The End of Journalling. Alexander von Humboldt's "Relation historique"
as a contrasting model to the narrative travel journal

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Abstract

When Alexander von Humboldt returned to Paris in 1804 after five years of travellingpeople were full of expectations and eager to hear or read his first hand account of histravels to South America. Until then knowledge about the living conditions andinformation about the flora and fauna of South and Central America had beenminimal because of the strict Spanish colonial rule. Humboldt himself had raised theirhopes in letters to friends and colleagues which contained not only bare scientificdata but also descriptions of wonders of nature and exotic adventures Humboldt hadlived through. The expectations in regards to Humboldt's travel journal were so highthat other writers tried to fulfil them by compiling a travel report from Humboldt'sscattered publications. The first one to appear was in French by J.-Delamere "Notice d'un voyage aux tropiques, execute par M.M. Humboldt et Bonpland en 1799 ...1804", the second one was in German by F. W. Schutz "Alexander von Humboldts ...Reise um die Welt und durch das Innere von Suedamerika. Ein interessantes Lesebuch fuer die Jugend. Hamburg 1805. Humboldt himself, however, withstood thepressure exerted by his publishers and the public to write a travel journal for manyyears. It was only after ten years that he started his "Relation historique" and he wouldnever finish it, it remained a fragment. In the paper the reservations that keptHumboldt from publishing his travel journal will be examined in detail. He was of theopinion that the chronological order required by a historical travel report did not meetscientific standards. He also considered the first person narrator, who tends to takecentre-stage in a travel journal, a problematic narrative figure. How did he then dealwith the chronology of events and how does he present the "I", the person who isexperiencing and judging the nature and the people in far away countries? These arethe two aspects the paper will focus on. --