

A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO ULRICH JASPER SEETZEN'S TRAVELS TO THE MIDDLE EAST WAYS OF KNOWING AND TRANSLATION*

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When, in 1802, Ulrich Jasper Seetzen left the German Lands heading towards the Middle East, he did not know what to expect. As many of his far travelling contemporaries, Seetzen aimed at exploring a region that was mostly unknown to the European world of scholars. Advised by other explorers, who had previously also moved way beyond the southeastern parts of Europe, like Carsten Niebuhr, as well as by those who had assiduously studied the region from afar, like Friedrich Blumenbach, Seetzen sketched out the ambitious plan to go to 'the Orient', the lands that would become the Middle East later on.¹ Adding to this already highly demanding objective, Seetzen boldly proposed to continue his journey and also to cross the African continent from east to west.² Without any doubt, Seetzen left his homeland knowing that he would be exploring parts of the world that would be most foreign to him, including many routes that would be dangerous for any foreigner. Envisioning to move this far away from central Europe, moreover, also

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¹ Taking the notion of 'the Middle East' and not the historic notion of 'the Orient' as our point of reference for the thematic section we edited, we take up the suggestions put forward by Zayde Antrim, who, however, also problematizes this particular notion; see: ZAYDE ANTRIM, *Mapping the Middle East*, Reaktion Books, London 2018, esp. p. 9–11. For a rather short account concerning travels see: EVA JOHANNA HOLMBERG, « The Middle East », in CARL THOMPSON (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*, Routledge, London – New York 2016, p. 372–383.

² ULRICH JASPER SEETZEN, « Reiseplan ins innere Afrika », *Monatliche Correspondenz zur Beförderung der Erd- und Himmelskunde*, 6 (1802), p. 126–159; 201–232; 317–342, 401–426.

included the rather well-known uncertainty about whether there would be any chance to return back home.³

In the beginning, the story of Ulrich Jasper Seetzen's travels is linked to the many centres of learning situated in the German lands: so, the story is also about Jever, Göttingen and Gotha. It seems that, especially, the numerous scholarly conversations Seetzen had in Göttingen inspired him to work on a detailed plan for his adventurous journey. Later, during his stay at the Gotha court, Duke Ernest II of Saxe-Gotha and Altenburg, as well as his son Duke August, promoted Seetzen's overall scientific programme, enlarging the already ambitious programme considerably. While Ernest II provided Seetzen with the opportunity for a scientific training on how to use astronomic instruments, carried out by Franz Xaver von Zach, one of the most prominent contemporary astronomers, August, who followed his father on the throne in 1804, promoted a different research agenda: he asked Seetzen to buy valuable objects for one of his most cherished projects: the soon to be founded prestigious 'Oriental Museum'.⁴ Leaving Europe with such a research agenda, Seetzen might have undertaken his travels as an impossible challenge. Yet, it seems as if, by that time, travelling, as well as exploring far-off places, was often linked to such a type of high aspirations.⁵

Therefore, the ambitions like the ones Seetzen cherished were shared by many members of the European republic of letters. Around 1800, in their view, the scientific traveller who was to head off for far away regions of the world was expected to be as open-minded as possible, collecting data and objects in order to make sense of those parts of the world that had hitherto been unknown to them.⁶ Many of the other contemporary travelling endeavours often followed similar exigent objectives. In hindsight, there seems to have been some kind of megalomania at stake when, for instance, the 'Association for Promoting the

³ Knowledge and its opposite, non-knowledge, have turned into a widely discussed topics, yet, uncertainty, which is in a way in between the two antagonistic poles has not emerged as a point of reference for further research. For some first approach see: JOHANNES PAUSE, « Reisen und Nicht-Wissen. Ein Aufbruch », in JOHANNES PAUSE, IRINA GRADINARI, DORIT MÜLLER (eds.), *Versteckt – Verirrt – Verschollen. Reisen und Nicht-Wissen*, Reichert Verlag, Wiesbaden 2016, p. 85–106; MORITZ EPPLE, ANNETTE IMHAUSEN, FALK MÜLLER (eds.), *Weak Knowledge: Forms, Functions, and Dynamics*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt a.M. 2019. For an overall discussion of the many aspects of travel see ALASDAIR PETTINGER, TIM YOUNGS (eds.), *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing*, Routledge, London – New York 2020.

⁴ See FRIEDEGUND FREITAG (ed.), *Luxus, Kunst und Phantasie. Herzog August von Sachsen-Gotha-Altenburg als Sammler*, Sandstein Verlag, Dresden 2022.

⁵ For an essay to grasp this type of exploratory endeavor see the contributions taken together in DANE KENNEDY (ed.), *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014.

⁶ For this persona see: ANGELY BYRNE, « The Scientific Traveller », in ALASDAIR PETTINGER, TIM YOUNGS (eds.), *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing*, Routledge, London – New York 2020, p. 17–29.

Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa' that was founded in London in 1788, would send John Ledyard off to cross the African continent from the Red Sea to the Atlantic. Similar ambitions also shaped the work of the 'Syrian Society', that was founded also in London in 1805; this rather little-known society was later renamed the 'Palestine Association' – following the model of the aforementioned association that promoted the exploration of Africa.⁷ Both associations reflected the desire to get to know larger world regions by sending out European travelling researchers who always were obliged to follow a large set of instructions.⁸ Nevertheless, after all, most of the travels from home, projected by these associations, were highly risky, as there was a total lack of knowledge concerning the particular regions and as there was no experience of these regions either that could possibly be shared before starting off. Thus, far-reaching ambitions largely prevailed: they were inspired by an imaginary ideal that included getting to know every possible place in the world despite the many unforeseeable difficulties for any European traveller to reach it and also return.⁹

According to his personal taste and his educational upbringing, Seetzen set out most probably first and foremost as what would later be called a natural scientist.¹⁰ Having been trained as a physician, many of his scientific goals were linked to the idea of getting to know the natural world. Following the footsteps of early modern naturalists who had previously explored far-off lands, observing natural phenomena, recording astronomical and meteorological data, collecting plant and animal specimens as well as stones, earths and minerals was part of Seetzen's day to day travelling routine that he recorded in his diaries and letters.¹¹ However,

⁷ For the short-lived Syrian Society see: RUTH KARK, HAIM GOREN (eds.), «Pioneering British Exploration and Scriptural Geography: The Syrian Society/The Palestine Association», *The Geographical Journal*, 177 (2011), p. 264–274.

⁸ See ALASDAIR PETTINGER, «Guidance and Advice», in ALASDAIR PETTINGER, TIM YOUNGS (eds.), *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing*, Routledge, London – New York 2020, p. 139–152.

⁹ For this most ambitious time-period in the history of exploration see IRIS SCHRÖDER, *Das Wissen von der ganzen Welt. Globale Geographien und räumliche Ordnungen Afrikas und Europas 1790–1870*, Schöningh, Paderborn, 2011, p. 132.

¹⁰ For two brief biographical accounts see NORBERT NEBES, «Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767–1811), Forschungsreisender und Sammler im Auftrag der Gothaer Herzöge», in ANGELIKA GEYER (ed.), *1846–2006, 160 Jahre Archäologisches Museum der Universität Jena, Thüringer Sammlungen im Kontext internationaler Netzwerke*, Logos Verlag, Jena 2008 (Jenaer Hefte zur Klassischen Archäologie 7), p. 76–94; BIRGIT SCHÄBLER, «Seetzen, Ulrich Jasper», *Neue Deutsche Biographie (NDB)*, 24 (2010), p. 155–156.

¹¹ For Seetzen's collection of minerals see the brief account by CARSTEN ECKERT, «Die naturkundlichen Sammlungen», in FRIEDEGUND FREITAG (ed.), *Luxus, Kunst und Phantasie. Herzog August von Sachsen-Gotha-Altenburg als Sammler*, Sandstein Verlag, Dresden 2022, p. 231–237. For early modern naturalists' travelling and observation practices see JULIA CARINA BÖTTCHER, *Beobachtung als Lebensart. Praktiken der Wissensproduktion bei Forschungsreisen im 18. Jahrhundert*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2020; furthermore, more recently, JULIA CARINA BÖTTCHER, «Alles

over time, being on the road, Seetzen might have considerably expanded these tasks. So, it seems as if he turned into an encyclopaedic traveller ‘avant la lettre’; in accordance with the ideas that he shared with many of his scholarly contemporaries, his gaze tried to capture the natural as well as the social and the cultural world that he conscientiously kept documenting in as many respects as possible.

Over the last three decades, Seetzen’s travels have been researched especially in German-speaking lands.¹² This research boom is linked to the fact that large parts of Seetzen’s writings are relatively easy to access by now in a printed version. His diaries, which had already been edited by Friedrich Kruse in the 1850s, were reprinted in 2004 and partially edited anew in 2011/12. These endeavours have been supplemented by an edition of Seetzen’s printed works, from 2017 onwards.¹³ A lot of attention has been paid to Seetzen’s biography, focusing on the traveller as well as the scholar – including a detailed discussion of his journey as such.¹⁴ In this respect, quite a few aspects have already been addressed.¹⁵ Yet, numerous elements still call for further exploration.¹⁶ This holds even more true once we

Bemerkenswerte Sammeln. Auf Forschungsreise in der Frühen Neuzeit », in SUSANNE FRIEDRICH, JANA MANGOLD, SUSANNE RAU (eds.) *Wandlungen des Sammelns. Praktiken, Wissen, Anordnungen – Ein Reader*, Transcript, Bielefeld 2024, p. 45–53. For some critical notes on the genre of letters and diaries written by travelers see the short articles EVE TAVOR BANNET, « Letters », in ALASDAIR PETTINGER, TIM YOUNGS (eds.), *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing*, Routledge, London – New York 2020, p. 115–127 as well as CHRISTINA LAFFIN, « Diaries and Journals », in ALASDAIR PETTINGER, TIM YOUNGS (eds.), *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing*, Routledge, London – New York 2020, p. 128–138.

¹² The start was made by HANS STEIN (ed.), *Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767–1811). Leben und Werk. Die arabischen Länder und die Nahostforschung im napoleonischen Zeitalter. Vorträge des Kolloquiums vom 23. und 24. September in der Forschungs- und Landesbibliothek Gotha*, Forschungs- und Landesbibliothek Gotha, Gotha 1995.

¹³ ULRICH JASPER SEETZEN, *Ulrich Jasper Seetzen’s Reisen durch Syrien, Palästina, Phönicien, die Transjordan-Länder, Arabia Petraea und Unterägypten*, ed. FRIEDRICH KRUSE, 4 vols., Reimer, Berlin 1854–1859, Reprint Olms, Hildesheim 2004; ULRICH JASPER SEETZEN, *Sämtliche gedruckte Schriften*, ed. by Detlef Haberland, 6 vols., Isensee Verlag, Oldenburg 2017.

¹⁴ See DETLEF HABERLAND (ed.), *Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767–1811): Jeveaner – aufgeklärter Unternehmer – wissenschaftlicher Orientreisender*, Isensee Verlag, Oldenburg 2014; Id. (ed.), *Der Orientreisende Ulrich Jasper Seetzen und die Wissenschaften*, Isensee Verlag, Oldenburg 2019.

¹⁵ GIOVANNI BONACINA, *The Wahhabis Seen Through European Eyes (1772–1830): Deists and Puritans of Islam*, Brill, Leiden 2015.

¹⁶ One might draw the attention particularly to Seetzen geographical and cartographical works in particular, as a few first attempts have already highlighted some of future potentials for further research: See Petra Weigel’s contributions on Seetzen’s maps: PETRA WEIGEL (ed.), *Das Heilige Land in Gotha. Der Verlag Justus Perthes und die Palästina-Kartographie im 19. Jahrhundert*, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha – Universität Erfurt, Gotha – Erfurt 2014, p. 34–37; EAD., « Erste Kartenskizzen von Syrien und Palästina von der Hand Ulrich Jasper Seetzens », in FERAS KRIMSTI (ed.), *Der Orient in Gotha. Katalog zur Ausstellung der Forschungsbibliothek Gotha auf Schloss Friedenstein*

start discussing Seetzen's oeuvre in relation to other contemporary travelling research endeavours.¹⁷

The so called 'oriental' manuscripts Seetzen collected are now part of today's Gotha Research Library. They have mostly been researched in this context,¹⁸ whereas the collection of Egyptian treasures that Seetzen amassed in Cairo and successfully sent to Gotha is today part of the holdings of the Gotha Friedenstein collection. The latter have been presented to the larger public already for quite a while as part of the permanent exhibition of the Gotha Ducal Museum.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the collection of ethnographical objects has been researched in depth only most recently; since 2023 it is also available online.²⁰ Most of the ongoing research has been pursued starting out from the two places that keep the most valuable holdings of Seetzeniana: Oldenburg and Gotha.²¹ Besides the treasures already mentioned, held in Gotha, the Oldenburg holdings particularly include the diaries and the letters, as well as many the manuscripts. Moreover, there are also numerous printed articles as well as other different collections that have been overlooked for a long time from the nineteenth century onward. Still, despite all the efforts of the past few years, following the above suggestion to tackle Seetzen as an encyclopaedic traveller calls for of a larger array of topics for future research. The following thematic section will certainly not fill this gap. Yet it is meant to invite further scholarly enterprises in order to historically relocate

vom 8. September bis 3. November 2024, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha der Universität Erfurt, Gotha 2024, p. 102–103. Furthermore STEFANIE ZEHLE, « ... das geographische Chaos der innerafrikanischen Länder zu studieren ... », in DETLEF HABERLAND (ed.), *Der Orientreisende Ulrich Jasper Seetzen und die Wissenschaften*, Isensee Verlag, Oldenburg 2019, p. 299–325.

¹⁷ See e.g. ANNE MARISS, « A World of New Things ». *Praktiken der Naturgeschichte bei Johann Reinhold Forster*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt a.M. 2015; SCHRÖDER, *Das Wissen von der ganzen Welt*, esp. p. 41; p. 125–127.

¹⁸ For the Gotha holdings, we might follow the research of Feras Krimsti and Monika Hasenmüller, who both portrayed Seetzen as a firsthand connoisseur when he began acquiring historical manuscripts during his travels: See MONIKA HASENMÜLLER, « Ulrich Jasper Seetzen als Sammler orientalischer Handschriften », in DETLEF HABERLAND (ed.), *Der Orientreisende Ulrich Jasper Seetzen und die Wissenschaften*, Isensee Verlag, Oldenburg 2019, p. 459–476; FERAS KRIMSTI, « Die Sammlung orientalischer Handschriften », in FRIEDEGUND FREITAG (ed.), *Luxus, Kunst und Phantasie. Herzog August von Sachsen-Gotha-Altenburg als Sammler*, Sandstein Verlag, Dresden 2022, p. 149–155.

¹⁹ For a recent appraisal see UTA WALLENSTEIN, « Ein Freimaurer im Orient – Ulrich Jasper Seetzen und die Aegyptiaca für den Gothaer Hof », in UTA WALLENSTEIN, MARKUS MEUMANN (eds.), *Freimaurer und Mysterien Ägyptens in Gotha*, Michael Imhof Verlag, Petersberg 2023, p. 262–275.

²⁰ See KERSTIN VOLKER-SAAD, « Seetzens Ethnographica als enzyklopädische Belege fremder Welten », in FRIEDEGUND FREITAG (ed.), *Luxus, Kunst und Phantasie. Herzog August von Sachsen-Gotha-Altenburg als Sammler*, Sandstein Verlag, Dresden 2022, p. 156–163. From 2024, the collection of Seetzen's Ethnographica has also been online, see GOTHADIGITAL, <https://gotha.digital/suchtreffer?add=1&ceid=13&no_cache=1&tx_jomuseo_pi1009_list%5BclassificationTopic%5D=Sammlung%20Seetzen&tx_jomuseo_pi1009_list%5Bcontroller%5D=Museo&cHash=3cf45c3a9c1e6aaab84a38ff3b885455> (Accessed April 2025).

²¹ See the references mentioned above.

an early nineteenth-century traveller whose impressive written as well as material legacies have for a long time been largely neglected.

Reassessing Seetzen implies developing a more nuanced understanding of the story of the European scholarly and literary encounter with the region that was historically taken as ‘the Orient’. With this in mind, we should pay some attention to the fact that the aforementioned ‘Palestine Association’ of London also eagerly published Seetzen’s geography of the Dead Sea, while French journals, too, tried to keep track of Seetzen’s works during his travels.²² Seetzen’s travels have to be studied in a European context; they were by no means an isolated German endeavour. However, following the Palestinian-American literary scholar Edward Said, the overall European engagement with the historic ‘Orient’ has for quite some time been qualified as a mere projection. Said concisely studied the ‘imaginative geographies’ that add up to what he called ‘Orientalism’. In a critical vein, he thus underscored the need to further acknowledge in how far these images should not be conflated with the area itself.²³ Taking Said’s stances into account, nevertheless, does not mean totally dismissing the many historic attempts to get to know the region by travelling. By contrast, from our point of view, reading and studying the written as well as the material legacies of travelling researchers like Ulrich Jasper Seetzen could also serve as an invitation to achieve a better understanding of an entangled history that is linked to questions of knowledge and translation.²⁴ In this respect, we suggest investigating in more detail to what extent Seetzen might be taken as a ‘go-between’. In this vein, we ask: to what extent did Seetzen, during his travels, at least partially and quite gradually start to ‘go native’, learning the language while also openly appreciating, if not admiring, many of the different social settings he visited during his journey.²⁵ As we shall show, Seetzen was on site, studying the field, like today’s

²² For the often-overlooked attention of the Syrian Society concerning Seetzen’s geographical assessment of the regions he travelled, see: ULRICH JASPER SEETZEN, *A Brief Account of the Countries Adjoining the Lake of Tiberias, the Jordan and the Dead Sea*, ed. Palestine Association, Meyler & Son – Hatchard, Bath – London 1810. For the French reading of Seetzen’s letters see the contribution by Clarisse Roche.

²³ See EDWARD W. SAID, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, London 2003; for a critical appraisal dealing with the German case see: SABINE MANGOLD-WILL, *Eine « weltbürgerliche Wissenschaft » – Die deutsche Orientalistik im 19. Jahrhundert*, Steiner, Stuttgart 2004; for a more recent short but also critical reappraisal, see BIRGIT SCHÄBLER, « Orientalismus », in PIM DEN BOER (eds.), *Europäische Erinnerungsorte*, vol. 3: *Europa und die Welt*, Oldenbourg Verlag, München 2012, p. 39–44.

²⁴ In this vein, see FERAS KRIMSTI, « Zur Geschichte der Orient-Studien in Gotha: Eine Skizze », in Id. (ed.), *Der Orient in Gotha. Katalog zur Ausstellung der Forschungsbibliothek Gotha auf Schloss Friedenstein vom 8. September bis 3. November 2024*, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha der Universität Erfurt, Gotha 2024, p. 11–23.

²⁵ See KAPIL RAJ, « Go-Betweens, Travellers, and Cultural Translators », in BERNARD LIGHTMAN (ed.), *A Companion to the History of Science*, Wiley Blackwell, Oxford 2016, p. 39–57; for a couple of case

ethnologists – including all the many pitfalls that are, as we know by now, part of the ethnological enterprise.²⁶ Following this general stance, we take Seetzen as a knowledge broker, an intermediary in his own right, linking his travels to the necessity of knowledge circulation and translation.²⁷ This certainly does not exclude also studying the many failed translations, the many possible misunderstandings as well as the many disruptions that arise once knowledge is being transferred over large distances.²⁸ Moreover and finally, studying travellers like Seetzen also calls for taking into account the unknown – a most often neglected realm. These stories of non-knowledge – the so-called ‘dark side of knowledge’ – also add to a more nuanced understanding of what is being transferred and what is left out because of ignorance. This also includes ‘agnotology’, the practice of leaving out knowledge that is not wanted.²⁹

The contributions in the following section try to shed new light on the European scholarly endeavour that inspired Ulrich Jasper Seetzen to travel to the Middle East. In this regard, in her contribution, Natalia Bachour discusses Seetzen’s perception of the various strata of physicians practicing in the Ottoman Empire at the end of the eighteenth century. All in all, Bachour critically engages with Seetzen’s observations of medical practices. These practices, she claims in her reading, were first and foremost filtered by newly emerging European concepts of medicalisation which certainly pushed other non-European medical practices rather aside.

Following in Seetzen’s footsteps in some ways, Henning Sievert also focuses his reading on Seetzen’s diaries: He examines how Seetzen portrayed ‘renegades’ which he encountered in person, i.e. immigrants to the Ottoman Empire from

studies see SIMON SCHAFFER et al. (eds.), *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770–1820*, Science History Publications, Sagamore Beach (Mass.) 2009.

²⁶ See MICH KNECHT, « ‘Vor Ort im Feld?’ Zur Kritik und Reakzentuierung des Lokalen als europäisch-ethnologischer Schlüsselkategorie », *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*, 113/1 (2010), p. 23–49.

²⁷ For this approach see also: STEFAN ROHDEWALD et al., « Wissenszirkulation », in STEFAN ROHDEWALD, STEPHAN CONERMANN, ALBRECHT FUESS (eds.), *Transottomanica – Osteuropäisch-osmanisch-persische Mobilitätsdynamiken. Perspektiven und Forschungsstand*, V&R unipress, Göttingen 2019, p. 83–103.

²⁸ See BRUNO LATOUR, « Der Pedologenfaden von Boa-Vista. Eine photo-philosophische Montage », in HANS-JÖRG RHEINBERGER, MICHAEL HAGNER, BETTINA WAHRIG (eds.), *Räume des Wissens. Repräsentation, Codierung, Spur*, De Gruyter, Berlin – Boston 1996, p. 213–264.

²⁹ See CORNEL ZWIERLEIN (ed.), *The Dark Side of Knowledge: Histories of Ignorance, 1400 to 1800*, Brill, Leiden 2016, for an approach that stresses the need to tackle the politics of knowing and not-knowing, drawing on the notion of agnotology, see: ROBERT N. PROCTOR, LONDA SCHIEBINGER (eds.), *Agnotology. The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2008, for an attempt to use this concept in order to better understand European knowledge production in respect to the non-European world, see: REBEKKA HABERMAS, ALEXANDRA PRZYREMBEL, « Einleitung », in EAD. (eds.), *Von Käfern, Märkten und Menschen. Kolonialismus und Wissen in der Moderne*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2013, p. 9–26.

Western and Central Europe. This contribution, thus, contextualizes and interprets the colourful if not dubious instances of border-crossing between religions and empires that have often been overlooked.

Then, Giovanni Bonacina, opens the debate on Seetzen as an observer of contemporary religious quarrels in a more particular way, focussing again on Seetzen's encounters with the Wahhabis. In a nutshell, his article highlights the necessity of critically exploring the travelling researcher's important contribution to the early nineteenth-century European understanding of Wahhabism.

All three contributions take Seetzen as a keen observer of the surrounding social and cultural worlds of the Middle Eastern lands that he kept describing in his diaries and in his letters. Against this background, Clarisse Roche takes a different approach, explicitly researching Seetzen's treatises on Bedouin and Arabian horses. Seetzen chose this rather uncommon subject for some of the articles he sent to European scholarly journals. While choosing this approach, Roche tentatively also explores the mechanisms of knowledge-making about Arabia at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Making knowledge is often linked to practices of collecting. The following contribution by Wolbert Smidt portrays Seetzen as a collector of languages during his stay in Cairo. Smidt takes Seetzen's rather self-made linguistic way of transcribing what he heard as a case in point that should not too easily be dismissed. By contrast, he convincingly highlights the extent to which Seetzen's linguistic notes leave some valuable insights into the multilingual setting of an early nineteenth-century centre of learning as well as on the ensuing transcultural encounters on site that merit our attention.

Taken together, all the contributions open up new questionnaires as they argue for a renewed interest in rereading the legacies that have linked and, in a way, also intertwined two world regions with one another. The last contribution by Christoph Schmitt-Maaß, again, puts this larger legacy on display by discussing a recently published novel by Michael Roes. In a nutshell, Schmitt-Maaß proposes that Roes retells the story of Seetzen trying to illuminate today's readers in several respects. Searching for the western self, he claims, while travelling in space and time, admissibly calls for a further reflection of still prevailing forms of othering that are informed by orientalist stereotypes. Moreover, and this is rather a subtext, the way travel accounts are still being read for entertainment and the pleasure of discovery even until today, sheds a different and new light on the historical Seetzen and his contemporaries. Yet, all of these stories, we might conclude, call for a critical reappraisal and sometimes maybe even need to be

dismissed as they should be further informed by the many different competing viewpoints that are at stake while at the same time most often being hidden.³⁰

Without any doubt, taken together, research on the many historical European travels to far-off lands and the ensuing scholarly studies remains certainly unfinished, as it is most partial and patchy even until today.³¹ This does not only hold true for the case of Ulrich Jasper Seetzen, whose collections offer numerous topics for future research. Moreover, Seetzen is not to be tackled as a single traveller, but, by contrast, should be rather seen as part of a larger European enterprise of getting to know the world outside of Europe.³² So, the story is not only about the German lands, including Jever, Göttingen and Gotha; instead, for the greater story other places have to be taken into account: Vienna, Constantinople, Aleppo, Jerusalem, Cairo, as well as London and Paris – just to mention a few.³³ The following contributions of the thematic issue do not succeed in filling this gap. If they have introduced some new questions and problems into an ongoing debate on the many travellers whose accomplishments have for a long time been underestimated, we might have accomplished what we had hoped for. This is all the more true given that many of these endeavours that we have touched upon have also shaped in one way or another the knowledge that would later on contribute to the making of the larger European colonial project.

³⁰ See also CLAUDIA ULBRICH, HANS MEDICK, ANGELIKA SCHASER, « Selbstzeugnis und Person. Transkulturelle Perspektiven », in EAD. (eds.), *Selbstzeugnis und Person. Transkulturelle Perspektiven*, Böhlau Verlag, Köln – Weimar – Wien 2012, p. 1–19.

³¹ For an essay to develop new critical readings see also: CLAIRE LINDSAY, « Travel Writing and Postcolonial Studies », in CARL THOMPSON (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*, Routledge, London–New York 2016, p. 25–34.

³² In this vein, see: BRUNO LATOUR, « Centres of Calculation », in Id. (ed.), *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 1987, 215–257; Id., « Drawing Things Together », in MICHAEL LYNCH, STEVE WOOLGAR (eds.), *Representation in Scientific Practice*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 1990, p. 19–68.

³³ DAVID N. LIVINGSTONE, CHARLES W. J. WITHERS, « Thinking Geographically about Nineteenth-Century Science », in EAD. (eds.), *Geographies of Nineteenth Century Science*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2011, p. 1–20.

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