In “Libraries and Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Norway and the Outer World,” Gina Dahl offers a marvelous insight into the intellectual life of Eighteenth-Century Norway by looking at library collections in Norway. This is a clever and engaging way to understand and analyze intellectual aspects of the Enlightenment.

She surveyed 63 book collections recorded in the 18th century and counted that 9000 books were classified as *historia*, and among them 4800 were descriptions of peoples and places.

This data alone tells us a few things: first that the intellectual life in Norway was remarkably active, that the interest in *historia* was quite high, and that the attention to “the other” was pressing. Printing houses started to populate the dual-monarchy of Denmark and Norway, even if, until the Nineteenth Century, more were based in Denmark than in Norway. Libraries grew in number and size. They came to include not just theology, jurisprudence, medicine, and science, but also books on other worlds, which were the fastest growing books in Norwegians collections at the time. The books came from everywhere: from educational trips abroad to trade routes. What we do not know and are not told is how does Norway fare compared to other European countries? Is Scandinavia any different from Britain or other counties in continental Europe? Is the interest in *historia* stronger, weaker, or proportional to the rest of Europe? Is Norway unique?

Dahl does a superb job in explaining what *historia* is and what it is not. The classification *historia* has little to do with what we consider history but more to do with different genres describing different places, such as travel journals. What would have been interesting to see would have been a more detailed explanation as to why *itineraria*, or *geographia* were categorized under *historia*. A deeper contextualization of Norway in the greater European intellectual trends may have helped. It was not uncommon in the 18th century enlightenment to consider history as conjectural history and possibly interpreted in terms of stages of development. Far-away places are places where we can study history in the sense that they are places where we can study civilizations which are not as advanced as ours. Dahl mentions this, but I fear it takes for granted that all readers have a deep knowledge of 18th century theories of history, potentially leaving less expert readers with too much hidden in her engaging text.

Despite these limitations, the book is a wonderful window in how "the other" was perceived in the 18th century. Dahl makes the point to show that the earlier descriptions of "the other" tend to be harsher than the more recent ones, possibly because of an increased exposure to "others" over time. Similarly the further away "the other" is, the fewer descriptions are found and the more prejudices are present in the descriptions. The distance of "the other" is therefore both physical and emotional. Dahl highlights that "the other" is "other" mostly because he is not Christian, and more specifically mostly because he is not Lutheran. And the further away from Lutheran one is, the more "other" he is. So for example Russians are "others" because Russian orthodox rites are perceived as too different from Lutheran rites. But Africans are "barbarians" because they do not know Christianity.

From these accounts of "the other" that Dahl analyzes, she highlights the complexity of perception of "the other." The interest in other cultures is a symptom of an increase in tolerance. But while some accounts describe beautiful places and fascinating people, others concentrate more on the "barbaric" and "uncivilized" aspects of foreign cultures.

The book has two parts in addition to an introduction and a conclusion. In part one Dahl describes "the World in Libraries" giving a detailed account of the content and classification methods of Norwegian libraries as well as of the various sources of books. In the second part she describes "the World in Books" offering suggestive summaries of the most popular books on Africa, Asia, Russia