

## BOOK REVIEW

**Travel and space in nineteenth-century Europe**, by Anna P. H. Geurts, London and New York, Routledge, 2024, 259 pp., US\$190.00 (hardback), ISBN: 978-1-032-76979-0

In *Travel and Space in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Anna Geurts propels the reader back into the footsteps of nineteenth-century travellers across Europe. They convincingly reconstruct how space shaped the traveller's experience and how their journeys impacted their conceptualisation of space.

Geurts excels in recreating the practical realities of their thirty-four protagonists, who are mainly Dutch residents. The book provides, for example, a detailed analysis of what travellers brought along, how they packed their belongings, in what premises they slept and how they used their beds. Other topics include traveller's bathing facilities and habits, how they coped with extreme weather conditions, what they visited, and their social interactions while travelling. Due to its rich descriptions of nineteenth-century travel, this book will be of interest to a broad readership. While discussing these primary sources, Geurts engages with an impressively broad strand of literature in a very comprehensive manner. The everyday spatial concerns of travellers are analysed through travellers' expectations and their encounters and structured around selected themes: home, sociability, disorder, cleanliness and atmospheric conditions.

The book is based on travel accounts selected from a self-composed database and complemented with additional travelogues to fully incorporate different class and gender positions within the analysis. The latter has rarely been studied, but Geurts consistently addresses these perspectives throughout their book, for leisure as well as work-related journeys. They convincingly integrate their material into a wide range of scholarship, in particular studies in travel writing and tourism. However, some scholarship is lacking, such as references to the broad field of migration history, which could be explored in future research. An example: the discussed journeys are not always easily categorised as business or leisure travel and distinctions between travellers, tourists and migrants are not as straightforward. How mobility is shaped by different motives and produced similarities and differences in travel experiences still has to be uncovered. For instance, how did migrants, travellers and tourists deal differently with "spatial micropolitics" and overcame cultural and topographical differences, economic obstacles, time constraints, or power relations caused by gender, class and other hierarchies' (p. 2)? The fact that legal barriers are not even mentioned as a key element of the spatial realities that Geurts' protagonists faced, is striking. Legal issues sporadically pop-up (e.g., p. 67–69) but state authorities remain mostly absent despite the spectacularly expanding bureaucratic apparatus and its attached law administrators during the nineteenth century. Linking their findings to migration scholarship may help Geurts to bring the state back into the picture.

My recommendation for further research serves above all to highlight the thought-provoking nature of the book. The analysis perfectly stands without addressing migration scholarship or other lacunae which are inevitable considering the broad scope Geurts uses. The book produces numerous new insights on being away from home and what it teaches us about perceptions of home and homeliness (chapter two), for example in discussing what baggage travellers carried and how this evolved over time. Chapter three looks at the people they encountered abroad and stresses the importance of sociability over privacy

throughout the period. Visiting people were often decisive in setting the itinerary of journeys, showing the wide social networks of travellers, who at the same time attached great importance to meeting new people on the road and at their destinations. More than escaping everyday life, the journeys were embedded in the usual social networks and hierarchies that travellers came from. Yet sociability while travelling also had its limits as staying over with people was rare because travellers preferred lodging in hotels. Privacy was also clearly desired for bathing and changing clothes throughout the period. Geurts' findings show that these needs for sociability and privacy barely evolved refuting the idea that the needs for privacy during the age of modernity strongly increased. Chapters four and five deal with cleanliness, the most important spatial preoccupation of travellers throughout their journey and wherever they were, be it on transport vehicles, in accommodations, or at tourist sights. It shows that these concerns were multi-layered ranging from order, to smells, fresh air, hygiene, darkness, dirtiness, spaciousness, or newness. Geurts shows that these apprehensions were omnipresent independent of gender, class and time and discusses how travellers intervened in such matters. Finally, chapter six looks at tactile aspects of travel, mainly atmospheric conditions, such as how people dealt with cold, warmth and rain, but also with hard and cramped places. Romanticising physical experience and suffering are scarce as most travellers sought comfort as ideal. Geurts discusses in detail how travellers strived to achieve optimal conditions according to their own standards, showing that being elsewhere did not imply expectations of elevating standards. Again, comfort remained important over time and surprisingly technology did only little to directly improve comfort levels.

Geurts provides a very welcome insider's micro-perspective on how the macro societal changes and technological evolutions of the nineteenth century affected the travel experience in this key period. They show that the changes are less dramatic than macro-level analyses assume. The modernisation of space did produce more flexible, independent and tolerant travellers, yet overall Geurts stresses the continuity of how travellers interacted with space. Given the breadth of scholarship Geurts engages with, it is unfortunate that the book does not contain a bibliography to get a better overview and to identify certain gaps. A table containing biographic information of the main protagonists, the trips they undertook and the sources they left behind would have been useful as well.

While the book modestly claims to be of value to students and researchers of cultural history as well as contemporary planning and design, I would recommend the book as an enjoyable must-read for any long nineteenth-century historian and beyond.

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