

# Niebuhr and the Visual Documentation of the Arabian Voyage, 1761-1767

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## Abstract

This paper discusses the characteristics of the visual documentation produced during the Arabian Voyage, 1761-1767, and published as illustrations in *Beschreibung von Arabien* (1772), *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien, I-II* (1774 and 1778) and *Reisen durch Syrien und Palästina* (1837). The illustrations are examined with regard to their motifs and distribution within the published works. The present study demonstrates that the images have little direct correspondence with the formulated scientific goals of the expedition. The point of view of the illustrations indicates a visual mapping, which is continuously shifting between overview and detail and between the immediately recognizable and the exotic. This links to the presupposed perceptions of the Orient as expressed through the initial planning of the expedition. Other factors which influenced the published results, such as the artistic skills and preferences of the draftsmen involved and - in the process of publication - reader targeting, are also discussed.

The mastermind behind the Arabian Voyage was Johann David Michaelis (1717-1791), professor of theology at the University of Göttingen. Michaelis's impetus for the expedition was for its members to bring back empirical observations on subjects pertaining to the Old Testament. The country of Yemen, in particular, was seen as a laboratory in which traces of the Old Testament world could still be found and studied.<sup>1</sup> This contrasted with a more progressive world, under the influence of the New Testament, and from where Michaelis operated and formulated the goals for the expedition. Echoes of these ideas and perceptions were channelled into the expedition's visual documentation.

Emphasis on empirical observation played an integral part in the planning of the Arabian Voyage. The members of the expedition were formally instructed to

keep a daily journal and to observe and document whatever was adhering to their particular field of expertise. Interpretations based on independent reasoning were specifically encouraged.<sup>2</sup> Visual documentation was considered of importance and the need for a trained draftsman was stressed.<sup>3</sup> In the final result - the publications by Carsten Niebuhr (1733-1815) - these two methods of documentation, written and visual, appeared alongside each other.

In the following, I wish to ask how can we quantify, classify and label the images from the Arabian Voyage and I will pose some questions about what they represent in the context of the publications into which they found use.

Four illustrated volumes have been considered, namely, *Beschreibung von Arabien* from 1772, *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien, I-II*, 1774-1778 and the posthu-

1. For a discussion on the views of Michaelis, see Hess (2000) and article by Hess in this volume.

2. Michaelis (1762), "Instruction", §8.

3. Michaelis (1762), "Instruction", §43.

mous third volume of the *Reisebeschreibung*, entitled *Carsten Niebuhr's Reisen durch Syrien und Palästina, nach Cypern und durch Kleinasien und die Türkei nach Deutschland und Dänemark*, which was published in 1837. These volumes, all printed in a quarto format, contain altogether 161 numbered plates. In addition to these are two unnumbered fold-out maps and a small amount of vignettes. The motifs range from maps of cities and historical sights to inscriptions and images of the local inhabitants and their manners and customs. The engravings are modest in scale and decisively contextual. They are tied to the text and were clearly not intended to be sold separately.

The four volumes dealt with here are all part of the material that Niebuhr prepared for publication under his own name. It is therefore reasonable to presume that the content of these works, the interrelation between images and text and the distribution and quantity of the plates in these works, largely correspond with the intention of the author.

Within the framework of the present conference, *World views and local encounters in early scientific expeditions 1750-1850*, I have chosen to understand “local encounter” as the entirety of impressions that the travellers were confronted with. I subsequently understand “world view” as the set of practices by which these encounters were transformed into something that was not only comprehensible, but also adhered to a specific way of communication.

In this perspective it might be useful to think of all the published images – and not only the maps made by Niebuhr – in map making terms. In “The Science of Cartography and its Essential Processes”, Joel L. Morrison has drawn up the following sequence, which describes a “cartographer’s conception of a map” and the process of transferring the cognitive realm (the “local encounter”) into something which can be communicated.<sup>4</sup> In order to achieve this goal, the following process (involving the set of practices proscribed by the “world view”) is outlined: selection – classification – simplification. These three steps will

4. Morrison (2011), pp. 24-31, especially pp. 28-29 and figure 1.4.4. First published in 1976.

result in the actual map, through which the cartographer communicates with the “map reader”. The same process is valid for image production at large, by means of pictorial conventions.

According to Bruno Latour, in his article “Drawing Things Together”, the aim of going out – in a scientific context – was to bring back something: “You have to go and to come back *with* the “things” if your moves are not to be wasted”.<sup>5</sup> Following Latour, this process took place by converting an “immobile” local encounter into something which was made “mobile” by means of documenting it. The local encounter – with all its potential fuzziness – could be transformed into an “immutable” entity, something through which the traveller’s world view was fixed and communicated in an understandable and comparable fashion. One of the primary means by which this “bringing back” was established was by map making, which, in the eighteenth century, was considered a quintessential way in which to gain power of the unknown.

This *seeing brought back*, the encounter with the Arabian reality, was the very essence of the voyage. How can we follow the transformation of the local encounter in the images? – by means of *selection – classification – simplification* and by means of the *immobile* turned *mobile*.

## Image makers

The following contains a brief overview of the draftsmen and artists involved in the making of the images from the Arabian Voyage. The large majority of engravings in *Beschreibung* and *Reisebeschreibung* were based on drawings produced by the expedition’s draftsman, Georg Wilhelm Baurenfeind (1728-1763), who died on the sea voyage from Yemen to India, and by Carsten Niebuhr. The latter was of course the sole producer of any drawings or sketches made on the journey from Bombay onwards.

As the expedition’s cartographer, Carsten Niebuhr had basic skills in drawing. His cartographical training with the astronomer and mathematician, Tobias Mayer (1723-1762), was based broadly on aspects

5. Latour (2011), p. 66 and pp. 68-69. First published in 1990.

of applied mathematics. According to Niebuhr, drawing practice with Mayer focused on “Grundrisse, Situationskarten und dergleichen...”<sup>6</sup>

The expedition draftsman, Georg Wilhelm Baurenfeind, was born in Nürnberg. He was the son of Michael Baurenfeind (1680-1753), an imperial notary, who was also known for his mastery in the art of calligraphy.<sup>7</sup> The latter, and less familiar aspect of the professional life of Michael Baurenfeind, is likely to have exuded some influence on Georg Wilhelm’s choice of profession.

Georg Wilhelm Baurenfeind was trained as an engraver.<sup>8</sup> Before relocating to Denmark, c. 1753, he contributed to the *Hortus Nitidissimis* by Christoph Jacob Trew, a series of prints of garden flowers, published between 1750 and 1792.<sup>9</sup> In Copenhagen, Baurenfeind obtained additional training at the Royal Academy of Arts in Copenhagen. He received the academy’s Gold Medal in 1759.

Baurenfeind’s teacher in Copenhagen was the influential Royal engraver, Johann Martin Preisler (1715-1794). Originally also from Nürnberg, Preisler was called to Denmark in 1744. Preisler’s father, Johann Daniel Preisler (1666-1737), was the author of a series of instructive books for artists, which were widely distributed and reprinted throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup> This could be the origin of at least parts of Baurenfeind’s solid knowledge of the contemporary

rules of composition and conventions as to the rendering of perspective.

We sadly have little knowledge of Baurenfeind’s work as a draftsman during the expedition. Although the Royal Instruction had specified that all the members of the expedition should keep a diary, such documents are known only from three of the members, namely Niebuhr, the philologist, Frederik Christian von Haven (1727-1763) and the natural scientist, Peter Forsskål (1732-1763).<sup>11</sup> Access to how Baurenfeind managed his assignment within the expedition is therefore very limited.<sup>12</sup>

The visual legacy from the Arabian Voyage also consists of the engravings of plants and animals, which Niebuhr published on behalf of his deceased travel companions, Peter Forsskål and Baurenfeind, the beautifully hand-coloured *Icones Rerum Naturalium* from 1776. Furthermore, a few sketchy drawings exist from the extensive dairy of von Haven.<sup>13</sup> No sketches or drawings can be ascribed to either Forsskål or to the expedition doctor, Carl Christian Cramer (1732-1764). A small group of Niebuhr’s drawings are preserved among his papers in Universitätsbibliothek Kiel and in Rigsarkivet (State Archives, Copenhagen). Most of these relate to the third volume of Niebuhr’s *Reisebeschreibung*, which was published after his death.<sup>14</sup>

The transformation from drawings to the engravings for the publications – in Copenhagen – was in the hands of at least five different engravers. It should be noted that not all engravings carry signatures. The engraver, Johann Friderich Clemens (1748-1831), was,

6. Niebuhr (1803), p. 263.

7. Michael Baurenfeind functioned as a teacher in calligraphy and published several works on Schreib-Kunst. See Baurenfeind, Michael, in: Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon (1993), Band 7, p. 633. He is considered a key figure in the development of German calligraphy in the 18th century and the last of the great Nürnberger masters. See Röhl (1992).

8. Baurenfeind, Georg Vilhelm, in: *Weilbach. Dansk Kunsterleksikon* (1994), vol.1., pp. 189-190. For the artists mentioned below: if not otherwise stated, see *Weilbach. Dansk Kunsterleksikon* (1994-2000), alphabetical entries.

9. For an example of Baurenfeind’s early works, see: <http://apps.kew.org/hortus/viewMeta.do?page=87&type=ideal&chap=7>. For *Hortus Nitidissimis* see: <http://apps.kew.org/hortus/tjaden.pdf>

10. See for instance Preissler (1734). A 7th Edition was issued in 1774.

11. Michaelis (1762), §8.

12. A few letters can be traced to Baurenfeind. Three letters in Erlangen are rendered in Rasmussen (1990), pp. 94-97. These concern general subjects. A letter from Baurenfeind is preserved in Rigsarkivet (the State Archives). Tydske Kancellis udenrigske afd. almindelig del 3. Realia. Arabiske Rejse, (pakke 3-003) I,137a (18.6.1762). Here Baurenfeind briefly mentions his work on drawing some Egyptian mummies.

13. See: Hansen og Rasmussen (2005), p. 95 and pp. 268-269.

14. For examples see: Rigsarkivet (State Archives). Tydske Kancellis udenrigske afd. almindelig del 3. Realia. Arabiske Rejse, (pakke 3-003), I, 133a (inscriptions from Sinai) and Universitätsbibliothek Kiel. Nachlass Niebuhr. Cod. MS 314.VII and VIII (several drawings).

like Baurenfeind, a student of Preisler and an important figure among Danish artists of the time. Clemens was responsible for some of the plates of highest quality in the *Reisebeschreibung*.<sup>15</sup> An etcher, about whom little is known, but who figure prominently in the volumes, is A.J. Defehrt (died 1774). Prior to working in Denmark, Defehrt was employed as an engraver for the French *Encyclopédie*.<sup>16</sup> A Frenchman, Claude-Emanuel Martin (died 1774) dealt particularly with the plates depicting inscriptions in the *Beschreibung* and *Reisebeschreibung*. The brothers Georg (1751-1817), Meno (1752-1833) and Peter (1754-1804) Haas, further students of Preisler, also contributed. Finally, the signature of Andreas Heckel (c. 1747-1799) can be noted.

Prior to publication, the images produced by Baurenfeind and Niebuhr were subjected to a certain selection process. Niebuhr mentions drawings by Baurenfeind that were not reproduced in his books.<sup>17</sup> In one instance, the illustration was deemed superfluous as a similar depiction was already provided by Frederik Ludvig Norden (1708-1742), whose volumes *Voyage d'Égypte et de Nubie*, 1755, served as a constant point of reference for the expedition. Norden was a Danish naval officer, who travelled in the Nile Valley in 1737-1738. Allusions to further unpublished drawings also occur in the journal of von Haven.<sup>18</sup>

Among the illustrations made by Baurenfeind and Niebuhr there are traces of an alteration process, in which several states of the engravings were produced. An interesting example is an engraving, which possibly originates from the estate of the above-mentioned J.F. Clemens.<sup>19</sup> In this, presumably first state of the image – a depiction of Carsten Niebuhr in Yemenite

dress – Niebuhr is shown with a clean-shaven face, while the final version, as printed in *Reisebeschreibung*, depicts him with a full beard.<sup>20</sup>

The copper plates produced for Niebuhr's publications during his lifetime were destroyed in the fire of Copenhagen in 1795.<sup>21</sup> The larger bulk of drawings brought back from the expedition was most likely destroyed at the same time. It is therefore unfortunately not possible to compare the process of transformation from drawings to prints in any systematic fashion. But the existing examples of drawings and sketches in the State Archives and in the Universitätsbibliothek Kiel generally seem to demonstrate a close correspondence between drawings and prints.

The expenses for the production of the copper plates were covered by the Danish Crown. The printing of the published volumes was at Niebuhr's personal expense.<sup>22</sup>

### Approaching the images: motif and distribution

We might approach the illustrations in *Beschreibung* and *Reisebeschreibung* through a paradox. It is fair to assume that these images were to some degree intended to document answers to the questions, which Michaelis had formulated for the expedition.<sup>23</sup> Yet, only a few of them come close to doing exactly that. There are no images of the many species of locusts that were the urgent subject of several questions, and readers would also look in vain for images of lepers or flying fish – other subjects mentioned by Michaelis.

The plates in the four volumes are unevenly distributed, as can be seen in the table below. In *Beschreibung*, Niebuhr's formal report in reply to Michaelis

15. For examples, see Niebuhr (1774), Tab. XXIX, "Abbildung der Araber in Egypten", and Tab. LIX, "Abbildung einer Araberin in Tehâma".

16. Pinault-Sørensen and Sørensen (1993).

17. See for instance Niebuhr (1772), p. 61 and p. 81.

18. Von Haven mentions a sketch of the royal caste of Kronborg and renderings of Egyptian antiquities observed in Alexandria, Egypt. Hansen and Rasmussen, (2005), p. 64 and p. 244.

19. Statens Museum for Kunst, inv. no. KKS10839.

20. Niebuhr (1774), Tab. LXXI, "Kleidung der vornehmen Araber in Iemen".

21. Niebuhr (1816), p. 69.

22. Niebuhr (1816), p. 43.

23. Michaelis' questions was first put to print in 1762 – thus after the departure of the expedition in January 1761. See Michaelis (1762). However, the members of the expedition were made familiar with some of the questions on departure and along the travel route. See Niebuhr (1772), pp. XVI-XVII.

Typological distribution of motifs	Beschreibung, 1772: 24 plates	Reisebeschreibung, 1774: 72 plates	Reisebeschreibung, 1778: 52 plates	Reise durch Syrien, 1837: 13 plates
Art and architecture	8%	7%	43%	7%
Folklore	21%	28%	6%	7%
Geography	29%	38%	37%	86%
Philology	42%	27%	14%	0%

lis's questions, the total is a mere 24 plates. The first volume of *Reisebeschreibung* from 1774 contains 72 plates, while the following two volumes have 52 and 13 plates, respectively.

A typologically overview of the motifs is also given in the above table. Here the plates have tentatively been divided into four categories, namely: *art and architecture*, *folklore*, *geography* and *philology*. *Art and architecture* includes for example the illustration of the city gate "Bâb el fitûch" in Cairo, Fig. 1, and the sculptural decorations in the Hindu temple of Elephanta in India.<sup>24</sup> *Folklore* includes so-called genre scenes, i.e. images of local peoples and manners and customs, Figs. 2-4. *Geography* covers any kind of map, ground plan or prospect. The category of *philology* includes representations of any form of inscriptions, be that ancient Egyptian stone carvings, manuscripts or coins. The absence of images within the category of flora and fauna is noticeable. The before-mentioned *Icones rerum naturalium* (1776) was dedicated to this subject. However, this work, as was the case of *Beschreibung* and *Reisebeschreibung*, also shows equally little direct correspondence with the question raised by Michaelis.<sup>25</sup>

Some general observations can be made. Quantitatively, the *Beschreibung* is the least illustrated of the volumes. The distribution of motifs in the volume is noteworthy for a high percentage of images within *philology* - primarily Arabic inscriptions. As to the *Reisebeschreibung*, it can be noted that the first volume is

decisively the most varied and the most richly illustrated. The full scope of Baurenfeind's abilities as an artist is demonstrated here. Furthermore, the first and the second volume of *Reisebeschreibung* have an almost identical distribution of plates with a geographical motif, while folklore is more predominant in the first volume. The third volume, which was posthumously published, consists almost exclusively of maps and ground plans.

### Inner narration

If seen as a collective body, the images in the four printed volumes relate the inner developments of the journey. Factors such as artistic abilities, personal interests - and, in the end, sheer survival - have decisively influenced the choice of motifs and the style and quality of the artistic work that was produced during the expedition.<sup>26</sup>

In the early images, such as "Prospect der Stadt Damiât", Baurenfeind's energy and artistic optimism are easily detectable.<sup>27</sup> In turn, his absence can be clearly noted in the later stages of the journey. The images from this period are evidently lacking in grand composition and in artistic imagination. The first volume of *Reisebeschreibung* contains fifteen plates entitled "Prospect", while in the second volume this number is drastically reduced to a mere two plates. By comparison, Baurenfeind's prospects are far more complex, as to composition, depth and detail, than are those of

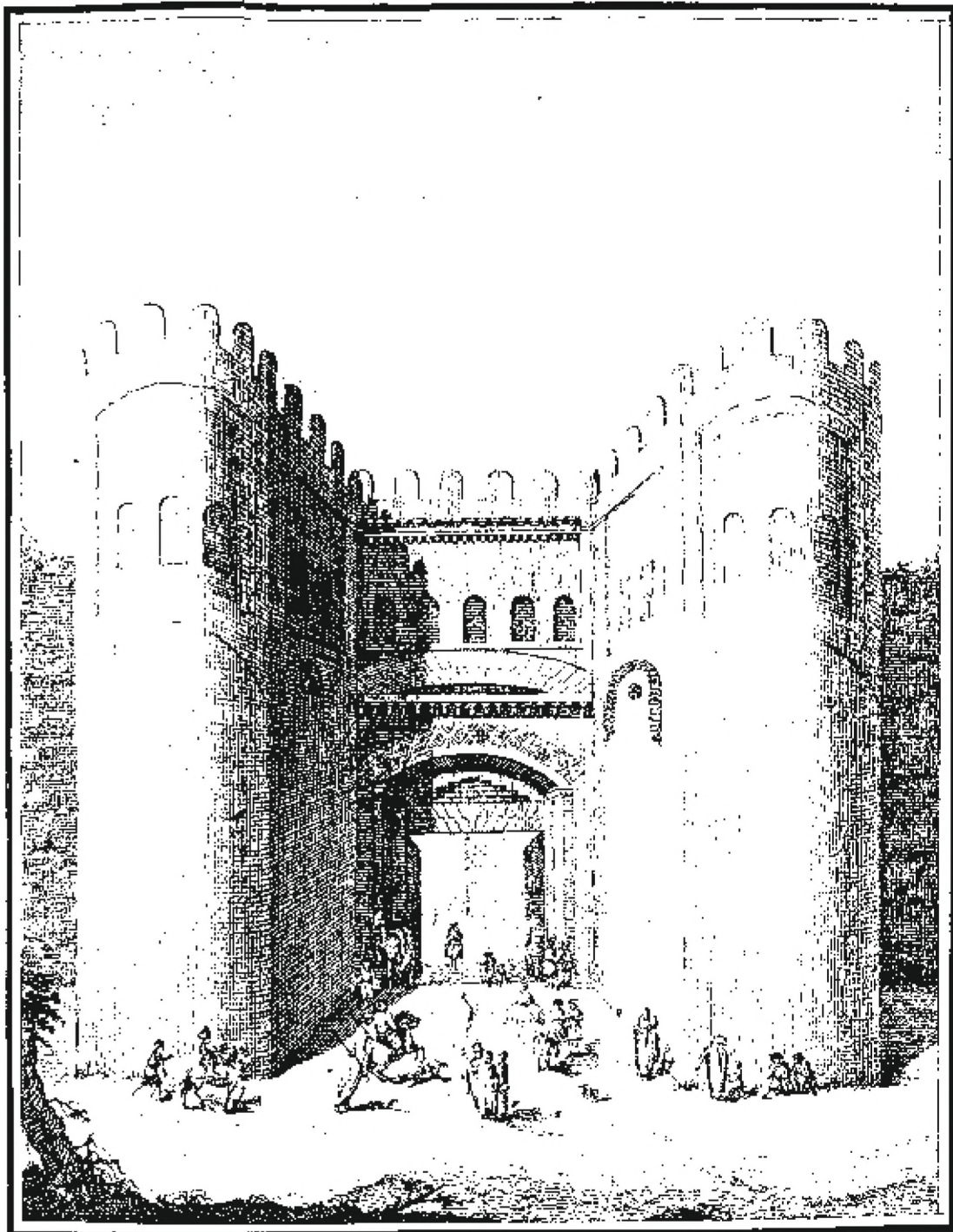
24. Niebuhr (1774), Tab. XIII and Niebuhr (1778), Tab. III-XI.

25. Michaelis (1762).

26. See also Weidner (2005), pp. 117-118.

27. Niebuhr (1774), Tab.VIII.

Tab: XIII.



*Bâb el fitâch, ein Thor zu Káhira.*

Fig. 1. "Bâb el fitâch". Niebuhr (1774), Tab. XIII.

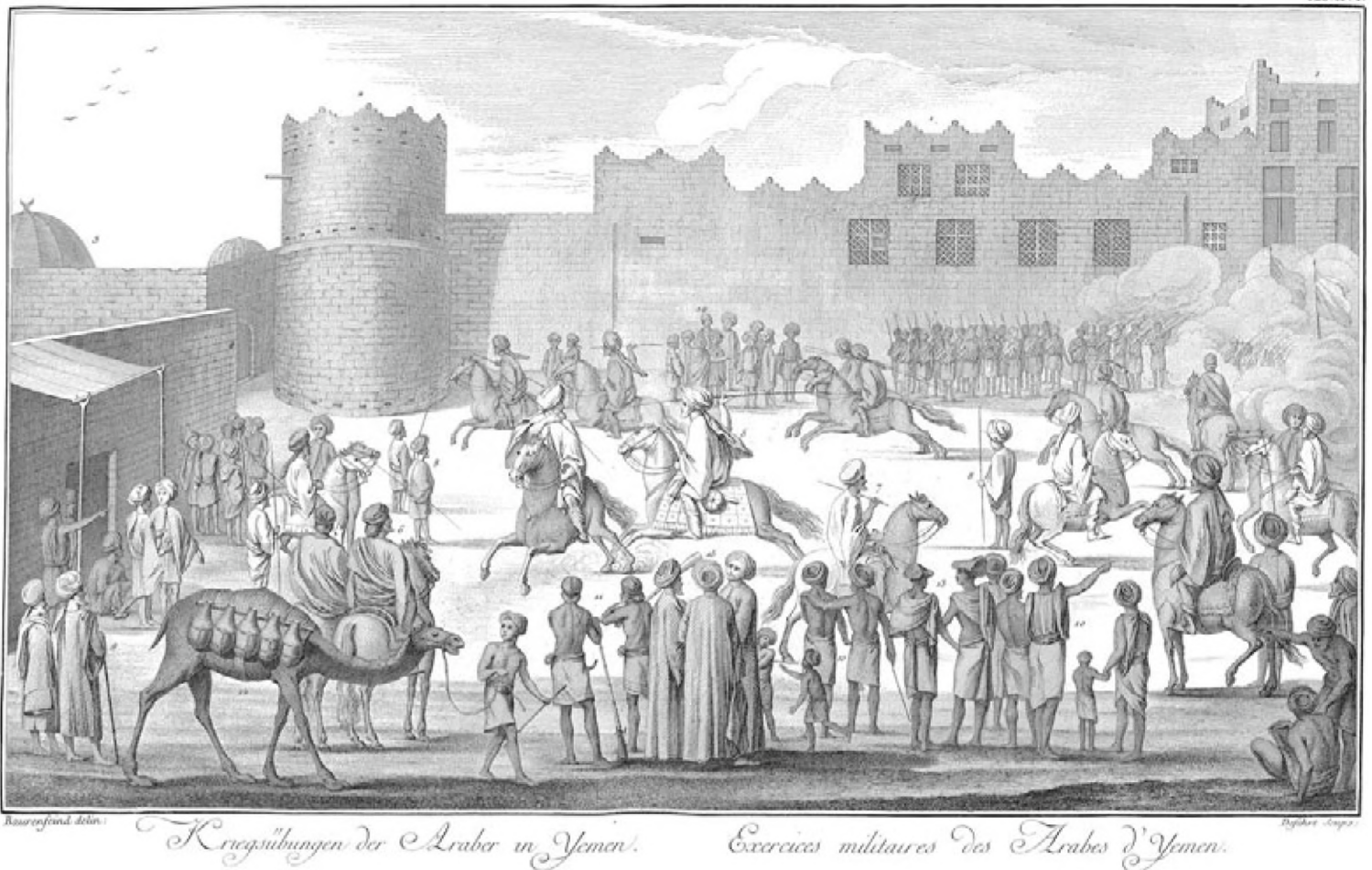


Fig. 2. "Kriegsübungen der Araber in Yemen". Niebuhr (1772), Tab. XVI.

Niebuhr. Furthermore, there is a marked decline in the number of illustrations within the category of folklore, which often included the rendering of the human form – something which Niebuhr's training had not prepared him for.

Overall, the general quality of the images is lower than in the beginning of the journey and problems with the use of perspective become noticeable. Niebuhr's illustrations from Elephanta Island can serve as an example. Niebuhr chose to document a rock-cut temple at this temple site. The building complex consists of deep pillared halls with decorated walls in high raised relief. Niebuhr presents an overview of the structure by means of a ground plan, while the remaining images consist of sections of wall scenes

with little indication of the spatial relationship between them.<sup>28</sup>

The *Mathematischer Atlas* from 1745 by Tobias Mayer, Niebuhr's tutor in cartography, demonstrates a clear focus on how to measure heights and distances. However – not unexpectedly – the volume offers little assistance on how to actually convey these measurements in a pictorial form.<sup>29</sup> This corresponds with

28. Particularly noticeable on Tab.V in Niebuhr (1778).

29. Mayer (1745). Available online at ECHO, European Cultural Heritage Online: <http://echo.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/ECHOdocuViewfull?url=/mpiwg/online/permanent/library/329WTZR/pageimg&mode=imagepath&viewMode=thumbs>

some the problems which are evident from Niebuhr's visual documentation on the part of the journey that followed after the death of Baurenfeind.

## Readers and images

The distribution of images in the four publications also seems linked with reader targeting. From his introductory words, it is clear that Niebuhr had two categories of readers in mind. Scholars were the primary objective for the *Beschreibung*. The *Reisebeschreibung*, on the other hand, potentially had a wider spectrum of readers, including those reading "merely for the passing of time" - "bloss zum Zeitvertreib" as Niebuhr formulates it.<sup>30</sup>

The relatively low percentage of images in *Beschreibung* has already been pointed out. The reason for this is partly to be found in the very planning of the expedition itself. The expedition was, as has been pointed out by Niels Peter Lemche, entrenched in a continuous conflict between the Biblical foundations expressed in Michaelis's questions and the scientific worldview(s) held by the participants.<sup>31</sup> The latter represented a plurality of disciplinary approaches, as is also evident from the structure and formulations of the Royal Instruction.

Many of the questions posed by Michaelis in *Fragen* proved difficult to approach in practice - be that in either written or visual form. Some anxiety about this discrepancy between the initial intensions and the final result is addressed directly by Niebuhr. He explains that the geographical descriptions included in *Beschreibung* was intended to boost the publication and also in order to compensate for the fact that Michaelis had not added in any way to the first draft of replies, sent to him for review.<sup>32</sup> The printed answers were subsequently unaccompanied by any scholarly commentary from the very man who had formulated and posed them. Assuredly, Niebuhr's geographical observations did add substantial weight both visually and textually.

In a similar fashion, the high quantity of images in the category of *philology* found in *Beschreibung*, can most likely be linked to its status as a formal report. A substantial amount of Michaelis's questions rested on elucidating passages from the Holy Scriptures, and the retrieval of inscriptions had a prominent place in the Royal Instruction.<sup>33</sup> The many illustrations of inscriptions in *Beschreibung* perhaps represented an attempt to adapt the visual appearance of the book to the scope of the expedition. Also, images of Kufic inscriptions and coins indicated scholarly substance and brought Niebuhr's work within the field of interest of not only Orientalists, but also historians and antiquaries at large. The illustrated inscriptions had even been proof-read. Niebuhr repeatedly refers to how the esteemed scholar Johann Jakob Reiske (1716-1774) had assisted him in deciphering the depicted Arabic inscriptions, and how Reiske's insights by far superseded the capacities of any of the local (Arab) scholars which Niebuhr had approached earlier.<sup>34</sup>

Compared to *Beschreibung*, the *Reisebeschreibung* was likely to appear to readers as a more broadly accessible work. The narrative of the day-by-day journey of the traveller(s) and the variation of themes and topics which are presented are lighter and of more general interest. These agreeable qualities were also expressed by means of the illustrations, which are, in comparison with those of the *Beschreibung*, both more numerous and more diverse. This holds especially true for the volumes from 1774 and 1778.

By genre, the *Reisebeschreibung* followed a contemporary trend. The number of illustrated travel accounts had risen markedly since the beginning of the eighteenth century. In his publications, Niebuhr has frequent references to illustrated works by fellow travellers such as Jean Chardin, Cornelis de Bryun, Frederik Ludvig Norden, Richard Pococke and Thomas Shaw among others. As the century progressed, many more would follow.

30. Niebuhr (1774), p. xii.

31. Lemche (2009), p. 9.

32. Niebuhr (1772), p. xix.

33. See Michaelis (1762). For references to the copying of inscriptions, see §12 and §§42-43.

34. Niebuhr (1772), p. 96.



This blooming of travelogues coincided with some more general changes in reading patterns which occurred in the second half of the century. These changes, sometimes labelled the “reading revolution” of the eighteenth century, caused a wider public to embrace reading as an objective for personal education and cultural stimulation. Although travel accounts did not form the core of this new surge in private reading, Niebuhr seemed well aware of its potentials.<sup>35</sup> His remark on *Zeitvertreib* and the overall composition of the *Reisebeschreibung* point decisively in this direction.

### Documenting the local encounter

How can we define the categories of images according to the function they have in Niebuhr’s books?<sup>36</sup> The motifs within the category of *folklore* have an intimate feel. By means of depicting a woman from the “Caffegebürge” of Yemen, the reader would get an impression of the life encountered by the travellers. Such genre scenes, Figs. 3-5, follow well-established pictorial conventions and connect with earlier images like those of Athanasius Kircher’s *China illustrata* from 1667 and many others.<sup>37</sup> The other type of illustrations within the category of *folklore* consists of careful depictions of shoes, hats and tools of contemporary life. Such instructive and classificatory illustrations are typical of eighteenth century imagery in both idea and conception. They carry an obvious kinship with, for instance, the plates in the French *Encyclopédie* and with antiquarian illustrations of the period.

The French *encyclopedists* are known to have likened the ordering of knowledge – by means of classification, overviews and taxonomies – to geographical practices. In this context, map making was

considered to hold a particular high status. As formulated by Matthew H. Edney in “Reconsidering Enlightenment Geography and Map Making” from 1999, the period considered the compilation of geographical maps as the “epitome of encyclopedic knowledge”.<sup>38</sup>

Maps, ground plans and prospects form the most constant element in the visual documentation from the Arabian Voyage. Niebuhr used his map making skills continuously and towards the latter part of the journey it became the dominant feature. As noted by Daniel Weidner, Niebuhr was at this point inclined to use the bird’s eye view to such a degree that ground plans and prospects become almost one and the same, turning everything into maps.<sup>39</sup>

By means of maps, that which was encountered – the individual, flimsy “localness” – was transformed into a highly abstract reproduction. The maps and ground plans were standardized information put to paper and they were “spoken” in a language which was internationally understood and often fluently translatable.

By means of maps, all the villages and coastlines could be directly compared with *any* other location on the globe. At the same time, the maps do not render anything that could actually be seen. Rather than rendering the local encounter objectively, maps are abstract images imbued with an “optical consistency” – as formulated by Latour.<sup>40</sup>

Overview and detail are constantly interchanging in the *Beschreibung* and the *Reisebeschreibung*. In their published form, the entirety of images manages to stress the ability of Niebuhr as author, mastering everything from grand-scale maps of entire regions to systematically arranged illustrations of Oriental shoes.

35. For a brief general account of reading in the 18th century, see Outram (2006), pp. 68-89. See also Wittmann (2010), pp. 39-51 and especially pp. 47-50.

36. Here I draw on the analysis offered by Weidner (2005).

37. For Kircher, see for instance <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/id?826819> or [http://www.stanford.edu/group/kircher/cgi-bin/site/?attachment\\_id=733](http://www.stanford.edu/group/kircher/cgi-bin/site/?attachment_id=733)

38. Edney (1999), p. 173. See also Burke (2000), p. 115.

39. Weidner (2005), p. 117. The example given by Weidner is Niebuhr (1837), Tab. XI, “Grundriss und Prospect der Stadt Kara hissâr”.

40. Latour (2011), p. 69.

Tab. LIX.



Baurenjind del.

J. F. Clouet sc.

*Abbildung einer Araberin in Tehâma.*

Fig. 3. "Abbildung einer Araberin in Tehâma". Niebuhr (1774), Tab. LIX.

Tab .L.XIV.



*Baurenfeind del.*

*J. J. Koenig sc.*

*Abbildung einer Araberin auf dem Caffeegebürge.*

Fig. 4. "Abbildung einer Araberin auf dem Caffeegebürge". Niebuhr (1774), Tab. LXIV.

## Seeing brought back?

By means of a series of pictorial conventions, each pertaining to their individual training, Baurenfeind and Niebuhr had transformed a series of *immobile* encounters into *mobile* images. But to what degree do the images record an actual local encounter?

Andreas Isler of Universität Zürich has demonstrated that, although the onset is a documentation based on “solely on own observations”, as Niebuhr states<sup>41</sup>, there are several instances of motifs and compositions which can be said to refer to earlier depictions.<sup>42</sup> These particular images, all made by Baurenfeind, clearly express the existence of codified pictorial conventions. As such these images can perhaps best be termed as *Orientalizing*. In one instance, regarding the image of a Banian in Mocha, Fig. 5, Niebuhr allows himself to hint at the “copying” process, and the subsequent absence of direct empirical observation, as he apologizes for the lack of perspective in between the main elements of the composition, in this case the standing man and the bovine creature behind him.<sup>43</sup> Isler has very convincingly pointed to the earlier *A Display of two forraigne Sects in the East Indies* from 1630 by Henry Lord as a model for this composition, Figs. 5 and 6. There is thus much variation with regard to the level of empirical observation in the images. In some cases, Niebuhr willingly admitted that the images were not based on personal observation, but on the basis of already existing images. This was the case of the images of the mosques in Mecca and Medina.<sup>44</sup>

A final, and hitherto less addressed group, consists of three images – none of which are from the hand of neither Baurenfeind nor Niebuhr.<sup>45</sup> Instead, these images were conceptualized and produced in Copenha-

gen for the sole purpose of supplementing the already existing illustrations. According to the signatures on the engravings, two are made by Peter Cramer (1726-1782) and one is by Thomas Bruun (1742-1800).<sup>46</sup>

Peter Cramer functioned as a theatrical painter at the Court Theatre in Copenhagen from the year 1769 and until his death. Thomas Bruun was appointed his successor. These two artists must rightly be added to the manifold list of draftsmen and artists that contributed to the visual documentation of the Arabian Voyage.

The three images, invented in retrospect, by Cramer and Bruun, all occur in the first volume of the *Reisebeschreibung*. One engraving is a capriccio-style rendering, depicting a group of Egyptian antiquities, Fig. 7. This image is followed, later in the volume, by a depiction of the audience hall in Sana, where the expedition was received by the local imam in July 1763, Fig. 8. The last image is the familiar portrait of Carsten Niebuhr in Yemenite dress, Fig. 9.<sup>47</sup> The signatures on the engravings serve as clear telltales, but there is another even more obvious indication as to their disparate status: their composition and motif simply do not fit the established visual patterns of the remaining illustrations.

The capriccio occurs as the last image in a series of depictions of hieroglyphic inscriptions, made by Niebuhr in Cairo as part of a philological documentation.<sup>48</sup> These images demonstrate an otherwise startling consistency. Niebuhr’s documentation focuses solely on the inscribed surfaces of the objects while it completely refrains from rendering them as three-dimensional entities. This stands in marked contrast to the more antiquarian mode of rendering employed in the scenographic capriccio.

The portrait of Niebuhr in Yemenite dress is seemingly comparable to the other depictions of local inhabitants from Yemen, with their single standing figure in a neutral landscape, Fig. 9 and 3 – 5. Yet, the reader is left to wonder at the implications of the dra-

41. “...bloss aus eigenen Beobachtungen...” Niebuhr (1772), p. xx.

42. Isler (2008), figs. 37-38, 39-40 and 41-42. Unpublished paper. I wish to extend my gratitude to the author for his permission to let me make use of this material.

43. Niebuhr (1772), p. 67.

44. Niebuhr (1772), Tab. XXI and XXII.

45. I first drew attention to these images in Hansen (2004).

46. For Cramer, see Neiiendam (1994).

47. Niebuhr (1774), Tab. XLII, LXIX and LXXI.

48. Niebuhr (1774), Tab. XXX-XLII.

Tab. III.



*Bourenpand del*

*Dycker sculp*

*Kleidung der Banianen zu Mochha.*

Fig. 5. "Kleidung der Banianen zu Mochha". Niebuhr (1772), Tab. III.

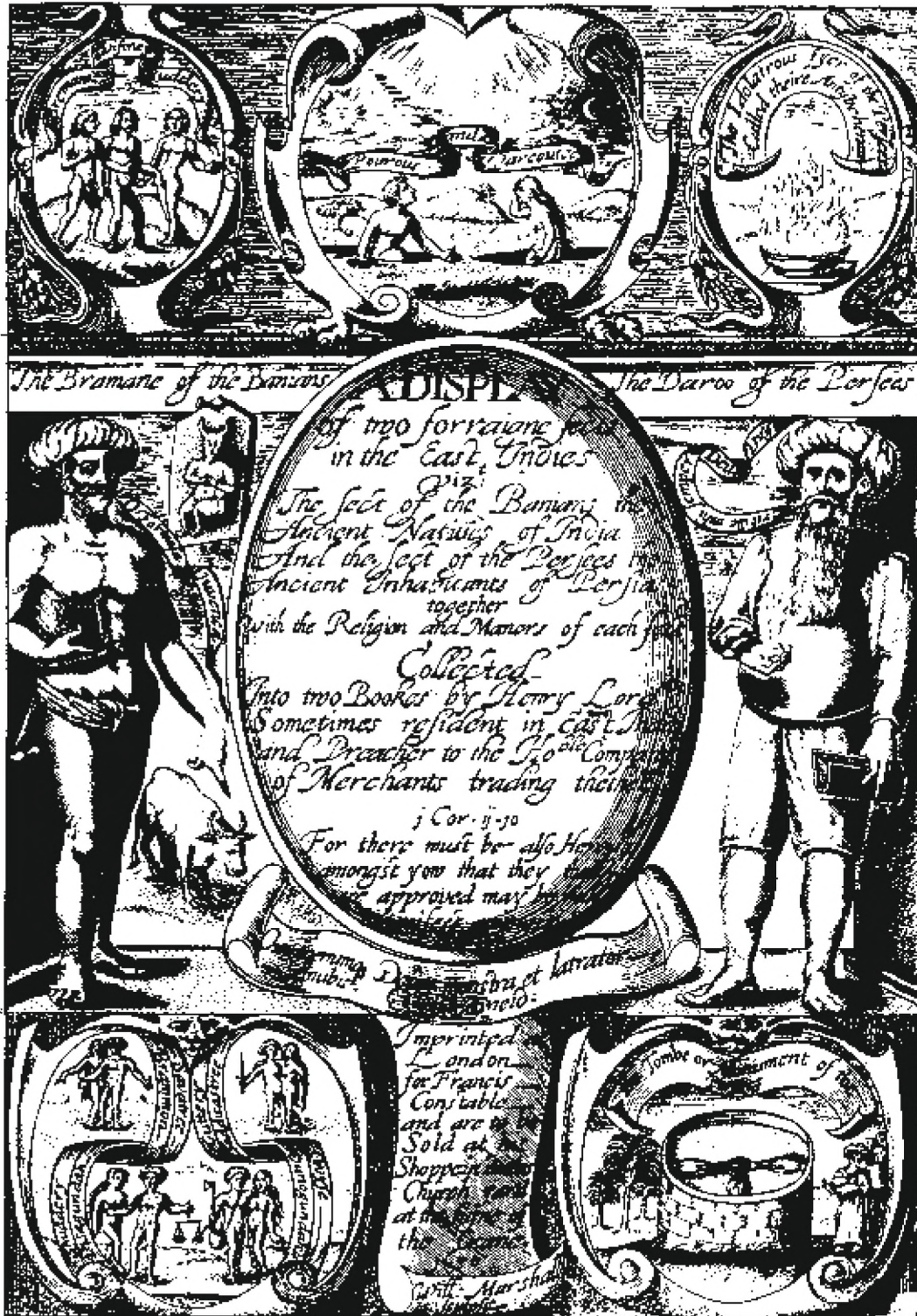


Fig. 6. Henry Lord, *A Display of two forraigne Sects in the East Indies*, 1630. Frontispiece.

*Tab. XLII*

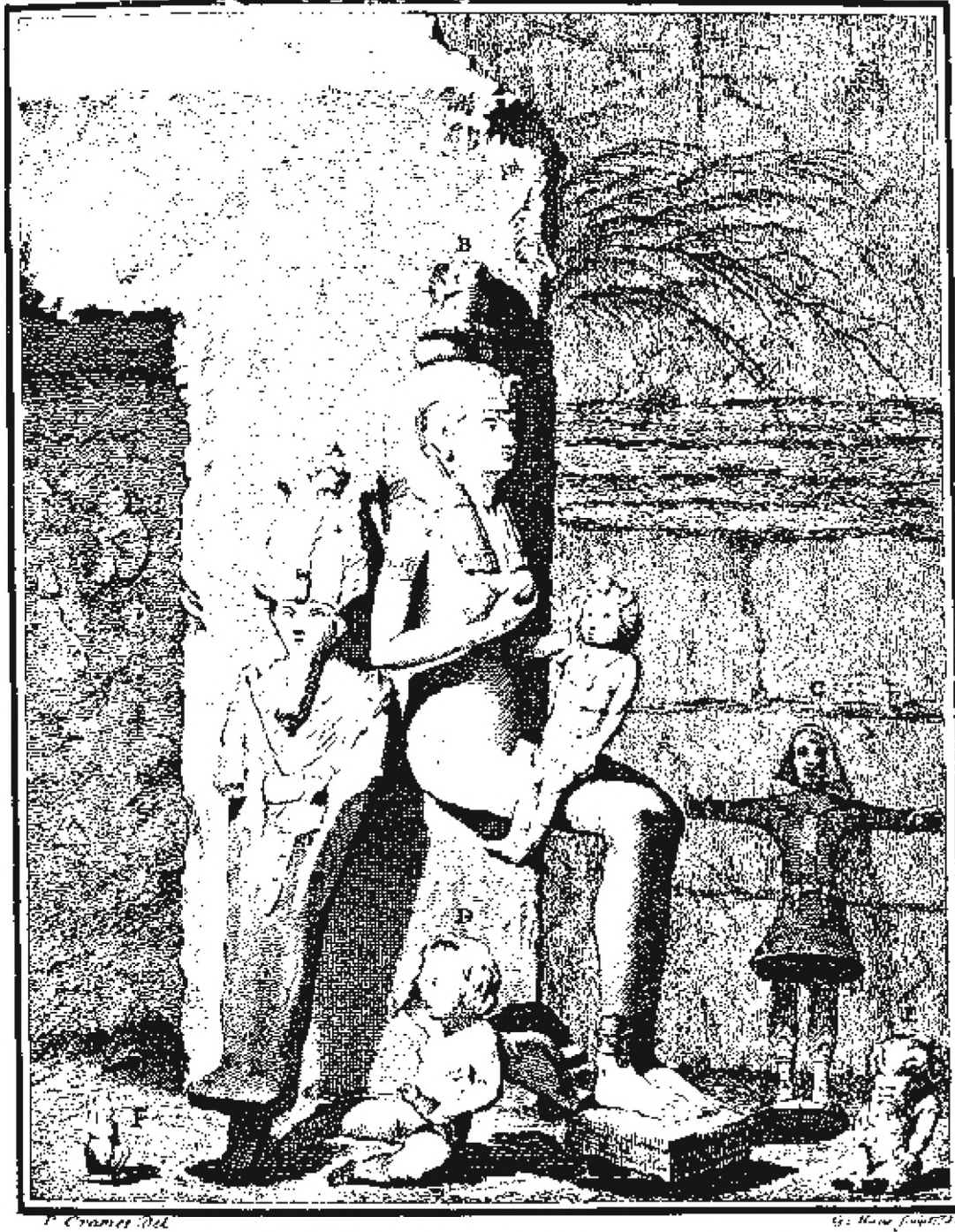


Fig. 7. Untitled, showing objects acquired by Niebuhr in Egypt. Niebuhr (1774), Tab. XLII. Most of the depicted objects are now held in the Collection of Classical and Near Eastern Antiquities, The National Museum of Denmark.

matic tableau unfolding in the background. What is the relationship between the tranquil posture of Niebuhr and the feud taking place in the immediate background? Is the scene merely included in order to demonstrate the usage of the particular knife in question or is it perhaps rather an illustration of the presumed “habits” of the East?

The engraving of the audience hall in Sana draws attention to itself with its vast proportions and dwarfed human figures, Fig. 8. The depiction borders on being an architectural fantasy. The dramatic use of light and shadow and the ominous atmosphere is rather different from the restrained and frontal mode of rendering seen in other related images. The depiction of the audience hall most likely has as its starting point the written description by Niebuhr, as there is a very close correspondence between the few descriptive details of the interior and what can be seen on Cramer’s image.<sup>49</sup> The image is a space greatly envisioned – but not a space seen.

These retrospective images help to clarify the particulars of the image production from the Arabian Voyage in general. The images made by Cramer and Bruun are characterized by a suggestive quality. They appear as if a secondary layer has been inserted – a layer, which is unrelated to the *in situ* documentation by the travellers. In their very essence, these retrospective images helped to recreate a situation left unregistered in the field. Such a filling out of lacunae, was a path that Niebuhr had left untrodden in the earlier *Beschreibung* and which was not chosen in the later second volume of *Reisebeschreibung*.

While the suggestive layering of the images by Cramer and Bruun touches on the curious and that which can be wondered at, they also draw on elements of exoticism *à la turque* and on preconceived notions of “the Orient”. This is particularly evident in the rendering of Niebuhr, with its emblematic illustration of the ill-tempered Orientals.<sup>50</sup> Notions of the

Orient as stagnant are perhaps also present in the caricaccio with its nostalgic longings for a bygone world, while the rendering of the audience hall seem to play with ideas of the fabled ceremonious opulence of the Orientals. As theatrical painters, Cramer and Bruun were most likely very familiar with conceptualizations of an Orient imagined, and their particular trade held a well of traditions to draw on, both within the framework of the stage plays and masquerades *à la turque*.<sup>51</sup>

The imaginary images by Cramer and Bruun obtain a contrasting quality, if seen in relation to the drawings made by Baurenfeind and Niebuhr. By mere comparison, the latter automatically becomes imbued with the appearance of authenticity and of something honestly observed – although these images are of course also, as pointed out in a study by Elisabeth Oxfeldt, to be considered from the perspective of cultural representation rather than objective and unfiltered observation.<sup>52</sup>

A similar interplay between primary and secondary images can be observed in another publication to which Peter Cramer also contributed, namely the *Voyage d’Égypte et de Nubie* from 1755 by F.L. Norden. This particular travelogue consists of more than 150 engravings, primarily of ancient Egyptian monuments, seen and documented by Norden. Upon publication, the work was equipped with a series of vignettes, some of which was designed by Peter Cramer. In these vignettes components from seventeenth-century antiquarian depictions are woven together with elements of Egyptomania to give a burlesque effect. These layered compositions stand in marked contrast to the *in situ* documentation of Norden’s own images.<sup>53</sup>

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reminds the travelers not to entice the well-known “Oriental vindictiveness”. Rasmussen (1990), pp. 66-67. The Royal Instruction given in Michaelis (1762) is abbreviated and does not include these passages.

51. Landweber (2005) and Holm (2010).

52. Oxfeldt (2010), pp. xii-xiii.

53. For a discussion of these vignettes in context, see Hansen (2012), pp. 222-227.

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49. Niebuhr (1774), p. 413.

50. Similar perceptions were also present in the documents relating to the Arabian Voyage, as seen in a draft of the Royal Instruction copied by F.C. von Haven. Here § 10 repeatedly



## Contemporary depictions – a brief comparison

What characterizes the mode of depiction and compositions of the images produced by Baurenfeind and Niebuhr? A way of approaching the images could be by means of a comparison with contemporary examples taken from the visual documentation of European cities, such as the work by Vasi and from contemporary travelogues. Although not identical in nature, these examples can nevertheless help address traits which are either manifest or absent in the image production by Baurenfeind and Niebuhr.

An aspect to be considered is the choice of perspective. In the artist Guiseppe Vasi's (1710-1782) well-known *veduti* of Rome, published in the mid-eighteenth century, seven different ways of documenting the cityscape can be determined: <sup>54</sup> *true perspective*, a *widened perspective* ("open-book" view), *telescoped* view (bringing elements together on one plane), *composite* or *collage* view (multiple angles brought together), the *capriccio* view (imaginative), the *embedded* view (a viewpoint which is physically impossible) and finally elevation or *bird's eye view*.

Reflecting on the images by Baurenfeind and Niebuhr and their way of rendering land- and cityscapes it can be observed that both the *widened perspective* and the *bird's eye view* were commonly used. Overview corresponds well with travelling and being on the move, and Niebuhr's many ground plans were indeed often the result of brief encounters. Nevertheless, overviews also exude that the observer is in control of things, and they communicate a sensation of totality and of bringing much back.

Another aspect to be considered is that of setting and choice of motif. It has been suggested that Vasi's renderings of the sights of Rome can be interpreted on the background of the scenographic conventions

outlined by Sebastiano Serlio (1475-1554) in the sixteenth century.<sup>55</sup> Serlio wrote a highly influential architectural treatise, in which he devoted a section to the design of theatres and stage sets. With reference to Classical models, Vitruvius in particular, Serlio outlined three types of backgrounds for the stage play: the tragic, the comic and the satirical background.<sup>56</sup> Each of these created an illusionistic backdrop for the actors using symmetrical arrangements and a central perspective.

The tragic background consists of an orderly street, lined with palaces and imposing commemorative monuments – a setting where noble and civilized deeds could take place. The comic background was to be composed in a more random and informal fashion and with such elements as private dwellings and perhaps an inn or a brothel. A setting fit for ordinary and common people. Finally, the pastoral background would contain woods or rural sceneries with cattle and shabby sheds. This was suitable for the creatures of nature, such as satyrs, and to less polished or dignified subjects.

In the case of Vasi, the images of Rome were viewed as a form of tableau with reference to the Serlian tradition. What if this is translated into the image production from the Arabian Voyage? It seems that in particular the pastoral setting is readily identified. The *Beschreibung* opens with an image of a Yemenite hut in the countryside, Fig. 10, and the third plate in the volume depicts the Banian man in a decisively pastoral landscape, Fig. 5.<sup>57</sup> In general, the renderings of the local inhabitants in Niebuhr's volumes focus on such humble figures.

There is no systematic documentation of local rulers or persons of religious or military importance – subjects fit for the use of a tragic background. One of

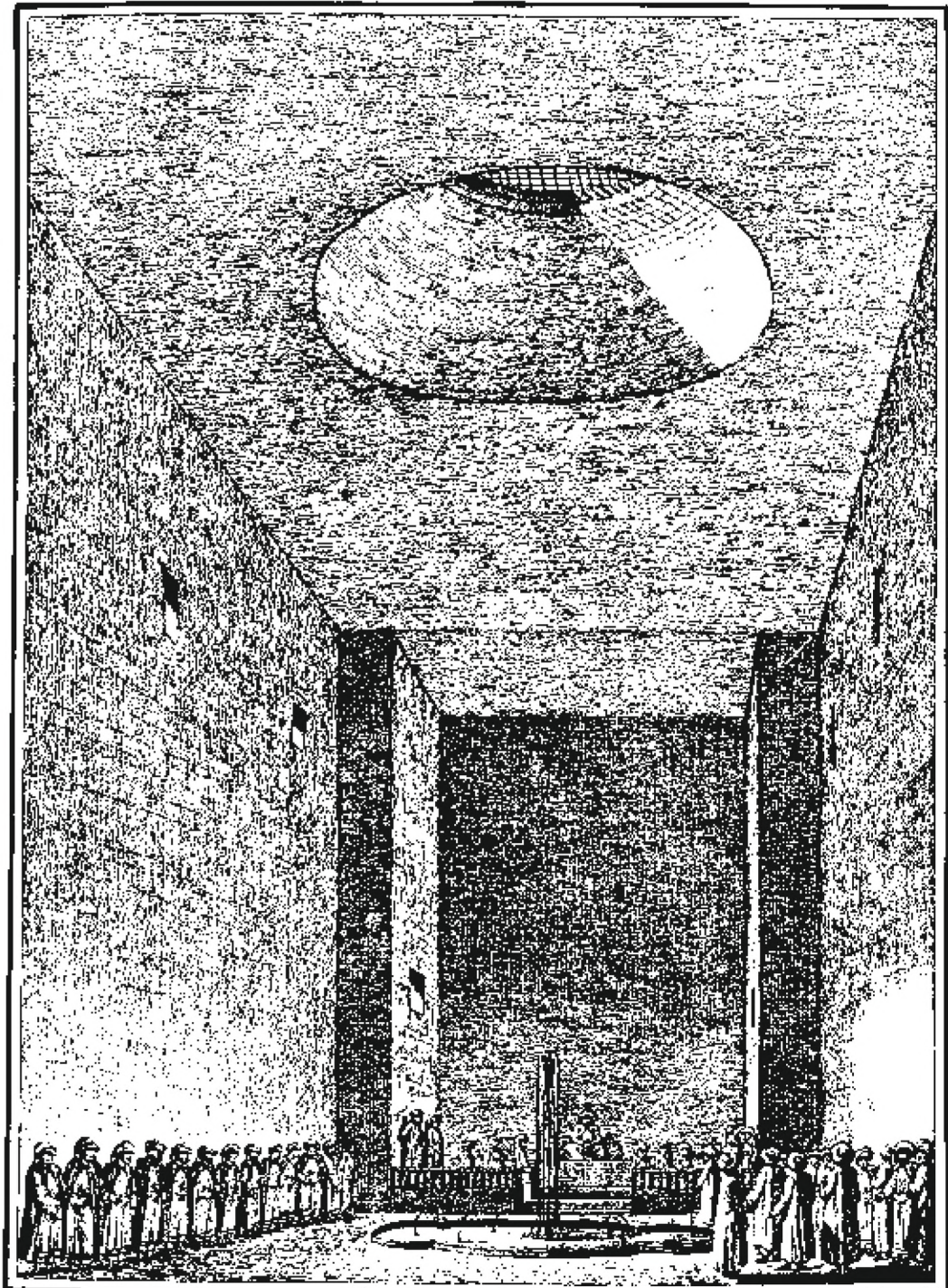
54. These categories are based on the work done on Guiseppe Vasi by Jim Tice, Erik Steiner, Allan Ceen, and Dennis Beyer, Department of Architecture and InfoGraphics Lab, Department of Geography, University of Oregon. See: [http://vasi.uoregon.edu/interpreting\\_types.html](http://vasi.uoregon.edu/interpreting_types.html)

55. See "City as Theatre" at: [http://vasi.uoregon.edu/interpreting\\_theatre.html](http://vasi.uoregon.edu/interpreting_theatre.html)

56. Serlio's treatise on architecture, (often referred to as *L'Architettura*), published from 1537 onwards, was fundamental to a renewed understanding of (and practical use of) Classical architecture, not only in the context of scenography, but in architectural theory as a whole.

57. Niebuhr (1772), Tab. I and III.

Tab. I, XIX



Hier Cranon delin.

Georg Haas-Jung 1774.

*Vorstellung der Audiens bey dem Imam zu Saná*

Fig. 8. "Vorstellung der Audiens bey dem Imam zu Saná". Niebuhr (1774), Tab. LXIX.

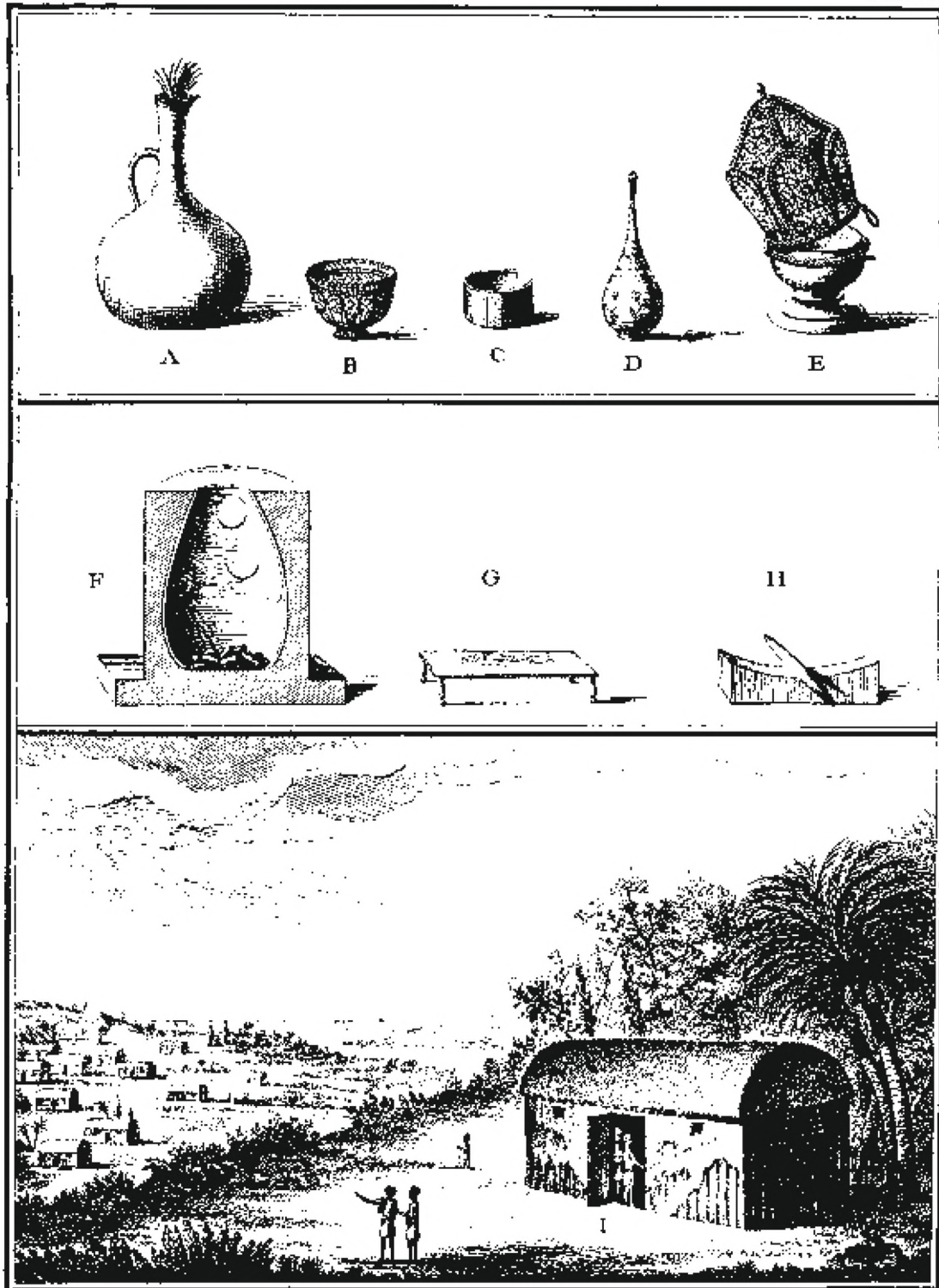
Tab. LXXI.



*Kleidung der vornehmen Araber in Iemen.*

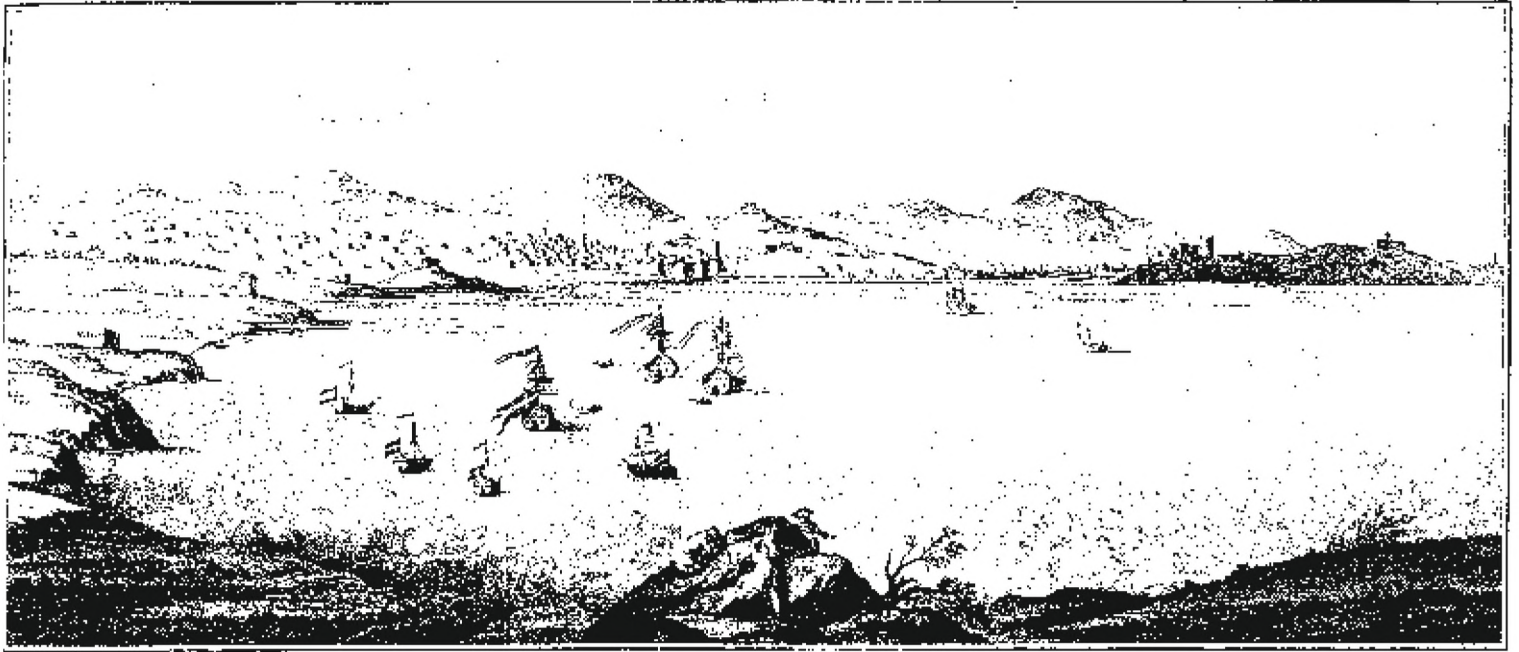
Fig. 9. "Kleidung der vornehmen Araber in Iemen". Niebuhr (1774), Tab. LXXI.

Tab. I.



*Deffhet, feid.*

Fig. 10. Untitled, showing various Yemenite utensils (top row: coffee pot, two cups, flask for rose water and incense burner; second row: oven, seat and grinder) and, below, a Yemenite hut in the countryside. Niebuhr (1772), Tab. I.



Prospect der Stadt Marseille

Fig.II. "Prospect der Stadt Marseille". Niebuhr (1774), Tab. II.

the few befitting candidates for this type of setting, this time in the *Reisebeschreibung*, is the rendering of a Cairene city gate, the "Bâb el fitûch", complete with a dwindling perspective, Fig. 1.<sup>58</sup> The expedition spent close to a year in Cairo (from November 1761 until August 1762), yet its gardens, squares, bridges and public and religious buildings – all the components that make up the urban landscape of such a city – are almost absent from the documentation. The same broadly applies for the other cities encountered by the expedition. Another single-standing example is found in *Beschreibung*, a double-page spread, depicting "Kriegsübungen der Araber in Yemen", where the house of the Dola and other buildings in the town of Luhayyah, are shown in the background, Fig. 2.<sup>59</sup>

Any systematic mapping of the stately buildings of the Orient, as is otherwise known from an European context, such as the *Vitruvius Britannicus* from 1715-31 or the Danish equivalent, *Den danske Vitruvius*, 1746-49 was

clearly not central to Baurenfeind and Niebuhr's approach. Both the *Vitruvius Britannicus* and *Den danske Vitruvius* had at its heart the documentation of the architectural capacities of a nation – the British Isles and Denmark, respectively. The purpose of these books, especially the *Vitruvius Britannicus*, was that of supplying models and references for future architectural building works.

Niebuhr did pay attention to architectural structures, but these were definitively historical in nature, as evidenced from his documentation of Elephanta, Persepolis and others. Seen through the perspective of the Serlian categories, the impression gained from the images from the Arabian Voyage is that of a slightly backwards, rural society, much like the Biblical past Michaelis had hoped to encounter.

Baurenfeind and Niebuhr's images generally refrain from rendering any specific historical narrative. This contributed to their appearance as a scientific documentation. What is documented in the images is the local encounter, not the traveller *in it*. The travellers

58. Niebuhr (1774), Tab. XIII.

59. Niebuhr (1772), Tab. XVI.

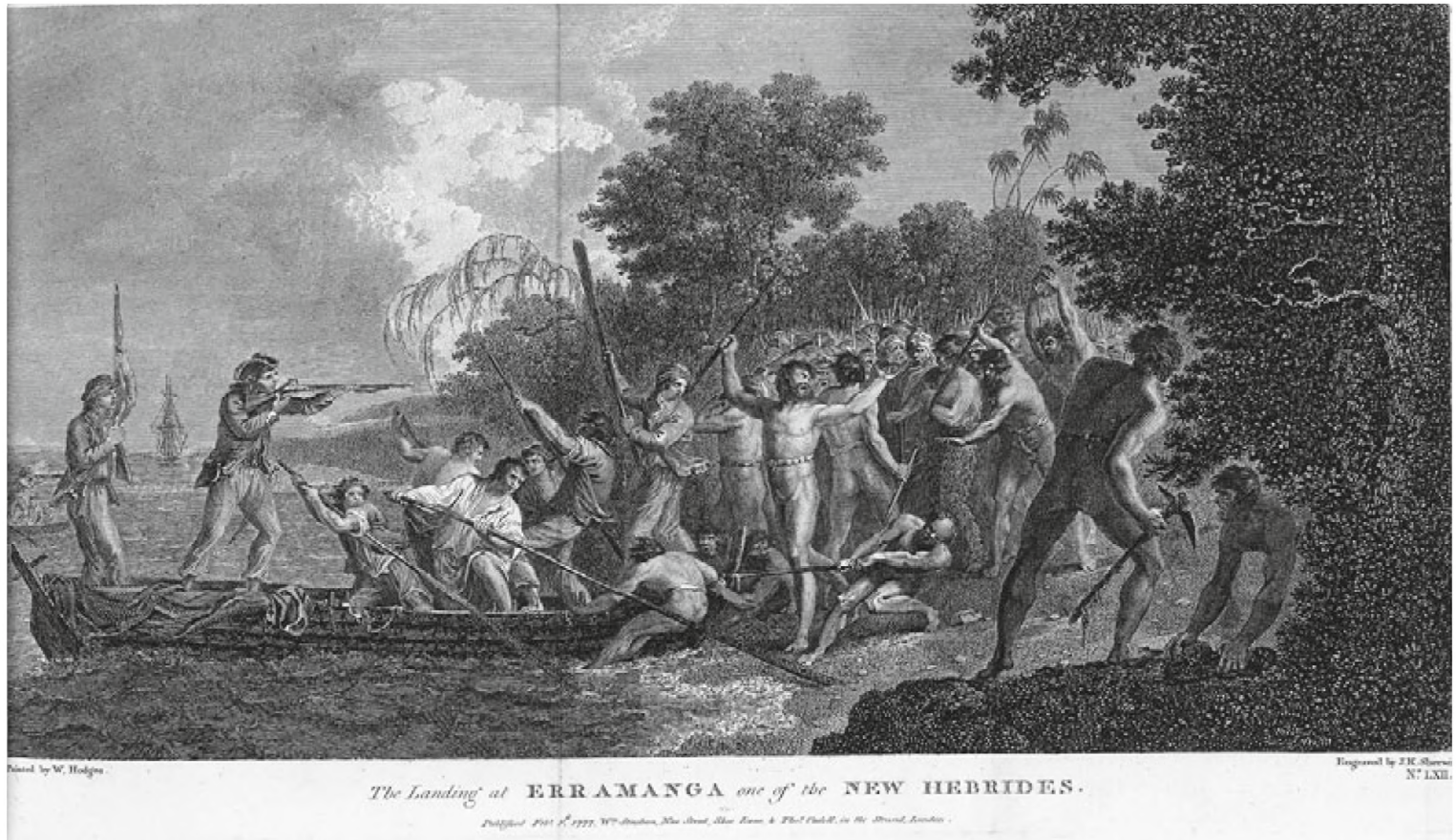


Fig. 12. William Hodges: *The Landing at Erramanga, one of the New Hebrides*, 1777. Engraving by John Keyes Sherwin.

on the Arabian Voyage are reclusive and are hardly ever seen. A prospect from Marseille most likely renders three of the expedition members on reconnaissance, although their identity is left unmentioned by Niebuhr, Fig. 11.<sup>60</sup> A second depiction, this time from Luhayyah, has three of the travellers – very discreetly – incorporated into the composition as “Drey von unserer Gesellschaft in türkischer Kleidung”, Fig. 2.<sup>61</sup>

By comparison, the artist, William Hodges (1744-1797), who accompanied James Cook on his second voyage in 1772-1775, gave the travellers a prominent role in his documentation, Fig. 12.<sup>62</sup> As Cook’s fame

grew, so did the inclusion of his person in the visual narrative. John Webber (1751-1793), who was the artist on Cook’s third and final voyage, frequently focused on the figure of Cook and the other travellers and on specific events on the journey – including the slaying of Cook by local inhabitants of Hawaii.<sup>63</sup> Such interaction between the observer and the observed is fundamentally alien to the images from the Arabian Voyage.

The impression gained from the plates in *Beschreibung* and *Reisebeschreibung* is not easily summarized. The

60. Niebuhr (1774), Tab. II.

61. Niebuhr (1772), Tab. XVI, p. 213.

62. Hodges’ interest in the practices of his fellow travelers is noted by Bonehill (2004a), p. 74. For an example see Bonehill

(2004b), cat. 35 and fig. 52, *The Landing at Erramanga, one of the New Hebrides*.

63. See for instance: <http://www.ourspace.tepapa.com/media/163>



Fig. 13. "Dress of the women in the back parts of Yemen". Niebuhr (1792), Vol. I, p. 309.

plates, the “seeing brought back”, demonstrate a variation in terms of motifs, as expressed in the four categories, *art and architecture*, *folklore*, *geography* and *philology*. However, the selection of the motifs cannot be said to be systematically controlled or governed by any stringently applied method and they do not relate in any formal fashion to the questions posed by Michaelis.

The most predominant feature is Niebuhr’s relatively uniform documentation of the cities and settlements encountered on the journey. This documentation – which was essentially fictive in its visual form – served to make the reader readily familiar with the Orient and the Biblical landscape. These images represent measurable and factual entities, which therefore could be mapped and made “mobile”. This idea of a world made familiar and recognizable was constantly coupled with images which portrayed the Orient by means of another set of well-tried pictorial models and – at least to some degree – codified motifs.

According to Michaelis the history of Yemen “steiget bis in die allerältesten Zeiten hinauf.”<sup>64</sup> The visual portrait as manifest in Niebuhr’s four publications indeed has a tendency to favour motifs entrenched in a sense of nostalgia or historical longing – expressed via such features as ancient inscriptions, scattered ruins and the pastoral life of simple and honest people.

It might be argued that although Baurenfeind and Niebuhr’s images did not reflect Michaelis’s questions by motif, they did after all – by their general mood and setting – fulfil some of the preliminary expectations of the expedition.

## Epilogue

Based on the way Niebuhr arranged text and image, page by page, there can be little doubt that he considered the images a vital part of his publications. Niebuhr also facilitated an instructive list for the book-binder as to where the plates were to be inserted, in order to ensure them to interact properly with the written description.

64. Michaelis (1762), vorrede, p. [a6].

The French edition of the *Reisebeschreibung* from 1776-1780, *Voyage en Arabie et en d’autres pays circonvoisins*, repeats the exact number of plates which appeared in the German first edition.<sup>65</sup> Yet, by the time of the English edition *Travels through Arabia, and other countries in the East* by Robert Heron from 1792, a dramatic reduction has occurred.<sup>66</sup> Only a small handful of poorly redone plates – including a map made by “Caspar Niebuhr” – made their way into the publication. Some plates have even been “glued together” by means of combining motifs from several plates into one (Fig. 13, a combination of the motifs in Fig. 3-4).

Niebuhr’s original intentions had been watered down dramatically in Heron’s version. Although unfortunate, such disregard as to the visual documentation is by no means an uncommon occurrence in the history of (re)printing of travelogues and in the history of illustrated scholarly literature as a whole.

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65. The French volumes consulted here are by printers S.J Baalde, Amsterdam and J. van Shoonhoven & Comp., Utrecht. (Collection of Classical and Near Eastern Antiquities, The National Museum of Denmark).

66. The text given by Heron is also abbreviated and combines passages from both *Beschreibung* and *Reisebeschreibung* into one.



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