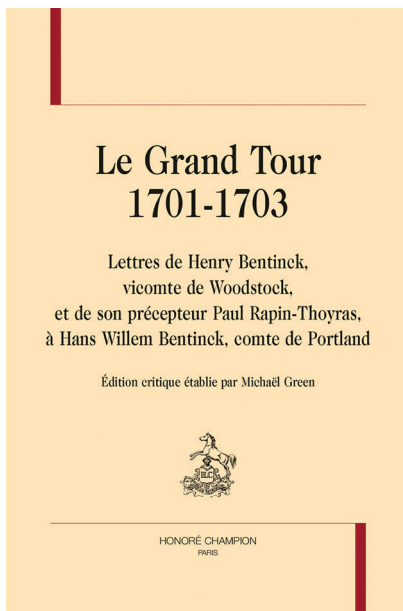


Review

Alan Moss, *Gemaakt op reis. Nederlandse jongeren op reis in de zeventiende eeuw*, Hilversum, Verloren, 2023, 528 pp. ISBN 9789464550047.

Michaël Green, *Le Grand tour, 1701-1703. Lettres d'Henry Bentinck, vicomte de Woodstock et de son précepteur Paul Rapin Thoyras à Hans Willem Bentinck, comte de Portland*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2021, 358 pp. ISBN 2745355392.



Summer is in the air. Now that the academic year is slowly but surely coming to an end, even the most work-addicted scholars start to long for a blissful vacation. Details on where, how, and with whom may vary – ranging from a lazy family vacation on a tropical beach, a city trip to a buzzing cultural hotspot, a hike in the remote mountains, or even a staycation at home – but the urge to take some time off from the hectic pace of academic life is heartfelt. To quench our thirst – and to survive the examinations – we can, as a way of proxy, already lose ourselves in books on travel in the past.

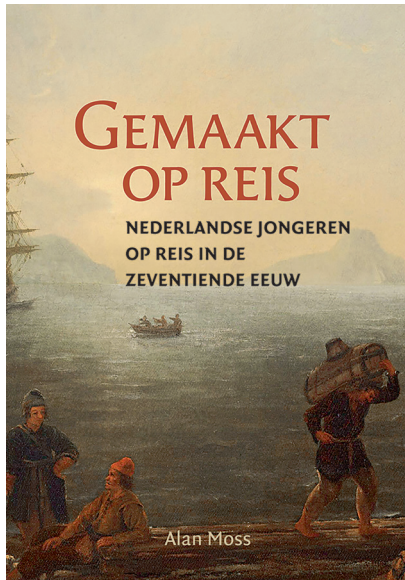
For years, the mass of academic literature, coffee table books, and catalogues on the Grand Tour has offered an escape valve for late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century readers fed up with modern mass tourism. Looking through a rather romantic lens, these books provided a foretaste of a travel culture that was in many ways the exact

opposite of our modern – i.e., bland, highly predictable, and deeply commercialized – tourism behaviour. Travel in the seventeenth and eighteenth, by contrast, was portrayed as saturated with adventure, since travellers had to face highwaymen, privateers, and other rogues, cross steep mountain passes, swallow inedible food, or sleep between dirty sheets. Unfortunately, most of this classic literature on the Grand Tour suffers from a severe lack of what the German expert Joachim Rees once identified as *fehlendes Problembewusstsein*. Methodological considerations, source criticism, or a research question are generally lacking. To put it bluntly, these books offer a good read for a wider public, but leave the more demanding reader somewhat insatiated.

During the last few decades, the historiography of the Grand Tour has slowly but surely matured, as experts have tried and tested all sorts of methodologies, from hardcore statistics to discourse analysis, adopted a more critical attitude towards their sources, and tuned their research questions to broader debates within cultural, social, political, or even economic history. Tapping new evidence from travel journals, letters, and a hodgepodge of other sources, experts on the Grand Tour have delved into a wide range of debates, including, to name just a few, the history of emotions, the senses or the body, the history of masculinity, politeness, connoisseurship, the history of transport, communication and mobility, religious coexistence and toleration, consumer and retail history, and debates about nationalism and nationhood. The two books under review here are part of this new strand of Grand Tour scholarship. Both engage with larger debates, although from slightly different angles.

Michaël Green, professor at the University of Łódzki, provides an edition of the eighteenth-century travel letters of the young Henry Bentinck, Viscount of Woodstock, and his *bear leader*, the Huguenot preceptor Paul Rapin Thoryas, to Henry's father, Hans Willem Bentinck, Earl of Portland. In his extremely thorough introduction of these letters, which first appear as rather flavourless, since they do not provide much detail about the classic sights on the way to Rome, Green masterly links these sources to debates about privacy and personal relations in early modern Europe. Through a close reading of the original letters, preserved at the library of the University of Nottingham, and copies kept at the British Library, Green analyses how an eighteenth-century correspondence perfectly illustrates which topics were deemed private and personal, since a handful of letters were consciously removed from the corpus. These include the letters in which Hans, Henry, and Paul bicker over the money that was required to travel in style, or those in which Henry recounts his unpleasant experience in Vienna, where he was given the cold shoulder by local elites. These and other writings, which could harm the reputation of his family, were carefully removed. The collection was, in other words, scrupulously edited.

Bentinck's letters also perfectly illustrate how complex the personal relations between father, son, and tutor were. For example, Thoryas did not hesitate to argue with his master when Portland suggested that his son should use his Italian journey as an opportunity to gain some military experience. Apparently, within the confines of personal correspondence Thoryas felt at ease to trespass classic social boundaries and to contradict his master. At the same time, the letters cast some light on the personal relationship between tutor and pupil. Thoryas took up the cudgels for his acolyte, as when Lord Portland was disgruntled about the behaviour of his offspring, who did not write frequently enough, spent too much money, or did not obey his orders. Woodstock, for his part, saw his preceptor as one of his father's spies rather than as a friend. Seen through the lens of privacy studies, the letters – which at first sight may seem rather bland – have turned into an extremely tasteful appetizer. It might inspire future cultural historians to dive into this new field and to tap new, empirical evidence from the hundreds of travel journals, letters, and other texts that have been preserved in the Low Countries.



Alan Moss's book, a revised version of his PhD dissertation defended at the University of Nijmegen, takes a radically different path. Green happens to be a gourmet, who links his unique collection of letters to one major debate in cultural history. Moss is more of an omnivore, who devours hundreds of Dutch and Flemish travel texts from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, and who tears them – albeit gently – to shreds to link them to several debates in social, religious, and cultural history. To do so, Moss turns to the concept of identity. Travel journals, letters, and other sources are not considered as pristine, unmediated texts that shed light on historical reality, but are presented first and foremost as a strong piece of self-fashioning where the writer tries to highlight different elements from his – or hers, in some extremely rare cases – identity. Moss defines five fields where the Grand Tour (or rather educational travel)

was decisive in identity formation, zeroing in on education, social status, religion, masculinity, and nationalism/nationhood. Not surprisingly, these fields have all been discussed intensively in – predominantly British – research in the last few years. Moss's research is therefore not entirely new, as he promptly admits in his introduction, but it definitely charts some new territory by bringing all these debates together.

True to the paradigm that identities are seldom stable nor univocal, but are highly malleable, dynamic, and multiple, Moss uncovers some fascinating paradoxes. Depending on their public, youngsters presented themselves in their travel journals, letters, and other texts as diligent students, hunting for a prestigious master's or doctoral degree from a foreign university, mastering the noble arts of dancing, fencing, or horsemanship in an academy at the Loire, in Geneva, or Padova, and visiting famous scholars, libraries, and other hubs for knowledge, while they were found gambling, boozing, or whoring at other occasions. Contradictions are also rife in consumption, where travelling youths tried to present themselves as restrained, hand-on-the-purse Dutchmen, yet they also spent impressive amounts of money on elegant clothes, posh accessories, art, and other accoutrements. Ambivalence is also found in the way these travellers presented themselves as true men: facing all sorts of dangers in the Alps with a stiff upper lip, while turning into pleasant and polite conversation partners for the fairer sex in a more urban environment. In all these debates, Moss does not deviate far from the consensus in the field, which can lead to a *déjà vu* experience. The same is true when he discusses religion. Even if there were exceptions, with some Calvinist travellers being vexed by Catholic relics, hagiolatry, or other 'popish insolence', they mostly reverted into a mild, neutral tone of tolerance when

describing the pompous processions, solemn Masses, and other exotic rituals in Rome, the cradle of Counter-Reformation Europe. Nevertheless, Moss does much more than simply endorse the consensus, as he brings some subtle distinctions in (religious) identity to the fore. More trailblazing, however, is the book's last chapter, in which he looks for traces of regional and/or national identity in travel journals. Moss convincingly argues that a sense of national belonging was already in the making long before the nineteenth century.

Alan Moss has, in sum, written a book that is – in contrast to the classic books on the Grand Tour – not full of anecdotes and tall tales. Not that they are not there. Moss is a born storyteller, who knows how to captivate his public. I also applaud the fact that he, true to his discipline, has broadened our focus beyond the classic travel journals, drawing on new evidence from *alba amicorum*, poetry, letters, and other (literary) texts. He also succeeds in linking the history of travel and tourism with major debates in social, cultural, and political history. It makes his book truly worth reading. The same holds true for Green's text edition. We have a long – but exciting – road ahead of us!

Gerrit Verhoeven, University of Antwerp/Royal Museums of Art and History