

Georg Schuller, a Transylvanian Traveler to South Africa and Dutch East Indies (1696-1699)

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Keywords: *Georg Schuller von Schulenberg, travelogue, Cape Colony, Dutch East Indies, exotic peoples*

Abstract: *Georg Schuller (aprox. 1670 - after 1742), the author of the oldest known travelogue written by a Transylvanian on South Africa and in Southeast Asia, is known not only for his spirit of adventure and his interest in the most diverse realities from distant regions (plants, animals, traditions, forms of social organization, social relations, public administration), but also for his reflections about what he saw and details that only a careful reader could apprehend, through an analysis whose key is the issue of Otherness. Such an approach also allows the reader to access the intellectual world of the author, a moderate and tolerant evangelical Christian. His conservative religious and political views, as well as his education were typical for the Transylvanian Saxon bourgeoisie of his period. He was familiar with the imagery of the Medieval bestiaries, with the works of the most famous poets and historians of the Greek and Roman Antiquity, but also with the Baroque discourse about cultural otherness and mores, as well as with narratives about the countries at the end of the - then known - world and the peoples who inhabited them.*

The travelogues written by Hungarian or German travelers from current Romania (not only Transylvania) who visited different regions of Asia and Africa have not yet been sufficiently studied by local historical researchers, although most of these travelers produced extensive stories about the places they visited and made a contribution not only to the increasing of the museum collections, but also to a better understanding of the nature of these exotic places, as well as of the culture of the indigenous peoples inhabiting them and the cultural interaction with the European settlers. Generally, the travelogues – particularly those written before the late 19th century, when the ethnology was established as an autonomous discipline – were regarded as having a lower documentary value² and occupying an intermediate zone between the scientific literature itself and a “confirming, sentimental literary periphery”³. However, they contain a lot of interesting information on the perception

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² Maria Bozan, “Călători transilvăneni în Orient în secolul al XIX-lea: Franz Binder, Andreas Breckner, Samuel Fenichel,” *Studii și comunicări de etnologie*, 19 (2005): 73.

³ Jean Copans, *Introducere în etnologie și antropologie* (Iași: Editura Polirom, 1999), 32.