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Travels from the Orient, Travels to the Orient: Does Comparison Make Sense?

Looking at the development of studies of travel writing and travel accounts through recent decades one can distinguish between three different stages: to begin with, and actually starting with the very first collections and bibliographies of travel accounts from the late eighteenth century onwards, the texts were primarily appreciated as goldmines of information about the continents, countries, societies, and cultures described by the many different pilgrims, explorers, scholars, and tourists. From the 1980s onwards, and due not least to the influence of Michel Foucault and of Edward W. Said's *Orientalism*¹ many of the same texts were criticized and valued as sources for a better understanding of the travelers' own prejudices and imperial gaze, cultures, and mentalities and those of their audience and readers.

Through the last couple of decades, however, it seems as if we have entered yet another stage: a whole wave of studies aiming at presenting travel accounts as sources for global, transnational, entangled, and connected histories (*Verflechtungsgeschichte* and *histoire croisée*), and history of knowledge (*Wissensgeschichte*). To some extent, these turns and programmatic calls have come about as a critical prolongation of the postcolonial studies of the final decades of the twentieth century, but realizing that it might not be enough to blame the West for its images and knowledge of "the Rest" has led many to a better understanding of how travel accounts can be read not necessarily as reflections of an either/or approach, but as expressions of the interactive and multidimensional productivity of the encounters.

When the contextual complexities and knowledge effects at both ends, at destinations as well as points of departure and return, have to be taken into account, the more interesting studies tend to concentrate on one travel account or one traveler at the time. Previously, studies of larger arrays of travel accounts – those to the Orient or the New World, or those of French, British, Italian, or German travelers for example – were fairly common. Today, such comparative studies certainly still continue to be published, but new insights seem rather to come from studies of single and perhaps also less well-known travelers and travel accounts.

1 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York 1978).

However, thanks to digitization and translations, many more travel accounts are easily accessible and available than ever before. And while this possibly also means that it has become much easier to find and access more marginal and lesser known travelers and their accounts, it also can be understood as an invitation to engage in larger, maybe even global, comparative projects taking advantage of the potentials of digital and distant readings of much larger amounts of texts than previous generations of cliometrically inclined historians had at their disposal. In what follows, I will try to describe some of the ways in which more broadly comparative studies might help us better to understand and interpret travel accounts while still treating them as contextual and interactive documents. Such projects might even turn out to be the beginning of yet another, a fourth, stage of *Reiseforschung*, which will come about by drawing on the potential of the large amounts of travel accounts now digitally available at our libraries and online.

1 Patterns

Let me start from two important exceptions to the rule described so far: two recent monographs dealing with large numbers of travel accounts while at the same time keeping at least programmatically aware of the new demand for double contextualization: In his study *Humeurs vagabondes*, Daniel Roche deals, on more than a thousand pages in classical *Annales* style, with a vast amount of travel accounts as sources for a global economic, social, and cultural history of early modern Europe.² More interestingly for our purposes, although less wide-ranging, Jürgen Osterhammel's *Die Entzauberung Asiens*, translated as *Unfabling the East*, likewise is devoted to a large number of mainly British, French, and German travelogues from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries as sources for a global history of economic, political, and cultural interactions and exchanges.³

Osterhammel's chronological focus also lets him identify two major changes in the development of European travel accounts from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. First, as suggested by the title of his book, Osterhammel describes the eighteenth century as a watershed, distinguishing an earlier period

² Daniel Roche, *Humeurs vagabondes: De la circulation des hommes et de l'utilité des voyages* (Paris 2004).

³ Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens: Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich 1998), English translation by Robert Savage, *Unfabling the East: The Enlightenment's Encounter with Asia* (Princeton 2018).

marked by some kind of *Zauber* (magic) or fables which the travelers of the Enlightenment somehow overcame, only to lead to the second major change, when new forms of imperial arrogance, racism, and Orientalism prevail in the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Osterhammel has of course much more to say and many nuances to add to this general picture, but by excluding both earlier and later accounts from his analysis he makes it seem as if only the travelers of the “enlightened century” can be trusted to make them into transparent sources for both the Asian empires they describe and the European public which they address. Earlier as well as later accounts thus are seen as insufficiently transparent: as enfabling and enchanting the East as either a surplus of meaning and wealth much admired and feared or later on as radical absence of progress and civilization now seen as a racially based privilege of Europe and the West.⁴

When trying to expand the comparative scope and include accounts from before and after the Enlightenment in the analysis and still want to live up to the demands for double contextualization we are left again with – fortunately growing – numbers of studies of singular cases which do not easily fit together into any kind of pattern. From the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we have for example Michael Wintroub’s fascinating *The Voyage of Thought*,⁵ a micro-historical study and cross-disciplinary analysis of the texts and contexts that informed the remarkable journey of the French ship captain, merchant, and poet Jean Parmentier (1494–1529), from Dieppe to Sumatra in 1529. While Parmentier was collecting curiosities rather than comparing civilizations as Osterhammel’s enlightened travelers, his voyage nevertheless allows Wintroub to engage deeply across interacting worlds of knowledge. Even more explicitly, Romain Bertrand has succeeded in disentangling and reconstructing the worlds which Cornelis de Houtman (1565–1599) engaged with during the earliest Dutch expeditions to Java and other places in East India in the last decades of the sixteenth century. Romain Bertrand’s *L’histoire à parts égales*⁶ is far from alone in demonstrating how close and contextualizing readings of travel accounts contribute to what seems to amount to a whole wave of global micro-histories of early modern travel un-

⁴ Most explicitly in the concluding chapter of Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung*, pp. 375–403.

⁵ Michael Wintroub, *The Voyage of Thought: Navigating Knowledge across the Sixteenth-Century World* (Cambridge 2017).

⁶ Romain Bertrand, *L’histoire à parts égales: Récits d’une rencontre, Orient-Occident XVI–XVII siècle* (Paris 2011).

dertaken by historians such as Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Nathalie Zemon Davis, Jonathan Spence, and, more recently, John-Paul A. Ghobrial and others.⁷

When crossing the line into the nineteenth century of imperial arrogance and superiority we find a large number of recent case studies of various expeditions paying due attention not only to the European context but particularly to the local and “native” agencies involved in the collection, exchange, production, and dissemination of knowledge in the field.⁸

Voyages of exploration and expeditions are of course not the only kind of travel reported about, but when it comes to other kinds of travel writing the same patterns seem to obtain: many interesting studies of singular cases reveal intercultural complexity, but when dealing with larger amounts of texts the analysis invariably tends to focus on either the places visited by a list of travelers, on the world and background shared by these travelers, or on what they have in common. Comparing arrays of accounts cannot be done without reducing complexity – and thus we are left again with increasing numbers of interesting

7 Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (London 2007); Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds* (New York 2007); Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard Wiegers, *A Man of Three Worlds: Samuel Pallache, A Moroccan Jew in Catholic and Protestant Europe*, translated by Martin Beagles (London, Baltimore 2003); John-Paul Ghobrial, *The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory*, in *Past & Present* 222/1 (2014), pp. 51–93; Jonathan D. Spence, *The Question of Hu* (London 1988); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to Be Alien: Travails and Encounters in the Early Modern World* (Waltham, Mass. 2011); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama* (Cambridge 1997); and, most recently, Christophe Granger, *Joseph Kabris ou les possibilités d'une vie 1780–1822* (Paris 2020).

8 See for example Felix Driver and Lowri Jonesm, *Hidden Histories of Exploration: Researching the RGS-IBG Collections* (London 2009); Johannes Fabians, *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa* (Berkeley et al. 2000); Dane Kennedy, *The Last Blank Spaces: Exploring Africa and Australia* (Cambridge, Mass. et al. 2013); Dane Kennedy (ed.), *Re-interpreting Exploration: The West in the World* (Oxford, New York 2014); Marianne Klemun and Ulrike Spring (eds.), *Expeditions as Experiments: Practising Observation and Documentation* (London 2016); Shino Konishi, Maria Nugent, and Tiffany Shellam (eds.), *Indigenous Intermediaries: New Perspectives on Exploration Archives* (Canberra 2015); Volker Matthies, *Im Schatten der Entdecker: Indigene Begleiter europäischer Forschungsreisender* (Berlin 2018); Kristian H. Nielsen, Michael Harbsmeier, and Christopher J. Ries (eds.), *Scientists and Scholars in the Field: Studies in the History of Fieldwork and Expeditions* (Aarhus 2012); Donald Simpson, *Dark Companions: The African Contribution to the European Exploration of East Africa* (London 1975); Martin Thomas (ed.), *Expedition into Empire: Exploratory Journeys and the Making of the Modern World* (Abingdon 2015); Martin Thomas (ed.), *Expedition into Empire: Exploratory Journeys and the Making of the Modern World* (Abingdon 2015); Martin Thomas and Amanda Harris (eds.), *Expeditionary Anthropology: Teamwork, Travel and the ‘Science of Man’* (New York, Oxford 2018).

micro-historical studies without being able to arrive at more general, global conclusions.

Getting back to Osterhammel, we could conclude that it does make sense to look at the accounts of the eighteenth century from a comparative perspective that allows a minimum of contextual understanding of both the European travelers and the Asian empires they visited. When it comes to the preceding generations of travelers, however, one would have to make a choice between either exclusively following those with the same or similar destination or a set of travelers from one and the same cultural background and tradition. Instead of enabling global histories of interactions, these comparisons only lead to yet more national and local histories or, in the best of cases, to connected global micro-histories like those mentioned above.

Compared to their enlightened successors, European travelers from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century still had a capacity for getting impressed and overwhelmed by awe and wonder when confronted with what for them still appeared as new and other worlds.⁹ From the late seventeenth century onwards, this capacity slowly came to be domesticated by a variety of innovations, such as instructions and questionnaires in preparation for the voyage. The ambitions were not only to notice and bring home the exceptional, singular, unique, and curious, but increasingly also to go for complete sets and series, for regularities and species. Encyclopedically minded antiquarians and botanizing Linnean apostles, missionaries in search for the varieties of religion, the great Russian, French, and British expeditions to the Pacific and around the world, and all the other geographers and cartographers testify to much the same spirit of *Vervollständigung* and systematization of observations that characterizes Osterhammel's diplomats and merchants when analyzing the Oriental and Asian variants of tyranny, despotism, and social and political order.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, however, this spirit somehow seems to expire, encyclopedic enthusiasm slowly giving way to various forms of reflexivity and specialization while undermining the authority of the traveler as privileged witness and observer. No longer being the only source of information about changes and events in other parts of the world, travelers by then had to prove their literary, professional, or scholarly qualifications. Following Osterhammel again, one can say that all this is compensated for by new forms of na-

⁹ As studied more closely in Michael Harbsmeier, *Wilde Völkerkunde: Andere Welten in deutschen Reiseberichten der frühen Neuzeit* (Frankfurt, New York 1994); Nathalie Hester, *Literature and Identity in Italian Baroque Travel Writing* (London, New York 2016); Frédéric Tinguely, *L'écriture du Levant à la Renaissance: Enquête sur les voyageurs français dans l'Empire de Soliman le Magnifique* (Genève 2000).

tional and European superiority and arrogance, racism, colonialism, and imperialism. Travel accounts might still criticize and undermine these new forms of authority, which of course can also be traced further back in time than Osterhammel wants us to believe, but what appears to have changed in principle is something more fundamental: a global temporalization of intercultural relationships which is also reflected in the travel accounts of the period.

Travelers' experiences have of course always been shaped by their expectations. But with the increasing tension between experience and expectation, between *Erfahrungsraum* and *Erwartungshorizont* as diagnosed by Reinhard Koselleck,¹⁰ travelers increasingly will tend to interpret their experience of differences in space as temporal distances, as differences reflecting later or earlier stages of history and development, as more advanced or backward ways of life, as belonging to the past or to the future.

For Jürgen Osterhammel this temporalization first of all led to a devaluation of experiences of the eastern empires no longer seen and described as challenges and potential rivals or even models to emulate, but as representing a never-changing, Oriental backwardness and past.¹¹ Numerous generations of pilgrims and antiquarians, scholars and explorers went of course to study, enjoy, admire, collect, and bring home all kinds of items belonging to the classical, biblical, ancient, medieval, or prehistoric past, but with the temporalization of the late eighteenth into the nineteenth century these items were increasingly reinterpreted as representing a potential future as well. Travelers were increasingly forced to make a choice between contenting themselves with the items of the past or to take them also as signs of a different future, as remains of gone ages and stages of history and development announcing a different tomorrow.

It is of course impossible to do justice to the complexities of these processes of temporalization, which François Hartog has followed through the voyages of Constantin François, Comte de Volney (1757–1820) and François-René de Chateaubriand (1768–1848) to the Orient and the New World in his *Régimes d'historicité*.¹² Sylvain Venayre has followed this up through a much larger corpus of travel accounts in *Panorama du voyage 1780–1920*¹³, while Mirjam Hähnle has

10 Reinhard Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt 1979).

11 Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung*, pp. 385–393.

12 François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité: Présentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris 2003).

13 Sylvain Venayre, *Panorama du voyage 1780–1920: Mots, figures, pratiques* (Paris 2012).

analyzed these voyages in even greater detail in her recent dissertation on Carsten Niebuhr (1733–1815).¹⁴

One of the, perhaps most important, consequences of this temporalization for the development of travel accounts has been the enormous multiplication and universalization of destinations and directions of the voyages depicted in accounts and descriptions from the nineteenth century onwards throughout the world. First of all, this is reflected in a reversal of the directions and orientation of travels within Europe: instead of mainly going from (Protestant) North to (Catholic) South and from West to East, travelers now went in all sorts of directions, from peripheries to centers as well as the other way around. In search of antiquities and remains from the past as much as of models and improvements for the future, there was no limit anymore to where to go and being able to write about.

One further, and for our comparative purposes even more important, aspect of this temporalization and the multiplication of directions and destinations is the exponentially increasing number of travel accounts originating from other traditions, from outside of Europe, throughout the nineteenth century. It is of course, though only rarely recognized, no secret that travel accounts as oral performances have been part of human history from the earliest beginnings. Shamans have always reported about the other world while still on their journey, and, with the growth of literacy, voyages and journals certainly were among the first subjects covered in writing almost anywhere in the world.¹⁵ And although it seems – as I have tried to argue more extensively elsewhere¹⁶ – that travel accounts in the easily recognizable shape of first-person accounts of experiences of otherness and alterity have a history which in Europe cannot be traced much further back than to the pilgrimage accounts of the late Middle Ages, one

14 Mirjam Hähnle, *Zwischen den Zeiten: Über die Temporalität von Relikten im Kontext der Arabien-Expedition (1761–1767)* (PhD thesis, University of Basel 2019). For yet another recent contribution see Sebastian Conrad, *A Cultural History of Global Transformation*, in *History of the World*, vol. 4: *An Emerging World: 1750–1870*, edited by Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel (Cambridge, Mass. 2018), chapter 3 – a book-size contribution with many references to travel accounts as evidence for the changes which indicate a global conjuncture, a global change in the conception of time.

15 See Eric J. Leed, *The Mind of the Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism* (New York 1992).

16 Michael Harbsmeier, *Allocentrism and Alterities: Ultra-short World History of the Genre of the Travelogue*, in *Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften* 2 (2020), pp. 205–210; Michael Harbsmeier, *Heimkehrrituale: Prolegomena zu einer Weltgeschichte des Reiseberichts als globaler literarischer Gattung*, in Erhard Schüttelz, Annette Werberger, and Schamma Schahadat (eds.), *Weltliteratur in der longue durée* (Paderborn 2022), pp. 35–51.

can certainly identify similar accounts of alterity in early modern Japanese, Chinese, Indo-Persian, Ottoman, and Arab literature. Under the pressures of temporalization however, and when challenged by European commercial, colonial, and imperial threats and temptations, new generations of Japanese, Chinese, Indo-Persian, Indian, and Muslim travelers have continued in their predecessors' footsteps through the nineteenth century to produce substantial numbers of texts describing their experiences in their neighboring countries and in Russia and France, in Britain and Spain, in Germany and Italy, the United States and Scandinavia, etc.

2 Potentials

There are of course many reasons why all these many travel accounts only have caught the attention of comparatively few scholars. As a rule, most of the accounts have been considered to be of little value as sources for the "Western" cultures and societies visited by these Oriental travelers, since these places were supposedly much better known from all sorts of other historical sources. At the same time, these same accounts have been assumed to be of little value as a rule, as Westerners believed them to have been under so much modern, European, and Western influence as to be no longer able to reflect anything authentically Oriental, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Persian, Ottoman, Arab, etc. During the first two stages of travel studies mentioned above, these accounts were of little interest indeed other than occasionally serving as further proof of the alleged singularity and superiority of European traditions of travel writing.¹⁷ In recent years, however, and with the rise of interest in travel accounts as sources for global and transnational histories, these same accounts have become absolutely crucial sources for not only a growing list of global micro-his-

17 See for example W. G. Beasley, *Japan Encounters the Barbarian: Japanese Travellers in America and Europe* (New Haven, London 1995); Feng Chen, *Die Entdeckung des Westens: Chinas erste Botschafter in Europa 1866–1894* (Frankfurt 2001); Andrew Cobbing, *The Japanese Discovery of Victorian Britain. Early Travel Encounters in the Far West* (London 1998); Michael H. Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain 1600–1857* (New Delhi 2004); Shompa Lahiri, *Indians in Britain: Anglo-Indian Encounters, Race and Identity 1880–1930* (Lahiri 2000); Masao Miyoshi, *As we Saw Them: The first Japanese Embassy to the United States 1860* (Berkeley 1979); Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-Century Bengal* (Delhi 1988); Simonti Sen, *Travels to Europe: Self and Other in Bengali Travel Narratives 1870–1910* (New Delhi 2005); Ying Sun, *Aus dem Reich der Mitte in die Welt hinaus: Die chinesischen Gesandtschaftsberichte über Europa unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Deutschlands von 1866 bis 1906* (Frankfurt 1997).

tories such as those already mentioned, but also of quite a number of books and PhD theses covering various sets of Oriental travel accounts of not only European, but also multiple other destinations.

When I began to look out for what I then thought of as a kind of *Lettres persanes* from the hands of genuine Oriental travelers in 1985,¹⁸ I did not have much more at hand than a few editions and anthologies, most of them translations of some of the primary sources. Now, more than thirty years later, however, one can rely on almost an entire library of relevant studies. I myself have made some minor contributions to this library with studies on Greenlandic accounts of the Kingdom of Denmark from the eighteenth century,¹⁹ the diaries of Chinese exiles and ambassadors to Europe and the West from the second half of the nineteenth century,²⁰ African representations of Europe as spectacle,²¹ questioning as an early version of Japanese accounts of Europe,²² and finally Indian views of England from the final decades of the nineteenth century.²³ Instead of trying to summarize the results of these investigations, in what follows I shall try to take a closer look at a number of recent studies of Muslim travelers and their accounts to see what they have to offer from a comparative point of view.

It was Bernard Lewis who opened up this line of enquiry in his *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* in 1982.²⁴ Trying to demonstrate that Muslim observers were strikingly less interested in Europe than contemporary Europeans were in the

18 Michael Harbsmeier, *Early Travels to Europe: Some Remarks on the Magic of Writing*, in Francis Barker et al. (eds.), *Europe and Its Others: Proceedings of the Essex Sociology of Literature Conference 1984*, vol. 1 (Colchester. 1985), pp. 72–88.

19 Michael Harbsmeier, *Stimmen aus dem äußersten Norden: Wie die Grönländer Europa für sich entdeckten* (Stuttgart 2001); Michael Harbsmeier, *Bodies and Voices from Ultima Thule: Inuit Explorations of the Kablunat from Christian IV to Knud Rasmussen*, in Michael Bravo and Sverker Sörlin (eds.), *Narrating the Arctic: A Cultural History of Scientific Practices* (Canton, MA. 2002), pp. 33–71.

20 Michael Harbsmeier, *Le monde renversé: Quelques expériences chinoises de la modernité européenne au XIX^e siècle*, in *Revue germanique internationale* 21 (2004), pp. 163–180.

21 Michael Harbsmeier, *Schauspiel Europa: Die außereuropäische Entdeckung Europas im 19. Jahrhundert am Beispiel afrikanischer Texte*, in *Historische Anthropologie* 2/3 (1995), pp. 331–350.

22 Michael Harbsmeier and Peter Ulf Møller, *Europe as Ethnographic Object: How Japan discovered the West*, in *Folk* 34 (1993), pp. 5–42; Michael Harbsmeier, *Interrogating Travelers: On the Production of Western Knowledge in Early Modern Japan*, in Gesa Mackenthun, Andrea Nicolas, and Stephanie Wodianska (eds.), *Travel, Agency, and the Circulation of Knowledge* (Münster, New York 2017), pp. 201–220.

23 Michael Harbsmeier, *Indian Views of England: Allochronism in Reverse*, in Anna Brus (ed.), *“The Savage Hits Back” Revisited: Art and Alterity in the Colonial Encounter* (Berlin 2021).

24 Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (London 1982).

Muslim world, Bernard Lewis had very little to say about any of the Muslim travelers who actually did write about their visits to Europe. Nabil Matar's studies and anthologies made a large number of texts available in translation. These showed that it was European distrust, travel restrictions, and inhospitality rather than any lack interest and curiosity among the Arabs that can explain why there were so many more European accounts of Arab regions than the other way around.²⁵ If to this we add the account of Ahmad ibn Qāsim Al-Hajari (c. 1570–c. 1640), the envoy who in the early seventeenth century was sent by the Moroccan sultan to France and the Netherlands to negotiate the release of captured Moriscos,²⁶ and the fascinating diary of the Christian Maronite from Aleppo Hanna Diyab (d. c. 1687), who went to Paris in the early eighteenth century to help Antoine Galland (1646–1715) with the publication of *One Thousand and One Nights*,²⁷ we get a first indication of early modern Arab-European interactions and *Verflechtungen* (entanglements).

With the Egyptian modernist and reformer Rifa'a al-Tahtawi (1801–1873), who stayed in Paris as imam for a group of forty-four students from 1825 to 1831, things seem to have changed. Tahtawi's *Takhlis al-Ibriz fi Talkhis Bariz* or *The Extraction of Gold or an Overview of Paris* was published in Cairo in 1834,²⁸ and became the first of many Arab accounts of visits to France and other European countries, to Russia and also to Japan.²⁹ Aiming more or less explicitly at learning, improvement, and getting access to more advanced knowledge and equipment, the accounts of these diplomatic emissaries, students, tourists, and exiles as well as al-Tahtawi's description of Paris have mostly been

25 Nabil Matar (ed. and trans.), *In the Land of the Christians: Arabic Travel Writing in the 17th Century* (Abingdon, New York 2003); Nabil Matar, *Europe through Arab Eyes, 1578–1727* (New York 2009).

26 Ahmad ibn Qasim al-Hajari, *Kitab nasir al-din ala'l-qawm al-kafirin* (The supporter of religion against the infidel), edited and translated from the Arabic by P. S. van Koningsveld, Q. al-Samarrai, and G. A. Wiegers (Madrid 1997). See also Michael Harbsmeier, *Fremde Blicke: Ausenansichten Europas im 17. Jahrhundert*, in *Zeitsprünge. Forschungen zur frühen Neuzeit* 7/2 (2003), pp. 455–476, here pp. 472–476.

27 Hanna Diyāb, *Von Aleppo nach Paris: Die Reise eines jungen Syrers bis an den Hof Ludwigs XIV*, unter Berücksichtigung der arabischen Handschrift, translated from the French adaptation by Gennaro Ghirardelli (Berlin 2016).

28 Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris: Al-Tahtawi's Visit to France (1826–1831)*, translated and introduced by Daniel L. Newman (London 2004).

29 Alain Roussillon, *Identité et modernité: Les voyageurs égyptiens au Japon (XIX^e–XX^e siècles)* (Paris, Arles 2005). See also Ibrahim Abdürrechid, *Un Tatar au Japon: Voyage en Asie 1908–1910*, translated from Ottoman Turkish and annotated by François Georgeon and Isik Tamdoğan-Abel (Paris 2004).

studied as integral to movements of enlightenment and modernization.³⁰ From a more broadly comparative point of view, however, they can also be interpreted as a continuation of the curiosity and fascination of their predecessors under the pressures of global temporalization.

Turning eastwards from the Arab to the Ottoman world the pattern seems to repeat itself with a twist. Evliya Çelebi (1611–c. 1687), the most famous of Ottoman travelers,³¹ as well as the earliest ambassadors to Europe in the eighteenth century were as deeply impressed by what they recognized as superior means and ways of communication and representation as their many successors in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries traveling to the same destinations.³² Where the earlier generations merely described and admired the libraries, theaters, opera houses, printing presses, post offices, museums, exhibitions, panoramas, and other public displays, later travelers were increasingly in search for models of improvement and progress to be introduced at home as well. Many of these travelers have been thoroughly studied in numerous publications resulting from the project *Europa von außen gesehen* (Europe seen from outside) led by Bekim Agai at the University of Bonn from 2010 to 2014.³³

Perhaps even more interestingly, however, Ottoman travelers of the nineteenth century also turned eastwards themselves, thereby producing their own variety of “Orientalism.” Christoph Herzog’s and Raoul Motika’s article “Orientalism ‘alla turca’” from twenty years ago, which has been followed up by a substantial dissertation on *Ottoman Travellers’ Perception of “the East” in the Late*

30 Anouar Louca, *Voyageurs et écrivains égyptiens en France au XIX^e siècle* (Paris 1970); Susan Gilson Miller (ed. and transl.), *Disorienting Encounters: Travels of a Moroccan Scholar in France in 1845–1846, the voyage of Muhammad aş-Saffār* (Berkeley, Los Angeles 1992); Nazik Saba Yared, *Arab Travellers and Western Civilisation* (Beirut 1996).

31 See the presentation in this volume by Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, as well as R. F. Kreutel (ed. and transl.), *Im Reiche des goldenen Apfels: Des türkischen Weltenbummlers Evliya Çelebi denkwürdige Reisen in das Guiarenland und nach Wien, anno 1665* (Graz 1957).

32 Mehmed Efendi, *Le paradis des infidèles: Relation de Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed efendi, ambassadeur ottoman en France sous la Régence*, translated from Ottoman by Julien Galland, edited by Gilles Veinstein (Paris 1981); Zeyneb Hanoum, *A Turkish Woman’s European Impressions*, edited by Grace Ellison (London 1913, reprint Cambridge 2012); Stéphane Yerasimos, *Deux Ottomans à Paris sous le Directoire et l’Empire: Relations d’ambassade* (Paris 1998).

33 See Bekim Agai, Olcay Akyıldız, and Caspar Hillebrand (eds.), *Venturing Beyond Borders: Reflections on Genre, Function and Boundaries in Middle Eastern Travel Writing* (Würzburg 2013); Bekim Agai and Stephan Conermann (eds.), “Wenn einer eine Reise tut, hat er was zu erzählen”: Präfiguration – Konfiguration – Refiguration in muslimischen Reiseberichten (Berlin 2013); Bekim Agai and Zita Ágota Pataki (eds.), *Orientalische Reisende in Europa – Europäische Reisende im Nahen Osten: Bilder vom Selbst und Imaginationen des Anderen* (Berlin 2010).

Ottoman Empire by Mustafa Serdar Palabiyik,³⁴ can also be seen as an invitation to compare travels to the Orient with travels from the Orient by focusing on the Occidentalists as against the Orientalist Ottoman travel accounts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Turning a further step eastwards to the Indo-Persian and Persian traditions of travel writing, we finally come to yet another and even better reason for answering the question whether it makes sense to compare in the affirmative. Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Muzaffar Alam were the first to point out that many of the Indo-Persian travel accounts of “the age of discovery” had very little or nothing to do with any European presence or inspiration.³⁵ The few and better known exceptions, Shaikh Syed Muhammad I’tisam al-Din’s (1730–1800) report of his visit to France and Britain from 1767 to 1769 in *The Wonders of Vilayet*³⁶ and Mirza Abu Taleb Khan’s (1752–1805/06) *Travels in Asia, Africa and Europe during the years 1799–1803*³⁷ thus appear in a new light as links in a chain ranging from the Mughal to the Safavid and the travelers of the Qajar Empire of the nineteenth century, and it is precisely in this field that the comparative study of travel accounts has taken the most spectacular steps forward over the last couple of decades.

The most recent of the monographs about Persian travel accounts from the Qajar period, Hamid Dabashi’s *Reversing the Colonial Gaze*,³⁸ spends quite a lot of energy on the attempt to show that, far from exclusively dealing with Europe, these travelers also went to many other destinations. Kamram Rastegar’s wide-

34 Christoph Herzog and Raoul Motika, Orientalism “alla turca”: Late 19th / Early 20th Century Ottoman Voyages into the Muslim “Outback,” in *Die Welt des Islams*, new series 40/2 (2000): Ottoman Travels and Travel Accounts from an Earlier Age of Globalization, pp. 139–195; Mustafa Serdar Palabiyik, *Travel, Civilisation, and the East: Ottoman Travellers’ Perception of “the East” in the Late Ottoman Empire* (PhD thesis, Middle East Technical University, Ankara 2010). See also Stephan Conermann, *Das Eigene und das Fremde: Der Bericht der Gesandtschaft Muṣṭafā Rāsiḥs nach St. Petersburg 1792–1794*, in *Archivium Ottomanicum* 17 (1999), pp. 249–270.

35 Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries 1400–1800* (Cambridge 2007).

36 Mirza I’tisam al-Din, *Shigurf namah i Velaet*, or, *Excellent Intelligence Concerning Europe: Being the Travels of Mirza Itesa Modeen in Great Britain and France*, translated from the original Persian manuscript into Hindoostanee, with an English version and notes by J. E. Alexander and Munshi Shamsher Khan (London 1827). See also Juan R. I. Cole, *Invisible Occidentalism: Eighteenth Century Indo-Persian Constructions of the West*, in *Iranian Studies* 25/3 (1992), pp. 3–16.

37 Charles Stewart (trans.), *Travels of Mirza Abu Taleb Khan in Asia, Africa and Europe during the years 1799, 1800, 1801, 1802 and 1803: Written by himself in the Persian Language*, 2nd ed. (London 1814).

38 Hamid Dabashi, *Reversing the Colonial Gaze: Persian Travelers Abroad* (Cambridge 2020).

ranging study *Literary Modernity between the Middle East and Europe*,³⁹ Naghmeh Sohrabi's *Taken for Wonder*,⁴⁰ the anthology *On the Wonders of Land and Sea*,⁴¹ and Sara Faridzadeh's PhD thesis⁴² have devoted most of their comparative attention to the European experiences of these generations of travelers. The best illustration of how far a micro-historical study of just one of these Iranian voyages to Europe can take us in the direction of a better understanding of emphatically global interactions can be found in Nile Green's admirably detailed reconstruction of what six Iranians students learned during their stay in England in the early nineteenth century.⁴³

Conclusions

Our survey of recent potential contributions to a comparative study of travel accounts to and from the Orient has given us some examples of successful micro-historical studies of singular encounters such as Nile Green's and a long list of travelers deserving such close micro-historical scrutiny. When trying to identify larger patterns, however, in the style of Jürgen Osterhammel's no longer merely curious and not yet eurocentrically and imperially arrogant and superior enlightened explorers of Asian empires, we are bound to remain disappointed: all the accounts quoted so far, whether to or from the Orient, are full of traces of experiences and observations of alterities, i. e., other ways of communication and representation, other ways of dealing with gender and age, with poverty and power, seasons and nature than what these travelers and their audience were used to and knew in advance. When trying to follow these traces we have to bracket our preconceived notions of both where the travelers came from and where they went to. Only when listening closely enough to the travelers themselves will they let us have a share in their global histories. Perhaps digitalization will be able to help us to find new ways of comparing these global experiences.

³⁹ Kamran Rastegar, *Literary Modernity between the Middle East and Europe: Textual Transactions in Nineteenth-Century Arabic, English and Persian Literatures* (London, New York 2007).

⁴⁰ Naghmeh Sohrabi, *Taken for Wonder: Nineteenth-Century Travel Accounts from Iran to Europe* (Oxford, New York 2012).

⁴¹ Roberta Micallef and Sunil Sharma (eds.), *On the Wonders of Land and Sea: Persianate Travel Writing* (Boston, Mass. et al. 2013).

⁴² Sara Faridzadeh, *Der östliche Westen: Grenz- und Fremdeheitskonstruktionen in iranischen Reiseberichten des 19. Jahrhunderts* (PhD thesis, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin 2017).

⁴³ Nile Green, *The Love of Strangers: What Six Muslims Learned in Jane Austen's London* (Princeton, Oxford 2016).

