Between 1488 (Bartolomeu Dias’s rounding of the Cape of Good Hope) and 1719 (the date of publication of Peter Kolb’s book *Caput Bonae Spei Hodiernum*) over 250 narratives were published in Europe which featured descriptions of the indigenous inhabitants of the Cape, the Khoikhoi. For the most part, these descriptions took the form of travel narratives and were almost entirely negative, the Khoikhoi (or ‘Hottentots’) being depicted as barbaric, naked savages, lacking human characteristics such as speech and reason, devoid of religion, practising cannibalism and engaging in unrestrained sexual promiscuity. Although a small percentage of printed works suggested that the Khoikhoi, by virtue of their primitive nature, might share certain attributes with humanity’s first parents and thus be exemplars of innocence rather than depravity, such works were rare before the 18th century. They were, in any case, based more on the iconography of the representation of the primitive in European art rather than eyewitness observation. Overwhelmingly, therefore, written and pictorial representations of the Khoikhoi in travel narratives before 1700

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1. The title of Kolb’s book means ‘The Cape of Good Hope today’. Its subtitle, ‘Das ist, vollständige beschreibung des Afrikanischen Vorgebürges der Guten Hofnung’, explains that it is a ‘full description’ of the African indigenous inhabitants of the Cape. Throughout this chapter I have used the unpublished English translation of Kolb’s work by Major Raven-Hart, the manuscript of which is in my possession.

2. This is the estimate of Anne Good, in ‘The construction of an authoritative text: Peter Kolb’s description of the Khoikhoi at the Cape of Good Hope in the eighteenth century’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 10, 1–2 (2006), p. 64.

3. For a convenient compilation of extracts from these travel narratives, see Major R. Raven-Hart, *Before Van Riebeeck: callers at South Africa from 1488 to 1652* (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1967) and *Cape of Good Hope, 1652–1702: The first 50 years of Dutch colonisation as seen by callers*, 2 vols (Cape Town: A.A. Balkema, 1971).

were negative.\textsuperscript{5} A significant change in the representation of the Khoikhoi occurred in the 18th century. Increasingly, the Khoikhoi came to be depicted with a degree of sympathy, and joined the ranks of that growing category of humanity that enlightened Europeans came to identify as ‘noble savages’. It is the purpose of this chapter to argue that this change in opinion was largely the result of the publication of Kolb’s book about the Cape, which contained the most detailed and sympathetic description of the Khoikhoi to that date. It is also my intention to demonstrate that Kolb’s book marked an important stage in the evolution of what we might call ‘travel literature’ into a genre akin to the scientific compilation of knowledge. Of great significance here is the transformation that written culture, or established European knowledge about the Khoikhoi, underwent in the colonial context. To put it simply, the knowledge of the Khoikhoi that Kolb gained during an extended stay at the Cape changed the way that Europeans thought about the Khoikhoi. Description, based on a lengthy period of personal observation, replaced the stereotypes of travel literature. Furthermore, as I hope to demonstrate in a brief discussion of the publishing history of Kolb’s work, the material form in which his knowledge was published was also of importance to the reception of his ideas.

I. Travel writing and the Khoikhoi

European knowledge about the Cape was first published in books which, very generally, we may refer to as being travel books. That is, they were written by men who had travelled, and the books were accounts of the travels that they had made. Certain features in the genre of travel writing influenced the way the Khoikhoi were portrayed. To begin with, these travel books did not have the Cape either as the specific destination of the journey or as the specific subject of the travel account. For early European voyagers, the Cape was significant because it lay on the route to the East. It was not significant in itself. If it had an importance it was largely symbolic — it marked the place where the seafarer left the Atlantic Ocean and entered the Indian Ocean. In time, seafarers judged that the Cape lay