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The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800 (review)

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The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800.

Edited by David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick. Pp. xx, 324.

ISBN 0333963415.

Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan. 2002. £49.50.

According to J.H. Elliot, the rise of the new Atlantic history is 'one of the most important new historiographical developments of recent years'. Along with the new British history, it is forcing scholars of early modern England, Scotland, Ireland and North America out of the comfort zone of their national histories. It 'pushes historians towards methodological pluralism and expanded horizons' (p. 27), and challenges us to 'trace connections' and 'draw comparisons' (p. 236).

David Armitage and Michael Braddick have edited an outstanding primer that will be warmly welcomed by first-time sailors and experienced navigators of this oceanic field. The collection is topped and tailed by two of the doyens of the new Atlantic history, Bernard Bailyn (who writes the Preface) and John Elliot (who provides the Afterword). Armitage himself contributes the introductory essay, a sophisticated theoretical analysis of the new subject. But the heart of the book lies in ten thematic essays arranged into three categories. The first category, 'Connections', contains pieces on migration (Alison Games), the economy (Nuala Zahedieh) and religion (Carla Pestana); the second, 'Identities', covers civility and authority (Braddick), gender (Sarah Pearsall), class (Keith Wrightson) and race (Joyce Chaplin); and the third, 'Politics', tackles empire and state (Elizabeth Mancke), revolution and counter-revolution (Eliga Gould) and slavery (Christopher Brown).

The topics covered indicate the diversity and ambition of the new Atlantic history. If the emergence of the new British history was largely driven by the questions of political historians (especially concerning the origins of the English Civil War), Atlantic history is more wide-ranging in its origins and scope—both thematically and geographically. The essays assembled in this unusually coherent collection provide wonderfully compressed overviews of their topics. Inevitably, some subjects lend themselves to the Atlantic approach more than others—as Elliot observes, migration and slavery are particularly well suited to this kind of treatment, and it is no surprise that the essays by Games and Brown are among the most satisfying. But the quality of the collection as a whole is very high, and each piece is packed with striking detail and provocative generalisation. Elliot even offers a speculative piece of 'counter-factual Atlantic history' in which Christopher Columbus enters the service of Henry VII of England and an expedition of five hundred West Countrymen conquers the Aztecs, with world-historical consequences (pp. 241-43).

There are also, however, some questionable statements. Gould suggests that 'Few historians would dispute the interconnectedness of what they now describe as the "three British revolutions" of 1641, 1688, and 1776' (p. 196). In fact, few scholars apart from John Pocock (to whom Gould refers) show the slightest interest in the connections between 1641 and 1776, and many historians of the English Civil War would insist that if a 'revolution' took place at all it did not do so until 1648-49. On another matter, historians of the Covenanter Parliaments will be surprised at the claim that the Glorious Revolution 'opened the way for the first truly independent parliaments in Scottish history' (p. 203). In other essays, the vastness of the subject inspires grandiose phrases—'inter-hemispheric civilisation' (p. xiv) will presumably appeal to science-fiction fans. The new subject is even generating new jargon. We read of 'circum-Atlantic history', 'Trans-Atlantic history', 'Cis-Atlantic history', the 'white' Atlantic, the 'black' Atlantic, the 'red' Atlantic, the 'multicoloured'

Atlantic and even the 'green' Atlantic (a reference to the Irish, not to ecology). One can only be grateful that there is as yet no sign of a 'tartan Atlantic'.

Scotland, in fact, does not loom particularly large. It receives reasonable coverage in the essays on migration and revolution, but in several others the Scots make only a token appearance. The index contains more references to Ireland, not least because it was such an important trial-ground for English colonialism. Scotland's relatively low profile reflects the fact that for much of the period from 1500 to 1800 the majority of Scots were facing East rather than West. As Games suggests, 'In their Atlantic orientation the English were distinct from the Scots, who were precociously European in orientation' (p. 37). Of course, the Scots made up for lost time in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, though the authors of this volume were unable to benefit from the latest studies of Scottish overseas migration, such as Tom Devine's *Scotland's Empire, 1600-1815* (2003) and Marjory Harper's *Adventurers and Exiles: The Great Scottish Exodus* (2003).

Despite this, historians of Scotland will find this to be a very stimulating collection. It provides a broader framework for national histories, and succeeds admirably in its task of pushing historians towards expanded horizons.

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The 'Conquest' of Acadia, 1710: Imperial, Colonial, and Aboriginal Constructions.
By John G. Reid, Maurice Basque, Elizabeth Mancke, Barry Moody,
Geoffrey Plank and William Wicken. Pp. xxiii, 297.

ISBN 0802037550 cloth; 0802085385 paper.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 2004. £40.00 cloth; £20.00 paper.

This collection of nine essays, by six United States and Canadian scholars, examines the British conquest of the French colony of Acadia and the subsequent problems which beset the administrators of the renamed Nova Scotia. The authors take a rather post-modernist approach to the conquest, arguing that there is no 'single valid narrative' of the conquest and that 'the events that are central to this book were experienced differently by native inhabitants, Acadians, and British and French officials, and by British colonists in New England and then in Nova Scotia' (p. xi). Consequently, each chapter takes a different approach and studies a different aspect of the conquest and its legacy.

Although the work is a collection of separate essays, it does have a clear central focus, and the essays develop several central themes. In particular, the authors also place the Acadian experience in the broader context of the eighteenth-century Atlantic world and arrive at two central conclusions. As they explain, 'The first is the bankruptcy of the notion that this period in history was the "colonial" era. Colonies existed, but they existed in relationship to imperial and native worlds that interacted with each other as well as with colonial population' (p. 208). The second is that the interaction between British, Acadian and Mik'maq 'by conforming neither with the accepted pattern of a colony of settlement nor with that of a "middle ground" provides the historian with an intermediate model. Here European settlement existed and so did imperial institutions of governance. The Acadian communities, however, represented a form of settlement that had become divorced from state formation and from formal imperial expansion' (pp. 208-9).

The authors also stress the pivotal role of negotiation in shaping their model of imperialism. Central to all negotiations in the region was the weakness of the British administration in Nova Scotia. Deprived of both money and men, British administrators were unable to impose their rule on the Acadians or Native