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REVIEW ARTICLE

Islands in Global History

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David Abulafia. *The Boundless Sea: A Human History of the Oceans*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. 1,050 pages. ISBN: 978–0199934980, $26.57.

Lauren A. Benton and Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, eds. *A World at Sea: Maritime Practices and Global History*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020. 267 pages. ISBN: 978–0812297348, $46.26.

Dolores Corbella Díaz and Eduardo Aznar Anglés, eds. and trans. *África y sus islas en el manuscrito de Valentim Fernandes* [Africa and its islands in the Manuscript of Valentim Fernandes]. Madrid: Dykinson, 2021. 253 pages. ISBN: 978–8413777573, $40.89.

Abstract

Islands have played a much larger role in global history than their small size may suggest. The study of islands, once a part of maritime history, has since 2006 grown into its own interdisciplinary field of "island studies." The three books analysed in this review all stand to contribute to the new field. The books under review are *The Boundless Sea* (2019), *A World at Sea* (2020), and *África y sus islas* (2021). Island-specific topics advanced by these books include islands as nodes in trade networks, the detrimental influence of colonisation on island environments, the use of islands as locations to escape from slavery, ethnographic descriptions of islands, and indigenous knowledge produced by islanders.

Keywords: islander voices; subaltern perspectives; island studies; maritime history; coastal zones; water–land interfaces

Despite their relatively small territories—only 2 percent of the earth's surface—islands have played a much larger role in global history than their size may suggest.[1] With 13 percent of world heritage sites on their 2 percent of land, islands have stimulated abundant interest in the academic community, enough to prompt the birth of a new interdisciplinary field of island studies.[2] This book review analyses the extent to which three publications augment the study of islands while probing how these publications can contribute to the field of island studies. The books analysed include a global history of the oceans (Abulafia), an edited book on maritime history with a focus on water–land

[1] Beate M. W. Ratter, *Geography of Small Islands Outposts of Globalisation* (Cham: Springer, 2018), 2.
[2] Godfrey Baldacchino, "Islands, Island Studies, Island Studies Journal," in *Island Studies Journal* 1:1 (2006), 3.

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interfaces (Benton and Perl-Rosenthal), and an edited and translated primary source with island descriptions from the sixteenth century (Aznar and Corbella). To provide context, a brief introduction to the field of island studies is included. The following review will provide an overview of the respective books' layouts and contents, highlighting how the authors analyse islands in global history and the extent to which islander perspectives or island-specific experiences are included. A deliberate limitation of this review is to narrow the scope to focus on islands. The sections are unevenly long due to the large length discrepancy among the books reviewed.

The Field of Island Studies

People debate whether the start of the field of island studies should be attributed to Charles Darwin's study of endemic animals on the Galapagos (1859), Margaret Mead's ethnological work on Samoa (1928), Epeli Hau'ofa's "Our Sea of Islands" (1993), Cyprian Broodbank's archaeological discussions on "islandscapes" (2000), or Godfrey Baldacchino's initiation of the first journal for island studies in 2006.[3] Regardless of when the field officially started, there is now an international scholarly platform created to study islands systematically, considering island-specific experiences, voices of islanders, and the interactions of islanders on a global stage. Research about islands has evolved into research about islanders.

Within history, islands were formerly studied as part of, and sometimes a marginal part of, maritime history. Islands in maritime history often appear (and then disappear) as transitory locations along the way to somewhere else or navigational obstacles en route.[4] Mediterranean history has often served as a bridge between maritime history and island studies, identifying island-specific traits, especially for small islands.[5] Atlantic history, North Sea history, and Baltic history also, and sometimes extensively, study islands.[6] Pacific history has a long tradition of comparative island research, partly due to the sheer number of islands, with more than 150 archipelagos.[7] Scholars from the

[3] Charles Darwin, Gillian Beer, *On the Origin of Species* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008[1859]); Margeret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa. A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization* (New York : Blue Ribbon Books, 1928); Epeli Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands", *The Contemporary Pacific* 6:1 (1994), 148–161; Cyprian Broodbank, *An Island Archaeology of the Early Cyclades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Baldacchino, "Islands, Island Studies, Island Studies Journal," 3–18.

[4] John B. Hattendorf, *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Maritime History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Molly A. Warsh, *American Baroque: Pearls and the Nature of Empire, 1492–1700* (Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute and University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Robert Muchembled et al., *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Jonathan Adams, *A Maritime Archaeology of Ships : Innovation and Social Change in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2013); Lincoln Paine, *The Sea and Civilization: A Maritime History of the World* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015); Kris E. Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Global Piracy on the High Seas, 1500–1750* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Angela Schottenhammer, *Trading Networks in Early Modern East Asia* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010). The subsequent review of *A World at Sea* will demonstrate how the field of maritime history is currently evolving.

[5] Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York: Collins publisher, 1972), 148–67; Peregrine Horden, Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 224–30.

[6] For example, David Hancock, *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Michael North, *The Baltic: A History* (Cambridge: MA Harvard University Press, 2015); Michael North, "The Baltic Sea," in *Oceanic Histories*, eds. David Armitage, Alison Bashford and Sujit Sivasundaram (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 209–233; Michael North, "The Atlantic Ocean," in *The World's Oceans. Geography, History, and Environment*, eds. Rainer Buschmann and Lance Nolde (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2018), 18–34.

[7] Examples include Hermann Mückler, *Australien Ozeanien Neuseeland* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2020); Sujit Sivasundaram, *Islanded: Britain, Sri Lanka, and the Bounds of an Indian Ocean Colony* (Chicago: University of

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Pacific were foundational for the field of island studies, having lamented the still "prevailing notion about islanders and their physical surroundings that, if not countered with opposite and more constructive views, could inflict lasting damage on people's image of themselves, and their ability to act with relative autonomy in their endeavour to survive reasonably well within an international system in which they have found themselves."[8]

Island researchers ask: what about the people who *live* in the middle of the ocean? Or the people living at the shores of the sea? What about islanders who never boarded a boat (because they could not afford to or did not want to)? What is unique about their experiences, and can they be compared with other islands, coasts, or ports? Indeed, islanders teach us about their long past of coping with waves of migrations, epidemic outbreaks, and climate and environmental changes.[9] Notably, many island societies, due to their locations along trade routes, needed to cope with cultural diversity, making them important locations to study integration, cross-cultural communication, multilingualism, hybrid religious practices, and peace-keeping initiatives.[10] Homing in on specific characteristics of islands *because they are islands* instead of an intermediary stop leads to theoretical developments and critical reflections on concepts of insularity or "islandness" that contribute to larger academic debates.

Thus, island studies starts first with island-specific dynamics and then works bottom-up or inside-out to draw conclusions about the larger context.[11] From a top-down perspective, islands may be in the same geographical and political space, but from a bottom-up perspective, local sentiments, environments, and customs can be key to understanding changing waves of migrations and goods that would have been misdiagnosed through a different lens of analysis.[12] The field of island studies differentiates itself with an analysis of "islands on their own terms."[13] Island studies scholars try to include the voices of islanders whenever possible; as is done within other fields, an attempt is

Chicago Press, 2014); Paul D'Arcy, *The People of the Sea: Environment Identity and History in Oceania* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006); Dorothy Shineberg, *The People Trade: Pacific Island Laborers and New Caledonia 1865–1930* (Honolulu: Center for Pacific Islands Studies School of Hawaiian Asian and Pacific Studies University of Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999).

[8] Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," 4.

[9] John Chircop and Javier Martinez Francisco, *Mediterranean Quarantines, 1750–1914: Space, Identity and Power* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018); Mark Harrison, *Contagion: How Commerce Has Spread Disease* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Juan Manuel Santana-Pérez, "Diseases Spread by Sea: Health Services and the Ports of the Canary Islands in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," in *The Mariner's Mirror* 102:3 (2016), 290–302.

[10] David Abulafia, *Mediterranean Encounters, Economic, Religious, Political: 1100–1550* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2000); Olivia Remie Constable, *Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World Lodging, Trade, and Travel in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Maeve McCusker, Anthony Soares, *Islanded Identities: Constructions of Postcolonial Cultural Insularity* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011); Anne E. Wilkens, Patrick Ramponi, Helge Wendt, eds. *Inseln und Archipele: Kulturelle Figuren des Insularen Zwischen Isolation und Entgrenzung* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2014).

[11] Baldacchino, "Introducing a World of Islands"; Baldacchino, "Studying Islands: On Whose Terms?"

[12] Reinhard von Bendemann, Annette Gerstenberg, Nikolas Jaspert and Sebastian Kolditz, „Konstruktionen mediterraner Insularitäten: Einführende Bemerkungen und Reflexionen," in *Konstruktionen mediterraner Insularitäten* (Paderborn: Schoeningh, 2016), 7–42; Matthew Boyd Goldie, "Island Theory," in *Islanded Identities: Constructions of Postcolonial Cultural Insularity*, eds. Maeve McCusker, Anthony Soares (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 1–40.

[13] Baldacchino, "Islands, Island Studies, Island Studies Journal"; Helen Dawson, Jonathan Pugh, "The Lure of Island Studies: A Coss-disciplinary Conversation," in *European Islands between Isolated and Interconnected Life Worlds*, eds. Laura Dierksmeier, Frerich Schön, Anna Kouremenos, Annika Condit and Valerie Palmowski (Tübingen: University of Tübingen Press, 2021), 13–31.

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made to read for silences in texts where certain groups, such as slaves, are not represented. Including subaltern perspectives is one goal of island studies research.

Several historians have been instrumental in including islands and islanders, as well as promoting island studies as a bridge between maritime history and global history.[14] Within island studies, history publications are less common than for other fields (such as geography, anthropology, archaeology, sociology, political science, sustainable research management, and economics) but gradually emerging, and on the rise. The subsequent review will highlight the potential contribution of three very different books to the nascent field.

The Boundless Sea (2019)

David Abulafia's *The Boundless Sea: A Human History of the Oceans,* published in 2019 by Oxford University Press, contains 1,050 pages, broken down into five parts: "The Oldest Ocean: The Pacific, 176,000 BC–AD 1350"; "The Middle Ocean: The Indian Ocean and Its Neighbours, 4500 BC–AD 1500"; "The Young Ocean: The Atlantic, 22,000 BC–AD 1500"; "Oceans in Conversation, AD 1492–1900"; and "The Oceans Contained, AD 1800–2000." The book contains fifty-one chapters, followed by a conclusion, a list of museums with maritime collections, suggestions for further reading, endnotes, and a sixty-five page index. Abulafia's tome contains seventy-two illustrations (including maps, material objects of maritime trade, coins, photographs of ships in museums, and historical paintings of sea vessels).

Abulafia has undertaken an enormous task to write a monograph with "boundless" geographical restrictions and no limit on the chronology considered. Since he includes many locations where the archaeological record and its material remains are the only surviving description of the past ("Reconstructing these worlds depends on archaeology," 299), it makes sense that Abulafia unfolds principally a history of oceanic trade. With the title *A Human History of the Oceans* one may have expected to hear a broader range of voices, perhaps envisioning a book about average people whose lives were dictated or influenced by "the world ocean."

But Abulafia's book could more accurately be described as a commodity history of merchants at sea. Many pages contain enumerations of goods exchanged (e.g., obsidian, black ebony, cinnamon, sandalwood, porcelain, aloe wood, sugar, furs, soap, cheeses, marble, coins) and Abulafia does not hide his interest in these objects: "There is an undeniable fascination in looking at the exotic objects and foodstuffs that were carried across sometimes enormous distances, and in thinking about what these things meant to the people among whom they arrived—whether walrus tusks from Greenland or lacquer boxes from Japan or sacks of cloves and nutmeg from the Moluccas" (xxi). Abulafia recognises that if the book were to have heroes, they would be the merchants (xx). His analysis is squarely on "how, why and when people crossed large maritime spaces" (xviii) and "what sort of interdependence was created between lands far apart from one another" (xviii).

Nonetheless, the lives of merchants and their struggles or accomplishments within daily life are less often recounted than the material items they had in tow. In *The*

[14] John R. Gillis, *Islands of the Mind: How the Human Imagination Created the Atlantic World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); North, *The Baltic*; Louis Sicking, "Islands and Maritime Connections, Networks and Empires, 1200–1700," Introduction in *The International Journal of Maritime History* 26:3 (2014), 489–493; Louis Sicking and Alain A. Wijffels, *Conflict Management in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic 1000–1800: Actors Institutions and Strategies of Dispute Settlement* (Leiden: Brill Nijhoff, 2020); Luca Zavagno, "Islands: not the Last Frontier: Insular Model in Early Medieval Byzantine Mediterranean, c. 650– c. 850," in *Borders and Conflicts in the Mediterranean Basin*, eds. Giuseppe D´Angelo and Jorge Martins Ribeiro, (Fisciano: ICSR, 2016), 3750; Rod Edmond, Vanessa Smith, eds., *Islands in History and Representation* (London: Routledge, 2003).

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Boundless Sea, often conquerors, rulers, or people with a high social status (e.g., Kupe, Columbus, Magellan, Cook) take centre stage.[15] In short, the reader may have expected the term *human* in the book title to have included a larger range of perspectives. The sympathetic mention of slaves for their unpaid labour (e.g., 490–3) and some noteworthy cases, such as Jewish children taken from Portugal in 1493 and brought to São Tomé (494), are welcome inclusions.

The main sources of information come from secondary literature (history, archaeology, and linguistics), maritime museums, including goods recovered from shipwrecks, and to a lesser extent, edited primary sources (primary sources are often cited through secondary literature). There is no combined bibliography at the end. The number of endnotes is less than one would find in most academic texts (but typical for a Penguin Books publication), and it is sometimes difficult to track down sources of information referenced. With this framework sketched out in brief, this review will now address the book content as they relate to islands in global history.

Much evidence is provided for the role of islands as bridges in global history. Abulafia gives the example of the Åland Islands between Sweden and Finland, and the small island of Flores between southeast Asia and Australia and New Guinea (7). He cites also the instance of Ceylon, "with Ceylon, the modern Sri Lanka, playing the role of Sicily, a substantial island looking both ways, [. . .] so that these areas functioned as bridges between the trading world of the western and eastern 'Indies'" (46). Sri Vijaya is described as a bridge between China and India "looking in both directions and serving the trade of both great landmasses" (161). Considering the Pacific at a time before written records, Abulafia concludes: "The closer one looks at this world, the more connected it appears to be" (15). Abulafia argues that islands were far from isolated pieces of land in the middle of the ocean but rather connected units in vast and powerful trade networks.[16] He makes the following reflection: "The term 'insularity' conveys a sense of isolation and looking inwards. [. . .] But much of what has been said so far in this book demonstrates how lacking in that sort of insularity island societies were" (231).

Island research in the last years has highlighted the important role of islanders in trade networks. Abulafia provides many examples of not only large, but also "small islands [. . .] whose remoteness was generally no barrier to lively interaction across hundreds and even thousands of miles" (6). Rhodes and Delos were involved in commercial networks of the Syrian coast, Rome, and Alexandria (99). Socotra was a trading hub to connect east Africa, the Red Sea, and India (125). Zabaj navigators reached as far as Sofala on the southeast coast of Africa (158). Gotland operated as a major trading hub (366). Hanseatic history relied on many islands in its network (413–22). Abulafia describes at length the Ryukyu islands and their outsized role in trade networks: "The chain of the Ryukyu islands, of which the best-known is Okinawa, is a perfect example of a small and apparently insignificant archipelago that profited from its middle position to acquire wealth and influence. Its rulers insisted that they live on poor and barren islands, which was precisely the reason that their subjects learned to make money by acting as intermediaries with the rest of the West Pacific Rim" (229).

[15] One could have hoped for more original source material for the early modern period, a period for which Abulafia has true expertise, such as was done in Abulafia's *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[16] The negative connotation of the term "insularity" in English is not always or even often true for other languages, as many authors have shown. See, for example, Katerina Kopaka, "What Is an Island? Concepts, Meanings and Polysemies of Insular Topoi in Greek Sources," in *European Journal of Archaeology*, 11:2–3 (2008), 179–197; Laura Dierksmeier, "Introduction: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Island Studies," in *European Islands Between Isolated and Interconnected Life Worlds*, eds. Laura Dierksmeier, Frerich Schön, Anna Kouremenos, Annika Condit, and Valerie Palmowski (Tübingen: University of Tübingen Press, 2021), 24–5.

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The permanent trading station at Quanzhau in China for Ryukyu islanders is highlighted as proof of a successful trade relationship until 1875, "a trading history of 436 years" (234). The global scope of the island's relations is inscribed on a bell in a temple from 1458, where it is written, "[On] the kingdom of Ryukyu [. . .] treasures from three countries, Korea, the Ming empire, and Japan, are to be found [. . .]. Its ships are a bridge between 10,000 nations" (231). Abulafia demonstrates how many islands throughout history, despite their size or isolated locations, were essential parts of strong trade networks—a conclusion in tune with current island studies research.

Abulafia highlights in his preface that one important theme of his book is the human settlement of previously uninhabited islands. Abulafia writes succinctly: "The important point is that newly arrived people who settled previously uninhabited islands rapidly changed the ecological balance, whether by clearing the land for crops, by introducing Pacific rats that attacked wildlife, or by themselves throwing off balance the delicate relationship between native flora and fauna and the environment. What was true in Aotearoa was true in virtually every island humans settled, in all the oceans" (39).

Throughout the book, Abulafia mentions Polynesian sailors in the Pacific, Portuguese sailors on Madeira, the Azores, Cape Verde, and St. Helena, with New Zealand as the last land to be colonised. Directly related to the occupation of uninhabited islands is the change of their landscapes due to European animal species or the "importation and cultivation of alien crops far from their place of origin" (xxv). Abulafia notes that uninhabited Atlantic islands, just like those in the Pacific, were transformed or destroyed by human settlers (481), a topic much discussed within island studies. He gives the example of Madeira, which lost much of the tree cover from the timber burned in sugar mills; further vegetation around Porto Santo suffered from the introduction of rabbits, who ate vegetation and "turned the island into a semi-desert" from which it never recovered (486). Likewise, on the Cape Verde Islands, goats and sheep uprooted plants, leaving the soil to retain less water, resulting in a more parched landscape (489).

Even before 1500 BC, Abulafia references twenty-eight plant species brought to the remote islands around Fiji and Samoa by the Lapita people, including yams, bananas, breadfruit, sugar cane, wild ginger, bamboo, and coconuts (12). Bone analysis reveals when rats arrived to change island plant and animal life henceforth, providing proof of island contacts by navigators across the Pacific. Abulafia uses the plant and animal migrations on remote islands in the Pacific to argue "voyages eastwards were indeed colonizing ventures" (13).

Throughout history, island locations "off the record" and often "off the map" have facilitated business kept intentionally behind the scenes. Colonisers notoriously used islands for slave hunts, as Abulafia demonstrates for the Ryukyu islands in the early seventh century (229), the decimation of the Canary Islands' indigenous populations (473), and the well-known blackbirding of Pacific islanders to work on Australian sugar or cotton plantations. Islands have also been used as major storehouses for slaves. The Cape Verde Islands, and later the Caribbean islands, acted as way stations for slaves from Africa to Europe or Latin America. On Santiago, the largest island of the Cape Verde archipelago, Abulafia writes that "as many as 25,000 African slaves passed through the island between 1500 and 1530" (490). São Tomé is also mentioned as a collection point for thousands of slaves.

A reoccurring island trope that surfaces in Abulafia's work is the intentional use of islands as places of exile, incarceration, or quarantine locations for infectious diseases. The Azores are included as a deposit site for convicts (487). The Cape Verde Islands were used as a leper colony (489).

Additional island-specific topics can be traced throughout Abulafia's work. Examples include the obstacles to arriving to an island (14, 286), longer life expectancy of island

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inhabitants (13), the effects of weather on island life (25, 50–2), island-specific shell currencies (28), island rivalries (e.g., Java and Sri Vijaya, 279), "saltwater people" whose livelihoods rely on the sea (9), islands as cultural melting pots (128, 152, 427), islands as bases for pirates, such as Socotra (125) or Tsushima (191), official and unofficial trade on islands (43, 235), mapping islands (471, 486), searches for uninhabited islands that could be moulded (492), holy/cemetery islands (e.g., Dilmun on Bahrain, Delos, and Sacred Island of Okinoshima, 18, 65, 99, 191), the fragile balance of natural resources on islands (31) or the lack of resources (247), including freshwater scarcity (9, 26). Researchers interested in island representations, perceptions, and imaginary islands will find interesting examples on the social construction of continents (393), legendary islands that never existed or disappeared (e.g., "Isle of Brazil," 487), relative isolation, where distance matters less than the available mode of travel (125), and the impact island visibility had on other islands or the mainland (4).

In short, Abulafia's history of the oceans mirrors the interest with which he addressed his sources, that is, a captivation with the merchants and items traded over long distances. Many examples from his work fit into the framework of island-typical attributes and can be compared with other islands, coasts, or the mainland. Island studies scholars would agree with his overall sentiment: "All this proves that a historian ignores the smaller, apparently insignificant place at his or her peril" (131).

A World at Sea (2020)

Lauren A. Benton (Yale University) and Nathan Perl-Rosenthal (University of Southern California) have published an innovative contribution to maritime history entitled *A World at Sea: Maritime Practices and Global History,* which historians of island studies should not overlook. With 267 pages, the edited book contains a well-written introduction, three sections (entitled "Currents," "Dispatches," and "Thresholds") with a total of nine chapters, an afterword, endnotes, and an index of eighteen pages. Some chapters contain black-and-white images; a list of images and author affiliations would have been a welcome inclusion. This book can be employed in the university classroom, for example with the first chapter by Carla Rahn Phillips, "Why Did Anyone Go to Sea? Structures of Maritime Enlistment from Family Traditions to Violent Coercion."

With a focus on comparative maritime practices, the authors plausibly distinguish their work from previous publications. The editors explain: "Our emphasis on practice embraces the promise of maritime social and cultural history from below" (7). Topics of interest to the editors include the connection between enslavement and maritime life, maritime environmental change, the motion of information, and the history of law at sea (all page 6). Benton and Perl-Rosenthal seek a balanced account of maritime practices, "understanding that the influence extended in both directions" between land and sea (7). They warn against maritime exceptionalism "staking unexamined claims that global change originated on the seas," and at the same time seek to show the potential to take maritime history "from its relatively quiet corner into an analytically central position within world history" (7). The chapters in this book do not directly address the field of island studies, but several chapters give important insight into the role of (also subaltern) islanders in global history, especially chapters 6 and 7. Other chapters, such as chapter 8, "Sovereignty at the Water's Edge: Japan's Opening as Coastal Encounter," include topics relevant to island studies, even when the information and frame of analysis fit more squarely into maritime history, for example about the demarcation and control of Japan's borders, waters, and coasts and satellite islands.

Chapter 6, "Indigenous Maritime Travelers and Knowledge Production," by David Igler (University of California Irvine), demonstrates the reliance of European travellers on

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indigenous support and knowledge. Igler points to a former research inclination to overlook indigenous actors: "Most maritime historians view indigenous people as tangential to these oceanic travels, flows of information, and historical currents. There are many problems with this established view" (110). Igler demonstrates how indigenous islanders served as informants, cartographers, navigators, chroniclers, and interpreters. He briefly includes the well-known example of Tupaia's assistance to James Cook on his first voyage to Tahiti in 1769 and a less-known example of Vasco da Gama's Muslim guide from Malindi (today Kenya) in 1498 before moving on to his main example: Choris's 1882 *Voyage pittoresque autour du monde.*

In this chapter, Igler includes twelve images to demonstrate how Choris's vivid illustrations of inhabitants on Hawaii and Alaska were influenced by Kadu (originally from the Mariana Islands), who served as the translator and cultural go-between on the 1817 *Rurik* voyage. Igler argues: "knowledge was not simply acquired or invented by Europeans, but instead resulted from connections and exchanges with the indigenous groups encountered on the *Rurik*'s voyage" (110). The one-year work relationship between Kadu and Choris influenced, according to Igler, Choris's selection of subjects, prioritising depictions of common people over rulers (124). As Igler mentions that Choris also criticised Spanish and Russian colonialism, this chapter provides an important basis for island studies scholars to consider the influence of indigenous islanders on a global scale.

Jeppe Mulich (City University of London) has written an excellent chapter with an assured impact for the study of islands in global history and the field of island studies. Chapter 7, "Maritime Marronage in Colonial Borderlands," provides many examples as to how Caribbean islands were used to flee the shackles of slavery. Marronage, the act of fleeing slavery for a short period (*petit marronage*) or long/permanent getaway (*grand marronage*), was, according to Mulich, "a common practice throughout slave societies" (134). He reports, for example, that early nineteenth-century sources from St. Croix show that marronage was the most common violation of slave laws issued by the Danish colony. Through marronage, slaves challenged the colonial establishments built on slave labour. Entire communities of maroons "existed more or less outside the bounds of colonial or national states" (134). While the best-known example of a maroon village (*quilombo* in Portuguese) is arguably the "Black Republic of Palmares," from mainland Brazil, Mulich notes that "these communities were not restricted to the continental Americas but could be found in great numbers on Caribbean islands, including in Cuba, Jamaica, and the colonial borderlands of Hispaniola" (136). Interestingly, Mulich clarifies that the role played by maroons in colonial societies was far from clear-cut: "A traditional inside/outside distinction is not easy to maintain" (136), as Mulich gives the example of former slaves who themselves get involved in the dirty business of enslaving other blacks or the pragmatic response of colonial officials to "integrate maroon communities if and when their destruction was impossible or impractical" (136).

Mulich argues that access to the waters between the Americas and the Caribbean islands (via a boat or piece of driftwood) allowed for more mobility of escape, avoiding the many dangers of a land-based escape, such as trackers and their vicious "negro dogs" (137). "The heavily trafficked ports of the region provided many options of vessels to board for maroons, and few captains in need of new crewmembers were willing to ask difficult questions of potential recruits. This went double for privateering vessels, which were often in search of new hands when they were in port to offload prizes and stock up on provisions" (139). The geography of islands also helped fugitive slaves to escape, as patrolling boats to catch maroons was very difficult in areas with "hidden coves and natural harbors on most islands in the region" (145).

Slave catchers and their dogs were, according to Mulich, less common on the islands than on continental American territory and island hopping in the Caribbean allowed

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escaped slaves the chance to enter a different colonial jurisdiction, thereby avoiding the realm of their former captors (139). While "British, French, Dutch, and Scandinavian colonial elites" sometimes cooperated to return escaped slaves, the Spanish authorities were less willing to cooperate; this was the case, Mulich argues, for Puerto Rico, where Catholicism sometimes played a role in exchanging freedom for baptism (144). Rewards were advertised in exchange for information about maroons in newspapers such as the *St. Christopher Gazette,* the *Antigua Gazette,* and the *St. Thomae Tidende,* but "it often proved challenging to reclaim slaves once they had made their way to a different imperial jurisdiction" (143). In short, Mulich provides island studies scholars with many precise and important examples to trace the role of Caribbean islands in the escape of slavery from the continental Americas.

África y sus islas (2021)

Valentim Fernandes (c.1450–1518) was a book printer, author, and notary for the Portuguese Crown.[17] He composed one of the earliest and most extensive ethnographic descriptions of hitherto unknown overseas territories of interest to the Portuguese Empire and merchants inside and outside of Portugal.[18] Until 2021, the manuscript of his *De insulis et peregrinatione Lusitanorum* (1506–7) was only available in Portuguese, Latin, or French (225).[19] Scholars in Spanish-speaking territories now have access to Fernandes's descriptions of the territories they live in and research, thanks to the translation Eduardo Aznar Anglés and Dolores Corbella Díaz (experts in Spanish philology and literature) have meticulously carried out.[20] It is not a coincidence that this edition was cofinanced by the Casa África from the Universidad de La Laguna (Tenerife). The prologue, by Antonio Tejera Gaspar (Tenerife), points to the importance of this text to the history of the Canary Islands.

After the prologue, the edition contains a fifty-six page introduction with an overview of the author, the author's sources, the book's contents, and the norms of translation followed throughout the edition. The reader would have appreciated more information about Fernandes; the four paragraphs leave many open questions, but the editors note the scarcity of available biographical sources.[21] The translation of the book spans 154 pages, followed by a bibliography and appendix with maps. Footnotes, kept to a manageable number (normally one to five footnotes per page), provide additional context, clarify word etymology, or note illegible text in the original manuscript. The folio is always included in bold with the translated information, making it possible to trace the information back to the original manuscript.

It should be noted that this edition is not a complete translation of the original manuscript held in the Bavarian State Library of Munich (*Codex Hispanus,* Number 27). The editors have translated the texts which they argue belong to the authorship of Fernandes and pertain to Africa and African islands. The edition contains translations for the following regions: Ceuta, the Sahara, Arguin (off of Mauritania), Baaffor's Mountains, Mali,

[17] Yvonne Hendrich, *Valentim Fernandes - ein deutscher Buchdrucker in Portugal um die Wende vom 15. zum 16. Jahrhundert und sein Umkreis* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2007), 15.

[18] Ibid., 15–16.

[19] See also Valentim Fernandes, J. Bensaúde, José Pereira da Costa, *Códice Valentim Fernandes* (Lisbon: Academia Portuguesa da História, [1506–7] (1997)); Hendrich, *Valentim Fernandes*; and Martha Frederiks, "Codex Valentim Fernandes," in *Christian-Muslim Relations 1500–1900*, eds. David Thomas and John Chesworth (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

[20] Dolores Corbella was the first academic from the Canary Islands to be nominated for a seat on the prestigious Real Academia Española in more than 80 years.

[21] For more extensive background information, see Hendrich, *Valentim Fernandes.* (Hendrich is cited as one of the sources for the information about Fernandes, see p. 17.)

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Tombuctu, the region between Cape Verde and the river Gambia, Gambia, Bububa, the Canary Islands (Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, Gran Canaria, Tenerife, La Gomera, La Palma, El Hierro, Salvaje), the islands of Madeira (Porto Santo, Azores, Santa María, San Miguel, Terceira, San Jorge, Graciosa, Pico, Fayal, Corvo, Flores), Porto Santo, the Azores, the Cape Verde Islands (Boa Vista, Sal, Maio, Santiago, Fogo, Brava, San Nicolás, Rasa, Mala Sombra, Santa Lucía, Santa Vicente, Santa Antón), Saint Tomas, Príncipe and Annobón, Cádiz, Arcila, Mandinga, Rio Grande, and Senegal. Sections transmitted orally by Diogo Gomes de Sintra to Martin Behaim and the description by Francisco Almeida about India have been intentionally excluded, as have sections copied from other descriptions found elsewhere (21). It would thus be necessary to go back to the original source to read the full descriptions as they appear in the manuscript. The folios translated include sections from 15–35r, 45r–215r, and 316r–349r.

As this primary source belongs to a genre some readers interested in the role of islands in global history may not be acquainted with, I briefly provide some context on this source type together with the review, offering parameters with which to determine how this text compares to others of its genre.[22] With a rereading of Greco-Roman sources, the Renaissance prompted the birth of a popular genre of island books often bearing the name *isolario* in Italian, *islario* in Spanish, or *insularum/insularium/de insulis* in Latin, the later being the term used by Fernandes in his *De insulis et peregrinatione Lusitanorum.*[23] *De Insulis* was a title used already in the Middle Ages to describe island compendiums or parts of encyclopaedias about islands, as was the case with the *De Insulis* of Isidore of Seville (c. 560–636 CE), *Etymologies.*[24]

Valentim Fernandes, self-defined as German and signing his work as "Valentim Fernandez alemão,"[25] extensively wrote about African and Asian territories and their islands. An early modern *isolario* often covered Greek islands or islands in the Mediterranean, making Fernandes's study of islands in and beyond the Atlantic Ocean somewhat unusual. Some early modern authors attempted to write about "all of the islands of the world,"[26] although smaller islands are often overlooked. Thanks to the numerous maps included in *isolarii,* the imagination of less educated or even illiterate people could be stimulated.[27] Fernandes includes eighteen island maps in his work, which Aznar and Corbella have reproduced in high quality in their edition.

According to the editors, Fernandes's main source of information was the *Crónica de Guinea* by Eannes de Zurara, and to a lesser extent *De Prima inventione* by Diogo Gomes de Sintra and the *Navegaciones* by Alvise Cadamosto, although the last source was never mentioned explicitly (22). The editors mention that Fernandes employed sources that

[22] For more information on island encyclopaedias, see Laura Dierksmeier and Stefano Cespa, "The Balearic Islands in 'Island Encyclopaedias,' 700 BCE–1700 CE: A Historical and Archaeological Assessment of Island Knowledge Production with Suggestions for Future Research," in *Shima - The International Journal into Research of Island Cultures* 16:1 (2022), 339–377.

[23] *Isolarii,* the term most often used to refer to the genre, were produced predominately during the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries in Florence, Venice, and Genoa, although Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Ottoman authors complemented the Italian works. See Tolias, "Isolarii, Fifteenth to Seventeenth Century," in *The History of Cartography, Cartography in the European Renaissance,* ed. David Woodward 3:1 (2007), 264.

[24] Stephen A Barney, Wanda J Lewis, J. A Beach and Muriel Hall, *The "Etymologies" of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 293–7.

[25] The editors report in their introduction that he was born in the region of Moravia, in current day Czech Republic (16). For more on his name variations, see Hendrich, *Valentim Fernandes,* 35–8.

[26] See Alonso de Santa Cruz's *Islario general de todas las islas del mundo,* 16th century, with 717 pages.

[27] The fact that many sources dwelt on sensational information might well be accounted for by the fact that some authors wrote predominately to make money, as some *isolarii* authors also published encyclopaedias of Venetian clothing or geological compilations of stones. See Tolias, "Isolarii, Fifteenth to Seventeenth Century," 281–3.

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were often (but not always) based on firsthand information (15). His choice of sources makes Fernandes's work stand out from other island books based heavily on texts from antiquity that were produced during the same time period. Due to censorship limitations on early modern authors, it was common that *isolarii* would heavily cite ancient writers; they had an authority that was not easily questioned. Normally one major limitation to *isolarii* is that these sources often contain only outsider perspectives. In that sense, Fernandes's work stands out because of the number of contemporary descriptions he included. Citing relatively recent sources of information involved substantial risk, as one could be held personally liable by the Inquisition for quoting a person who later turned out to be a Lutheran.[28]

Fernandes writes that he includes details about the customs and ideologies of people before they were conquered by Christians "so that the readers can enjoy to hear them" (169). *Isolarii* were often designed to fulfil the growing curiosity about places, historical sites, and political events that captured the interest of armchair travellers. Information that often appeared in *isolarii* included population,[29] major cities, harbours, monasteries, climate, soil fertility, freshwater sources, livestock, threats (rodents, big birds, snakes), and curious customs and norms of dress,[30] although not all of Fernandes's entries contain all of these elements. His island descriptions encompass the year of discovery by Europeans, distance to the mainland (*tierra firme*), island name etymology, livestock or animals absent (e.g., no chickens), fruits available, poisonous plants and dangerous animals (e.g., wild dogs, snakes), navigational hazards around the island, fishing possibilities, architecture of houses, commerce, markets, and goods for sale (e.g., dyes, spices, metals, slaves), freshwater sources and quality of water, the number of houses, the names of different ethnic groups and their relationship/hostility to one another, religious tolerance to other groups, natural history (e.g., descriptions of turtle incubation time), the skin colour of island inhabitants, their clothing customs (or lack of clothing), and the name and value of the local currency.

Aznar and Corbella have, in short, expanded access to the historiography of African islands through their meticulous translation of Valentim Fernandes's detailed work.

Conclusion

The books reviewed here expose different considerations for islands and their former inhabitants. Indeed, the roles of islands in global history depend on the lens of analysis employed. Abulafia, with a focus on maritime trade, demonstrates how even small or remote islands could be major players in large trade networks with actors of various religions, languages, and political affiliations. Mulich has, in Benton and Perl-Rosenthal's edited book, given centre stage to islands as locations of escape despite their reoccurring depictions as places of exile. Igler demonstrates how indigenous island inhabitants possessed specialised knowledge about the sea and how fervently sought-after that information had been. Fernandes, in his manuscript translated by Aznar and Corbella, provides a much different view into aspects of daily life on early modern African islands; his descriptions of types of clothing worn, housing architecture, and rival religious groups provide a treasure chest of ethnographical and geographical information as it was known in 1506–7.

[28] Also, the norms of scholarship during the early modern period often privileged established written accounts over oral accounts as reputable sources of information.

[29] The population estimates often excluded women and children, as the number of men was considered relevant to determine the defences to be expected during an attack. Also in Fernandes's work, the population is listed as excluding women and children, for example on p. 169.

[30] Dierksmeier and Cespa, "The Balearic Islands in 'Island Encyclopaedias,'" 339–377.

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In some cases, the books overlap with their content; for example, Fernandes's manuscript and the Cook expedition (Igler in Benton and Perl-Rosenthal) are mentioned at some length in Abulafia's manuscript (About Fernandes: 493-495. About Cook: e.g. 3, 13, 26, 31, 733, 785, 791–2, 812). Nonetheless, the books seldom overlap in their modes of analysis. Each book reviewed here represents a different approach to island studies, accentuating different aspects of island life.

The three books reviewed break new ground in different ways. Abulafia provides a multitude of examples over a very long timespan to demonstrate time and again how connected islands were throughout history. Benton and Perl-Rosenthal hand readers new and little-researched examples of islands as bastions of freedom and indigenous knowledge. Aznar and Corbella demonstrate through Fernandes's work the challenges of island life as intimately inhabited spaces with limited natural resources. Topics within island studies not addressed extensively by these books include the daily life of women and children on islands, the intense impact of weather on island life, and the adaptations of islanders to the many challenges they faced, especially for islands under colonial rule. All in all, research about the importance of islands in global history is on the rise, and the authors, editors, and translators mentioned here have made a laudable contribution. As each text focuses on different aspects of island life, the books can be best read together rather than at the exclusion of one another.

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