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### Foreword to the Annual C. Th. Dimaras Lecture (2017)

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C. TH. DIMARAS ANNUAL LECTURE, 2017

DAVID ARMITAGE

World History as Oceanic History:  
Beyond Braudel

SECTION OF NEOHELLENIC RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH / NHRF



## FOREWORD

David Armitage is the Lloyd C. Blankfein Professor of History at Harvard University, specialising in international history and intellectual history. He is also an Affiliated Professor in the Harvard Department of Government, an Affiliated Faculty Member at Harvard Law School and an Honorary Professor of History at both the University of Sydney and Queen's University Belfast. A prize-winning teacher and writer, he has lectured on six continents and has held research fellowships and visiting positions in Australia, Britain, China, France, Germany, Korea and the United States. Among his books are *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (2013), *The History Manifesto* (2014), *Civil Wars: A History in Ideas* (2017) and, as editor, *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (2nd ed., 2009), *Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People* (2014) and *Oceanic Histories* (2018). He is a Corresponding Fellow of the Real Academia de la Historia in Madrid, Royal Society of Edinburgh and Australian Academy of the Humanities. He completed his undergraduate and postgraduate studies at the University of Cambridge (PhD in intellectual history). His work was influenced by the Cambridge School of intellectual history, and especially by Quentin Skinner. He has taught at Columbia University and since 2004 has been based at Harvard University.

Prof. Armitage delivered the 22nd lecture in the annual series of lectures in honour of Constantinos Dimaras.<sup>1</sup> His rich historiographical output offers various tools of analysis and poses new challenges associated with the future of global history, and the responsibilities of the historian, while also sharpening our view of contemporary economic and social problems. According to his view, global history acquires a necessary political and cultural significance, which he and his co-author also underline in *The History Manifesto*, an open-access e-book, which reassesses the notion of the *longue durée* first popularised by Fernand Braudel. In the same vein as Braudel, he proposes a historical approach to the past that combines the micro- with the macro-level in research, and opts for a historical narrative that can be globally understood

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. Armitage was invited to deliver the 2017 C. Th. Dimaras lecture by the Institute of Historical Research of the National Hellenic Research Foundation, which is indebted to Harvard University's Centre for Hellenic Studies in Greece, as well as its director, Prof. Ioannis Petropoulos, for its financial support.

and foster public dialogue while also being open to new technological developments.

In the 2017 C. Th. Dimaras lecture that follows, Prof. Armitage notes that until recently, most historians shared a prejudice in favour of the history of land, territory and their human inhabitants. Yet two-thirds of the world's surface is water and much of human history has been conducted on its shores, around its seas and across its oceans. He thus proposes reimagining the history of the world through its oceans and seas and examines the multiple genealogies of oceanic history, the Mediterranean, Pacific and Atlantic among them. He then takes the example of the Atlantic and its history to show how models from other oceanic arenas can help us to open up new histories, of regions within larger oceans, of the transnational connections between oceans and of the world beneath the waves. Thus, Prof. Armitage asks some pertinent questions concerning the history of historical thinking, the oceans as units of historical analysis, and the oceans as the means for international and trans-cultural history.

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