

International Conference - December 1 & 2, 2016 - Chambéry / Grenoble

Boundaries and Religious Otherness

Religion in Travel Writings

16th-20th Centuries

Organizing Committee

Université Grenoble Alpes /

Université Savoie Mont Blanc

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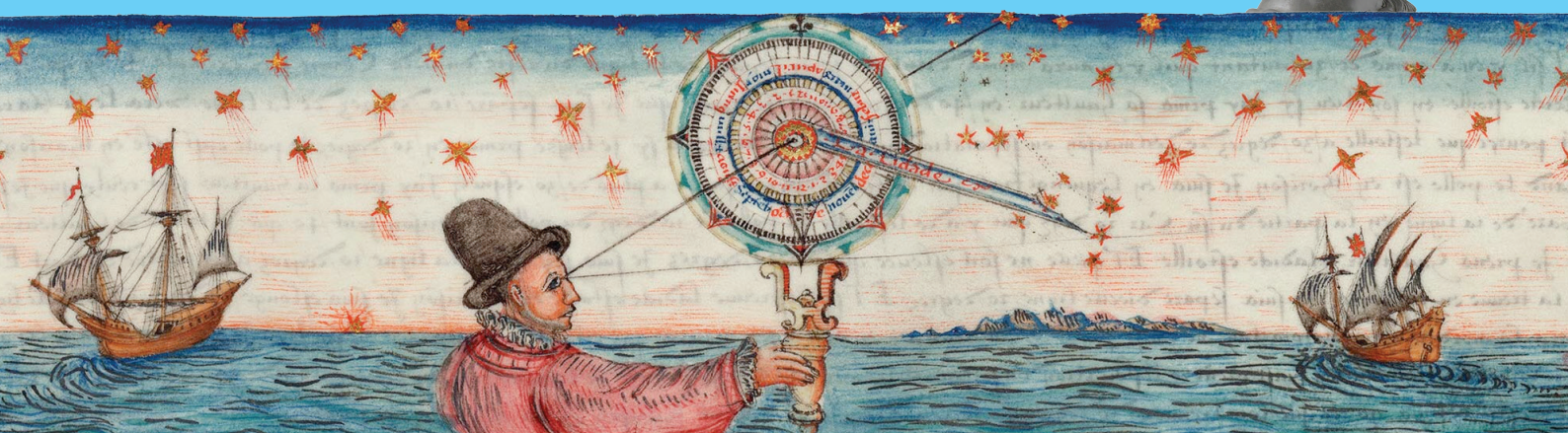
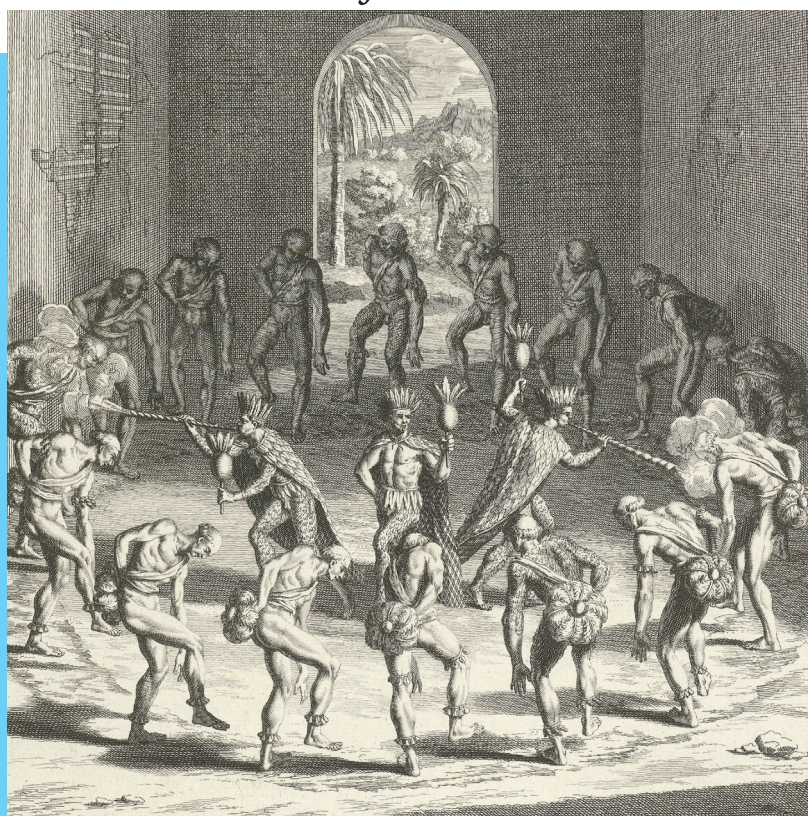
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UNIVERSITÉ
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International Conference Boundaries and Religious Otherness: Religion in Travel Writings 16th-20th Centuries

Thursday, Dec. 1 and Friday, Dec. 2, 2016

Chambéry (Université Savoie Mont-Blanc)

Grenoble (Université Grenoble Alpes)

Chambéry and the Grenoble location are linked by a 45 minute by train ride.

Major international airports in Lyon (France) and Geneva (Switzerland) are located nearby.

This multidisciplinary conference aims to build bridges across disciplines such as history, civilizational studies, literature, and anthropology—among other fields—that rarely co-operate in academia. We also aim to address a diachronic time frame covering the 16th to the 20th centuries. The historiographical tradition equates the journey to a change of scenery and an experience of Otherness.

In their mapping of the physical and ideological space, authors of travel writings often comment upon the crossing of a border or boundary—whether religious or geopolitical—between peoples of a different religion or religious culture (such as the Catholic French travelling to Spain or Italy). Whether it is a geopolitical border, an invisible boundary line, or the coexistence of two groups with different religious identities, the traveller often comments on the differences experienced, perceived or imagined and coloured by their preconceptions.

We posit that ‘the religious’, considered from a scientific viewpoint, represents an essential and universal element of the cultural, the political and the social spheres. The religious fact, whether remarkable, exotic—or merely different—is described and interpreted in travel writings.

It is rarely perceived in its entirety, some observers commenting only the exterior appearance of places of worship, the bizarre in a ceremonial, considered without its context, or a cultural fact whose full scope they do not necessarily understand.

The practices, beliefs, and related loci surprise or shock the chronicler who understands them in relation to their society of origin. The chronicler, whether conqueror or mere traveller, conveying often unconsciously their own religious message, but also other values that are related to their social position as trader, humanist, philosopher, or administrator, attempts to give meaning to their vision of the Other.

The texts we propose to consider here are travel writings in the broad sense (travel journals proper, whether personal or destined to be read by others), official reports (of a religious or military mission), documentaries and letters, but also fictionalized texts integrating various forms of travel reminiscences. These writings may have, by their nature, very different purposes that we aim to apprehend. Fiction certainly introduces distance from the subject, but it is after all a characteristic of the romantic travel journal to recreate the Self as an element of the narrative fiction. We will seek to highlight the constants in the writings of European travellers, whether on an official or semi-official mission, or whether on private journeys in Europe or in the rest of the world.

We invite proposals for papers from specialists of civilizational studies, from historians, and discourse analysts, as well as from other fields dealing with diverse travel texts, including illustrated stories, covering a long period from the 16th to the 20th centuries.

We will address the following topics:

Topic 1: The persistence of questions in a long time frame

- A binary approach: the dominant religion versus the minority religion (Catholics v. Protestants or Orthodox, Christianity v. Islam, Christianity v. paganism) or, on the contrary, the minority religion of the visitor in contrast with the dominant religion of the visited region (i.e. the Protestant gaze on Catholic Europe, or vice versa).
- The curiosity for the Other—or the rejection of the Other, the Different: ethnological and anthropological approaches, with a view of the specificities of each historic context.
- The motives of evangelization: they underlie the endeavours of the European missionaries of the 16th century; according to Francisco Lopez de Gomara, the discovery of America is the most important event since the birth of Christ (*Historia general de las Indias*, 1552).

Topic 2: Fascination, repulsion, 'superstition' and cultural exoticism

In the context of Christian domination, the traveller may adopt diverse—and at times contradictory—attitudes:

- A fascination for cultures and religions that are considered to be a preliminary stage for the acceptance of Christianity (i.e. the Canadian Hurons seen by the Recollects Fathers).
- A repulsion for mores and practices perceived as 'barbarian' or 'savage'.
- The evidence of a popular Christian superstition in the discourse of travelling European elites.
- An interest for exotic cultural traits that are not necessarily perceived as religious by the viewer.
- The observation of syncretism (such as the Jesuits considered shamans by the Tupi in 16th century Brazil).

Topic 3: Ruptures, continuities, evolutions

- Europe and the colonial context: we will consider the full spectrum of diverse situations and questions whether the traveller writes from America or from a land of Islam (in crusade-like situations or spying on the weaknesses of the Ottoman Empire). As an example, the contradictions are numerous: the Moriscos are deported from Spain in the early 17th century while the Muslim slaves are kept.
- Writing as the basis for action or to understand the Other; linguistic unification and its limits (i.e. the place of Indigenous languages in the Americas—Quechua, Aymara, Nahuatl ... along with Spanish, Portuguese or Latin).
- The case of minorities such as:
 - The Creoles in Hispanic America who were considered as a specific group by their contemporaries, in the same way the Indigenous ('Indians') were a group; as a group they were targeted by the Inquisition while the Indigenous were not;
 - The Christians of the Orient in the Ottoman Empire whom the Jesuits considered with a patronizing attitude in their correspondence;
 - the religious coexistence within Europe, as in the United Provinces ('Dutch Republic') or Livorno.

Topic 4: The gaze of the chronicler, male or female, the gendered approach

- The religion of the Other in the gaze of female and male visitors.
- The female chronicler in a foreign land: her integration in a foreign group and her perception of the religion of the Other.
- The place of men and women in the religious practices described by travellers (i.e. in the Catholic world: female and male saints, figures of devotion, the role of priests, friars, and nuns, etc.).

Proposals

Proposals for papers in English or in French, up to 3000 signs, spaces included, plus a short bio of 8 lines max, are to be sent to <colloque-frontiere-alterite@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr> before June 15, 2016, copy to <susanne.berthier@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr>

You will receive an answer before July 7, 2016. Selected papers will be published.

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Scientific Committee:

- Bruna Conconi, Università di Bologna, Bologna, Italy
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- Willem Frijhoff, Erasmus Universiteit, Rotterdam, Netherlands
- Manuel Garcia y Griego, University of New Mexico, United States
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