

## **WSIP Compiled Abstracts**

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### **Virginia Aksan**

Department of History, McMaster University

WSIP seminar September 2012 – abstract

My contribution to the WSIP 2012 seminar will take up three inter-related nodes of convergence implied by the recent work in world history (circa 1500) around the need for a social (as contrasted to a material) history of the world (Pomeranz) and an inter-imperial interdisciplinary dialogue on cultural exchanges (Doyle). Current work on violence, which has developed templates while insisting on the distinct regionalism of its appearance and evolution, has important implications for the history of military formations and the cycles of war. It also allows for cross-cultural comparisons around rebellions – each with its own cause and ethnic resonance, but evolving in cyclical patterns around kinds of organizational & social behaviors. A second node is the global significance of migration and the question of labor - which brings together fascinating work on Mediterranean slavery, peasant production, and diachronic comparisons across the spectrum from slavery to wage labor, and the transformation of the human condition via international law, treaty, and individual and collective agency. Finally, the study of empire as an organic and permanent aspect of human civilization allows for all sorts of cross-imperial examinations of the relationship between political negotiations & cultural transformations, which has an impact on our understanding of the origins of wars, rebellions, and the agency of ethnic and religious populations. The ambiguity of identities in the fluid and mobile worlds of violence, warfare and labor seems a ripe topic for cross-imperial analysis through the gender/masculinity lens. (Strasser/Tinsman).

### **Joselyn Almeida-Beveridge**

Department of English, UMass Amherst

Literature, Atlantic Studies, and World History

My work on Romantic and Victorian literatures within the context of Atlantic Studies participates

in the general turn towards area studies that Kenneth Pomeranz identifies as “another route to world history.” Although the turn to the Atlantic World as a unit of analysis, began for historians in the early 1990s and reached a peak in the last decade, as Eric Slauter chronicles, its resurgence within literary studies manifests several of the same aims as those Pomeranz outlines, developing “agendas beyond the nation... Either process may involve studying regional units defined by being zones of interaction rather than by any presumption of a shared “mainstream” heritage, networks of people who live in multiple regions without being dominant in any one of them .... as well as more specific flows of goods, capital, ideas, diseases and so forth” (71). In bringing together Britain, Africa, and Latin America through the construct of the pan-Atlantic, my work has sought to add heteroglossia to the otherwise monolingual models of the Black Atlantic and the circum-Atlantic by mapping the material, authorial, and textual networks and that interconnected Britain and the Hispanic world outside. This project also goes beyond event-driven historiography and literary history, which in light of Britain and Spain’s alliance against Napoleon, tend to focus on the Peninsular War and its aftermath. As helpful as these histories are in delineating the broad contours of an Atlantic Anglo-Hispanic imaginary, they finally reaffirm the potency of the nation as an organizing category. Yet they cannot account in depth, for example, for what Pomeranz terms “the multidirectionality of influences” (78).

The work of José Blanco White speaks to this multidirectionality within Romanticism, a movement traditionally identified with the rise of the nation state. An intellectual and writer who befriended Robert Southey, the leading Hispanist in Britain, as well as other leading members of the Hispanic diaspora in Britain, such as Andrés Bello, who would come to be considered one of the principal voices of Latin American literature, Blanco bridged British and Hispanic worlds (broadly understood here to include Spain and the Americas). While I am interested in examining how Blanco as an author problematizes categories of nation and identity by pluralizing the languages of Romanticism and thereby multiplying the networks of readers and contexts in which he can be read, my paper also interprets Blanco’s translation of William Wilberforce’s Letter on the Abolition on the Slave Trade (1807) to explore some of the productive tensions Slauter outlines in his analysis of how historians and literary scholars read each other’s work.

#### Works Cited

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### **Sahar Amer**

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Reading Medieval French Literature from a Global Perspective

#### Abstract

This paper outlines the process, implications and ethics of reading medieval French literature from a global perspective. I suggest that such a reading requires a redefinition of two core theoretical categories, that of cultural and literary transmission, and that of intertextuality. Citing my research into medieval French and Arabic gender and sexuality and into the medieval fable tradition, I show that literary transmission in the Middle Ages was fragmented rather than direct and that cross-cultural literary transmission and production is above all a process of selection, cross-fertilization, and transformation. My research also shows that intertextuality in the Middle Ages operates at both direct (interlinguistic) and indirect (intercultural) levels, hence questioning the traditional dichotomies of "inside" and "outside," text and context. By focusing on the dialogic exchanges between medieval French and Islamicate cultures, on moments of interaction and collaboration but also of contestation and subversion, I highlight the challenges, but also the usefulness of re-reading medieval French literature through an Islamicate lens.

### **Eric Chaney**

Harvard University

Institutions, Political Power and Institutional Change before 1500 CE

#### Abstract

*Recent research in economics and political science attributes long-term divergence in economic and institutional outcomes to the actions of rent-seeking political elites. This paper surveys recent work on institutional divergence between Western Europe and the Islamic world before 1500 CE. The paper then explores the interface of cultural beliefs with these institutions to explore the extent to which the existing materialist bent of the literature ignores important determinants of both economic and political outcomes. I conclude that although some differences in cultural beliefs may have been more endogenous than previously recognized, the interaction between cultural beliefs and institutional outcomes remains an exciting area for future research.*

## **Christopher Chase-Dunn**

University of California-Riverside

“The Evolution of Systemic Logics”

In order to perceive major transformations in the logic of social change it is necessary to adopt an anthropological framework that compares small-scale human societies with larger and more complex societies that have emerged and that compares complex civilizations with one another and studies their interlinkages. Much of recent thinking about long-term social change has been premised on the rejection of functionalism. The evolutionary structural-functionalism of Talcott Parsons (1966; 1971) was vague and implied that the Harvard Faculty Club, like earlier English redoubts at Oxford and Cambridge, was the highest form of human civilization. But the idea of evolution can be applied without any assumptions about superiority or progress.

Hall and Chase-Dunn (2006; see also Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997) have modified the concepts developed by the scholars of the modern world-system to construct a theoretical perspective for comparing the modern system with earlier regional world-systems. The most important idea that comes out of this theoretical perspective is that transformational changes in institutions, social structures and developmental logics are brought about mainly by the actions of individuals and organizations within polities that are **semiperipheral** relative to the other polities in the same system. Semiperipherality is the position of some of the polities in a core/periphery hierarchy. One of my key arguments in this paper is that some of the polities that are located in semiperipheral positions become the agents that form larger chiefdoms, states and empires by means of conquest (semiperipheral marcher polities), and some specialized trading states in between the tributary empires promoted production for exchange in the regions in which they operated. So both the spatial and demographic scale of political organization and the spatial scale of trade networks were expanded by semiperipheral polities, eventually leading to the global system in which we now live.

## **Frederick Cooper**

New York University

Empires Old and New

Abstract

That political commentators evoke empires of the distant past—Charlemagne's and Chinngis's as well that of Rome—to make a point about the present often leads to tendentious claims, but it does indicate discomfort with a view of world history as a long movement from empires to nation-states. My paper, based on my book with Jane Burbank, Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference, argues that an "inter-empire" perspective provides a better viewpoint on the mid-20th century as well as the 9<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, or 16<sup>th</sup>. Political ideas generated in different periods and contexts, including those of popular sovereignty and self-determination, played out within contexts shaped by a small number of powers, all with

resources drawn from diverse territories and peoples. The paper argues as well that an inter-empire perspective provides a fruitful alternative to the metanarrative of an "expansion of Europe" or to arguments for a "colonial modernity" in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries distinct from other forms of empire. And it points to the importance in the most recent past of exploring the efforts to people to find alternatives to both empire and nation-state.

## **Jane Hwang Degenhardt**

University of Massachusetts Amherst

### Global Trade and Early English Empire: Inter-imperialism and the Pursuit of Gold on the Renaissance Stage

Viewing the early modern world-system as a precursor to modern-day globalization, I address the question of how England's early participation in global trade informed its fashioning of itself as an empire. While the dominant narrative of early British imperialism centers around colonial expansion in the Americas, it seems important to recognize not only how participation in eastern trade contributed to the formation of British empire, but also how the English viewed their engagement in global trade in relation to other models of empire, and in particular colonial empires. Approaching this topic from the discipline of Renaissance literary study, I present a case study of Thomas Heywood's stage play *The Fair Maid of the West*, Part I (c. 1600). In this play, a lowborn English barmaid turns into a seafaring adventurer and grows rich by plundering Spanish ships. Deemed a "girl worth gold" by the King of Morocco, she refuses to allow *herself* to be bought, even for all the gold in Barbary. As critics have argued, Bess earns her gold through her virtue and ultimately functions as a unifying symbol of the English nation. But how might Bess's comparison to gold also conjure negative attributes associated with gold digging? In the discourse of the Black Legend, gold was associated Spain's colonial exploitation of the mines of South America and the cruel treatment of the Amerindians. Employing an inter-imperial analysis, I argue that Heywood's play purifies the English pursuit of gold by celebrating its repossession from the Spanish and by further offering an English model for accumulating economic wealth through a trade relationship with Morocco that is shown to be antithetical to Spanish colonialism. Building upon Barbara Fuchs's work on imperial mimesis, I examine how Heywood's play participates in empire building by imagining English empire in contra-distinction to Spain and more particularly in ways that set North African trade against New World colonialism. I demonstrate how an inter-imperial framework brings not just Spain and Morocco into view, but also the absent Amerindians and the imperially-dominant Ottoman empire, illuminating a larger economic and imperial force field that extends beyond the frame of the play.

## **Barbara Fuchs**

UCLA

World Histories/Metahistories

Using Spain as my example, I complicate the distinction between materialist and cultural histories (Pomeranz, Strasser and Tinsman), while foregrounding the long-term implications of inter-imperial rivalries (Fuchs 2001, 2003, Doyle 2012). I show how the *material culture* of Iberia after the fall of Granada in 1492 remained profoundly tied to the world of Al-Andalus, despite Spain's attempts to distance itself from its "Moorish" history. World history, I suggest, must attend not just to historical events but to their rhetorical construction, if it is to account for the complex and enduring legacies of early modernity. Powerful discursive apparatuses such as the Black Legend and orientalism require particular attention, as they color our view of world history across the centuries. Via a reading of Edward Said's glancing account of Spanish imperialism in *Orientalism*, I show how complex is the imbrication between these discourses.

## **Sergey Glebov**

Smith College & Amherst College

Abstract:

My paper explores the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Northern Eurasia. Traditionally, both Russian and Western historiography saw the 17<sup>th</sup> century as the time of crises (viewed from the perspective of early 18<sup>th</sup> century Europeanizing reforms by Peter the Great). In this paper, I argue that, in fact, 17<sup>th</sup> century Muscovy was an extraordinarily successful early modern state as it transformed itself from a petty principality on the edges of Poland-Lithuania into a sprawling empire. This transformation hinged on several developments, such as the ability to mobilize human and economic resources and offer its population a working political model. Even more importantly, Muscovy's success appears to have been dependent on utilizing different forms of organization of imperial space and making social and political differences operational. If in Ukraine Moscow offered Ukrainian Cossacks a "Habsburg style" arrangement based on formal autonomy and privileges, in the Volga region and Siberia Moscow tsars appeared to follow in the footsteps of the Mongols, implementing what became a system of "yasak," tribute based subjecthood. Since the expansion into Siberia was economically and strategically key to Moscow's transformation, I discuss Muscovite expansion in Northern Eurasia in the context of fur trade, resource acquisition, and steppe politics.

**Holly E. Hanson**

Mount Holyoke College

“Seeking the Not Inevitable History of Global Inequality”

This essay explores how we might create a history of global inequality which provides insights not only into the processes which have generated inequality, but also, how those processes might be reversed. Placing history in a time frame that includes the future, combining micro and macro history, and carefully interrogating the categories we use to think about social processes can be powerfully effective in explaining how humanity transformed the 1 to 3 income gap of 1820 into the 1 to 72 income gap of the present. The essay uses the long history of political authority in Uganda to exemplify the erasure of process in what Dirlik calls “spaces that conventionally have been rendered into containers of history”. In southern Uganda, what is generally seen as a process of Weberian bureaucratization glosses as progressive a loss of people’s ability to act for themselves, and the decline of a political system premised on reciprocal obligation, whose ghosts haunt the politics of the present.

**John Higginson**

UMass-History

“Revolutions Then and Now”

Abstract for WSIP Paper

African slavery, the earlier bullion crisis of the latter fifteenth century, and the consequent hyperinflation of the Price Revolution of the sixteenth, compelled the aristocracy and other possessors of great wealth in the West Atlantic countries to think of human labor as something almost as important as precious metals in the maintenance of wealth. The wealth generated by the slave trade and slavery was powerfully destructive of mercantilist conceptions of how an economy should be organized and the place of aristocratic privilege in the maintenance and organization of the state. African slavery and plantation agriculture demonstrated that human labor could also generate new riches as well as maintain previously accumulated wealth. But as the boundaries and quantities of the new kind of wealth expanded in, say, England, France and the Netherlands and in their overseas colonies, new conceptions of personal freedom and political power, which had grown markedly during the Reformation and Thirty Years War, arrived at an impasse. The English Civil War, which played itself out in several guises between 1640 and 1688, broke this impasse gave a political meaning to Galileo and Johan Kepler’s conception of revolution.

**Maghan Keita**

Villanova University

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WSIP

ABSTRACT

## AFRICA AND THE WORLD

### A RECONSIDERATION OF THE MEDIEVAL

Imagine the histories of the medieval world--the acts and the products--if Africa and peoples of African descent were seriously considered. The argument offered here suggests that a fundamentally different set of discourses would result even if only the most familiar and conventional of the primary sources were re-read and re-analyzed with Africa as the lens.

What would be revealed is not simply Africa as a bonafide subject of the histories of the medieval world, but also as an epistemological reservoir, a source of historiographic conceptualizations, and a space out of which authors of African descent produced rich bodies of knowledge. In such a context, this intellectual production would be recognized as having helped shape the medieval world. Such a recognition would also have profound impact on our present condition, and our future possibilities and potential.

**Richard Lim**

Department of History, Smith College

I propose to explore why current emphases on global studies have as yet made but a small impact on the field of ancient history and will take on a particular topic, the history of Manichaeism (cp. Liu 2011 on Buddhism and Islam) as a case in point to demonstrate the challenges of a world history approach to the study of late antiquity, my own area of specialty. Two notable areas where ancient studies, and Roman studies in particular, has incorporated wider analytical horizons can be found in the renewed emphasis on Mediterranean trade with the "East" as part of the trans-Eurasian network of contact and exchange now termed the silk road (Christian 2000) and attempts to undertake comparative studies of empires, such as Qin/Han China and Rome, that mostly examine their respective imperial structures and ideologies only (cp. Doyle 2012). These efforts belie the fact that considerable obstacles, ranging from scholarly formation to the pull of Mediterranean-centric and regional approaches, stand in the way of classical studies taking on world history perspectives in a meaningful and fulsome way. My paper will address a select number of these considerations as well as briefly examine how the study of Manichaeism speaks to the promise and challenge of overlaying a trans-Eurasian (or world history) analytical and narrational frame on the material.

**Lydia H. Liu**

Columbia University

The Moral Economy of Material Culture in World History

I agree with scholars of world history that the study of world historical processes can reveal *longue durée* patterns that single empire studies tend to obscure, whether or not one chooses to endorse the world systems hypothesis. In an interesting self-reflective moment, Pomeranz criticizes a strong materialist bent in world history and suggests several possibilities for integrating social history into world historical studies. To that critique, I might add that I see a strong emphasis on the narrative of causality--that sacred cow of historical writing--which historians of nation states and world historians equally share. By wresting the narrative of causality from the hands of nation-state historians, one obtains a different picture of how things “out there” happened on global scale or in several different registers. Yet, in Pomeranz’s characterization of the situation, what could be more “theoretically and methodologically conservative” than the insistence on a certain logic of causality? I hope this familiar epistemological move will be made visible and debated as a method problem in the workshop discussion.

One of the specific challenges to the multiple relationships among the material, the political, and the cultural fields in what Doyle calls “inter-imperial analysis” is how to understand the moral economy of material culture in the expansion of empires and imperial interactions. I have a few preliminary speculations to offer in my study of the eighteenth-century rivalries between Europe and China on the value of *kaolin* and *petuntse*--the exotic material used in the production of fine porcelain—and the role of heat as a physical property (fusibility and vitrification), etc. Apart from my earlier study of Defoe and *Robinson Crusoe*, I will extend my inquiry of laboratory tests to a broader analysis of 18<sup>th</sup> century English literature that obsessed over the moral implications of imported goods and their incommensurable values.

**Luís Madureira**

University of Wisconsin Madison

A Subaltern Empire? Portugal’s Expansion into Asia

Abstract:

Taking as its point of departure a critique of Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s influential hypothesis that Portuguese colonialism has been historically subaltern with respect to the colonial projects of other major European powers, this paper seeks to lay the

groundwork for an alternate orientation for Portuguese or Lusophone postcolonial studies. Among the questions it raises concerning Santos's hypothesis is whether his proposed articulation of an "exceptional" Lusophone postcolonialism is not only located in the former metropolis but also reproduces in a post-colonial context the rhetoric of colonial specificity employed by Portugal's authoritarian colonial regime. Concomitantly, the paper interrogates the unqualified ascription of the term colonialism to account for such ambiguous contexts and situations as the experiences of Portuguese tradesmen in Asia, those who functioned as middlemen between African chiefs and Portuguese merchants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and settled into African inland communities, usually married local women and followed African laws and customs, often submitting to the chief's sovereignty. It concludes by indicating the eurocentrism underpinning Santos's definition of Portuguese colonialism as "subaltern," since it is predicated exclusively on the relation between Portugal and western European powers. It suggests, finally, that Portugal may have, since its arrival in Asia, come to occupy the (semi)periphery not of an economic system it had supposedly "inaugurated," but to an enduring world system that predated "western European states' entry into an Afro-Eurasian world-system" (Doyle 6). In the end, I propose that the practitioners, detractors and official chroniclers of the Portuguese empire begrudgingly, and at times openly, acknowledge their "late arrival on a world scene of sophisticated finance, advanced transport and agricultural technology, and highly literate metropole culture," as though conceding in the last instance that they were not as much the initiators or founders of, but the "apprentices" to global capitalism (Doyle 7, 9).

**David Mednicoff, J.D./Ph.D.,**

Director, Middle Eastern Studies, University of Massachusetts

Abstract, "Arab Legal Politics in World Historical Perspective,"

The central concern of my own work is the overlap and interaction among native and global legal and other political ideals in the contemporary Arab world, and the implications of these ideals for political change and stability. Taking off from the basic idea that history prior to 1500 is tremendously relevant to contemporary Arab and Islamic identity, my paper discusses three more refined dimensions of the relevance of pre-modern history, decentered from the West, in reference to my interdisciplinary work on contemporary Arab societies. These are (1) the need to understand the achievements and limits of Islamic law in indigenous, but dynamic Arab terms, (2) the relevance of considering the historical relations of the Arab world to regions other than the West, and (3) the importance nonetheless of shedding more clarity and historical detail around the ideologically-charged relations between Western and Arab societies.

There is much to be said for a research agenda that would go further in a global or social

historical direction, for instance, by problematizing more deeply the idea of region altogether or seeking less top-down, more local Arab history. However, for work like mine, that seeks to situate and separate, but also embrace appropriate interconnections in, the charged narrative of Arab-Western relations, going far along this path risks obscuring the key problems and relationships that my research needs to chart.

Therefore, Laura Doyle's focus on inter-imperiality, and Lauren Benton's work on diverse legal regimes, form particularly fruitful early historical theoretical links to work like mine that seeks to both understand and problematize "Western," "Arab" and other broad notions of legal and political theory. On the other hand, work like Schatzmiller's, which seeks to counter negative images of non-Western history, is quite useful for its particular empirical data and conclusions, but less relevant to interdisciplinary work on the contemporary Arab world, which has already largely problematized and addressed essentialist Western stereotypes. Indeed, the WSIP project holds great hope that it can help historians, humanists and social scientists see where they have already dealt with significant concerns around global history, as well as where the major lacunae are being revealed.

## **Alan Mikhail**

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The Ottoman Empire, the Imperial Turn, and Questions of Periodization

### **Abstract**

This paper seeks to describe the uncomfortable place of the Ottoman Empire in the last two decades of scholarship in the field of comparative empires. This discomfort arises from the sheer longevity, size, and diversity of the Ottoman imperium but also, and more importantly, from the trouble Ottomanists face reconciling grand historical narratives based on the rise and fall of empires with the more mundane task of understanding the cultural and social history of times and places we still know very little about. One strategy Ottoman historians have employed in trying to address this historiographical tension is to zoom in on a particular period of the empire's history. Within this focus on various ages, as Ottomanists like to call them, the early modern period has emerged as a favorite. This is largely due to presentist ambitions for a world organized around something other than nation-states. Early modern empires offer the most recent example of such a world and thus have not surprisingly emerged as an important subject of the comparative historical work of the past two decades. Although this kind of periodization strives to get beyond rise-and-fall narratives of empire, it nevertheless ascribes to other grand

narratives—notions of early modern fluidity, flexibility, or belonging for example—that mask various political and economic processes of differentiation. The challenges thus seem to be twofold: first, to maintain the particularities of Ottoman historical experience while critically engaging in comparative analysis and, second, to be conscious of how periodization affects understandings of historical change over time.

**Jason Moralee**

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Rome's Capitol in the Middle Ages: Instances in the Mobile History of a Hill

Abstract

The Capitoline Hill was the Roman empire's holy mountain, a place made to tell stories about the origins of the Roman people and its religious history. This paper asks if locations such as this, even though they are rooted in place, have cultural mobility. It illustrates this problematic by profiling two instances in the global history of hill: the circulation of medieval legends that re-write the Capitol as one of the Seven Man-Made Wonders of the World and the discovery of the hill's most important temple, the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, in the nineteenth century, which pitted the German Empire against an emergent Italian nationalism.

**Karen Y. Morrison, Ph.D., "Kym"**

Assistant Professor of African Diasporan History

W.E.B Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies

University of Massachusetts

Black Diasporic Studies and the Writing of Non-Chauvinist Grand Narratives

This brief paper provides a reading of the conference essays that places them in relation to post-colonial approaches to Black Diasporic Studies. Part of the challenge and promise of such a reading is the unique location that Black Studies occupies at the intersection of U.S.-oriented ethnic studies and more externally focused area studies. From this position, Black Diasporic

Studies have effectively called attention to the profound intersection of race with other categories of social difference in the shaping of world history. This paper considers how the post-colonial methods, concepts, and theories suggested by the conference essays may inform new problematics on race within Black Diasporic Studies that beyond chauvinisms, such as those founded on ethnicity and gender, while reclaiming the roles of non-elite and non-European men and women as distinctive elements in grand historical narratives.

### **Richard Payne**

Assistant Professor, Mount Holyoke College

Research Associate, Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University

Research Fellow, Trinity College, University of Cambridge

The Inter-Imperial Origins of a Global Mercantile Economy: Sogdians and Arabs, ca

300-800 CE

In the first millennium CE, enduring mercantile networks with a global reach appeared in the interstices of the Roman, Iranian, and Chinese empires. If the "Silk Roads" and Arabia and its seas are well known channels of long distance trade, the economic innovations of the peoples inhabiting these spaces in between deserve wider recognition and a central place in the history of a global economy. The Sogdians and Arabs, in particular, specialized in the pursuit of profits, whether through long distance trade or production for markets, to a much higher degree than sedentary aristocratic elites in imperial societies. When the Arabs created an empire of their own, a mercantile elite culture displaced the landed aristocratic cultures of the Iranian and Roman empires, which precipitated unprecedented growth in the Near East and beyond. Research on economic growth in antiquity has centered on the Greco-Roman Mediterranean, at least since Rostovtzeff's attempt to find the origins of capitalism in the principate. Historians of the preindustrial economy would do well to shift their focus away from the metropolises to inter-imperial spaces to find the practices, institutions, and dispositions that were prerequisites for the development of global mercantilism.

## **Bruce Robbins**

Columbia University

### Abstract

As a student of narrative, I want to offer some reservations about the narrative choices that seem likely to result from the project of expanding the historical scale of scholarship. This is a project that I favor, but cautiously. I cannot be fully enthusiastic for example about the possibility that the critique of triumphalist narratives of Eurocentric modernity will stop, congratulate itself on a job well done, and not consider what it has put in the place of that narrative, or failed to put there. Is a repudiation of progress really progress?

The decline narratives of nostalgic neo-medievalism, as in *All Things Shining* by Dreyfuss and Kelly, are no more historically accurate than the Whiggishness they seek to replace. One result we have already started seeing is a rehabilitation of religion. (David Christian's *Maps of Time* which arrives at the supra-empirical conclusion that human beings "belong" in the universe, is a good example of how materialist history can serve to revive and disguise a religious sensibility.) A new cosmopolitanism in time also seems likely to rehabilitate empire. This impulse is already visible in the Pomeranz essay as well as the seminal essays of Jerry Bentley. Politics tends to drop out. If we are not supposed to impose presentist concepts like "democracy" on periods and places to which such concepts were not indigenous, are we not doing the same in the guise of supposedly neutral materialist concepts like "cross-cultural interaction" (Bentley)? Doesn't this boil down to a characteristically presentist celebration of global commerce in its wished-for freedom from political interference?

## **Maya Shatzmiller PhD, FRSC\***

University of Western Ontario

Islam and the 'Great Divergence': Was Marīnid Morocco a precursor of the Atlantic Empires?

## Abstract

The paper examines three questions related to the ‘Great Divergence’, the main question occupying economic historians: When did the ‘Great Divergence begin and what was the role of demographic shocks in economic growth in pre-modern societies? Were the Atlantic Empires the engine behind the ‘Great Divergence’? Were Islamic economic and legal institutions behind the decline of the Islamic part of the world?

All three questions underlie and link the empirical analysis of a case of an ignored Islamic Empire, that of the Marīnids in Morocco, 1250-1465, to theoretical work on the subject.

Situated on the African Atlantic shore, the Moroccan state displayed all the hallmarks of the empire building process, well ahead, in fact a hundred years before the Portuguese and Spaniards began their quest for Empire, and two hundred years before the Dutch, French and English embarked on theirs. Between 1250-1465, the Marīnid rulers used their military might to make territorial gains along the Atlantic coast into Black Africa, the Iberian Peninsula, and North Africa and created an Empire stretching all the way to Egypt, on the Southern shores of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. An internal demographic growth, visible in both the Islamic world and in Europe was at the origin of their ‘Quest for Empire. The Marīnid state reformed its social, economic, and legal institutions, manufactured ideological legitimacy worthy of a world power, and incorporated previously alienated ethnic, legal and military elites into government apparatus. They energetically urbanized and industrialized the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts and the hinterland, and ensured control over the African gold and manpower supply. In their final assault on Tunis, the international grain export market, the Empire armies fell victim to the bubonic plague of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Black Death. Unlike Europe, which began its rise to economic power in the 200 hundred years following the Black Death, the Moroccan Empire did not recover.

My paper is devoted to the examination of paradigms in a comparative context on the back of rich economic empirical data: size of the army and the navy, urbanization rate, agricultural productivity, taxation, trade routes, supply of money and precious metals, relations between center and periphery, overland trade versus maritime, international markets and commercialization, interregional markets, technological progress, political stability, effect of the Black Death on labour shortages, manufacturing and productivity. On the cultural front, I will document on the basis of Arabic sources the process of Berber integration into the Arabic-Islamic world community norms.

I will use the three questions mentioned above, in the analysis of the Marīnid Empire experience, and apply it to recent literature on the rise and fall of Empires. I will link the empirical evidence to the theoretical models of the Atlantic Empires, to the performance of Islamic institutions and to the demographic shock to the Malthusian equilibrium. I will use the work of the following authors among others: Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson on “The Rise of Europe: Atlantic Trade, Institutional Change and Economic Growth”, Timur Kuran, *The Long Divergence. How Islamic Law held back the Middle East*, and Ronald Findlay and Mats Lundahl, “Demographic shocks and the Factor Proportions Model: From the Plague of Justinian to the Black Death,” My book, *The Berbers and the Islamic State*, 2000, will be used for the historiographical background and the literary sources of the Marīnid Empire.

### **Tansen Sen**

Baruch College, The City University of New York

“Cross-Regional Warfare in World History: Two Episodes of Chinese Military Interventions in Early Medieval South Asia”

The role of warfare and military confrontations in cross-cultural interactions during the pre-modern times (before ca. 1500) is usually neglected. This is especially true of studies that deal with the exchanges between ancient China and South Asia, where the transmission of Buddhist doctrines and cultural interactions are emphasized. By examining two episodes of military, the first during the mid-seventh century and the second in the early fifteenth century, this essay demonstrate the role of geopolitical and other considerations in the interactions between far-flung pre-modern polities of China and South Asia. The essay also raises questions about the reliability of Chinese sources on foreign regions, polities, and rulers.

### **Michael Sugerman**

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The history of research into the relationship between ancient Egypt and the cultures of the southern Levant presents us with a situation distinct from many other ancient such systems. In this case, the Levantine “margin” has been investigated by antiquarians and archaeologists because of its own perceived historical value, rather than as an adjunct to research in its larger imperial neighbor. Over the course of the past century, these investigations have generated a huge amount of archaeological data, most of which has been studied through the lens of historical perspectives that (a) use models based on European colonial and imperial practices and (b) situate specific sets of written documents as the framework upon which archaeological data must be hung.

Archaeology offers non-document-based approaches to the study of the past, and allows for the possibility of studying cultures distant in time and space from our own. But for the past forty

years or so, much of the discourse on the interactions between ancient Egypt and the southern Levant has taken place in the context of world systems theory and core-periphery interactions. This approach often focuses analysis on hegemonic states to the detriment, if not exclusion, of the study of local developments outside of the imperial center.

Investigating the Late Bronze Age material culture of the southern Levant using models based on other “peripheral” or inter-imperial cultures enables archaeologists to explore local agency in the development of regional political and economic systems.