textual object, Dickens's *Great Expectations*. Instead, it flirts with fragments of all these subjects without coming close to identifying any but the most amorphous social vision in any of them. While in its own terms this avoidance of closure represents a certain kind of achievement, in the end it comes across as an elegiac one — an unspoken testimony to the unrealized ambitions of the New Historicism itself.

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Joan-Pau Rubiés. *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes, 1250–1625*. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pp. xxii, 443.

A well-organised demonstration of the importance of the popular tradition of travel narrative in the development of a critical, secular approach to the study of non-European cultures and peoples, Rubiés' book also challenges a common tendency to generalise Said's critique of "orientalism." Careful analysis of a number of Western travellers' reports shows that they were often less bound by their own cultures than were contemporary Muslim observers, who viewed India through the prism of Persian and Mughal norms. Pre-eighteenth-century European orientalism is, according to Rubiés, rare except in the works of armchair tourists, like Botero, who drew on travel narratives to develop overarching theories about "eastern" despotism, contrasted with European civility.

Covering Western travel writers from Gerald of Wales in the twelfth century to the seventeenth-century Roman aristocrat Pietro della Valle, and based on careful reading of a wide range of sources — Persian, Arabic and South Indian — the book presents a sensible and convincing argument that, over the centuries, secular observers of the Indian world developed an increasing ability to distinguish between their subjects' culture and religion. Here they moved much more quickly than most of the missionaries who followed Portuguese expansion to the East. Until the troubled efforts of the Jesuit Nobili to accommodate Indian custom while pursuing an evangelical goal, most ecclesiastics seemed unable to see Hindu culture on its own terms. This did not dissuade lay writers from doing so, but it meant that they usually avoided any objective discussion of religious practice. Nonetheless they played a substantial role in providing Europeans like Montaigne with evidence that could be used to develop an "anthropology" that was relatively unencumbered by Christian presuppositions and that prepared the way for the critique of religion as culture underlying much of the thought of the Enlightenment.

The connections between humanist high culture and the frame of reference of most of the writers studied here were slight, but the interesting presentation of the narrative of Niccolò Conti (who lived in the east for thirty-five years) in a work "edited" by Poggio Bracciolini shows that they were not unimportant. Poggio used Conti to correct the information provided by ancients like Ptolemy and Strabo,

demonstrating the independence of humanist scholars too often seen as unquestioning devotees of the Greeks and Romans. Rubiés might have done more to suggest how much Conti's book shaped later expositions of Indian culture.

Although Rubiés does not presume much knowledge of the history of Vijayanagara, the only substantial Hindu kingdom of the period studied, Europeanists may find portions of the book difficult to assimilate. Here a few more detailed maps and a chronological appendix might have assisted the reader. Some of the details presented about the history of the empire and the many smaller states which developed after its defeat in 1565 might have been better located in another book, but given the difficult terrain on which the author operates, this is understandable.

The book would have benefited from more careful editorial attention; on a number of occasions it is difficult to read or obscures its point. An informed proofreader could have improved the text. Rubiés sometimes refers to Taprobane (the ancients' name for Ceylon, later sometimes applied to Sumatra) as Trapobane, and both spellings appear in the index. Some of the primary sources used are listed in the bibliography only under their editors' names. Despite these relatively minor problems and the book's high price (U.S. \$74.95), it certainly belongs in all respectable undergraduate university libraries.

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