

Unter den drei bisher erschienenen Bänden der Geschichte der Welt ist dieser wohl der beste. Seine meisterhaften Darstellungen der großen asiatischen Reiche sind besonders beeindruckend – ebenso auch die Würdigung der geschichtsmächtigen Rolle der Weltmeere, die in dieser Periode hervortritt.

**Christoph Strobel: *The Global Atlantic. 1400 to 1900*, New York: Routledge Publishing 2015, 186 p.**

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Developing from a variety of genealogies, historiographical works adopting an ocean or sea as a framework for analysis have become more common after World War II, as early Atlantic studies and Fernand Braudel's famous work exemplify. According to Bernard Bailyn, Atlantic History's proposal consists of approaching Western Europe, West Africa and the Americas during the early modern period as a single unit, in order to address their numerous connections, mutual influences, and interdependencies. This methodological framework has the advantage of surpassing previous national and continental perspectives, both artificial and teleological. Moreover, it has opened the way for the integration of Africa, Africans and Afro-descendants, a shift influenced by the anticolonial struggles in Africa and Asia, the development of a postcolonial thinking, the emerging

of civil rights movements and the so-called double consciousness in the USA.

However, as many authors have observed, the Atlantic approach came to reproduce Eurocentric cultural geographies and to privilege the Northern Hemisphere, reflecting the Cold War political agenda of NATO. Since the 1990's, with the collapse of the USSR and the intensification of globalization, the decline of area studies has been paralleled by a growing popularity of Global and World historical approaches. As a result, especially in the last decade, a demand for a larger Atlantic has emerged. Thus, Atlantic History's chronological framework has been expanded and the Atlantic basin has been considered in a more global perspective, taking into account how it has influenced and been influenced by other regional and oceanic circuits.

Following this new tendency, Christoph Strobel's book explores the global interconnectedness of the Atlantic world, arguing that it has emerged as a globally integrated structure. Written in a textbook format, the volume provides a very concise and readable synthesis of the most recent scholarship on the field, also referring to the contribution of influential authors such as Alfred Crosby, Sidney Mintz, Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, Jerry Bentley, John Thornton, and Kenneth Pomeranz. The book consists of four chapters, followed by a chronology, an updated select bibliography, and an index. As a periodization framework, Strobel assumes three ages in the history of the Atlantic world: trans-regional exchange networks (before 1492); Atlantic Ocean system (from the late-fifteenth to the mid-eighteenth century); Global integrated system (from

the second half of the eighteenth into the nineteenth century).

Chapter 1 presents the interregional long-distance exchange networks in Afro-Eurasia and the Americas before 1492. Between the eighth and the fourteenth centuries, the Norse (or Vikings) created a decentralized network of migration and trade connecting today's Iceland, Greenland, Newfoundland, Russia, Ireland, the British Isles, northern France, the Mediterranean, the Arab world and the Byzantine Empire. In the fourteenth century, the Hanseatic League integrated merchant groups from various regions around the North and Baltic seas. The Mediterranean connected Europe, Asia, and Africa, promoting the circulation of commodities, peoples and cultures. In the fifteenth century, the Portuguese conquered several coastal towns in North Africa, in order to grow grain and access the Saharan trade in salt and gold. From the ninth to the sixteenth centuries, the empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay linked West Africa via the Niger, Senegal and Gambia rivers, also promoting the trans-Saharan trade through a sophisticated system of oases. In North America, from around two thousand years before Columbus, Mound Builders' peoples like the Adena, the Hopewell, and the Mississippians navigated the Ohio, Missouri and Mississippi rivers, developing an extensive system of trading centres across the Eastern Woodlands. In Mesoamerica and South America, the Olmecs, Mayas, Aztecs, and Incas maintained far-reaching exchange networks based on extensive agricultural and tribute systems. According to Strobel, all these older trans-regional networks would be the roots of the emerging Atlantic world.

Chapter 2 discusses Afro-Eurasian interactions in the making of the Atlantic world. Unlike many authors, Strobel addresses Eurasia and Africa together. First he explains how the Mediterranean basin promoted the circulation of nautical knowledge between Arabic, Turkish and European peoples. It was also the cradle of the plantation system, combining enslavement and sugar production as early as the twelfth century. Taking advantage of this navigational and farming expertise, in the fifteenth century Portuguese and Castilians colonized the Atlantic archipelagos, also building forts on the West African coast to access commodities like gold, pepper, ivory, and slaves. In order to do so, they had to obtain the permission of local rulers, and to negotiate with local elites and intermediaries, as endemic diseases kept them confined to coastal enclaves. Strobel convincingly demonstrates how West Africa was integrated in a truly global Atlantic economy, trading cloth from the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan regions, glass beads and metal from Europe, alcohol and tobacco from the Americas, textiles from India and China, and cowries from the Maldives. And yet, during the early modern age Africans managed to control much of their commercial interactions and did not depend on European products. Moreover, they were the majority of migrants in the Americas and the most disease resistant group in the Atlantic world.

Chapter 3 addresses the Afro-European colonization of the Americas and the connection between the Atlantic and the Pacific basins through the Spanish Manila Galleons, created to compete with the Portuguese Indian Ocean route. As we know, the European conquest of the Americas

benefited from the impact of Afro-Eurasian diseases on indigenous populations, as well as from the rivalries between native peoples. However, Strobel reminds us that for a long time the hinterlands of the continent remained largely out of colonial control. The huge amount of American silver and gold obtained through the *encomienda* system and enslaved African labour enabled the Spanish to obtain spices in Southeast Asia and to access a great variety of Chinese and other Asian goods, such as porcelain, silk, gemstones, furniture, carpets, perfumes, pepper, cinnamon, and tea. Nevertheless, Europeans were minor commercial partners in Asia, and even in the Spanish-dominated Philippines much of the trade was conducted by resident Chinese merchants. Strobel also discusses the so-called Columbian exchange: the intense exchange of goods, crops, animals and insects that took place in the early modern period. For instance, Afro-Eurasian diseases spread into the Americas, and the diffusion of many South American crops such as maize, manioc and potatoes fed Europeans, Africans and Asians, enabling an increase in the world population. Chapter 4 examines the connections between the Atlantic world and the Indian Ocean system, the most important trade zone in the world from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries. In spite of the maritime power of the Portuguese, Dutch, English, French, Swedish and Danish fleets, until the eighteenth century Europeans were largely confined to coastal forts and surrounding territories in Asia, and local potentates and merchants controlled the trade routes overland. According to Strobel, Europeans actually played the role of intermediaries in the Indian Ocean

trade, being even financed by Asian traders and financiers. They had to obtain huge amounts of silver and sugar in the Americas to be able to purchase spices, saltpetre, cotton and silk fabrics, gemstones and other luxury goods in Asia. Across the continents, new products generated new demands, and production areas started following the consumption demands from far away overseas markets. In cultural terms, the translation of Confucius' writings into Latin had a dramatic influence on several Enlightenment intellectuals in Europe. The reverse was also true, as Europe had a significant influence on Chinese science and art. From the late eighteenth century on, industrialization and technological innovations in communication, transportation, weaponry, and medicine enabled the Northern Atlantic powers to take control of larger colonial areas and to dominate global trade. As a result, by the nineteenth century the Atlantic world had become integrated into world history.

Despite assuming Europeans as pivotal intermediaries, this book does not project an anachronistic prevalence, underlining the limits of European domination and influence in Africa, Asia and the Americas until at least the mid-eighteenth century. The author also avoids focusing on the North Atlantic, referring to the Iberian, African, Native American and Asian agency. On the whole, Strobel considers the Atlantic framework still to be a valid one, although he asserts the need to analyse its broader networks, even proposing the concept of Global Atlantic. In this regard, it would be valuable to mention the problems and possibilities addressed over the last decade by authors like David Eltis, Alison Games, Peter Coclanis, Nicholas Canny, and Jorge

Cañizares-Esguerra. Paradoxically, for a work which claims a more global approach, the bibliography includes references in the English language only. Nevertheless, through its enjoyable narrative, this book provides a comprehensive and useful overview on the global currents of the Atlantic world.<sup>1</sup>

Note:

- 1 On the topic see also: D. Eltis, *Atlantic History in Global Perspective*, in: *Itinerario* 23 (1999), pp. 141-161; A. Games, *Atlantic Constraints and Global Opportunities*, in: *History Compass* 1 (2003), pp. 1-4; P. Coclanis, *Atlantic World or Atlantic/World?*, in: *William and Mary Quarterly* 63 (2006), pp. 725-742; J. Cañizares-Esguerra / E. Seeman (eds.), *The Atlantic in Global History, 1500-2000*, Upper Saddle River 2006; N. Canny, *Atlantic History and Global History*, in: J. Greene / M. Philip (eds.), *Atlantic History. A Critical Appraisal*, Oxford 2009, pp. 317-336; K. Kupperman, *The Atlantic in World History*, New York 2012.

**Alexander Kraus / Martina Winkler (Hrsg.): Weltmeere. Wissen und Wahrnehmung im langen 19. Jahrhundert (Umwelt und Gesellschaft, Bd. 10), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2014, 253 S.**

Rezensiert von  
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Für kleinere Teilgebiete der Geschichtswissenschaft ist die Frage nach der Strategie gegenüber dem historiographischen Mainstream eine Gretchenfrage. Abgrenzung unter Verweis auf die spezifischen Beson-

derheiten des eigenen Forschungsbereichs ermöglicht eine hohe Spezialisierung um den Preis einer relativen Randständigkeit innerhalb der Fachdisziplin. Annäherung verspricht eine größere Wahrnehmung in der Breite um den Preis einer Reduktion von Differenzierung in der Tiefe. Historiker und Historikerinnen der maritimen Geschichte haben sich oft für den ersten Weg entschieden und dieses Teilgebiet damit in ein Dilemma geführt, wie Alexander Kraus und Martina Winkler konstatieren: Eine maritime Geschichte, die vehement auf einer grundsätzlichen Spezifität ihres Forschungsgegenstands „Meer“ beharrt, begünstigt nicht nur ihre eigene Marginalisierung, sondern trägt auch zu dem misslichen Umstand bei, dass der historiographische Mainstream in seiner Beschäftigung mit dem Maritimen wieder und wieder auf die immer gleichen Fragen zurückfällt. (S. 11–13) Einen Ausbruch aus dieser unbefriedigenden „Schleifenbewegung“ (S. 12) versprechen sich die Herausgeber vom zweiten Weg. Im vorliegenden Sammelband haben sie zu diesem Zweck elf gegenstandsbezogene Untersuchungen zu maritimen Themen zusammengestellt, die auf einen boomenden Forschungstrend aufspringen: die Wissensgeschichte. Mit dieser Herangehensweise wollen sie sich weniger in die klassische maritime Geschichte einreihen als vielmehr eine „kulturelle Meeresforschung“ anregen, die inner- wie interdisziplinäre Anschlussfähigkeit verspricht.

Räumlich will sich der Band nicht auf eines der Weltmeere beschränken lassen. Kohärenz stellt er durch einen engen zeitlichen Rahmen her, der das 19. Jh. – ganz überwiegend dessen zweite Hälfte – und die ersten Dekaden des 20. Jh.s umfasst.