Review Essay

Sean Metzger. *The Chinese Atlantic. Seascapes and the Theatricality of Globalization*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020. 274pp. ISBN: 978-0253047366. $75.00 hardcover.
Karel Davids. *Global Ocean of Knowledge, 1660–1860: Globalization and Maritime Knowledge in the Atlantic World*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. 344pp. ISBN: 978-1350142138. £85.00 hardcover.

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> I imagine the French themselves would have been sorry if they had destroyed this fine instrument, for the realms of science, and the acquisition of invention are open to all, and they will share with us the improvements of navigation and the ascertainment of geography.

Elizabeth Montagu's comment in 1760, when Britain and France were combatants in the Seven Years' War (1756–63), on John Harrison's chronometer captures a theme of this review, that of the interplay of knowledge and rivalry.

The two very different books under consideration show the many possibilities to be gained from oceanic history, more particularly that of the Atlantic. Each is of interest, but more of the review will be devoted to the Davids book which is the longer and more historical work. The Pacific is the world's largest ocean but, partly due to its size and to the attitudes of the ruling élites of the major states on its periphery, was singularly little crossed in its entirety until the late eighteenth century. Indeed, the Pacific only really became a unit with the "opening up" of China and Japan in the late nineteenth, and with subsequent trade and migration.

The Atlantic, the world's second largest body of water, making up about a quarter of the Earth's water surface, is more compact, especially east-west, than the Pacific or, for that matter, the Indian Ocean. Moreover, after a Norse period that extended only briefly to North America, the Atlantic has had a close linkage east-west since the end of the fifteenth century, which provides a way to look at one of the major means and regions of global history, and to do so in a period that co-exists with that history. Indeed, the opening of the Atlantic world was one of the aspects, almost conditions, of modernity, and notably so if a non-Asian account of modernity is advanced, although that is an increasingly problematic approach. Davids and Metzger deal with the development of knowledge of the ocean during this period of modernity, but do so drawing on different disciplinary emphases and literatures, and also with the focus on differing periods and, indeed to a degree, Atlantics.

Karel Davids, Professor Emeritus of Economic and Social History at the Vrije Universitat Amsterdam, has been engaged with the history of knowledge for many years, publishing relevant works respectively, in 2008 and 2013, on the technology, economy and culture of the Netherlands in 1350–1800, and the relationship between religious contexts and technological development in China and Europe between about 700 and 1800. His new work focuses essentially again on a study in the history of knowledge, rather than the Atlantic itself.

It is a valuable study, although significant problems arise from the degree to which sections of the book have been presented as workshop papers, a necessary process but one that possibly could and should have seen further rewriting in order to cut out irritating repetitiveness, and meld the book together and make it sturdy like the ships that successfully sailed the Atlantic; many of course foundered. Moreover, Davids does not really move adequately from generalities to specifics, and quotations and examples that he does not include, can readily be added. Alongside instances similar to that cited by Montagu (a quotation not in the book), there were others that were different.

The impact of the accelerating process of globalization on the growth of maritime knowledge, as well as the obverse, provides the essential dynamic of Davids' book, with knowledge conceived in a broad sense, although with a sophisticated conceptual awareness of the methodological difficulties involved in terms of both knowledge and globalization. He selects the period 1660–1860 as it is the age of developed networks before the transformation of steam. Some readers, however, might be unconvinced by the distinction between a first Atlantic, of the Iberian peoples, and the second, in which Britain, France and the Dutch all played a significant role. Nevertheless, in practice, it is valuable not only to delimit the age of Atlantic sail (as also later with steam) but also to separate it up for purposes of analysis. Yet, at the same time, it is necessary to accept the important degree of significant overlap with the earlier period. Moreover, this overlap included the extent to which Iberian maritime knowledge was acquired, directly or indirectly, by Northern European navigation and governments.

Davids argues that ocean-related knowledge expanded markedly in 1660–1730, with France in particular acquiring more information and deploying it for political, economic and religious purposes: as he notes, the religious orders, notably the Jesuits, Franciscans and Dominicans, provided a crucial means of information acquisition and transmission, especially for Spain and France. From 1730, Davids detects a decline in the importance of the religious systems and, instead, the significance of governments, trading companies, and self-organized, cross-imperial networks. Moreover, Davids recognizes a shift from 1730 toward the Atlantic world as increasingly a single space for the exchange of knowledge, for example on best medical practices at sea.

That idea of a single space of course makes no sense from the perspective of Morocco. Indeed, Davids, like other writers on the Atlantic, has far too little to say about Atlantic Africa, which tends to emerge in terms of the significant subject of slavery.

As Davids does not adequately note, alongside knowledge, power was at stake, especially with regard to exploration; and all aspects of naval activity were understood in that light. Thus, the active British charting of North American waters in the 1760s and 1770s was designed to secure not only trade but also the capacity for force-projection. Thus, the knowledge pursued as power by the British state was very much knowledge located in the oceanic sphere.

As a result of Harrison's chronometer, Davids notes, navigators were able to calculate their positions far more accurately, which made it easier for mapmakers to understand, assess, and reconcile, the work of their predecessors. Initially, chronometers supplemented the earlier practices of dead reckoning and lunar observation, rather than immediately driving them out, but they were swiftly used, including by James Cook, as well as by Captain Constantine Phipps on his failed voyage towards the North Pole in 1773, a voyage that disproved the idea that the sea did not freeze because of its salt content. This voyage was another instance of the unsuccessful attempt to match for the North Atlantic the routes to other oceans offered by the South Atlantic. There were also improvements in the method for finding latitude more precisely.

Aside from charts of the ocean, maps of its coastline also improved during the period. Indeed, the coastline of the South Atlantic was increasingly explored. In particular, there was a search for Pepys Island which was alleged in 1683 by William Crowley, a privateer, to lie about 230 nautical miles (260 miles) north of the Falkland Islands, and was probably a misidentified account of the latter, one that found its way into travel accounts, such as William Hacke's *Collection of Original Voyages* (1699) and maps. It may have been Puig, a phantom island that the French believed to exist.

In 1764, Captain John Byron, who had sailed on Anson's voyage, being shipwrecked off Chile, was sent to find Pepys Island, which was seen as a potential base on the route to the Pacific. There was no island, but Byron in 1765 explored the coast of Patagonia, an area well to the south of the Spanish settlements in the Plate estuary and also sailed to the Falkland Islands before going on into the Pacific. On his return in 1766, there were reports that the crew had met nine-foot giants in Patagonia, and this led to the frontispiece illustration in the 1767 published account of the circumnavigation. Earlier voyages, including those of Magellan, Drake, and Cavendish had also claimed to encounter such giants. The reports were countered by the official account of Byron's voyage which appeared in 1773. 1767

had also seen a French corvette make the first full survey of the Tristan da Cunha archipelago.

Meanwhile, information on the region increased, notably with *A Description of Patagonia and the adjoining parts of South America* (1774) based on the papers of the English Jesuit missionary Thomas Falkner. Falkner (1707–84) was typical of the lives that crisscrossed the Atlantic, eroding national boundaries, although the harsh treatment of non-Europeans frequently limited this process. Brought up as a Calvinist in Manchester and trained as a surgeon, Falkner took a post as a surgeon on a ship taking slaves to Buenos Aires where, falling ill, he was cared for by the Jesuits, becoming a Jesuit missionary to the native peoples in Patagonia. In 1768, the Jesuits were expelled from the Spanish empire, and Falkner returned to England to minister as a Catholic priest. In Argentina, he had been employed by the Spanish government in 1750 to draw a map of the coast from south of Brazil to Tierra del Fuego which was printed in 1761. His 1774 book was translated into French, German, and Spanish.

The first decades of the nineteenth century saw a continuing increase in the intensity of Atlantic interconnectedness, extension of networks, and velocity of flows of ships, people, and goods; although the role of imperial systems declined or, at least, changed with the wars of independence between 1775 and 1825. This decline was linked to knowledge becoming increasingly collectivized and shared, which he argues was a necessity for a liberal trading regime.

As far as types of knowledge are concerned, Davids sees phase differences between changes in various fields, differences related to variations in capabilities and limitations, with techniques, resources, and frictions all playing a role. As he points out, the depths of the Atlantic were still largely unknown in the 1860s, and this was a significant issue in the laying of telegraph cables. With reference to the alternate leadership of Britain and France in medical science, hydrography and the determination of longitude, Davids underlines the extent to which leading roles in specific fields of maritime knowledge could change, and also interact with the tensions between professional and interest groups, such as men of science and naval officers. However, he also argues that disparities in knowledge did not persist for long. This process he claims was encouraged by the slackening of ideological and national rivalries in the world of knowledge, a situation that contrasted with that in the twentieth century during the Cold War in particular.

There is a chronological overlap between the Davids and Metzger books, but more significantly a conceptual contrast. Metzger, Professor in the School of Theater, Film, and Television at University of California, Los Angeles, presents in effect a work about interdisciplinary performance studies that is also an instance of them. Building on his existing work on current Chinese culture, especially of a conceptually novel and outward looking type, Metzger is interested in the social

reproduction of Chineseness and more particularly by Chinese migrants and entrepreneurs. Thus, the Atlantic, more particularly the Caribbean, becomes a setting for a new insular, in the shape of new Chinese communities, but also a setting there for both interaction with the local and a meditation on a strand of the global in the shape of the new key nature of Chinese culture(s). Film, photography, art including screen installations, writing, and, most excitingly, tai chi, all play a role. As with many works of this type, it is unclear how typical the texts are, but as a discussion of a range of texts with which we will mostly lack familiarity, there is a feel of the exciting, even entrancing about some of the material. Linked to this there are apt and interesting illustrations, some in color.

This volume may appear to have nothing to do with that of Davids, but that is not the case. Instead, there is an important overlap in the shape of forms of knowledge and their representation. Metzger is particularly good at searching for understandings of capitalism, oppressiveness, and other tensions, in the modern world order, and if there is at times a somewhat instrumentalist account of some of his individual texts, the overall impression is one of a fruitful flux of creativity. Davids looks more to systems than to texts, and he scarcely is interested in the alternative knowledge-sets of outsiders, for example slaves, or indeed former slaves, notably in Haiti. Nevertheless, each capture the value of the Atlantic as a setting for scholarly discussion of the storm-tossed diversity of the past. Metzger's book, however, would be better if it could include the specificities of the positive and negative responses to the expansion of Chinese political influence in the region. This can be seen in parts of Atlantic Africa, notably Angola and Equatorial Guinea, but is most pronounced in the wider Caribbean, including Guyana. The Chinese have developed links with a number of states, including Barbados, but there have also been serious differences, notably with Jamaica, over the terms imposed on loans. It would be helpful if works on cultural images and nodes can include a presentation of the resonances of political specificities.

So also with Davids' book. While aware of great-power competition, it underplays its significance, and would have been illuminated by more of an understanding of the same interaction with Atlantic oceanography during the Cold War. Ultimately, knowledge was very much not a free-floating variable.