

Adrien Delmas. *Les Voyages de l'écrit: Culture écrite et expansion européenne à l'époque moderne; essais sur la Compagnie Hollandaise des Indes Orientales*. L'Atelier des voyages 8. Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2013. 286 pp. €60. ISBN: 978-2-7453-2310-1.

Along the lines of Miles Ogborn's or Pierre Berthiaume's analyses of the institutional links between European colonial companies and travel writing, Adrien Delmas focuses on the Dutch East India Company (VOC) during the seventeenth century. Comprised of seven essays, ranging from La Popelinière's theorization of a new kind of historical writing to Peter Kolb's first colonial history of South Africa, Delmas's study is very convincing: the diversity of his sources, in regard to their medium (archives, printed books, and manuscript accounts) or their language (most are in Dutch, but also in Latin, French, English, and Spanish), gives an interesting overview of the circulation of texts and the practice of writing in the VOC's newborn empire.

Following Grotius's famous essay *De Mare liberum*, published to justify Dutch acts of piracy close to Singapore, the VOC started using written materials to consolidate its power, while trying to control very strictly the dissemination of its published accounts. The well-documented case of Van Linschoten is instructive: the success of this first travel account published by a Dutch man about spice trade routes to Goa and Portuguese strongholds surpassed the VOC's expectations and the many editions and translations of his *Itinerario* (1596) around all of Europe most benefited — with a certain irony — England and its new East India Company, thanks to Richard Hakluyt. Because the dissemination of printed travel accounts escaped its control, the VOC rapidly imposed strict controls on travelogues and diaries written by its employees and, above all, opted for manuscript over print for every account of its activities.

The Dutch policy of secrecy ended up being as protective as that of their worst enemies, the Iberian nations. This political decision is essential for understanding

the VOC's expansion and its rivalry with the flourishing corporation of Dutch printers, but also the accumulation of memoirs and manuscript diaries (a "sea of paper") stacked in their Amsterdam offices. Delmas's analysis succeeds in documenting the circulation of written material, from the VOC's control of printed books to the use of writing during the colonial foundation of Cape Town and then to the material diffusion and acquisition of books in the new colonies. His essay on Cape Town's library is truly excellent, thanks to his reconstruction of the social networks allowing books to travel from the Netherlands to the readers of the new colony without any restrictions. This is very different from the Spanish case and shows how the circulation of printed books was tolerated by Dutch authorities. Very interesting also is the analysis of the foundation of Cape Town and the use of memoirs as a tool for appropriation by its administrator Van Riebeeck. As Delmas demonstrates convincingly, the dissemination of written material contributed to colonization in different ways: as a proof of ownership to justify further conquests, as a source of information for future involvement, as a cultural good for a new colonial society, but also as a story aimed at soliciting funding for colonial empire and, finally, as a means of control in the hands of the metropolis.

On the downside, the essay about Grotius is not the most original (in comparison with M.-J. Van Ittersum's monograph) and we find some gaps in the bibliography. The analysis of La Popelinière could also benefit from a better contextualization and a comparison with his model, Jean Bodin, would be helpful. Most importantly, Delmas's approach to the written text seems incomplete: as a historian, Delmas seems to ignore textual strategies and rhetorical figures that create specific effects, even in the driest travelogue. The circulation of written material is indeed a colonial issue, but it also implies a textual construction that involves social and political matters (this aspect appears only, and only briefly, in the final essay on Peter Kolb). Very briefly, it would be interesting to analyze how the authority of written material, so often debated in these pages, is established within the text. However, Delmas's study offers a brilliant and complex exploration of the prism of the "powers of writing" in an early modern colonial context. *Les Voyages de l'écrit* is a crucial and original contribution to our understanding of the connection between colonial history and the study of print culture.

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