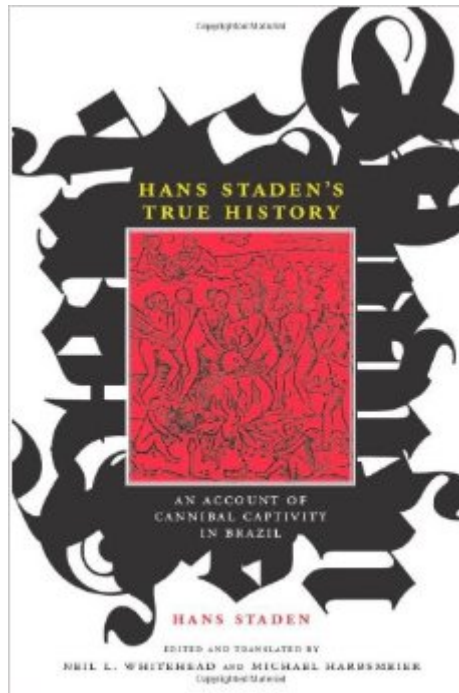


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Hans Staden's True History: An Account Of Cannibal Captivity In Brazil



Synopsis

In 1550 the German adventurer Hans Staden was serving as a gunner in a Portuguese fort on the Brazilian coast. While out hunting, he was captured by the Tupinambá, an indigenous people who had a reputation for engaging in ritual cannibalism and who, as allies of the French, were hostile to the Portuguese. Staden's True History, first published in Germany in 1557, tells the story of his nine months among the Tupi Indians. It is a dramatic first-person account of his capture, captivity, and eventual escape. Staden's narrative is a foundational text in the history and European rediscovery of Brazil, the earliest European account of the Tupi Indians, and a touchstone in the debates on cannibalism. Yet the last English-language edition of Staden's True History was published in 1929. This new critical edition features a new translation from the sixteenth-century German along with annotations and an extensive introduction. It restores to the text the fifty-six woodcut illustrations of Staden's adventures and final escape that appeared in the original 1557 edition. In the introduction, Neil L. Whitehead discusses the circumstances surrounding the production of Staden's narrative and its ethnological significance, paying particular attention to contemporary debates about cannibalism. Whitehead illuminates the value of Staden's True History as an eyewitness account of Tupi society on the eve before its collapse, of ritual war and sacrifice among Native peoples, and of colonial rivalries in the region of Rio de Janeiro. He chronicles the history of the various editions of Staden's narrative and their reception from 1557 until the present. Staden's work continues to engage a wide range of readers, not least within Brazil, where it has recently been the subject of two films and a graphic novel.

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Customer Reviews

I am fascinated by eyewitness accounts of early interactions between Europeans and indigenous peoples residing elsewhere on this earth --- which seems to be losing cultural diversity at an accelerating pace. Having reports such as Hans Staden's is a precious window into one such culture--that of a people who practiced ritual cannibalism in the region of Brazil now subsumed by Portuguese colonial society-- Rio de Janeiro. The scholarly introduction to Staden's early (16th century) account of his captivity (and how he avoided becoming the main course at a feast) is very informative, but overly long----in my opinion.

An extraordinarily detailed account of Hans Staden's captivity by Brazilian cannibals in the early 16th century, complete with reproductions of woodcuts that accompanied the original publication. This edition features a lengthy, informative, and intriguing introduction by Neil L. Whitehead, who places European accounts of cannibal cultures during early exploration of the New World at the forefront of modernist ethnography. He brilliantly exposes ways in which these early ethnographies constructed and highlighted Otherness in the newly discovered American cultures.

This is a great account of a culture that seems so foreign to the modern world. Just the fact that this account ever made it to be published hundreds of years was quite miraculous. I enjoyed the story and the carvings. The introduction was quite interesting and gave a lot of useful context to the story. However, I lost interest as it wore on (its over a third of the book). Maybe I'm not academic enough.

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