Hans Staden’s *True History and Description of a Land Belonging to a Wild, Naked, Savage, and Man-Eating People*, first published in German at Marburg in 1557, soon became a European best seller. The book recounted the adventures of Staden, a gunner from the region of Hesse, as he sailed between Europe and Brazil in the employ of Spain and Portugal. He was held captive by the Tupinambá of coastal Brazil and maneuvered his way into escape, aided by the crew of a French ship. Eve M. Duffy and Alida C. Metcalf’s *The Return of Hans Staden: A Go-between in the Atlantic World* provides a thick description of Staden’s adventures and the making of his account in a format accessible for undergraduate students. The volume is a cultural history of captivity, cross-cultural interaction, and reintegration told through the experience of a cultural intermediary between Reformation Germany and Brazil. Duffy and Metcalf synthesize rich details from across early modern social and cultural life and from recent critical scholarship on Staden, the Atlantic world, and European history.

The introduction characterizes Staden as a transactional and representational go-between, mediating between cultures on the ground, and subsequently representing and translating the culture of the Tupinambá people of Brazil to literate Europeans via the words and images of his *True History*. The reader is invited to consider travel accounts as artifacts that “help to reintegrate the traveler into the community” (1), an approach that allows the authors to bring together interpretations of the structure, rhetoric, production, and purpose of Staden’s book in subsequent chapters.

The authors begin by exploring the lure of the sea and the riches of the Indies in Reformation Germany, introducing the reader to Staden’s native land of Hesse and to the oceanic voyages out of Lisbon. In 1553, Staden became a gunner for the new Portuguese fort on Santo Amaro Island, located just off the coast of the colony at São Vicente in northeastern Brazil. The focus then shifts to Staden’s capture by warriors of the Tupinambá people, enemies of the Portuguese and their allies the Tupinikin, who held Staden captive for nine months. This chapter is less successful than the others, often appearing to take Staden at his word

---

1 Hans Staden, *Warhaftige Historia und Beschreibung eyner Landschafft der wilden nacketen grimmigen Menschenfresser Leuthen in der Newenwelt America gelegen* (Marburg, 1557).

*William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser.*, 71, no. 3, July 2014
DOI: 10.5309/willmaryquar.71.3.0467
rather than analyzing Staden’s account through other perspectives on his encounters. The authors might have drawn here on French and Portuguese accounts, ethnohistorical sources, and archaeological evidence. Duffy and Metcalf argue that “Staden stepped into a highly dangerous but powerful new role in order to survive,” that of the “transactional go-between” (55); for example, he claimed to his captors that he was French, since the French were allies of the Tupinambá, thereby buying himself valuable time to engineer his ultimate escape. The authors read Staden’s captivity narrative through his dissimulations, showing how he set out to gather information wherever possible, and to lie to both the Tupinambá and to outsiders whom they encountered whenever necessary.

On his escape and eventual return to Hesse, Duffy and Metcalf argue, Staden fashioned himself as a representational go-between. The authors draw here on Metcalf’s Go-betweens and the Colonization of Brazil, 1500–1600. Go-betweens explored the parts played by a multitude of physical, transactional, and representational go-betweens in the history of sixteenth-century Brazil. The present volume drills deep into the experience of one go-between who played multiple roles to his audiences. The core of the book focuses on Staden’s True History, unpacking two agendas that framed the account. One was Staden’s desire to measure up to the Protestant morality of Prince Philipp, Landgrave of Hesse. In order for Staden to reintegrate into Hessian society to his best advantage, he needed to demonstrate not only that his Brazilian experiences revealed his godliness and loyalty to Hesse, despite his having been in the employ of rival—even heretical—European powers, but also that these events offered a moral message to others. The authors contextualize the True History well in this confessional setting. As Lisa Voigt has argued, early modern audiences valued the perspective that cross-cultural experiences gave captives, something that is well demonstrated by Duffy and Metcalf.2

The second frame for the True History, according to the authors, is the humanist approach to texts that underpinned the methodology of Johannes Dryander, professor of medicine at the new evangelical Protestant university at Marburg, founded by Landgrave Philipp. Dryander had also served as an official interrogator and censor. In his introduction to the True History, Dryander analyzed the epistemology of eyewitnessing and attested to Staden’s moral fiber and truthfulness, noting that Staden was “questioned closely” (82) by many on his return, including Landgrave Philipp of Hesse. What Dryander implies here is that the critical, contextual analysis

2 Alida C. Metcalf, Go-betweens and the Colonization of Brazil, 1500–1600 (Austin, Tex., 2005); Lisa Voigt, Writing Captivity in the Early Modern Atlantic: Circulations of Knowledge and Authority in the Iberian and English Imperial Worlds (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2009).
of the text and the evaluation of its author allowed those who had not witnessed Brazil with their own eyes to nonetheless establish accurate knowledge of Brazil. This methodology for making knowledge about things that were distant in space shared elements of the methods of humanist textual scholarship for making knowledge about things that were distant in time.

Staden’s *True History* comprised two parts. The first is a narrative history of Staden’s experiences that is hagiographic in tone and structure. This is followed by a relatively matter-of-fact description of Brazil and the Tupinambá probably shaped by Dryander. Duffy and Metcalf show, in the fourth chapter, how these parts “enable Staden to establish his eyewitness authority while also emphasizing his suffering and ultimate salvation by an all-forgiving God” (93). The *True History* thus balanced the dual, potentially problematic identities of captive and insider in a way that added to Staden’s trustworthiness in the eyes of his audience. Duffy and Metcalf’s careful reading of the text is clear here. They note, for example, that Staden “inadvertently reveals that he must have had a wife while in captivity” (101) and that he was held in high enough esteem in the Tupinambá village to name a child. Staden’s account is, nonetheless, framed in such a way as to assure his readers and interrogators that he was merely posing as an insider, and he proffers to his audience the valuable knowledge he thus gained but without going against his faith or his people in his own mind. This was a considerable balancing act, in which he recounted his own dissimulations in Brazil while declaring the truthfulness of his account and the uprightness of his character.

Staden’s *True History* is renowned for its illustrations of cannibals, commonly held up as exemplars of the insatiable attraction of sensationalist tales of distant lands for early modern Europeans. The authors offer us a methodical iconographical analysis that does not begin with assumptions about the images’ inaccuracy or purpose but rather historicizes these images in illuminating ways. In the final chapter, they show how the woodcuts were the product of “an unusual collaboration between Staden, an artist, and a woodcutter” (112), in which Staden “intervened . . . to ensure that his eyewitness gaze was faithfully reported” (131). The cannibal imagery did not reuse stock images or themes, as an artist working alone might well have done, but constituted new woodcuts with precise iconographic details and frequent “I” clauses within them. Duffy and Metcalf also discuss Staden’s own appearance in numerous woodcuts, naked but with postures and gestures that evoke religious self-introspection and even Christ’s suffering.

Overall, this book offers an accessible commentary on the life, times, and writing of Hans Staden that integrates scholarship on early modern Europe with that of the Atlantic world. It will attract not only scholars of the Atlantic world but also readers with an interest in early modern
mentalités. The volume’s clarity and style make it well suited for nonspecialist scholars and undergraduate students. As the authors introduce new themes and characters, explanatory paragraphs on the historical background necessary for apprehending their significance and on the recent historiography on the topic bring readers up to speed on everything from Reformation Germany to the production of woodcut illustrations. Scholars of early images of the Americas and of cultural encounters, captivity, and oceanic expansion will find the material engaging.