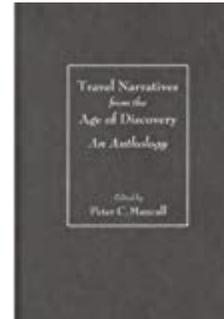




Peter C. Mancall, ed. *Travel Narratives from the Age of Discovery: An Anthology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. xv + 413 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-515596-9; \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-515597-6.



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Writings to Explore

This volume of travel narrative excerpts from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries allows students and other interested readers to experience the cultural diversity of this newly-connected world and the meaning attached to that cultural diversity by writers with different backgrounds and perspectives, including a number by non-Europeans and several about European lands. Divided according to geographical region (Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe), the excerpted accounts range from the canonical (Linschoten, Columbus, Raleigh, Fynes Moryson), to the less well-known (Leo Africanus's *Geographical Historie of Africa* [1600]), Coronado's *Journey to the Country of Cibola* [1540]), to revelations (Andrew Battel's account of his *Adventures* as a captive in Angola [1625], al-Samarquandi's *Narrative of a Journey to Hindustan* [1442-44]). The individual selections, which include sets of images as well as prose passages, range in length from two pages to over a dozen, each with a short introduction that provides information about the author, connects the excerpt to the narrative as a whole, and, where appropriate, discusses the publication history of the narrative or images. In his lengthy introduction to the entire volume, Peter Mancall surveys existing schol-

arship on travel and cultural exchange in this period, providing an excellent bibliography of key works in the field, and explores the significance of these accounts and the promise they hold as historical sources. The result is a unique and timely addition to the primary source offerings on the European expansion, the historical experience and understanding of diversity, and the early modern world.

This book presents travel as an eye-opening experience, and seeks itself to open the eyes of readers to a world in which Europeans, while occasionally triumphant, were often awed, vulnerable, marginal, or downright irrelevant. Most of the accounts, for reasons discussed in the introduction, come from European sources, but this collection deliberately decenters the navigational accomplishments and conquests of Europe. As a result, the traditional highlights of the Age of Discovery, such as Vasco da Gama's arrival in India and the conquest of Peru, are either omitted or mentioned only in passing. Rather than focusing on how people reached distant lands or how they conquered them, the excerpts are designed to show what they made of them. These

descriptions provide insight not only about the individual traveler's assumptions, agendas, and literary skill, but also, if read carefully, about the observed cultural and natural phenomena. Read as a whole, these accounts reveal the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to be a time of complex and multifocal encounters, dispelling the myths that expansion led swiftly to imperial mastery, and that it was a process only initiated by Europeans. Gone too is the traveler so entangled with his own prejudices that he is incapable of seeing in other cultures anything but the reflection of his own. Instead, the travelers excerpted here, generally, tried to capture their experiences with intricately detailed descriptions, rather than neat encapsulations. Therefore, this collection should inspire readers to make new connections and seek further information, including reading the accounts in their entirety. Particularly for undergraduates, who are this collection's intended audience and who tend to arrive with simplistically positive or negative views of the European expansion, these accounts amply document the varied ways in which power, commerce, and cultural difference were experienced in different times and places.

The richness of these sources is the focus of the introduction, in which Mancall interweaves brief sketches of the European encounter with Africa, Asia, and America with discussions of the various accounts provided in the collection. The reader gains a good grasp of the potential of these texts, but relatively little advice about how to analyze the mass of material to arrive at usable insights. From my experience teaching Renaissance travel narratives to undergraduate students, they quickly grasp the overt agendas and themes of an account, but struggle with separating representational strategies and literary license from the more ethnographically reliable elements. They often lack the background to see how a particular account or culture conforms to or challenges existing genres and norms. If, as Mancall rightly points out, "[e]very observer carried cultural baggage that shaped each observation" (p. 10), highlighting the larger pieces of luggage in some detail would help readers understand the writer's vantage point. That early modern Europeans valued social stratification, order, the subordination of women, manliness as displayed through violence and control, and gold as the most precious form of material wealth is implicit in many of the accounts, but not always known or readily apparent to students. Reading descriptions of cannibals or monsters, to take another example, would be aided by a more precise catalog of European expectations about the monstrous. Of course, such guidance could be carried too far and encourage students

to see these accounts through neat little rubrics or to assign a passage one straightforward meaning. It is, in fact, a strength of current scholarship on travel narratives, a strength mirrored in this volume, that it eschews reductive readings, and a sign of the richness of the travel narratives that they resist such readings. However, for the second edition of this text, a more systematic introduction on the culture of the travelers, the idea of travel, and the methodology of reading travel accounts would, I think, let students use these texts more confidently, thereby extracting greater value from them. In the meantime, instructors should be prepared to offer such guidance on their own.

The German involvement in the Age of Discovery is, appropriately, represented by a single excerpt, from Hans Stade's [sic: for Staden] account of his stay among the "wild tribes" of eastern Brazil. The German involvement in the publishing industry of sixteenth-century Europe is also represented, however, by the inclusion of a number of images from the lavishly illustrated volumes published by the de Bry family of Frankfurt. The Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and, to a lesser extent, French authors come in for their due, but overall there is a slight imbalance in favor of English accounts, a tendency furthered by the editor's concern to use contemporary English translations wherever possible. As a result, many accounts are excerpted from Hakluyt's (first edition, 1589) and Purchas's (first edition, 1625) massive travel compilations, with due attention given to the work of these compilers in the introductory matter. The influential earlier compilations of Fracanzano da Montalboddo (1507) and Gian Battista Ramusio (3 vols, beginning 1550), in contrast, are marginalized. While in general the brief introductions to the individual excerpts expertly situate the writer and the text within their historical context, the "Mundus Novus" letter is simply attributed to Amerigo Vespucci, despite the considerable debate over the authenticity of the published version of this letter,[1] and the publication history provided for the letter omits its appearance in *Neue vnbekante landte* and subsequent travel compilations published in German and Latin between 1508 and 1555.[2]

But this volume is not aimed at specialists in the history of travel or travel narratives. It is instead designed to attract novices to the study of these sources, to expose them to the wealth of material available, and to introduce them to this era of global interaction through the tangible experiences and impressions of travelers from Europe, to Europe, and beyond Europe. In this, it succeeds admirably.

Notes

[1]. See, for example, Luciano Formisano's introduction to *Letters from a New World: Amerigo Vespucci's Discovery of America*, ed. Luciano Formisano (New York: Marsilio, 1985), pp. xxviii-xxxv.

[2]. Fracanzano da Montalboddo, ed., *Neue vnbekant-*

the landte vnd ein neue weldte in kurtz vergangter zeythe erfunden, trans. Jobst Ruchamer (Nuremberg: G. Stuchs, 1508), sig. i ii v. Also included in: *Novus Orbis regionum ac insularum veteribus incognitarum* (Basel: J. Herwagen, 1532) (with additional editions), translated as *Die new welt, der landschaften unnd Insulen, so bis hie her allen Atlweltbeschrybern unbekant*_ Strassburg: G. Ulricher, 1534).

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