EDITORIAL

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This issue of *V(eliko) T(arnovo) U(niversity) Review: Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences* focuses on representations of travel and mobility from the Middle Ages to the present. Apart from five articles, which explore aspects of this topic, two more texts, originally presented as conference papers, are included under *Varia*. The issue also comprises five reviews of internationally and locally published books on subjects ranging from facets of travel and mobility to philology and Ottoman studies.

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Travel and mobility have played a major role in human history since its very dawn. According to Eric J. Leed, that history is very much "a story of mobilities, migrations, settlements, the adaptation of human groups to place and their integration into topography" (quoted in Roberson xi). Globalization has perhaps sharpened our sense of the incidence of the spatial displacement of people, animals, material goods and cultural products but it is undeniable that what we are witnessing today was, albeit to a lesser extent, also part of the past.

Needless to say, not all forms of travel have been voluntary. History has preserved numerous accounts of forced displacement, ranging from stories of enslaved Africans shipped across the Atlantic Ocean in the past to contemporary narratives of refugees risking their lives either in improvised sea voyages or by attempting to cross difficult land borders. According to the American author and social activist bell hooks, such accounts should make us wary of using the word "travel" as an umbrella term for *all* kinds of spatial displacement: "[t]ravel is not a word that can be easily evoked to talk about the Middle Passage [or] the Trail of Tears" (quoted in Clarke 3). Other commentators have cautioned against the widespread assumption that travellers are predominantly "bourgeois, literate, *text-producing* [my emphasis]" subjects (see Drace-Francis 3). However, the fact that such an assumption exists and is seldom questioned or problematized is also significant: it is indicative of the intimate connection between travel and *writing* (see Hulme and Youngs 2) as a socially and culturally conditioned mode of representing it .

According to Stephen S. Gosch and Peter N. Stearns, "there are more records about travel than about any other human activities" (2), and some of these records date back to the very remote past. They identify the Egyptian official Harkuf, who served two kings of the Sixth Dynasty (ca 2255 – 2152 BCE), as "the first long-distance traveller whose name we know" and who left "a written account, or narrative, of his journeys" into the interior of Africa, probably as far as today's western Sudan (Gosch and Stearns 14). For Tim Youngs, the roots of modern travel writing are to be sought in ancient narratives such as Harkuf's (19).

Rather than conveying personal impressions, a lot of premodern accounts of travel provided practical information about distances, routes or landmarks that could be of use to future travellers. According to Maria Pretzler, "the tradition of written travellers' accounts probably began with seafarers' logs" (quoted in Youngs 20). Apart from ship logs, there were written accounts about the physical-geographical features of particular localities and the safest ways of travelling through them. Such information could be used in military operations undertaken for purposes of conquest and the subjugation of undesirable "others."

The first article in this issue discusses a number of texts, mostly produced in the Middle Ages, which focus on the location and terrain of the Haimos Mountains (the Stara Planina and the Sredna Gora in present-day Bulgaria). These mountains played the role of a natural barrier, especially to travellers and army troops intending to move from south to north or along the aptly named *via militaris*, which passed through the eastern half of what is designated as the Balkan Peninsula today. In an attempt to shed light on medieval notions of self and other and their role in the power politics of south-east Europe, the article's author Kiril Marinow draws attention to the negative stereotypes that were attached to the inhabitants of the Haimos region particularly by members of Byzantine elites. The negative attitude of upper-class Byzantines was in part moulded by received images of "barbaric" mountain populations that could be traced back to classical literature but was also the outcome of a more recent history of military defeats. In addition, horror stories of journeys through a land

infested with robbers and brigands found their way into medieval devotional literature and saints' lives. The medieval narratives, discussed by Marinow, echo themes that could be traced back to the Odyssey, the *locus classicus* of literary travel, such as the danger of journeying in unfamiliar surroundings and confronting hostile "others." Needless to say, "Odyssean" themes of this kind can likewise be found in later European travel writing. Byzantine stories about the Haimos region were evidently part of a process of identity construction in which negative hetero-images of "barbaric" mountain dwellers were contrasted with an auto-image of Byzantium as a repository of positive cultural and religious values.

The next two articles, by Vesselin Budakov and Pavel Petkov respectively, engage with some of the cultural meanings of travel in the "long" eighteenth century. The important role of fictional and non-fictional travel-related writing, produced in that historical period, in shaping our own ideas of travel and its representations has been stressed repeatedly by cultural historians and literary critics alike. Budakov analyses the complex phenomenon of the Grand Tour through the prism of a debate about the utility of educational travel and, more specifically, about its function in shaping knowledge about the young "tourist's" native culture and its foreign counterparts in continental Europe. It may be argued that both the Grand Tour and the debate about its value have already received a lot of attention from earlier commentators. Budakov, however, bases his analysis on three texts, which have so far attracted relatively few critics: Richard Lassels's *The Voyage of Italy* (1670), Jean (John) Gailhard's *The Compleat Gentleman* (1678) and Richard Hurd's *Dialogues on the Uses of Foreign Travel* (1764). More notice has perhaps been taken of Lassels's book since it is in it that the phrase "Grand Tour" (presumably) first appeared (Hibbert 18). The reading of the two late-seventeenth-century texts in conjunction with the third one, which was produced some ninety years later, provides some fresh insights into both the Grand Tour as an early phase in the development of modern tourism and its assessment in the context of a debate that reveals the complexity and controversial character of Enlightenment thought.

Petkov discusses changing Western attitudes to China in the eighteenth century: a time when European identities were forged through a process that also involved the construction of perceptions of significant "others." China emerged as one of those "others." The author contrasts the positive image that it had among European intellectuals in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with what he perceives as an increasingly negative portrayal in the eighteenth century. The main text, which Petkov analyses in his article, is *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719). One of the merits of his reading is that it sheds light on important aspects of what we may describe as "Enlightenment Sinology". It is a pity, though, that the author has not taken into consideration recent critical revaluations of "Romantic Sinology", some of which seriously problematize his view of a uniformly negative attitude to China in the later eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth centuries. Peter J. Kitson's 2013 study *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange 1760 – 1840* exemplifies the new trend in the reassessment of Western images of China.

Heather Williams's article explores interactions between the minoritized cultures of Brittany and Wales. Travel writing provides her with "a privileged point of access" into the tangle of cultural relations between Wales and the region of France, identified by Matthew Arnold in the nineteenth century as the only Celtic territory which "is not ours" (149). The author primarily analyses Welsh-language travel accounts about Brittany but also examines texts, written in French, thus successfully rising above the monolingualism, which characterizes a lot of present-day critical writing in the English-speaking countries. By building upon postcolonial theory and the cultural turn in translation studies, Williams develops a translingual and transnational model of interpretation which enables her to produce an illuminating study of periphery-periphery relations and to highlight Wales's Europeanness.

The last article in the specialized part of the issue focuses on two books of travel writing, Gavin Francis's *True North. Travels in Arctic Europe* (2008, 2010) and Sara Wheeler's *The Magnetic North. Notes from the Arctic Circle* (2009, 2011), which represent journeys around the Arctic and self-consciously reflect upon received perceptions of the "old" continent's polar regions and some northern territories beyond the physical-geographical confines of Europe. The two texts have been selected for analysis because they shed light on important aspects of the travel genre in the present. They problematize colonialist patterns of portraying the places that their narrators visit and the "characters" whom they encounter in the process, and favour a perspective on travel which is sensitive to social, political, cultural and ecological issues. Wheeler, in particular, is very much concerned with the plight of indigenous populations and their struggle for survival and recognition in a changing world. While the problem of whether a total break with the ideological legacy of

travel writing is possible remains unresolved in the two travel texts under consideration, they nevertheless enhance our knowledge and sense of responsibility for the planet which we all inhabit, thus demonstrating the continued relevance of the travel genre to some of the key concerns of the present.

It is hoped that the five articles briefly considered above will stimulate further discussion among scholars and social scientists with an interest in travel, mobility and their representations.

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