – the orders of the directors of a transoceanic trading company, and the replies to those orders – the merchants and factors of the English East India Company in India were

still required to engage in the management of information and credibility at a distance. This was to be a collective endeavour, as William Langhorn, the company's agent at Fort St George in Madras, acknowledged:

[M]atter of moment and difficulty requiring Consultation, appearing to him as some solid substance beyond the circuit or penetration of the Eye at once, and w<sup>ch</sup> a single man attempting though by degrees shall loose as fast as he changes aspects; But w<sup>ch</sup> multitudes of Concello<sup>rs</sup> taken in parts; Collation and discourse shall search & sift out every scruple. It has ever been commendable to use our own judgem<sup>ts</sup> yet best when examined and tried (according to the Owners discretion) by that of others.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, this was, perhaps, not so very different from the practice of communities of scholars in institutions such as the Royal Society considering reports from elsewhere, or even more informal collectives convened for the discussion of distant correspondents.<sup>12</sup> The “medium” that matters here, of course, is speech.

Acknowledging this requires an examination of the ways in which the spoken word – and its place in the forms and practices of collective evaluation – was part of the determining of credibility at a distance.<sup>13</sup> While the parsing of truths through speech inevitably leaves an inadequate archival trace, it is worth applying Steven Shapin's commentary on interpersonal truth-making to the past as well as to our present:

If we ask ourselves how it is that we came to believe a whole range of expert scientific and technical claims – probably the majority of those whose truth we now accept – we will discover that we were told these things by familiar others, often in a setting of face-to-face interaction: by people whose names we know (or knew) and whose characteristics we know (or knew).<sup>14</sup>

- 11 British Library India Office Records E/3/37 *Original Correspondence: 5th April 1676 to March 1677*, fol. 56<sup>v</sup> [15 January 1677], cited in Miles Ogborn, *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 82.
- 12 See, for example, Simon Schaffer, “Newton on the Beach: The Information Order of *Principia Mathematica*”, *History of Science* 47, no. 3 (2009): 243–76; and Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).
- 13 Miles Ogborn, “Talking Plants: Botany and Speech in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica”, *History of Science* 51, no. 3 (2013): 251–82.
- 14 Steven Shapin, *Never Pure: Historical Studies of Science as if It Was Produced by People with Bodies, Situated in Time, Space, Culture, and Society, and Struggling for Credibility and Authority* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 30–31.

While such forms of speech did not and cannot resolve all the issues involved in establishing the truth of reports from beyond the realm of direct experience (or even those of direct experience), they are vital in the stabilizing of collective modes of trust and credibility over space.<sup>15</sup>

This examination of collective ways of establishing credibility begins to construct an idea of knowledge, and modes of verifying that knowledge, as being formed within information networks. For a connection or a flow to be part of a network it is, of course, necessary for there to be multiple nodes and connections, and for them to have some degree of ongoing (if changing) use and reproduction. Across the early modern period such networks – as routinised forms of connection between increasingly distant places – were extended and consolidated by a whole range of people, institutions, and materialities in ways that turned contacts that had been singular or sporadic into regular connections.<sup>16</sup> This had implications for knowledge of the world and its credibility. As Joan-Pau Rubiés indicates for the assessment of sixteenth-century travel writing, it was only “as repeated observations confirmed or denied textual authorities that depended on hearsay, [that] many marvels dissolved and were replaced by ‘facts’”. The credibility of a single account of a far-off place could only rest on the reliability of the tale’s teller. When it could be compared to other accounts different epistemological techniques could come into play in “sorting testimonies into credible and not credible”. As Rubiés notes, in the sixteenth century this was the preserve of particularly well-placed authors and institutions, working with print and manuscripts: Ramusio, Hakluyt, the *Consejo de Indias*, and the historians of the Jesuit order. By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the proliferation of printed accounts, the libraries of scholars like Gabriel Rollenhagen or John Lockman effectively performed the same function. Indeed, in the early seventeenth century, as Michiel van Groesen shows, new media forms emerged which served to plug readers into effective, if rudimentary, information networks. As he demonstrates for the newssheets of writers such as Théophraste Renaudot, these were regular productions with a weekly periodicity shaped by the provision of European news. While this did not match the more irregular temporalities of information flows within the Atlantic world, readers would expect Renaudot’s *Gazette* to provide them with a digest of intelligence from various places and perspectives, all in one place and on a regular basis. Within such networks, the relationship between knowledge, credibility, and distance took on new forms.

Considering the historical geography of knowledge in this way means that it is important to attend to forms of knowledge or information about distant

15 Charles W. J. Withers, “Trust – in Geography”, *Progress in Human Geography* 42, no. 4 (2018): 489–508.

16 For a consideration of this in relation to Britain’s changing place in the early modern world, see Miles Ogborn, *Global Lives: Britain and the World, 1550–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

places, and the documents or other materials that contained them, as part of the process of building what were envisioned to be enduring connections or networks. As Christina Brauner argues, the treaties agreed between Africans and Europeans on the West African coast were not simply representations of that region – although they had to contain information about people, places, and the political and economic relationships between them – but attempts to intervene in the region by establishing new and reasonably stable relationships of trade, peace, or sovereignty, or at least the expectation of them, which connected people across space. That means considering these documents as material objects which were signed, sealed, and delivered within co-produced transcultural ritual practices, including forms of writing, which had to have credibility with all parties involved, and also at a distance in space, time, and personnel from the moment in which they were produced. Inevitably, some of these connections worked and others failed. Some networks were built, while others never grew or fell apart.

Indeed, the historical geography of such networks of knowledge and information shows how partial, differentiated, and under construction they could be, as well as demonstrating the impressive information architectures that did get put together. Renaudot's Atlantic news was decidedly patchy from France's own colonial ventures in New France and the Caribbean, for either logistical or political reasons. However, he was able to draw on a relatively rich set of reports from Amsterdam, Madrid, and Lisbon to present the progress of the long, and ever-changing, war between the Dutch and the Habsburgs (and later the Portuguese) over Pernambuco, in Northeast Brazil. Offering on-the-spot information from different sides of a conflict in which the French presented themselves neutral, if interested in the outcome, Renaudot constructed an archive within which his readers had to form their own opinion of not only events and their implications, but the status of the information on which those opinions were based.

States, and institutions such as trading companies or the Jesuits, operated on a grander scale and in manuscript, not print. Nicholas Popper's account of the work of Joseph Williamson in Restoration England emphasises the extent of his attempt to centralize information resources in the service of a nascent English empire. Williamson, Popper shows, managed a "network" of around two hundred correspondents – from diplomats to spies and ships' captains – who sent him more than twenty thousand letters in the 1670s covering all sorts of matters that they thought he might be interested in. Each letter was, on its own, insignificant and lacking in credibility, coming as it did from an interested party inevitably viewing a changing world from a particular position. What was important was what could be learned from them in aggregate through "an endless cycle of inscription, archivization, and organization, in which provenance and source was elided in favour of comparing and integrating discrete particulars of information". Williamson and his State Paper Office clerks became "a text processing organism", using various paper technologies – indexes, notebooks, and digests – to recombine information into

thematic groupings where credibility emerged not from the source of the information, but in the comparison of many decontextualized snippets. While perhaps merely an illusion of control – Williamson did not see his own fall coming – this archival node, articulating a far-flung information network, and others like it, demonstrate the difference that the established geographies of connection, and reciprocal flow, between people and places which were characteristic of states and corporations by the early eighteenth century, made to the establishment of credibility at a distance. It is not necessary to hold to the Latourian model of immutable mobiles and centres of calculation, to recognize the effects on the production of credibility – if not the guaranteeing of truth – of the gathering, organization, and comparison of knowledge in an archive.<sup>17</sup>

What, in the end, can be said about the historical geography of the production of truth, and the changing ways in which the demands distance placed on credibility were dealt with over time? On the one hand, there was a narrowing of the questions asked, and the sorts of answers that were sought, which came with both the routinisation of global connection and the institutional accumulation of information. Renaissance travellers' accounts of what might be out there in the world, and how it might confound European categorisations of the human or the natural, became more of an accounting for people, things, and their characteristics associated with the Enlightenment. As these essays show, multiple sources of information were increasingly triangulated and rationalized in an attempt to get closer to a truth that was already assumed not to be one containing wonders and marvels. Yet, on the other hand, the multiplication of potential sources of information meant that important questions about human difference emerged and remained unsettled in a world increasingly structured and divided by forms of racial capitalism and European imperial dominance. For example, the Jamaican planter and historian, Edward Long, compiled notes from classical sources, travellers' tales, and works of natural history to blur the boundary between the human and the animal in the service of a racist account of the gradations of humankind that justified the enslavement of Africans in the Caribbean. Could you be sure, he asked his readers, that there were not people with tails in the Nicobar Islands as reported by Dutch travel accounts, that the 'Orang Utang' could not speak, and that black and white people were not fundamentally different parts of the human race? To pursue this argument Long only needed to argue that each of his many sources might just be true enough to question the unity of the human.<sup>18</sup> This also had implications for which voices might be heard and attended to.

17 Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

18 Miles Ogborn, "Discriminating Evidence: Closeness and Distance in Natural and Civil History of the Caribbean", *Modern Intellectual History* 11, no. 3 (2014): 631–53; and Idem, *The Freedom of Speech*, 6–15.

Indeed, what counted as being close to the truth was highly differentiated. The range of people and institutions in Europe that were interested in knowing about distant places meant that there were very different sorts of truths being sought, and very different criteria and standards of credibility. States and empires, trading companies, missionary societies, natural philosophers, and news- or entertainment-hungry reading publics had quite different needs for information, and different tolerances for how far that information might be from the truth. Some tried to apply formal veridiction criteria of various sorts, or at least the sorts of comparison and sifting outlined above, to reach what they could rely on as the truth in domains such as natural philosophy. These have provided strong models of early modern truth making.<sup>19</sup> However, for others, “truths” just had to be true enough to decide a course of action. In the political, economic, and military domains, truth might be said to have worked more in terms of what was likely or expedient, giving contests over credibility a different shape and relative significance. Finally, for some, truth may not have mattered very much at all to how they engaged with reports from far-flung places. A good story of something that might possibly be true could well have been enough.

All of these elements might be seen in the particular account of transatlantic truths and lies with which I began. There were attempts, via formal legal procedures of speaking on oath, made by governor Robert Lowther to establish the truth of Reverend William Gordon’s authorship, production, and distribution of *A Representation of the Miserable State of Barbadoes*, as well as of his character as “a very loose liver for a Minister of the Gospel”, a man who should not be believed.<sup>20</sup> There were also the evident factional divisions over who would give credence to the accounts of Gordon and Lowther, with neither side really expecting to convince the other of what they claimed, while each tried to sway the king and Privy Council. Finally, there must have been those for whom this was a domain in which the truth was not at stake and could never be established. The men and women in Barbados who left church as Lowther’s “Declaration” was being read, and “hasten’d out with so much precipitancy, that they trod on each others Heels”, may not even have paused to read Gordon’s rebuttal.<sup>21</sup> Those colonists, and the enslaved Africans who watched them go, would certainly have been justified in thinking that neither version of events would get them any closer to the truth of their situation in the early modern world.

19 In particular Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

20 LT, vol. 14, 68.

21 *The Barbadoes Packet*, 24.

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