

## Travel Treasures

Travelling is a fascinating thing to do. But what today is seen for the most part as an interruption of the daily life at home, as something done only during vacations, used to be a much more challenging endeavor, full of risks. People travelled to explore virtually unknown and uncharted land; they went to conquer, to investigate, and to bring Christianity. Letters and reports written during the journey or after one's return were a means to share whatever one had learned, as well as to let those who stayed behind participate in one's experiences. For us today these documents are a treasure of ideas and worldviews.

One such treasure has been preserved in the Jesuit Collection of the University Library in Maastricht. Among the 265,000 volumes covering an immense variety of fields, the international orientation of the Jesuit order has given us a series of travel writings. They span a time period from as early as the sixteenth century to as late as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and are proof of the explorative nature of past travellers: both the Old World and the New World were explored widely, and since not all of the books in the Jesuit Collection were written by actual Jesuits, the different backgrounds – scientific and religious, military and commercial – add to the writings' diversity.

With a group of thirteen students Annemieke Klijn and Ernst Homburg embarked on their own journey following some of the authors in their explorations. No matter whether they were Arts and Culture or European Studies students, all shared a fascination for travelling and cultural exchange, so the idea of delving deep into the riches of the University Library was impossible to resist. As part of the Maastricht Research Based Learning (MaRBLe) programme and the Honours programme, the students set out to study these fascinating works in the framework of the 'On Expedition' project. Not only

the writing could reveal much about contemporary ideas and worldviews, about the places travelled to and the discoveries made – be they cultural, scientific, or else – but also the beautiful and sometimes lavish illustrations offered a unique view into the past.

But why study these documents? Because travel reports, be they from the eighteenth or twenty-first century, offer views not only of the reported culture but also of the reporter's culture. Travel reports are a representation of that other world that is being or was explored, and travel writers are the mediators, or 'go-betweens,' as Stephen Greenblatt (1992) put it. In today's increasingly globalized world the study of ways in which knowledge, and especially such knowledge of different cultures and ideas, was exchanged becomes more and more vital in order to derive from it possible ways to deal with contemporary issues. Among the most important questions related to such a study is surely the one of perception: how did the reporter perceive the peoples and places he visited? And, if possible to say, how was he perceived? The importance of understanding this process of perception has been outlined by Edward W. Said and Carl Thompson. In the 2003 preface to his seminal work *Orientalism* (first edition: 1978), Said points out both the intentions and consequences of 'Othering,' of describing the 'Other,' the unknown and different people or culture. He insists that the "terrible reductive conflicts that herd people under falsely unifying rubrics like 'America,' 'The West' or 'Islam' and invent collective identities for large numbers of individuals who are actually quite diverse, cannot remain as potent as they are, and must be opposed" (p. xxii). At their worst, such categorizations can lead to unfounded hatred of the 'Other.' In his study of *Travel Writing* (2011) Thompson picks up on the idea of representing the 'Other' in relation to travel literature. It can happen on a variety of levels, relating to cultural, physical, spiritual, intellectual and other areas of life which one might call 'markers' of 'Othering.'

In their various papers written in context of the aforementioned MaRBL e and Honours programme 'On Expedition,' the students looked at such 'markers' not only to analyze their chosen book but also to contribute to a comparative view of different kinds of travel writings. The diversity of the books studied reflects the fact that the term 'travel writing' is a 'very loose generic label, and has always embraced a bewilderingly diverse range of material' (Thompson, 2011, p.11). In some cases the authors even never visited the countries they wrote about; they based their stories on reports by other witnesses. The material in the project also ranged from scientific reports written after travelling in North America to, for instance, letters sent from Japan. Each of the thirteen students looked at one particular author from either of the mentioned geographical areas: Athanasius Kircher, Nicolas Trigault, George Staunton and Clément Pellé (China); Mutius Vitellescus, Nicolas Trigault, Engelbert Kaempfer, François Caron, Carl Pehr Thunberg and Gustav Kreitner (Japan); and

Hernando de Soto, Louis Hennepin, Pehr Kalm and Cornelius de Pauw (North America).

This volume collects the individual efforts, with each chapter giving an overview over the respective book's historical context, its author's biography and its publication history before going into the details of analysis. The presentation and perception of the 'Other' based on the idea of 'markers' is the focus of the second half of each chapter, together with another topic relevant more specifically to the chosen work, after which follows a general discussion and conclusion. In addition to this volume, an exhibition has been put together in partnership with the Art and Heritage Commission of Maastricht University and the University Library. Moreover, after consultation with the Academic Heritage Foundation (Stichting Academisch Erfgoed, SAE) the results of the investigations will probably be added to Wikimedia. The SAE is a collaborative project in which (nearly) all Dutch universities participate, and Maastricht University's MaRBLe project 'On Expedition' serves as Maastricht's contribution to SAE's nationwide initiative, entitled 'Going on an Expedition' ('Op Expeditie'). The goal of that project, realised in collaboration with the Amsterdam-based Tropenmuseum and Wikipedians, is to add academic heritage pertaining to the theme of 'Going on an Expedition' to Wikimedia Commons. And while this is but a first step in the exploration of the treasures in the Jesuit Collection of Maastricht University, the authors hope that this journey will be continued by others to come. For all, participating in this project has been a valuable experience in doing in-depth research with all its obstacles and rewards under the inspiring tutelage of Annemieke Klijn and Ernst Homburg, and on top of that comes the privilege of knowing first-hand one of these fascinating travel treasures.

Helen Piel, on behalf of the research team, October 2013

## Bibliography

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