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De-personifying Collaert's *Four Continents*: European descriptions of continental diversity, 1585-1625

Adriaen Collaert's personifications of the four continents are typical examples of how continents and their respective cultures were represented in the art and literature of Europe in the early modern period. For example, Asia is the exotic double to Europe, possessing an 'otherness' upon which European identity has been juxtaposed. Such personifications of continents and broader tropes of 'the other' and 'the exotic' have greatly influenced the historiography of the idea of Europe. However, the creation of art and literature characterised by these tropes reflects only part of the European understanding of the wider world. This article will explore how travellers – such as missionaries, merchants and ambassadors - in Europe's encounters with non-European societies presented a complex picture of the world and sought to offer practical guidance and knowledge. How travellers' accounts and personifications interacted is important for understanding the European experience of other continents. In considering how travellers presented their knowledge of continents, it is possible to analyse both how early modern Europeans viewed other continents and question how useful artistic representation of 'other' continents are for understanding how they viewed their own.

Keywords: comparative history, merchants, exotic, cultural encounter, idea of Europe

Personifications of continents have provided an attractive source for historians to understand the idea of Europe, both through images of Europe itself, but also by presenting a unified 'other' against which Europeans have been presumed to define themselves.¹ However, these images paper over the cracks in this analysis and do not represent the variety of experiences Europeans had during cultural encounters overseas. By drawing predominantly from the journals of travellers – including merchants, ambassadors, and missionaries – this article will examine the relationship between stylised representations of non-European peoples, such as the personification of continents, and the practical guidance and information offered in travellers' accounts. In turn, this will reveal how European's perceived the world around them and highlight some of the difficulties in using personifications as a means of identifying non-European 'otherness' or European unity.

The boundary between fact and fiction was often permeable during this period and the power of these stylised tropes is important within the accounts of travellers, and visa versa.² Numerous accounts of the world beyond Europe were available to early modern Europeans, particularly in cities with an established book trade such as London or Amsterdam. The popularity of travellers' accounts with non-readers was significant, but the role of first-hand experiences in providing guidance and information to later travellers was also vitally important in securing success if future encounters. Indeed, these publications attested to the importance of travellers as a source of reliable information for the wider public. For example, in Samuel Purchas's *Purchas his Pilgrimes* (1625), the editor highlighted the importance of

‘a New way of eye evidence’ as the source for the information contained. He continued in the introduction to the reader to argue that the work included ‘what a World of Travellers have by their own eyes observed’, once more emphasising the importance of eyewitnesses for producing information relating to the wider world.³ The role of practical experience of travellers in disseminating information relating to both Europe and other continents is important for understanding contemporary perceptions of these diverse regions, and for understanding the role of personifications and exotic tropes that remained alongside.

First, we should consider what personifications of continents were, and what they represented to contemporaries. The memorable image of *Queen Europe (Regina Europa)* in Sebastian Münster’s *Cosmography* (1544) is a striking example of how early modern Europeans portrayed their continent.⁴ In this print, Europe was personified as a regal woman, with Britain as her sceptre and Portugal her crown, and the Ottoman Balkans at her feet. Without altering the geographical shape of Europe beyond recognition, the artist dramatically demonstrated his own perception of a glorious Europe – powerful, advanced, and imperial. This view of European pre-eminence is thought to have developed through the contemporary conviction that Europe had inherited Greco-Roman civilisation and a belief in the universal nature of the Christian faith, with its concomitant necessity to expand the boundaries of the Christian world in order to save souls and defeat the Infidel.⁵ The prevalence of ‘ancient’ understanding of the world during the early modern period highlighted these divisions, and early modern collections sought to surpass the knowledge of the ancients in order to provide dependable information.⁶ For example, in the English translation of Jan Huigan van Linschoten’s *Discours of Voyages into y East and West Indies* (1598), the printer John Wolfe boldly claimed:

‘The ancient Travellers had in deede a certain kind of knowledge of this country [East Indies] and People; but it was very uncertain and unperfect: Whereas we in our times are thouroughly learned and instructed by our experience in the Provinces, Cities, Rivers, Havens and Traffiques of them all; so that nowe it is become known to the whole world.’⁷

However, in spite of the attempt by printers such as Wolfe, many preconceptions of the extra-European world remained, influencing cultural encounters and the relay of information back to Europe. Contemporary sources, such as Richard Eden’s *History of Travayle* (1577), revealed the major influence of these traditions on the development of European perceptions of the world.⁸ In this text, Eden described the reliance of all nations on geographical division to understand the world and presented his books as a means for the English to take advantage of this knowledge for the advancement of the country. Alongside these ideas was a sustained early modern interest in the ‘exotic’, that is, aspects of societies and cultures that seemed not only different from those experienced in Europe but also mysterious or semi-mythical. The exotic could have positive connotations, for example, the almost mystical qualities associated with some non-European goods such as ginger or cloves (believed to restore strength and sight respectively!), or negative ones, such as cannibalism and human sacrifice associated with America.⁹ These ideas, of civilisation and barbarism, the exotic and the known, were clearly expressed in personifications, and staple representations

were developed during the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth. Of these, Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (1593), was particularly influential as it presented accepted emblemata that other artists could copy themselves.¹⁰ By creating personifications of continents, it was possible for early modern Europeans to express more easily their understanding of the world, and to try to comprehend the diverse cultures that they had been brought into contact with through the great expansion of European overseas exploration. These emblemata retained an important place in accounts regarding the extra-European world, particularly in frontpieces and maps, and also in the architecture and art of developing imperial states where personifications provided a useful means of demonstrating a states' place in the hierarchy of the world.¹¹ Such personifications were part of the development of widely used tropes in this period, with emblemata such as those found in Ripa's *Iconologia* used liberally in the following centuries.

The exotic qualities of lands beyond Europe, it has been argued, enabled Europeans to define themselves against the non-European world in cultural as well as geographical terms. Personifications and 'exotic' tropes were used to demonstrate a homogenised European perception of the non-European world, which, in turn, Europe could be defined in opposition to. Although considering a later period, Michael Wintle's introduction in *Imagining Europe* highlights how historians have approached the complex issue of European identity. Here, Wintle suggests that 'images of self-perception are what we use to define our own identity, and we are helped in doing so by our perceptions of what we are not: our opposites, or Others'.¹² According to Wintle, this process of identification enabled the formation of a collective identity in Europe since the Renaissance. Kiril Petkov has argued that this collective identity was pervasive and he suggests 'there was a growing sense of 'Europeanness', embracing all Europeans, including those in the East who had previously been regarded, mainly on religious grounds, as distinct. The advent of new 'others', Ottoman and Asiatic, changed this perception profoundly even for the most uninterested of European observers'.¹³ Other historians have examined this development in greater depth. For example, Stuart Schwartz considers how understanding and representing different cultures drew as much from the self-perceptions of the observer as the act of observing itself, but literary and artistic representations of the 'other' remain his main source.¹⁴

The development of a European identity juxtaposed against an exotic 'other' has been the attention of significant scholarly attention, particularly since Edward Said's *Orientalism* invigorated the debate, again drawing on a range of artistic and literary sources to consider European's representation of the world.¹⁵ However, focussing on the development of generalised tropes regarding different continents and the connected idea of a pervasive interest in the exotic within art and literature in this period can be troubling. Much recent work has sought to oppose Said's position, and has called for a reorientation of the 'Orient' to question Said's portrayal of an 'Orientalist' west that was homogenous, and to reflect the countercurrents to Orientalism within European circles.¹⁶ Jonathan Sell rightly points out that the separation of 'fact' and 'fiction' in early modern art and literature is anachronistic. The deployment of fiction was, at times, necessary to support fact, and the recurring exotic tropes in travellers' writing is a means of providing accessible context to readers as it is a representation of early modern European perspective of the world.¹⁷ The construction of knowledge in the early modern period has also been the focus of much attention from

historians of travel writing and natural science, with questions regarding how the wondrous and the exotic interacted with factual information central to the debate.¹⁸ Erik Ringmar's assertion that 'predispositions are nothing more than predispositions, and there are often [...] quite contradictory interpretations present in each society' is well made, but an over-reliance on sources containing similar devices to represent otherness is apparent.¹⁹ The unity of representations regarding exotic lands and peoples, with tropes similar to those from the Collaert prints and in Ripa's *Iconologia*, has long held an attraction for historians analysing the relationships between Europeans and non-Europeans. While the role of these tropes is important, they were not intended to reflect the broader knowledge available to Europeans in the early modern world, and in turn can present a homogenised world-view rather than reflect the spread of ideas, knowledge, and experience that stratified and divided Europeans in their understanding of the world.

One prominent example of personified continents is the series of prints created by Adriaen Collaert, after drawings by Maerten de Vos, in Antwerp between 1588 and 1589. As a series presenting each continent separately, this collection highlights contemporary trends in continental personifications through numerous, specific, accoutrements in each print. The interpretation of each is open to some speculation, but even a cursory examination reveals the main themes that characterised European representations of other continents during this period. It is worth considering the *Europa* print in more detail first, as the other three are in some respects consciously juxtaposed to the European image (figure 1). Here, as in all four prints, we find the continent represented as a female, the central figure to the print. In Europe's case, she sits astride a globe, the first of many representations of European dominance that are placed in the image. Beyond the globe, the crown and sceptre worn and held by Europe highlight the continent's leadership further and remind us of the imperial accoutrements of Queen Europe in Münster's *Cosmography*. The presentation of Europe as the most important continent is significant considering the date – the late 1580s – where European dominance overseas was restricted to only limited trading activities in Asia and Iberian colonisation in America. The dominance of Europe that Collaert seeks to demonstrate is thus not political, but instead cultural and technological. Culturally, the wealth of Europe is highlighted by her modest (in comparison to Africa and America), luxurious gown, the vines in her hand and the cross atop her crown. Furthermore, the bull of the Europa myth stands behind her, tame and subjugated by European husbandry alongside other animals. Referencing the 'ancient' ideals of Europe through this mythological image also reveals the debt owed to a much older tradition of describing Europe and the placement of Europe at the peak of civilisation. The bounty of Europe is demonstrated further by the temperate landscape – the most hospitable setting of all four prints.

Each feature represents an aspect of European civility, and each has been carefully placed by the artist. The second facet of European dominance, military superiority, is also depicted. Most obviously, this is shown by Europe's own armour; she alone of the four continents wears a breastplate. More significant still is the depiction of a European military encounter in the background. Here, we are presented with both the only organised military force among the prints, and also small puffs of smoke from firearms, weapons seen as a major advantage of Europeans over what Collaert presents as less advanced enemies. The presentation of European military strength is replicated in the America print (figure 2) where

a European force using gunpowder weaponry engages a primitively naked and axe-wielding native group. Through these many references, brought together in a single, complex image, Collaert is able not only to represent Europe as the dominant continent, but also to demonstrate what he believes are the reasons for this achievement.

The other three prints – of Africa, America, and Asia – are constructed in a similar manner to that of Europe, with a central figure representing the continent and a complex background to describe further the societies of each. Those of Africa (figure 3) and America are illustrations of European perceptions of each continent as primitive, and ripe for colonisation. Both of the central figures are nude and lacking in civilising accoutrements – although this along could represent the ‘innocence’ of non-Europeans and the possibility of finding a new Eden beyond Europe. In Africa’s background, there are ruined Egyptian and possibly Carthaginian civilisations, a nod to Africa’s distant albeit sophisticated past as part of the civilisations that appear in both biblical and European history. However, Collaert’s main focus was on the savagery of what he sees as contemporary Africa – a land of warring beasts. Alone of the prints, Africa lacks a battle scene; instead we have the image of wild beasts attacking each other. These include the expected snakes and lions, but also include what appears to be a cockatrice. If nothing else, this demonstrates how Africa was the least known of the continents in the imagination of the sixteenth century artist. America, though, is represented as the least civilised of the four. Here, there are more humans, but rather than refer to more advanced civilisations, such as the Spanish encountered with the Aztecs, Collaert instead focuses on the primitive aspects. The warriors in the scene are armed with simple axes and bows, and are all naked – a standard exemplar of barbarism. Furthermore, the buildings are only primitive huts and there is little sign of cultivation or husbandry. Instead, Collaert presents the scene of a roasting human arm above the fire and dismembered remains nearby. This overt reference to cannibalism was the most damning representation of America throughout this period, and shows how early negative representations made by the Iberian Empires continued to shape artistic and literary representations of America.²⁰

The final print, that of Asia (figure 4), reveals a more complex relationship between this continent and Europe – one based on exchange, interaction, and, possibly, admiration for the supposed power and riches of the East. In this print Asia, unlike Africa or America, is presented as a part-civilised continent, in some ways more so than Europe. Asia is clad in a luxurious robe that significantly outdoes Europe in terms of grandeur and wealth. Modest, unlike the more primitive personifications of Africa and America, the robe is made of Asian silk and is resplendent with precious stones. It is the first of many references to the wealth of Asia in the print. For example, the camel that Asia rides acts as a reference to traditional trade routes and the large incense burner that she holds reflects the goods of the continent. At the same time, exotic Asian imagery continues with a tulip in the foreground and elephants and rhinoceros in the background. While the great wealth of Asia and the exotic interests of Europeans represent a positive interest on the part of Collaert, the final aspects of the print point towards the threatening aspects of Asia as perceived by the artist. Warring armies, one bearing an Islamic flag, are both formed of cavalry alone, a reference to the nomadic highlighted further by the inclusion of tents alongside a fortress. This reference to the nomadic, suggests that Collaert perceives Asia to be a source of the horse-born hordes that invaded Europe in an earlier period and were seen as a contributing factor in the decline of

the Roman Empire. Indeed, Ottoman expansion into Europe during the sixteenth century continued to remind contemporaries of this threatening aspect of Asia.

As this demonstrates, Collaert's representation of Asia reveals how European perceptions integrated the wealth and power of this region, strengths that made it impossible for Europeans to dismiss Asian power in the same way as they might African or American societies. The societies of Asia were forced into the single, idealised personification without reference to the great complexity of states and cultures that Europeans interacted with in the continent. This generalisation within early modern artistic representations of Asia has enabled historians to suggest that the European experience of Asia can be similarly viewed as an experience of the exotic 'other', rather than the experience of numerous different cultural encounters. How these tropes influenced early modern European's interaction and experience of the non-European world is important, but so too is the need to look beyond these images to explore the stratified and complex view of the world held by travellers. While Collaert created his images of continents from contemporary discussions and pre-existing artistic tropes, we can turn to other sources to gain more understanding of the first-hand experience. In these, we can see some of the flaws in using personifications of continents to interpret European understanding of Asia during this period.

However, although these personifications of continents and exotic tropes can be considered to have shaped European relationships through altering the perceptions of participants, numerous sources written during this period reveal that in fact the opinions of Europeans, and the accuracy of their understanding, varied significantly. Such variation also questions how far personifications reflect the experiences of travellers and how artists selected and appropriated images of cultural encounter when creating personifications. This literature stems particularly from the trading and missionary communities of Europe whose understanding and experience of other continents was drawn from practical experience, and as such we find a body of written work, printed for public consumption, that overcomes the constraints of generalised 'otherness' and instead attempts to express the 'factual' experience of overseas encounters. Of course, the readers who experienced printed sources like these probably remained much smaller than those who experienced artwork, plays, poems, or public spectacles that relied on personifications to create a public understanding of the world reliant on generalisations. However, while the sources considered in this article might have had a smaller audience, it is more likely that they were utilised by other travellers to a similar or greater extent. As such, the relationships developed between Europeans and non-Europeans in the early modern period were created and sustained from members of similar missionary or commercial communities where these sources were most readily available. Therefore, the historians' understanding of these relationships is surely dependent on not only the self-perception demonstrated in art, but also on the accounts by travellers delivering 'eye-witness' accounts of the world. The interaction between the exotic tropes and travellers' accounts is complex, with many tropes remaining popular throughout the following centuries in the decoration and in the content of travel accounts. However, by breaking down some of the tropes represented in these personifications, and exploring the construction of early modern knowledge about the world, a less homogenised and comparative understanding of European perceptions can be developed.

One difficulty in assessing how the personification of continents expressed early modern prejudices relates to the projects for which such personifications were created. In some circumstances, it was beneficial for Europeans to consider societies as inferior in order to support their own territorial or mercantile ambitions.²¹ As such, some of the earliest descriptions of American and African cultures focused on their perceived savage natures and uncivilised cultures allowing for policies of enslavement and conquest that may have been unacceptable over fellow Christians. These descriptions often became the basis for later atlases and histories of the world, influencing the perceptions held by later travellers to other continents and the artists who depicted them. They lead to the expectation of the savages depicted, likely leaving some travellers surprised by the sophisticated societies that they actually encountered.²² In turn, audiences in Europe expected to see savages in accounts of the non-European world, and their continued inclusion is, in part, due to authors and printers seeking to meet these expectations.²³ Many descriptions were much generalised and heavily prejudiced against non-Europeans, leading to Carmen Nocentelli's conclusion that 'the Turks, the Chinese, the Native Americans, and others were stereotyped as beastly fornicators; the Burmese and the Japanese were held to be incorrigible sodomites.'²⁴ Stereotypes such as these became a hallmark of images representing continents and other societies.

For example, François Deserps' book *A Collection of the Various Styles of Clothing Which are presently worn in the countries of Europe, Asia, Africa and the Savage Islands*, printed in 1562, claims to realistically depict native costume for a European audience. Deserps' images of Native American costume draw strongly from generalisations about this continent; 'The Brazilian Man' is depicted nude with primitive weaponry, which neatly personifies contemporary attitudes towards this supposedly barbaric and irreligious culture, similarities that it shares with the Collaert prints.²⁵ The image of the naked savage that Deserps portrays is a regular feature in the personification of continents. It can be seen as a personification not only of the continents that it represents but also a personification of the immorality and backwardness of the societies therein. Deserps had never travelled outside of Europe and it is likely his images represent tropes common at the time. This goes some way to explaining the inaccuracies in his drawings, but he would nonetheless have created them from the common preconceptions of his time, which may have been drawn in some way from travellers' accounts and from existing emblemata.

The negative prejudice that images such as this express were influenced by the benefits that such portrayals could entail, but authors and editors also actively manipulated accounts to better suit the audiences for which they were intended. That Deserps seemingly printed this book explicitly for the education of the future King of France, Henri IV, suggests just how much influence these images could have had over the very highest echelons of European society. It must be noted however, that the only other naked savage in Deserps book was a Scottish highlander, an image that does little to support the idea that all Europeans were considered equally civilised. Deserps' book could suggest the hierarchy of cultures within Europe, with the French, as you'd expect, at the very heights of cultural achievement and the highlanders relegated to a position of barbarism on the periphery of Europe. By the late sixteenth century new information was coming to England regarding part of Europe such as the Balkans which, under Ottoman rule, was more exotic in some ways than the American continent.²⁶ In *History of Travayle to the West and East Indies*, Eden includes a

section describing Scandinavia alongside accounts of Muscovy and Persia – suggesting once again that even Europeans quite close to home could logically be coupled with non-Europeans in the author’s mind – perhaps in this case through the routes used by the English Muscovy Company rather than collected by their equal status.²⁷ However, while there are descriptions and images of societies personified that express the development of negative prejudice during this period, other sources reveal a more nuanced understanding and, in some cases, a genuine admiration for non-European cultures.

Debates over the status of non-Europeans in relation to religion were important factors in influencing European interaction with native peoples. The missionary nature of much European interaction with other continents, and the religious world view that many Europeans possessed, further complicated the prejudices they held in relation to other continents. This too limited the extent to which personifications express contemporary perceptions. To some degree continents had been personified within religious themes, for example, images of Asian peoples often referred to their ‘heathen’ religions by including images of men wearing religious dress, as demonstrated in Willem and Joan Blaeu’s *General Map of Asia* (1662).²⁸ These two Dutch cartographers sought to create accurate maps, and had access to the necessary information through Willem’s time as cartographer for the Dutch East India Company in the 1630s, but they still included stylised images depicting Asian religion and culture through personification. This fascination with the cultural practices of non-European societies is further developed in literary descriptions, such as Edward Aston’s translation of Dutch author Joannus Boemus’ *The Manners, Lawes and Customes of All Nations* (1611), which often highlighted positive customs alongside the negative references to heathen religions.²⁹ This interest in culture and religion may have fed into simultaneous interest of the exotic for many readers, but for travellers these details would have been vitally important, practical information. However, while the images and descriptions suggest an interest in the religious practices and customs of non-European cultures, the prejudices that developed about continents often developed due to the political implications of different religious opinions on imperial rule.

The political implications of religious differences meant that early modern fears and distrust of other cultures was not confined to extra-European areas. Travel to Italy, described as ‘the seat of the Anti-Christ’ by Protestant Europeans, is one stark example of this, with fear of the effects of travelling within decadent, debauched southern Europe coupled with a fear of the corrupting influence of Catholicism and the reach of the Inquisition.³⁰ Divisions within Europe were further highlighted by English and Dutch fears of Spanish and French hegemony, referred to as ‘Catholic tyranny’, a political divide within Europe that created a ready market for works depicting these states – rather than non-Europeans – as the barbarous savage.³¹ Ironically, English and Dutch encounters with non-Europeans through which historians have seen the experience of an exotic ‘other’ actually stemmed from a desire to damage European enemies through trade with more acceptable non-Europeans.³² Following the rift in European Christianity produced by the Reformation there seems to have been a greater fear among Protestants of travellers being lost to the anti-Christ by travelling within Europe than there was for travellers outside.

As a consequence, in John Browne’s *Merchant’s Avizo* (1616), a guide written for the sons and servants of merchants travelling overseas, the author sets down a number of key

stratagems for succeeding in unfamiliar environments such as those found in ‘Spaine and Portingale, or other Countries’.³³ These include advice as useful within Europe’s divided borders as it was beyond them – particularly in terms of adhering to different laws and customs that merchants encountered.³⁴ Browne had travelled widely as a merchant, and it is clear that he believed specific knowledge regarding foreign customs and culture was key for mercantile success. The recruitment policy of the English East India Company for example was particularly favourable to young merchants who had grown up in Mediterranean countries.³⁵ This was both for the linguistic benefits this brought and also because it was thought that if they had remained devout Protestants living under Catholic rule in Spain and Italy they would not be at any risk living under Islamic or ‘heathen’ rule in the East. Recognition that experiencing the divisions within Europe could be preparation for living in Asia suggests that Asian cultures were not considered as alien as the generalisations found in art and literature would suggest. This division between Europeans was also readily apparent in Asia, where English merchants allied with Persia to undertake the conquest of Ormuz from Portugal in 1623.³⁶ Even among fellow Protestants there was no unity in the face of the ‘heathen’ in Asia, and the Dutch and English came to blows regularly during the first quarter of the seventeenth century when the English were unwilling to attack Asian possessions but willing to confront the Dutch for a greater share of the spice trade.

With the divisions in Europe during the early modern period in mind, it is not surprising to find that there were divisions even within the religious views of individual countries in relation to non-Europeans. An important debate in 1550 between Bartholomew de Las Casas – who had travelled to America – and Juan Gines de Sepulveda – who had not – about the treatment of Native Americans in Spain’s new colonies reveals how generalisations of non-European peoples had shaped people’s perceptions. De Sepulveda’s belief that Native Americans were spiritually inferior to Europeans, as indeed were the people of Asia and Africa, was widely held within Europe and encouraged the development of theories about how to rank different continents in order of their civilised attributes.³⁷ This prejudice about the inferiority of non-European continents to Europe in general is apparent in many of the illustrated frontpieces of contemporary atlases or descriptions where personifications of continents often highlight the supposed barbarity or backwardness of their subject matter in a similar way to Collaert’s prints.³⁸

However, these images do not reflect the numerous perspectives that Europeans held. Cultural encounters with non-European people could be positive as well as negative. Las Casas debated that the Native Americans possessed reason and were spiritually equal to Europeans with the potential to become good Christians and civilized people – even going so far to suggest they had the potential to join the priesthood.³⁹ The defence of Native Americans was taken up by other authors. Joseph Acosta, for example, was a Jesuit missionary who had travelled extensively in America who condemned the; ‘many excesses and outrages (...) committed upon them [native Americans], using them like brute beasts, and reputed them unworthy of any respect’.⁴⁰ The defence of indigenous peoples from outside Europe highlights how some Europeans considered Native Americans to be more than the savages they were represented as in the personifications of the continents. Instead, they considered them as redeemable souls and potentially industrious citizens, as seen in the images of naked, but productive native workers in André Thévet’s *La Cosmographie*

Universelle (1575) as opposed to the naked cannibals of Collaert.⁴¹ In Asia inhabitants of the Spice Islands were similarly considered redeemable, and the East India Company factor Edmund Scott believed that linguistic difficulties were the main factor that held back conversion.⁴² Similarly, the inclusion of a black Magus in many Epiphany paintings could indicate how Africa was perceived as a potential source of converts to Christianity – a belief validated by numerous examples of early positive responses to the missionary effort of the Portuguese.⁴³ Although not making Africans equal to Europeans culturally, negative prejudices were based upon religion. They nod to a desire for the integration of Africa into a Christian world – just as North Africa had been integrated into the civilised world of Rome (perhaps this is also a reason for Collaert to include ancient ruins in his Africa print).

Further to travellers seeing potential converts, other travellers even revealed a positive attitude towards certain non-Christian cultures. For instance, Matteo Ricci, a Jesuit missionary whose experience in China led to an alteration in the approach this organisation took when engaging non-European cultures, thought that ‘the Chinese have not only made considerable progress in moral philosophy but in astronomy and in many branches of mathematics as well.’⁴⁴ The experience of Ricci, and other missionaries, is particularly important. Many early accounts of Asia brought back to Europe were written by participants in these missions, and the encouragement of further missionary work was a key incentives for their publication. Also, understanding other cultures was essential for missionary success, and these accounts provided first-hand accounts and guidance. Other travellers also sought to understand non-European cultures and the merchant Edmund Scott thought that it was only through interaction with the more morally advanced Chinese that had allowed the Javanese natives to progress from cannibalism.⁴⁵ The divisions within Asia highlight some of the issues of relying on artistic representations as sources for expressing homogenous European perceptions of the world. Cultural prejudice is not well expressed through the personifications of continents as these lack the ability to express the diversity of cultures experienced by European travellers – nor was expressing this diversity the purpose of these images. The European experience of China was particularly complex, and is an excellent example of how European attitudes towards Asian peoples shifted significantly because of practical experience. While Zang Longxi has suggested that ‘for the West, then, China as a land in the Far East becomes traditionally the image of the ultimate other’ in the work of European philosophers, the experiences of merchants and missionaries reveal a different picture.⁴⁶

European expansion during the early modern period was not only driven by a desire to convert, or subjugate native peoples under European crowns, but also to gain profits from the exotic and rare goods that other continents produced. Many more Europeans would have experienced other continents through the consumption of commodities produced there rather than through the religious debates about native rights or through reading, or hearing, travel literature. The importance of commodities to European perceptions of other continents is apparent in the detailed descriptions of goods in contemporary literature, both their characteristics and production, alongside descriptions of the political structure and customs of other states.⁴⁷ In the works of Eden, Hakluyt, and Langhanez, the importance of economic incentives for European interaction is evident, incentives that encouraged the dissemination of knowledge about extra-European products and peoples in order to encourage investment and advertise products.

Personification of continents that represent their economic relationship with Europe often place stereotypical figures in a subservient position to a European figure. One example is a Grocers' Guild celebration in London where 'traditionally' dressed Indians are 'set to work in an Island of growing spices', a tribute to the source of the Grocers' wealth and a demonstration of how representations of non-Europeans through dress and appearance were used commonly.⁴⁸ Pieter Bast and Claes Janszoon Visscher's celebration of Amsterdam's economic expansion and wealth, the print *Profiel van Amsterdam* (1611), demonstrates this well. Here a female personification of Amsterdam presides over a complex scene of economic exchange that includes a dark, short African; camel-leading, turbaned Persians; and tall, robed Chinese figures.⁴⁹ However, like Deserps' images of the savage Scot, subservient European figures also represented through personifications by Bast, also paid homage to Dutch supremacy, suggesting once more recognition of European division just as much as non-European inadequacy.

However, the placement of non-European continents in a subservient position does not accurately reflect the realities of trans-continental trade in the early modern period. In cases such as China, Japan and many of the states in India, merchants who were dominant in trade from a European perspective, such as the Dutch and English, were forced to integrate themselves within existing trade networks, adapting their own methods to suit the powerful states that they were trading with.⁵⁰ More than this; throughout Asia there were occasions where Europeans placed themselves under the political authority of native rulers in order to trade.⁵¹ The account of the embassy of Thomas Roe to the Great Mughal in India for example, although including numerous examples of uncivil aspects of the Mughal Court, described an activity undertaken as an attempt to gain greater privileges from this Asian ruler.⁵² Here, the European was the supplicant. Even in America and West Africa 'the slave trade and Amerindian trades, both presumed epitomes of European dominance, have come to be seen as subject to significant local African and Amerindian control.'⁵³ Thus, where art might present Europeans and an idea of Europe as the dominating power in the world, practical experience suggested a different story. Of course, how far preconceived ideas affected European interaction is hard to judge, but it is likely that the common tropes regarding the non-European world led some travellers to expect cultures substantially different to those they encountered. Personifications of European trading superiority over other continents do reveal some interesting examples of how some Europeans perceived other continents – that is, as a source of profitable commodities – but these personifications fail to demonstrate the experiences as seen in printed accounts of travellers who actually participated in cultural encounters.

In addition to trading relationships, the divergence between European and non-European military strength, is an important aspect of both personifications and the work of historians.⁵⁴ However, even though military strength was used in Asia and Africa to help establish European settlements and trading posts, powerful continental powers remained a recognisable threat.⁵⁵ For instance, in Richard Hakluyt's edited collection of English overseas activity, the *Principall Navigations* (1589), he included an account by Frey Peter of Lisbon that described 'this King of Pegu is the mightiest king of men' with power greater than any European state, 'for he bringeth into the field at any time, when he hath warres with other princes, above a million of fighting men'.⁵⁶ The Great Mughal was also believed to possess

extraordinary military capacity, and according to Botero Giovanni was capable of raising forces ‘under his standard, one hundred and fifty thousand horse [and] the number of footmen was 500 thousand.’⁵⁷ While these numbers were probably inflated by European observers, the very belief that they might be accurate suggests an understanding of the respective strength of the states in Asia in comparison to Europe.

Personifications of continents invariably involve stereotyping of other cultures, and as such could be perceived as representing the development of a negative European prejudice during the early modern period. Alongside the continued use of general emblemata we can see continued, detail descriptions in printed accounts that draw together diverse European experiences, suggesting again that interpretations of European identity relying on these images overlook an important aspect of this complex topic. For example, Eden’s descriptions of Asian kingdoms consider the specific peculiarities of each individual kingdom, providing details ranging from ceremonial practices to mercantile information to exotic animals.⁵⁸ Similarly detailed accounts, such as Ricci’s *China in the Sixteenth Century* or John Huijghen van Linschoten’s *Discourse of Voyages into the East and West Indies* (1598), further highlight European understanding of the diversity of Asia, and refute the argument that personified images of continents reflect predominant European perceptions of non-European peoples in this period.⁵⁹

In addition to negative descriptions, there were also positive accounts of non-European cultures. For example, English accounts of the first East India Company voyage to Japan pay significant attention to the culture and character of the Japanese, and contain ethnographical information similar to that of early travellers to the rest of Asia. In Samuel Purchas’ collection of English travellers’ accounts, the Japanese are complimented for their ‘good order’, albeit in comparison to Mughal India, and it is noted how they ‘affect brevity’, an important virtue in the eyes of the English.⁶⁰ Perceptions of the Japanese in a positive light did not end here, with comments that Japanese women were ‘well faced, handed, and footed: clear skind and white’.⁶¹ Another example, of Java, admires the workmanship of the buildings in Bantam where the markets remind Scott of fairs in England, although at other times he is scathing in his condemnation.⁶²

Descriptions of different Asian societies in this manner demonstrate the positive perceptions held by the English towards them upon the establishment of their factory. They suggest that English merchants did not hold differences in religion or race as necessarily negative factors (though the mention of white skin could indicate otherwise), and that the difficulties experienced in interacting with native customs in other parts of Asia were based on individual judgments rather than underlying and pervasive notions of cultural superiority. Furthermore, contemporary debates about the treatment of non-Europeans during this period were also diverse, with non-Europeans being presented as anything from noble savages and irredeemable cannibals to practitioners of advanced mathematics and possessors of an English-like work ethic.⁶³

Returning to Collaert’s prints, we can see how personifications represent only one experience of other continents and cultures by Europeans. The images they represent, of European superiority and unity juxtaposed with non-European backwardness and subservience, are artistic depictions of a developing trend in art and literature to paint exactly

that picture. The continued use of sixteenth century emblemata, such as Ripa's and Collaert's, sustained this image, and their continuing vitality suggests that the information brought back by travellers was not integrated with the public perception of the world. For viewers of this art and readers of travel literature and audiences in public spectacles, the image of Europe may well have been one of civility in the face of barbarism, but to many the diversity witnessed by many travellers would also be known. For some people the exotic other may have just been that, an exotic unknown brought to them only through artistic endeavour. However, this developing trend does not fully reflect the development of European understanding of non-European cultures nor the dissemination of substantial amounts of information created for consumption both by readers in Europe but also future travellers - such as the merchant, the ambassador, or the missionary.

These works, developed and distributed within the knowledge economies of major trading centres and missionary circles, offered an alternative interpretation of other cultures and societies. Where personifications offered unity, these offered diversity; where personifications were sustained by consistent emblemata, these were practical guides developed by peers and fellow travellers. Not only did they offer a different view of non-European societies but they represented a different view of Europe also. The skills necessary for trading in Asia were similar to those of trading in Europe – Protestant merchants in Spain were under different laws and faced with a different religion just as much as those trading in the Spice Islands or Japan. Violence was common in Europe just as it was common outside of the continent and the images associated with Catholic tyranny could just as easily represent the savage other. Indeed, the image of the barbaric Spaniard took on certain synergies with the barbaric American through the course of the Spanish conquests in America.⁶⁴ Recognising how eye-witness accounts and travellers' guidance was disseminated, in part through engagement with artistic tropes and 'exotic' imagery, is important for understanding how knowledge of Europe and the non-European world was exchanged and utilised by individuals whose practical interests spread beyond the boundaries of local, regional, and national communities.

Consequently, the varied descriptions and perceptions from different European areas, and the great division between Protestant and Catholic Europe, adds further difficulty to interpreting these personifications. In spite of divisions they remained a popular trope even though they did not successfully reflect the activities and experiences of early modern Europeans who actually travelled within Europe and within the extra-European world. These experiences outside Europe gave travellers' unique insight into other cultures and they were depended upon by other Europeans for providing detailed and accurate accounts. As such, the historians' temptation to use these stark and attractive images is fraught with the difficulty of successfully highlighting their internal contradictions and descriptive limitations. Personifications do represent one trend within the development of European understanding and ordering of the world, but they are only one trend of many. The image of united Europe opposed to the exotic and homogeneous entities of Asia, Africa and America might be an attractive one for historians, but in the eyes of early modern travellers such simplicity was not apparent, and their practical experiences revealed an entirely different picture.

Notes

- ¹ This ‘othering’ process is discussed in detail in: Wintle, Michael. *The Image of Europe: visualising Europe in cartography and iconography throughout the ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 53-58, 64-70
- ² Sell, Jonathan, *Rhetoric and Wonder in Early Modern Travel Writing, 1560-1613*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006. 2.
- ³ Purchas, Samuel, *Purchas his Pilgrimes*. London: 1625. i-iii.
- ⁴ Image used in Davies, Norman. *Europe: a History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. xx.
- ⁵ Arnold, David. *The Age of Discovery, 1400-1600*. London: Routledge, 2002. 24; Pagden, Anthony. *European Encounters with the New World: from renaissance to romanticism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. 54-87.
- ⁶ Hall, Edith. *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek self-definition through tragedy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. 101-103; Hulme, Peter, and Ludmilla Jordanova. *The Enlightenment and its Shadows*. London: Routledge, 1990. 1-16.
- ⁷ Linschoten, Jan Huigen van, trans. William Phillip. *His Discourse of Voyages into y East and West Indies*. London: 1598. v.
- ⁸ Eden, Richard. *History of Travayle in the West and East Indies, and other countreys lying eyther way, towards te fruitfull and ryche Moluccaes As Moscovia, Persia, Arabia, Syria, Egypte, Ethiopia, Guinea, China in Cathayo, and Giapan: with a discourse of the Northwst passsage*. London: 1577. i-xvii.
- ⁹ Linschoten, Jan Huigen van, trans. William Phillip. *His Discourse of Voyages into y East and West Indies*. London: 1598. 113-4
- ¹⁰ Ripa, Cesare. *Iconologia*. Rome, 1593. Europe was first included in Ripa’s *Iconologia* in 1609, and the guide was re-printed numerous times in the 17th century in a number of European states.
- ¹¹ Wintle, Michael. *The Image of Europe: visualising Europe in cartography and iconography throughout the ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009
- ¹² Wintle, Michael. *Imagining Europe: Europe and European civilisation as seen from its margins and by the rest of the world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*. Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2008.
- ¹³ Petkov, Kiril. “England and the Balkan Slavs 1354-1583: An Outline of a Late-Medieval and Renaissance Image.” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 75 (1997) 87.
- ¹⁴ Schwartz, Stuart, *Implicit understandings: observing, reporting, and reflecting on the encounters between Europeans and other peoples in the early modern era*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. 1-5
- ¹⁵ Said, E. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978; Prakash, Gyan. “Writing post Orientalist histories of the third world.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 32 (1990) 383-408; Barker. *Europe and its others*. 1985.
- ¹⁶ Scott, David. ‘Kipling, the Orient, and Orientals: “Orientalism” reoriented?’ *Journal of World History* 22 (2011) 300-2. The new direction urged by Said’s critics is clear in: Irwin, Robert. *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and its discontents*. Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2006; Varisco, Daniel. *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007; Warraq, Ibn. *Defending the West: a critique of Edward Said’s Orientalism*. New York: Prometheus Books, 2007; Scott, David. ‘Kipling, the Orient, and Orientals: “Orientalism” Reoriented?’ *Journal of World History* 22 2 (2011) 299-328. And attempts to apply these ideas in an early modern context can be found in: Barbour, Richard. *Before Orientalism: London’s Theater of the East 1576-1626*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003; MacLean, Gerald. *The Rise of Oriental Travel: English Visitors to the Ottoman Empire, 1580-1720*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004; Carey, Daniel (ed.) *Asian Travel in the Renaissance*. Maiden, M.A: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.
- ¹⁷ Sell, Jonathan. *Rhetoric and Wonder in English Travel Writing, 1560-1613*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006. 2, 8-9, 32.
- ¹⁸ Greenblatt, Stephen. *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991; Rubies, Joan-Pau. *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; Korte, Barbara. *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations*. New York: St Martin’s Press, 2000; Horodowich, Liz. ‘Armchair Travelers and the Venetian Discovery of the New World.’ *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 36 4 (2005) 1039-1062; Sell, Jonathan. *Rhetoric and Wonder in English Travel Writing, 1560-1613*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.; Betteridge, Thomas (ed.) *Borders and Travellers’ in Early Modern Europe*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007; Rubiés, Joan-Pau. *Travellers’ and cosmographers : studies in the history of early modern travel and ethnology*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007; Sebek, Barbara & Deng, Stephen (eds.), *Global Traffic: Discourses and Practices of Trade in English Literature and Culture from 1550 to 1700*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- ¹⁹ Ringmar, Erik, “Audience for a Giraffe: European Expansionism and the Quest for the Exotic” *Journal of World History* (2006) 397.

- ²⁰ Lindenbaum, Shirley. "Thinking about cannibalism." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004) 478
- ²¹ Marshall, Tristan. "The Tempest and the British Imperium in 1611." *Historical Journal* 41 (1998) 375-400
- ²² Mancall, Peter. *Travel Narratives from the Age of Discovery: an anthology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. 26-7.
- ²³ Sell, Jonathan. *Rhetoric and Wonder in English Travel Writing, 1560-1613*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006. 32.
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- ²⁶ Petkov, Kiril. "England and the Balkan Slavs 1354-1583: An Outline of a Late-Medieval and Renaissance Image." *The Slavonic and East European Review* 75 (1997) 87.
- ²⁷ Eden, Richard. *History of Travayle in the West and East Indies, and other countreys lying eyther way, towards te fruitfull and ryche Moluccaes As Moscovia, Persia, Arabia, Syria, Egypte, Ethiopia, Guinea, China in Cathayo, and Giapan: with a discourse of the Northwst passage*. London: 1577. xv.
- ²⁸ Blaeu, Joan and Willem. *Atlas major, sive Cosmographia Blaviana, vol. X*. Amsterdam: 1662. 1-2.
- ²⁹ Boemus, Joannes, trans. Edward Aston. *The Manners, Lawes, and Customes of All Nations*. London: 1611
- ³⁰ Games, Alison. *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. 99-100.
- ³¹ One example, the St Bartholomew's Day massacre, provided a source for numerous attacks on Catholic tyranny throughout the early modern period. See "In Paris? Mass, and Well Remembered: Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy and the English reaction to the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre." *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 21 (1990) 401-409; Butterfield, H. "Acton and the Massacre of St Bartholomew" *Cambridge Historical Journal* 11 (1953) 27-47. For the representation of the Spanish during the Dutch Revolt see Nierop, Henk van trans. J. C. Grayson. *Treason in the Northern Quarter: war, terror, and the rule of law in the Dutch Revolt*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009.
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- ³³ Brown, John. *The Merchants Avizo*. London: 1616. 1.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.* 5.
- ³⁵ Games, Alison. *The Web of Empire: English cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 93-98.
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- ³⁷ Frederickson, George. *Racism: a short history*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002. 35.
- ³⁸ Lach, Donald and Edwin van Kley. *Asia in the Making of Europe, Volume III*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1965-1993. Plates 68-77.
- ³⁹ Elliott, J. H. *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492-1830*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007
- ⁴⁰ Acosta, Joseph trans. Edward Grimston. *The Naturall and Morall Historie of the East and West Indies intreating of the remarkable things of heaven, the elements, mettalls, plants and beasts which are proper to that country: together with the manners, ceremonies, lawes, governments, and warres of the Indians*. London: 1604. 431.
- ⁴¹ Thévet, Andre. *La Cosmographie Universelle, illustrée de diverses figures, etc.* Paris: 1575. 917, 922
- ⁴² Scott, Edmund. *An Exact Discourse of the Subtilties, Fashions, Pollicies, Religion, and Ceremonies of the East Indies, as well Chyneses as Javans, there abiding and dwelling*. London: 1606. 94.
- ⁴³ Hahn, Thomas. "The Difference the Middle Ages Makes: Color and Race before the Modern World." *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001) 1-38; Huyghen van Linschoten, Jan. *John Huighen van Linschoten his Discours of Voyages into the East & Weste Indies, etc.* London: 1598. 51
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- ⁴⁹ Bast, Pieter and Claes Jansz. Visscher. *Profiel van Amsterdam met aanvullence prenten en teksten*. Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum.
- ⁵⁰ Lach, Donald. *Asia in the Making of Europe, Voume. I*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1965-1993. 70-72
- ⁵¹ Games, Alison. *The Web of Empire: English cosmopolitans in an age of expansion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. 83-84.
- ⁵² Purchas, Samuel, *Purchas his Pilgrimes*. London, 1625. 535-578.
- ⁵³ Steele, I. K. "Exploding American Colonial History: Amerindian, Atlantic and Global perspectives." *Reviews in American History* 26 (2998) 70-95.
- ⁵⁴ Pagden, Anthony. *European Encounters with the New World: from renaissance to romanticism*. New Haven: 1993. 183-189.
- ⁵⁵ Pires, Tomé. trans. Armando Cortesão. *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires and the Book of Francisco Rodrigues*. London: 1944. 90.
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- ⁵⁷ Gionvanni Botero, *Relations, of the Most Famous Kingdoms and commonweals through the world*. (London: 1616), 284.
- ⁵⁸ Eden, Richard. *History of Travayle in the West and East Indies, and other countreys lying eyther way, towards te fruitfull and ryche Moluccaes As Moscovia, Persia, Arabia, Syria, Egypte, Ethiopia, Guinea, China in Cathayo, and Giapan: with a discourse of the Northwst passage*. London: 1577. 389-396.
- ⁵⁹ Ricci, Matthew. trans. Louis Gallagher. *China in the Sixteenth Century: the journals of Matthew Ricci*. New York: Random House, 1953; Huyghen van Linschoten. *John Huighen van Linschoten his Discours of Voyages into the East & Weste Indies, etc*. London: 1598.
- ⁶⁰ Purchas, Samuel, *Purchas his Pilgrimes*. London: 1625. 372-3.
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