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Siegfried Huigen. *Knowledge and Colonialism: Eighteenth-Century Travellers in South Africa.* xii + 273 pp., illus., apps., bibl., index. (Originally published as *Verkenningen van Zuid-Afrika: Achttiende-eeuwse reizigers aan de Kaap* in 2007.) Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2009. \$147 (cloth).

Siegfried Huigen, an associate professor of Dutch literature and cultural history at the University of Stellenbosch, presents the accumulation of scientific knowledge by various travelers to the Cape of Good Hope. In focusing on the eighteenth century rather than the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this book is a welcome contribution to a growing body of literature on South Africa. Huigen discusses the travel journals of scientific travelers to South Africa. He shows that these travelers were not greatly driven by the economic or political issues of their employers, such as the Dutch East India Company and, later, the English and Dutch Batavian Republic governments. Thus he clearly takes a stand against Mary-Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Routledge, 1992), which argues that the publications of European travelers facilitated imperial expansion. Huigen provides evidence that these travelers, though in the service of their respective Cape governments, maintained their independent standpoints with respect to South Africa's natural history and its inhabitants.

Huigen's scientific traveler is a university-trained man, educated by people like Buffon, Linnaeus, Degérando, and Allamand. His scientific curiosity leads him to undertake expeditions inland and experience the Cape people and nature for himself. He is familiar with publications on the Cape's natural history and inhabitants. He compares and adjusts the old knowledge with his own findings. Some of these newly published travel journals influenced the writings of enlightened philosophers in Europe, such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Kant, and Herder, and contributed to the formation of their views regarding ethnography and cultures. Huigen showcases how the learned traveler sought to gain authority while trying to bring his experiential knowledge into the existing scientific discourse of the day.

Knowledge and Colonialism uses the travel journals of the German mathematician Peter Kolb (who was sent to the Cape to do astronomical research but after his Prussian patron's demise became an employee of the VOC—the Dutch East India Company), the Dutch-English commander of the Cape garrison Robert Jacob Gordon, the French-Surinamese VOC servant

François Le Vaillant, the English colonial official John Barrow, the Dutch commissioner-general J. A. de Mist and his son, and, finally, Lodewyk Alberti, a former bailiff. These travelers undertook explorations deep into the South African hinterland, where they encountered unfamiliar landscapes and animals such as the giraffe. But, as Huigen makes clear, most explorers showed a special interest in the customs and appearance of the nomadic inhabitants, today referred to as Khoikhoi.

Kolb, especially, sought to reappraise the image of the “Hottentots.” In his book *Caput Bonaë Spei Hodiernum* (Monath, 1719) he presented them not as lazy, animal-like, and stupid, but as a people with a distinct culture and habits—as Kolb himself had witnessed and experienced. Kolb's book, written in German, was immediately published in Dutch (1727), English (1731), and French (1745). Huigen emphasizes the differences among the various translations. The German and Dutch versions are far more elaborate in both text and illustrations than the French and English ones and deal extensively with the Khoikhoi. Huigen criticizes the many English-speaking historians, especially Pratt, who have relied on the English or French versions. They do a disservice to history when they rely on a partially translated book either to characterize Kolb or to ground their own remarks on the Cape of Good Hope's history. Huigen brings the encyclopedic richness of Kolb's book to our attention.

The author has put his finger on a sore spot: primary and secondary literature written in German (or Dutch, for that matter) rarely reaches the Anglophone historian. Furthermore, he warns us that historical sources can get lost in translation. By having his book translated into English, he ensures that it will reach an international audience. The book was first published in Dutch as *Verkenningen van Zuid-Afrika: Achttiende-eeuwse reizigers aan de Kaap*, in 2007. A literal translation of the Dutch title would be “Reconnaissances of South Africa: Eighteenth-Century Travelers at the Cape.” The word “reconnaissance” (and “*verkenning*”) means “to know,” “to explore,” and “to examine.” This is more closely related to the topic of the book than the English title it actually appears under. The travelers he discusses, Huigen informs us, emphasized the fact that they had explored the African hinterland and established new facts autonomously, thus contributing to the formation of new knowledge. The author states that the traveler benefited from the colonial establishment because it allowed him to quench his scientific thirst; he was not a “colo-

nial spy with *Imperial eyes*" (p. 239). Including the word "colonialism" in the title shifts the emphasis to the eighteenth-century traveler and the colonization of South Africa—just what Huigen argues against. This book shows that doing history is an ongoing interaction between reading, translating, and interpreting—which together further historiographical discourse.

ALETTE FLEISCHER

Joanna Stalnaker. *The Unfinished Enlightenment: Description in the Age of the Encyclopédie*. xvi + 240 pp., illus., bibl., index. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2010. £27.95, \$45 (cloth).

The Unfinished Enlightenment is about theories and, to a lesser extent, practices of description in France from around 1750 to 1800. Description might seem to be a boundless and thus unstudyable concept, but, as Joanna Stalnaker reminds us, it was already a central element of Michel Foucault's classical "episteme," where it manifested itself as fixed and mechanical through about 1800—a claim that Stalnaker repudiates here. More recently, the burgeoning field of historical epistemology has begun analyzing description. Stalnaker identifies her work as participating in this current while insisting on the literary as well as epistemological interest of description. Indeed, one secondary framework in which she situates her research is that of illuminating precursors, literary and otherwise, to "realistic" and "romantic" descriptions of nineteenth-century literature, but she argues that eighteenth-century description should be seen on its own terms. As she demonstrates, the late eighteenth century was rich in conflicting theories of description, none of which prevailed—whence the book's title—before being upset by the divergence of literary and scientific discourse around 1800.

The book is divided into three parts. The first, on description in natural history, comprises two chapters: one on Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, Louis-Jean-Marie Daubenton, and others' *Histoire naturelle* (1749–1789), the other on Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Etudes de la nature* (1784–1788). The second part, on description in encyclopedias, includes a chapter on description in the *Encyclopédie* (1751–1772) and one on the little-known genre of descriptive poetry, sometimes called encyclopedic in virtue of its annotated enumerations of objects of nature. The third part, also in two chapters, examines Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *Tableau de Paris* (1781–

1788) and *Le nouveau Paris* (1798), both vast and fragmented descriptions of Paris. The preface and introduction discuss methodology and background, while the conclusion opens the book up onto broader perspectives.

Without specifically enumerating them, *The Unfinished Enlightenment* returns repeatedly to a handful of tensions regarding description. First, should descriptions be short, so as to avoid missing the forest for the trees, or should they be long, so as to avoid missing anything or so as to recreate, mimetically, gargantuan subjects? Buffon and Daubenton rejected Carl Linnaeus's minimal descriptions, but they recognized the need for limits to their "complete" ones. Second, should descriptions be standardized to facilitate comparison and consultation—as Daubenton's tables of anatomical measurements were—or should they vary to accommodate subjects' peculiarities, offer multiple viewpoints, or maintain readers' interest? Third, the order of descriptions was much discussed: in particular, the significance of the "first brushstroke" continued to be acknowledged even after the analogy with painting had suffered multiple critiques. Fourth, should descriptions be focused, as they were in the Linnaean tradition, or should they be open to details of environment and context, as they were in Bernardin's description of the strawberry plant and Mercier's descriptions of Paris? Fifth, nomenclature was at issue within description. Resistance to specialized nomenclature was strong with Buffon and Daubenton, among others. In the *Encyclopédie*, however, Denis Diderot argued that readers gained something from exposure to technical terminology—namely, an appreciation of knowledge's shape and complexity—even if they failed to understand that terminology clearly; as Stalnaker notes, a similar "effet du réel" was theorized by Roland Barthes to explain the "extraneous" description in nineteenth-century novels. Mercier too sprinkled his descriptions of Paris with contemporary jargon, convinced that such terminology created a sense of time past and the ephemerality of the present. Underlying many of these tensions regarding description were assumptions about reading and readership. Indeed, one reason for the eighteenth century's many controversies over description was the growing interest of the public in arts and sciences, which encouraged rethinking the practice of description. Assumptions about reading were particularly formative in descriptive poetry, where verses about nature were accompanied by scholarly footnotes (in one instance by Georges Cuvier) explaining circumlocutions, a system that effectively split the experience of reading.