

The Historical Review/La Revue Historique

Vol 15 (2018)



World History as Oceanic History: Beyond Braudel

David Armitage

doi: [10.12681/hr.20462](https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.20462)

Copyright © 2019, David Armitage



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

Armitage, D. (2019). World History as Oceanic History: Beyond Braudel. *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, 15, 343–364. <https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.20462>

WORLD HISTORY AS OCEANIC HISTORY: BEYOND BRAUDEL

David Armitage

ABSTRACT: 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. This article proposes reimagining the history of the world through its oceans and seas and examines the multiple genealogies of oceanic history, Mediterranean, Pacific and Atlantic among them. It argues that these models do not exhaust the potential for an oceanic history of the world. It 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.

Historians, no less than other humans, are prone to terrestrial prejudice, an attachment to happenings on land, to the comforts of *terra firma*, to the gravitational pull of territory in all our lives. We might call this attachment *terracentrism*, a short-sightedness about our species, its environment and our connected history that is just as reassuring but also quite as debilitating as other prejudices, such as Eurocentrism in history or logocentrism in philology.¹ Terracentrism, of course, runs much deeper, into our seeming destiny as animals of the land who are not at home on the sea. To venture onto the ocean was long thought to be somehow unnatural, with shipwreck and drowning the fitting rewards for hubris in rejecting our destiny as terrestrial creatures.² And yet 70 per cent of our planet's surface is water: the Pacific basin alone could hold the entire land-surface of the world with room to spare. It

I presented a version of this text as the C. Th. Dimaras Lecture at the National Hellenic Research Foundation in December 2017. For the honour of the invitation, and for kind hospitality on that occasion, I am especially grateful to Maria Christina Chatzizionnou. My thanks also go to the Cambridge University Press for permission to use material appearing in David Armitage, Alison Bashford and Sujit Sivasundaram (eds.), *Oceanic Histories*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

¹ Rila Mukherjee, "Escape from Terracentrism: Writing a Water History", *Indian Historical Review* 41 (2014), pp. 87–101.

² Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*, trans. Steven Rendall, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997.

is, therefore, something of a paradox that our planet is called Earth when it is so thoroughly dominated by the sea: “Ocean” would be a much more appropriate and accurate name. In this regard, our home may be exceptional among the known planets, but it is not alone within the solar system and beyond in having oceans, even if these extra-terrestrial “water worlds” – on Mars, or on Saturn’s moons, for instance – remain for the moment beyond the reach of historians.³

The intellectual effort to overcome our ingrained terracentrism is, of course, nothing new. By the late 1990s, historians and geographers were beginning to claim that the spaces and scales of world history might be reordered on the basis of natural boundaries of oceans.⁴ Yet it was only early in our own century that scholars put the ocean into history, revealing changes in the sea as earlier pioneers in the field had mapped changes in the land.⁵ By then, there was already a widely watched movement to promote a so-called “New Thalassology”, attending to the oceans and seas of the world. In one sense, this was not so new, as most of its promoters assumed the primacy of Mediterranean models for oceanic history and frequently referred to Fernand Braudel’s work on the Mediterranean as germinal.⁶ More recently, the Harvard historian Bernard Bailyn promoted Atlantic history as a field in itself, distinct from other oceanic histories in its scope and its origins.⁷ However, scholars of other oceans and seas have persuasively critiqued and recontextualised this genealogy, by showing how thinkers, narrators and historians have written of

³ Jan Zalasiewicz and Mark Williams, “Oceans of the Solar System”, chap. 9 in *Ocean Worlds: The Story of Seas on Earth and Other Planets*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

⁴ Martin Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; Jerry H. Bentley, “Sea and Ocean Basins as Frameworks of Historical Analysis”, *Geographical Review* 89 (1999), pp. 215–224; Philip E. Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Oceans*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

⁵ Compare, for example, William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1985, with Jeffrey Bolster, *The Mortal Sea: Fishing the Atlantic in the Age of Sail*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012.

⁶ Edward Peters, “Quid Nobis Cum Pelago? The New Thalassology and the Economic History of Europe”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 34 (2003), pp. 49–61; Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, “The Mediterranean and the ‘New Thalassology’”, *American Historical Review* 111 (2006), pp. 722–740; Markus P. M. Vink, “Indian Ocean Studies and the ‘New Thalassology’”, *Journal of Global History* 2 (2007), pp. 41–62.

⁷ Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.

the oceans beyond the Mediterranean – and, by extension, the Atlantic – over long periods before the rise of scholarship on seas in Europe and the United States: the “new” thalassology now appears to be not quite so new in light of the longer genealogies of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, for example.⁸

Before most of these watery regions had historians, they had histories, in the plural, most of which extended back millennia rather than centuries, as shown by the continuity of human migration and mobility in the Pacific, Red Sea, South China Sea and Black Sea, among others. The deep histories of oceans and seas provide better frameworks for historical understanding than Eurocentric categories like modernity and Enlightenment. From a terrestrial standpoint, what Herman Melville in *Moby-Dick* (1851) called “the sea which will permit no records” could appear to be outside history and beyond time.⁹ This was the implicit claim behind a long series of attempts to place the prime meridian offshore, in the eastern Atlantic or through the Bering Strait, before it was finally planted at Greenwich in the late nineteenth century.¹⁰ Even then, the oceans slipped the bonds of modernist webs of universal time. It has been hardly a century since time zones were extended from land to sea: “Until 1920, oceans and seas remained timeless.”¹¹

Oceans may have been formally timeless until recently, but they were enmeshed in multiple temporalities. Many students of oceans and seas claim *longue durée* ambitions for their studies, picking up the traditions of narration of Arab cosmographers, or explicitly and implicitly recalling Braudel. This is with good reason and application for some oceanic spaces, but for others it plainly fails to encompass the incommensurable temporalities of non-Western cultures. Human history in the Pacific, for example, is recounted generationally and genealogically by some islanders, in a productive challenge to historians considering oceanic pasts.¹² Even in the Atlantic, that

⁸ Sujit Sivasundaram, “The Indian Ocean”, and Alison Bashford, “The Pacific Ocean”, in Armitage, Bashford and Sivasundaram (eds.), *Oceanic Histories*, pp. 31–61, 62–84.

⁹ Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851), quoted in Hester Blum, “Terraqueous Planet: The Case for Oceanic Studies”, in *The Planetary Turn: Relationality and Geoaesthetics in the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Amy J. Elias and Christian Moraru, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015, p. 25.

¹⁰ Charles W. J. Withers, *Zero Degrees: Geographies of the Prime Meridian*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017, pp. 29–37, 159–167.

¹¹ Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time, 1870–1950*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015, pp. 87–88.

¹² Damon Salesa, “The Pacific in Indigenous Time”, in *Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People*, ed. David Armitage and Alison Bashford, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 31–52.

seemingly most time-bound of oceans, enslaved Africans experienced time quite differently from their masters and those who profited from their labour: the Atlantic, like parallel regions, was a sea of histories, not an ocean with a single history.¹³ Oceans were arenas for the competition of timescales and the negotiation of histories. Artificial efforts to demarcate and define them, whether by inscribing territorial limits, slicing them longitudinally with treaty zones or date lines or bisecting them across the equator, were only writ in water.

* * *

To illustrate the potential and promise of oceanic history in the twenty-first century, I turn now to the Atlantic Ocean, for some the paradigmatic ocean of history, for others the Mediterranean of modernity itself. In response, I want to argue that the Atlantic is but a suburb of the world ocean and, therefore, inextricably part of world history, over geological time as well as on a human scale, despite the best efforts of international organisations to mark it off from other oceanic regions.¹⁴ This unbounded Atlantic had multiple, fluid histories long before there were Atlantic historians to record them. There were histories *around* the Atlantic, along its shores and within its coastal waters. There were histories *in* the Atlantic, on its islands and over its open seas. And there were histories *across* the Atlantic Ocean, beginning with the Norse voyages in the eleventh century and then becoming repeatable and regular in both directions from the early sixteenth century onwards, long after the Indian and Pacific Oceans had become so widely navigable.¹⁵ For almost five centuries, these memories and experiences comprised the history of many Atlantics – north and south, eastern and western; Amerindian and African;¹⁶

¹³ Walter Johnson, "Possible Pasts: Some Speculations on Time, Temporality, and the History of the Atlantic Slave Trade", *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 45 (2000), pp. 485–499.

¹⁴ International Hydrographic Bureau, *Limits of Oceans and Seas*, Monte Carlo: Monégasque, 1953, pp. 13, 18–19; Shin Kim, *Limits of Atlantic Ocean*, International Hydrographic Organisation, Special Publication 23, Seoul: Ji Young Sa, 2003.

¹⁵ Kirsten A. Seaver, *The Frozen Echo: Greenland and the Exploration of North America, ca. A.D. 1000–1500*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

¹⁶ Paul Cohen, "Was there an Amerindian Atlantic? Reflections on the Limits of a Historiographical Concept", *History of European Ideas* 34 (2008), pp. 388–410; Thomas Benjamin, *The Atlantic World: Europeans, Africans, Indians and their Shared History, 1400–1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009; John K. Thornton, *A Cultural History of the Atlantic World, 1250–1820*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012; Jace Weaver, *The Red Atlantic: American Indigenes and the Making of the Modern World, 1000–1927*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

enslaved and free; Spanish and Portuguese;¹⁷ British, French, Dutch, creole and “hybrid”¹⁸ – but not yet a single Atlantic history. More comprehensively Atlantic histories began to appear in the late nineteenth century; later, various species of political and geopolitical Atlanticism flourished after two world wars, but it would take until the latter part of the twentieth century for self-identified Atlantic historians to come onto the scene. Only in the early part of our own century did Atlantic history briefly emerge as a discrete field of study before oceanic history and global history engulfed it once more.¹⁹

Before there was Atlantic history, there were many segmented and discontinuous Atlantics – even if they were not known by that name or placed in that frame.²⁰ There were no westward probes across the ocean until centuries after eastward-moving peoples had created pathways across the sea: to this extent, the history of the ocean’s becoming “the Atlantic” must still start with Europe and with Europeans. Until the fifteenth century, most navigation was coastal, leading to cartographies both mental and formal that resembled road maps more than navigational charts, much like early modern Japanese representations of a “small eastern sea” rather than of an open Pacific ocean.²¹ The Norsemen who settled in what is now Newfoundland likely thought they were in Africa; Christopher Columbus probably went to his grave believing he had reached Asia. The waters they crossed joined known parts of the world but did not display vast novel vistas; they would not appear on maps, or in European minds, until sixteenth-century Spanish navigational manuals and Dutch cartography began to reveal the full extent of what stood between Europe and Africa on one side and the Americas on the other. Yet even then, what oceanographers now think of as “the” Atlantic long remained divided into sub-oceanic regions, particularly along a north–south axis bisected by the Equator. Oceanic currents, such as the Gulf Stream – first

¹⁷ John H. Elliott, *El Atlántico español y el Atlántico luso: divergencias y convergencias*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Cabildo de Gran Canaria, 2014.

¹⁸ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998; Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Benjamin Breen, “Hybrid Atlantics: Future Directions for the History of the Atlantic World”, *History Compass* 11, no. 8 (2013), pp. 597–609.

¹⁹ Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *The Atlantic in World History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; Christoph Strobel, *The Global Atlantic 1400 to 1900*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2015.

²⁰ Patricia Pearson, “The World of the Atlantic before the “Atlantic World”: Africa, Europe, and the Americas before 1850”, in *The Atlantic World, 1450–2000*, ed. Toyin Falola and Kevin D. Roberts, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008, pp. 3–26.

²¹ Marcia Yonemoto, “Maps and Metaphors of the “Small Eastern Sea” in Tokugawa Japan”, *Geographical Review* 89 (1999), pp. 169–187.

mapped by Benjamin Franklin in the late 1760s, though undoubtedly familiar long before in sailors' artisanal knowledge – created routes through the ocean that reinforced the distinctions.²² At least until the early nineteenth century, denizens and historians of the ocean had to reckon with “both Atlantics”, as the pioneering hydrographer James Rennell termed them around 1830.²³ As late as the 1870s, the northern portion could still be called, in a reference work from the United States, “the Atlantic proper”, in contrast to the “Ethiopic” sector, or South Atlantic.²⁴

Until the late nineteenth century, then, there were at least two Atlantics. Above the Equator, lay the “Mer du Nord”, the “North Sea” or, as Britons called it, with their eyes turned towards North America, the “Western Ocean”. Beneath the Equator, there was a mostly separate oceanic system that emerged with voyaging back and forth between Africa and South America, particularly in the context of the trans-Atlantic slave trade: this was, variously, the “Oceanus Ethiopicum”, the “Mare Aethiopicum”, “Oceano Australe”, “Oceano Meridionale”, or “Mare Magnum Australe”. The Afro-Latin Atlantic, with Brazil and Angola at its extremities, was the arena for the “longest and most intense forced migration of the modern era”, in which almost five million enslaved persons were transported westwards from Africa between 1556 and the end of the Brazilian slave trade in 1850. As Luiz Felipe de Alencastro has persuasively argued, that mid-nineteenth-century moment marked a major watershed in Atlantic history by diminishing the significance of one maritime system – the South Atlantic Gyre, in which currents and winds had determined routes of travel in the age of sail – at just the point when steamships were liberating mariners and their vessels from the winds and allowed the northern and southern Atlantic systems to be more firmly

²² Joyce E. Chaplin, “The Atlantic Ocean and its Contemporary Meanings, 1492–1808”, in *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 36–39; Chaplin, “Circulations: Benjamin Franklin’s Gulf Stream”, in *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World*, ed. James Delbourgo and Nicholas Dew, Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, pp. 73–96.

²³ James Rennell, *An Investigation of the Currents of the Atlantic Ocean, and of Those which Prevail between the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic*, ed. Jane Rodd, London: J.G. and F. Rivington, 1832, p. 60; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 69–70 on “the two Atlantics”. Rennell’s work appeared posthumously.

²⁴ George Ripley and Charles A. Dana (eds.), *The American Cyclopaedia: A Popular Dictionary of General Knowledge*, 16 vols., New York, 1873), 2, p. 69, quoted in Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, “The Ethiopic Ocean –History and Historiography, 1600–1975”, *Portuguese Literary & Cultural Studies* 27 (2015), p. 2.

sutured together.²⁵ “The Atlantic is crossed daily by steamers,” wrote the American oceanographer Matthew Fontaine Maury in 1861, “the Pacific not once a year.”²⁶ It was not a coincidence that perhaps the greatest emancipated voice of the age, Frederick Douglass, proclaimed in 1852 that “Oceans no longer divide, but link nations together. From Boston to London is now a holiday excursion. Space is comparatively annihilated. Thoughts expressed on one side of the Atlantic, are distinctly heard on the other.”²⁷ Douglass was no doubt thinking of “the Atlantic proper”, but his words increasingly described the Atlantic basin as a whole, north and south as well as east and west.

The emergence of this integrated Atlantic – post-emancipation, post-colonial, if not quite (or perhaps ever) post-imperial – made possible the imagination of larger Atlantic histories in the sense of historical accounts that took the Atlantic basin as their bailiwick. Indeed, a narrative arising from this moment and constructed around the rise and fall of the slave trade and the histories of slavery and emancipation, may be the most promising point of origin for Atlantic history itself. W.E.B. Du Bois’ *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870* (1896) is emblematic of this post-emancipation historiography, a history of the black Atlantic a century before the sociologist Paul Gilroy made the term fashionable while using Du Bois’ own concept of “double consciousness” as a lens.²⁸ Du Bois’ work was a study on an intercontinental scale over a *longue durée* of almost 250 years. It represented a black Atlantic history that appeared almost before there was any other Atlantic history, and it placed bondage and the forcible displacement of subaltern populations at the heart of the Atlantic story.

The next wave of Atlantic histories came during what, from an Atlantic perspective, was the interwar period.²⁹ In the closing stages of World War

²⁵ Alencastro, “The Ethiopic Ocean”, pp. 1, 6; see also Kenneth Maxwell, “The Atlantic in the Eighteenth Century: A Southern Perspective on the Need to Return to the ‘Big Picture’”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, n.s., 3 (1993), pp. 209–236.

²⁶ Matthew Fontaine Maury, *The Physical Geography of the Sea and its Meteorology* (1861), ed. John Leighly, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1963, p. 37.

²⁷ Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July? An Address Delivered in Rochester, New York, on 5 July 1852”, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, ed. John W. Blassingame, 5 vols., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979–92, 2, p. 387.

²⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870*, New York, 1896; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

²⁹ For more on these interwar genealogies of Atlantic history, see Sylvia Marzagalli, “Sur les origines de l’“Atlantic history””: paradigme interprétatif de l’histoire des espaces

I, the American journalist Walter Lippmann began to write of an “Atlantic community”, which was initially North Atlantic in scope but which he later extended to include various Latin American countries. His idea went underground during an era of American isolationism but resurfaced later as the backstory for the institutionalised Atlantic community erected after the next great war. Lippmann emerged afresh as a promoter of Atlanticism as a species of internationalism in the era of US-led building of international institutions, from UNESCO to NATO, that is often held to be the seedbed for Atlantic history as an integrated field of focus.³⁰ It is from this moment that we get the initial conception of the “Atlantic world” as a geopolitical expression of an Atlantic community and as a historical entity, mostly in the writings of diplomats and legal internationalists.³¹

The post-World War II genealogy of Atlantic history underpinned a narrative with a durable chronology and implied geography. European westward expansion into oceanic space led to waves of emigration premised on the dispossession of indigenous peoples and the destruction or transmutation of their communities in order to facilitate settler colonialism, initially under the supervision of European metropolises. The increasingly insatiable slave trade pumped expendable labour into a system of early capitalist production, leading to escalating inequality and racial domination. Those hierarchies did not collapse when perceived political oppression and the creole response to it sparked a series of “Atlantic revolutions” that led to political independence, the formation of new nation-states (which were retrofitted with their own national histories) and, with a delay of decades and sometimes as a result of civil war, the emancipation of the enslaved. This was the teleological narrative that informed Atlantic history at the height of its fortunes in the early twenty-first century. It settled into a timeline between the late fifteenth and the first third of the nineteenth centuries but inevitably missed the watershed of 1850 and the later Brazilian abolition of 1888 and only belatedly incorporated the Haitian Revolution as a pivotal event. It was,

atlantiques à l'époque moderne”, *Dix-huitième siècle* 33 (2001), pp. 17–31; William O'Reilly, “Genealogies of Atlantic History”, *Atlantic Studies* 1 (2004), pp. 66–84.

³⁰ Bailyn, *Atlantic History*, pp. 6–30, is the classic account of this genealogy of Atlantic history.

³¹ See, for example, Arnold Ræstad, *Europe and the Atlantic World*, ed. Winthrop W. Case, Princeton, NJ: American Committee for International Studies, 1941; Ræstad, *Europe and the Atlantic World*, Oslo: H. Aschehoug, 1958; Claude Delmas, *Le monde atlantique*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1958; Robert Strausz-Hupé, et al., *Building the Atlantic World*, New York: Harper & Row, 1963.

by accident or design, but still without acknowledgment, an Atlantic history whose chronology revealed its geography as still centred on that “proper” Atlantic above the Equator. This was a history of the North Atlantic as strung between European expansion and early industrialisation and informed by a liberal story of oppression relieved by revolution and emancipation, both personal and political.

Until the explosion of self-consciously Atlantic history in the late 1990s and early 2000s, scholarship flowed largely in the channels cut after World War II. These intellectual conduits directed Atlantic history into imperial and national histories, within a chronology from encounter to emancipation between the late fifteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The major exceptions were those African historians like Philip Curtin who followed Du Bois and his successors in studying the long-term dynamics of the slave trade: their work necessarily affirmed the established periodisation of Atlantic history, but it penetrated deeper into the South Atlantic context and into Africa, it integrated the Caribbean more firmly within Atlantic history and it focused on a slave-system driven by national entities, in Portugal and Britain especially, but decidedly supranational and intercontinental in scope.³²

The challenge for Atlantic history in the late twentieth century was threefold: first, to integrate the various streams of Atlantic history – political, economic and cultural; black and white Atlantics; national and transnational histories; second, to press against conventional chronological and geographical boundaries; and third, to define the identity of the field without cutting it off from other areas of historical inquiry. The rapid maturation of Atlantic history only partly rose to those challenges. As seminars and conferences, monographs and articles proliferated in the early 2000s, Atlantic history offered an expansively integrative approach at just the moment when historians were becoming increasingly sceptical that a national frame was adequate to capture the processes, both local and global, in which they were interested. In 2002, amid this explosion of self-confidently Atlantic studies, I proposed three concepts of Atlantic history to anatomise existing approaches and to point up prospective pathways for the field: these were *circum*-Atlantic history, *trans*-Atlantic history and *cis*-Atlantic history.³³ By *circum*-Atlantic history, I meant “the history of the Atlantic as a particular zone of exchange

³² See, for example, Philip Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969.

³³ David Armitage, “Three Concepts of Atlantic History”, in *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, ed. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, 2nd ed., Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 17–29.

and interchange, circulation and transmission”: in short, Atlantic history as transnational history.³⁴ Trans-Atlantic history is “the history of the Atlantic world told through comparisons” between empires, nations, states and similar communities or formations, such as cities or plantations – that is, Atlantic history as international, interregional or, as we might now say, interpolity history.³⁵ And cis-Atlantic history comprises “the history of any particular place – a nation, a state, a region, even a specific institution – in relation to the wider Atlantic world”, or Atlantic history conceived as local history and even as microhistory.³⁶

This typology was not exhaustive and I intended the three categories to be mutually reinforcing: circum-Atlantic history made trans-Atlantic history possible and both depended on cis-Atlantic histories; these emerged in turn from circum- and trans-Atlantic connections and circulations. At the time, and for many years after, they adequately captured the bulk of work conducted as the history of an Atlantic world that was largely defined against inter-oceanic and global connections, conceived of as a holistic, multi-continental system and viewed as the sum of experiences above the waves and on the territories adjoining and within the Atlantic Ocean. By now, they no longer seem as comprehensive as they once did, not least because they were derived mostly inductively, from existing practices within Atlantic history itself. The evolution of oceanic history in the last decade suggests a pressing need to extend my original trichotomy to take account of more recent developments, within and beyond Atlantic history, and to imagine new prospects for Atlantic history itself. With these goals in mind, let me offer three *more* concepts of Atlantic history in addition to my original triad:

³⁴ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, Cambridge, MA: Columbia University Press, 1996, was the source of the term.

³⁵ I take the term “inter-polity” from the work of Lauren Benton and Adam Clulow: for example, Benton and Clulow, “Legal Encounters and the Origins of Global Law”, in *The Cambridge World History*, vol. 6, pt. 2, *The Construction of a Global World, 1400–1800 CE: Patterns of Change*, ed. Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 80–100.

³⁶ Lara Putnam, “To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and the Atlantic World”, *Journal of Social History* 39 (2006), pp. 615–630. For self-consciously cis-Atlantic histories, see, for example, Stephen K. Roberts, “Cromwellian Towns in the Severn Basin: A Contribution to Cis-Atlantic History?”, in *The Cromwellian Protectorate*, ed. Patrick Little, Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007, pp. 165–187; Daniel Walden, “America’s First Coastal Community: A Cis- and Circumatlantic Reading of John Smith’s *The Generall Historie of Virginia*”, *Atlantic Studies* 7 (2010), pp. 329–347; Steven A. Sarson, *The Tobacco-Plantation South in the Early American Atlantic World*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

1. *Infra-Atlantic* history: the subregional history of the Atlantic world
2. *Sub-Atlantic* history: the submarine history of the Atlantic world
3. *Extra-Atlantic* history: the supraregional history of the Atlantic world

These three new concepts supplement, but do not supplant, my earlier trichotomy. Taken together, they can offer novel ways to reenergise the field of Atlantic history and to increase its integration with other areas of historical analysis. They can also stand proxy for some of the most promising futures for world history as oceanic history more generally.

Infra-Atlantic History

Infra-Atlantic history is the inverse of circum-Atlantic history as “the history of the ocean as an arena distinct from any of the particular, narrower, oceanic zones that comprise it”.³⁷ In contrast to that integrative approach, it focuses instead on those more specific and bounded regions that flow into or abut on the larger ocean but which have their own integrity as islands and archipelagoes, littorals and beaches, straits, gulfs and seas in their own right. It is the history of the peoples who inhabited these sub-regions, who lived by the sea or pursued maritime lives in coastal and insular waters. This is not the Atlantic as a congeries of cis-Atlantic histories, because there is no assumption that those places should be connected to a larger circuit of communication. Nor is it the Atlantic as a “world” or a “system” but instead as a series of distinct spaces and the competing visions that emerged from them. To paraphrase a distinction Greg Denning made for Pacific history, it is history *in* the Atlantic rather than history *of* the Atlantic.³⁸

Infra-Atlantic history draws inspiration from adjacent oceanic histories that have also attempted to break down wider oceans into their component parts. As one historian of the Red Sea has noted, “most maritime spaces are innately fractured, fragmented and unstable arenas”; this affirms the argument of Nicholas Purcell and Peregrine Horden that the Mediterranean should be spared from Braudelian synthesis by decomposition into many microecologies or Sugata Bose’s similar claims in favour of the dizzyingly various “hundred

³⁷ Armitage, “Three Concepts of Atlantic History”, p. 18.

³⁸ Greg Denning, “History ‘in’ the Pacific”, *The Contemporary Pacific* 1 (1989), pp. 134–139; compare Richard Blakemore, “The Changing Fortunes of Atlantic History”, *English Historical Review* 131 (2016), p. 862, on the attendant “risk of losing the impulse to search for connections across boundaries or on an Atlantic scale” that might come with history “in” rather than “of” the Atlantic.

horizons” visible in the Indian Ocean arena.³⁹ It has been suggested that the future of global history in an age of resurgent nationalism, populism and anti-globalism lies in narrating disintegration as well as integration.⁴⁰ On this view, a segmented Atlantic has as much to reveal as a coordinated one. This is because it is more likely to reflect particular experiences than to fall into the traps of Eurocentrism – the assumption that the Atlantic was a European preserve or invention – or the teleological premise that Atlantic integration was inevitable, even perhaps irreversible.

Infra-Atlantic history can be discovered first throughout the islands of the Atlantic. That search takes us back to one possible root of the term “Atlantic” itself. Around 355 BCE, Plato in the *Timaeus* imagined the island empire of Atlantis, in the western ocean beyond the Mediterranean “frog-pond”, which warred with Athens before disappearing in a cataclysmic flood. The first European voyages into the Atlantic lent his myth fresh plausibility – or, at least, utility in accounting for earlier links with the Americas – though it later became a western analogue to the Indian Ocean’s Lemuria, a sunken superpower around which identities later swirled.⁴¹ The first recorded westward explorer of the Atlantic was Plato’s near-contemporary, the island-hopping Pytheas of Massalia (Marseille), who made it to Britain, the Orkneys and Shetlands and possibly even Iceland in the fourth century BCE.⁴² Long thereafter, the Atlantic would be a realm of imaginary islands – the Fortunate Isles, St Brendan’s Isle, the Island of the Seven Cities and Ultima Thule, among others – before Europeans learned that it was indeed a sea fringed with many insular formations, from the Canaries and the Azores to the Greater and Lesser Antilles.⁴³ All had their own infra-Atlantic

³⁹ Jonathan Miran, “The Red Sea”, in Armitage, Bashford and Sivasundaram, *Oceanic Histories*, p. 171; Nicholas Purcell and Peregrine Horden, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2000; Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.

⁴⁰ Jeremy Adelman, “What is Global History Now?”, *Aeon Magazine* (2 March 2017), accessed 31 December 2017, <https://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment>.

⁴¹ *Plato’s Atlantis Story: Text, Translation and Commentary*, ed. Christopher Gill, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017; Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *The Atlantis Story: A Short History of Plato’s Myth*, trans. Janet Lloyd, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007, pp. 56–62; Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Lost Land of Lemuria: Fabulous Geographies, Catastrophic Histories*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

⁴² Barry Cunliffe, *The Extraordinary Voyage of Pytheas the Greek*, London: Allen Lane, 2001.

⁴³ John R. Gillis, *Islands of the Mind: How the Human Imagination Created the Atlantic World*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

histories before trans-Atlantic contact and their inhabitants would continue to live such histories even when they became more deeply implicated in an emergent Atlantic world.

The Atlantic gradually came into focus as a sea *with* islands, but was it also a sea *of* islands? Pacific studies prompt the question.⁴⁴ In that oceanic history, the paradigm of a sea of islands expresses indigenous consciousness of attachment and importance; it reframes as plenitude what outsiders put down as the absence or insignificance of territories in the “Earth’s empty quarter”.⁴⁵ There were no indigenous Atlantic equivalents to the immense colonising voyages of the Polynesian navigators, which made islands into stepping-stones across vast oceanic expanses. The “Atlantic Mediterranean”, populated by islands from the Canaries to the Azores and joined together by Atlantic winds, could hardly compare with these, though the Caribbean islands and the adjacent coastal regions of southern North America and northern South America have a claim to be a “trans-oceanic Mediterranean” or even an “Atlantic Oceania”, albeit on a far smaller scale than anything within the Pacific.⁴⁶ Territories such as Ascension Island, Tristan da Cunha and St Helena remained remote from each other and from the five continents until well into the twentieth century, and for much of the eighteenth century, St Helena had functioned as a gateway to the Indian Ocean world while the Falkland Islands “open[ed] ... facilities of passing into the Pacific Ocean”.⁴⁷ These were islands *in* the Atlantic, but not quite *of* it.

⁴⁴ Paul D’Arcy, “The Atlantic and Pacific Worlds”, in *The Atlantic World*, ed. D’Maris Coffman, Adrian Leonard and William O’Reilly, Abingdon: Routledge, 2015, pp. 207–226; Damon Salesa, “Opposite Footers”, in *The Atlantic World in the Antipodes: Effects and Transformations since the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Kate Fullagar, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012, pp. 283–300.

⁴⁵ Epeli Hau’ofa, “Our Sea of Islands” (1993), in *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works*, Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008, pp. 27–40; R. G. Ward, “Earth’s Empty Quarter? Pacific Islands in a Pacific World”, *The Geographical Journal* 155 (1989), pp. 235–246.

⁴⁶ Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus: Exploration and Colonisation from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, 1229–1492*, Houndmills: Macmillan Education, 1987, p. 152; David Abulafia, “Mediterraneans”, in *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, ed. William V. Harris, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 82–85; John R. Gillis, “Islands in the Making of an Atlantic Oceania, 1500–1800”, in *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges*, ed. Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal and Kären Wigen, Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007, pp. 21–37.

⁴⁷ John McAleer, “Looking East: St Helena, the South Atlantic and Britain’s Indian Ocean World”, *Atlantic Studies* 13 (2016), pp. 78–98; George Anson, *A Voyage Around the World, in the Years MDCCXL, I, II, III, IV*, ed. Richard Walter, London, 1748, p. 92, cit. *ibid.*, 79, on the Falklands.

Mediating between the Atlantic, its islands and the lands that surround it are its coasts and beaches. All maritime activity begins from these regions where land and sea meet but their potential within Atlantic history has only just begun to be explored.⁴⁸ Within the historiography of the Pacific, the beach holds a special place as a metaphor for the meeting of cultures and a space where mutual understandings and misunderstandings were performed and identities continually reshaped.⁴⁹ The beach has not functioned as illuminatingly in Atlantic historiography, perhaps because of a later European association with the seaside as a location for leisure and pleasure, aesthetics and athletics.⁵⁰ Infra-Atlantic history might restore significance to such spaces by doing what Henry David Thoreau punningly called “*littorally* ... walking down to the shore, and throwing your line into the Atlantic”, to look for more local and bounded objects of study where the “ocean is but a larger lake”.⁵¹ Here were points of interaction between the human and the natural (especially protein-rich resources such as fish) and between land and sea – oceanic histories in miniature, in effect.

The histories of frontiers and borderlands have been largely terrestrial and located within the interiors of continents but there is great potential for examination of the “saltwater frontier” where incomers and indigenes, especially, met from the early fifteenth century in Africa and from the early sixteenth century onwards in the Americas, both Caribbean and continental. Exchange and interchange, followed often by conflict and dispossession, took place first in these liminal spaces, as native habitations were transformed into bridgeheads for settlers to protect themselves by sea or project their power over land, for example along the eastern seaboard of seventeenth-century North America.⁵² “The American coasts can be said to have been Europe’s initial New World frontier,” and that idea can be extended around the edges of the Atlantic world, especially along its western shores.⁵³

⁴⁸ For more general inspiration, see Alison Bashford, “Terraqueous Histories”, *The Historical Journal* 60 (2017), pp. 253–273.

⁴⁹ Greg Denning, *Beach Crossings: Voyaging across Times, Cultures and Self*, Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Publishing, 2004.

⁵⁰ Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750–1840*, trans. Jocelyn Phelps, Cambridge: Polity, 1994.

⁵¹ Henry D. Thoreau, *Cape Cod* (1865), ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988, pp. 92, 98.

⁵² Andrew Lipman, *The Saltwater Frontier: Indians and the Contest for the American Coast*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015.

⁵³ John R. Gillis, *The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012, p. 91.

Infra-Atlantic history extends well beyond the moment of early interactions. After the initial period of encounter and occupation, European powers attempted to integrate new territories and subjects into their networks of sovereignty and authority. Imperial entanglement was always incomplete because a patchwork of corridors and enclaves rendered empires uneven in their penetration and, like any network, made up as much of holes as linkages. Within the Atlantic world, coasts, rivers, estuaries and islands were sites for the elaboration of empire, both on the fringes of continents and in archipelagoes like the West Indies where empires competed for control cheek by jowl with one another in contested “interpolity microregions” well into the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ When examined at this granular level of microregions, infra-Atlantic history shows that two features of Atlantic history, usually assumed to have an elective affinity, connectivity and integration, were only contingently related: to be enmeshed within Atlantic networks was not necessarily to be part of an ever more entangled Atlantic world. Yet infra-Atlantic history may still appear superficial, in the literal sense of the term. Like most species of Atlantic history, it starts on the surface of land and ocean and builds upwards and outwards from there. To go deeper, we need to consider “sub-Atlantic” history.

Sub-Atlantic History

Sub-Atlantic history is history from below – not in the traditional, social-historical, meaning of that phrase, but rather meaning history that took place “below the water line” or “below the waves”.⁵⁵ The term itself seems to have emerged at that pivotal moment in the middle of the nineteenth century when the two Atlantics were increasingly united by the advent of steam navigation and when both sides of the Atlantic were joined for the first time by the telegraph: for example, the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s earliest instances of “sub-Atlantic” come from 1854 and 1875, respectively: “subatlantic

⁵⁴ Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empire, 1400–1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010; Jeppe Mulich, “Microregionalism and Intercolonial Relations: The Case of the Danish West Indies, 1730–1830”, *Journal of Global History* 8 (2013), pp. 72–94; Benton and Mulich, “The Space between Empires: Coastal and Insular Microregions in the Early Nineteenth-Century World”, in *The Uses of Space in Early Modern History*, ed. Paul Stock, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 152.

⁵⁵ Marcus Rediker, “History from Below the Water Line: Sharks and the Atlantic Slave Trade”, *Atlantic Studies* 5 (2008), pp. 285–297; Ryan Tucker Jones, “Running into Whales: The History of the North Pacific from Below the Waves”, *American Historical Review* 118 (2013), pp. 349–377.

telegraphy” and the “subatlantic cable enterprise”.⁵⁶ More recently, the word has been invoked, with reference to Caribbean thinkers such as Édouard Glissant and Derek Walcott, to cover the realm of “the sub-Atlantic as a repository of historical memory”.⁵⁷ Sub-Atlantic history can cover all these senses and more, to denote the world beneath the waves of the Atlantic, its currents, sea floor and waters, as well as the denizens of marine ecosystems, human interactions with the natural world of the Atlantic, and the history that took place *within* the ocean itself.⁵⁸

Sub-Atlantic history remedies the striking absence of “one area of inquiry [...] from Atlantic history: the ocean itself”, considered as “a single oceanic unit, a huge bioregion differentiated by human activities at different rates in specific subregions.” It can be an adjunct to infra-Atlantic history, as the examination of a particular segment of the ocean and its interactions with animals, land and humans.⁵⁹ Oceans may appear to be timeless, the profound and unchanging stage for what, in Braudelian terms, might appear to be the spume of events on the crest of its waves. By contrast, sub-Atlantic history reveals the history of the sea as a variable and shifting entity transformed by human activity (for example, through overfishing or by polluting) as well as by more overarching processes like climate change. Sub-Atlantic history accordingly brings Atlantic history more fully into alignment with environmental history as a whole.⁶⁰

Sub-Atlantic history should also encompass the histories of activities beneath the ocean. The Atlantic does not have the same large migratory populations of aquatic animals on the scale of the Pacific, with its whales, fish and pinnipeds, for example; human migration and settlement in pursuit of those creatures has not shaped Atlantic history to the same degree as it has the human history of the Pacific.⁶¹ However, humans have long hunted whales

⁵⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “sub-Atlantic”.

⁵⁷ James Delbourgo, “Divers Things: Collecting the World Under Water”, *History of Science* 49 (2011), p. 162; cf. *ibid.*, 167, on “a sub-Atlantic unity made by the deaths of Africans”, in the poetry of Derek Walcott.

⁵⁸ More generally, see John Gillis and Franziska Torma (eds.), *Fluid Frontiers: New Currents in Marine Environmental History*, Cambridge: White Horse Press, 2015.

⁵⁹ Jeffrey Bolster, “Putting the Ocean in Atlantic History: Maritime Communities and Marine Ecology in the Northwest Atlantic, 1500–1800”, *American Historical Review* 113 (2008), pp. 21, 24; Bolster, *The Mortal Sea*.

⁶⁰ For an important overview, see J. R. McNeill, “The Ecological Atlantic”, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World, 1450–1850*, ed. Nicholas Canny and Philip D. Morgan, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 289–304.

⁶¹ Jones, “Running into Whales”.

up into the high Arctic reaches of the Atlantic, and demands for protein from dried fish determined sailing and settlement patterns in the North Atlantic and colonial linkages between New England and the Caribbean (for provisioning the enslaved population) in the eighteenth century.⁶² Access to the products of mammals and fish thereby shaped forms of Atlantic integration for centuries, as did the winds and currents of the basin until the advent of steam. Much Atlantic history has taken for granted the ocean and its inhabitants that drove these developments. Future oceanic historians will want to look *at* the ocean, as well as across it, to discern its true historical dimensions.

Consciousness of the ocean *qua* ocean also forms part of sub-Atlantic history. Because most white inhabitants of the Atlantic world until the early nineteenth century shared a post-Roman prejudice against swimming, “it is most certain that the *Indians*, and the Negroes excel all others in [the] Arts of Swimming and Diving”. For this reason, Africans, African Americans and Native Americans were on the leading edge of submarine knowledge-gathering in the Atlantic, for example working to recover specimens for Sir Hans Sloane in Jamaica, diving for pearls or salvaging materials from wrecks.⁶³ They were also more likely to fall victim to ferocious fauna like sharks: “the shark and the slave trade had gone together from the beginning.”⁶⁴ More generally, while the geography of the Atlantic was reasonably well known by the late sixteenth century, its oceanography and hydrography only began to be explored in the late eighteenth century. Before then, although fishermen and sailors possessed vernacular understandings of the winds and waters of the Atlantic and its animal populations, exploration of the ocean was confined to coastal waters. The first deep-sea sounding of the Atlantic took place from HMS *Racehorse* in the Norwegian Sea in 1773 but major scientific work on the deep ocean did not take off until the late nineteenth century, with the *Challenger* expedition

⁶² See, for instance, David J. Starkey, “Fish and Fisheries in the Atlantic World”, in Coffman, Leonard and O’Reilly, *The Atlantic World*, pp. 55–75; Peter E. Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004; Christopher P. Magra, *The Fisherman’s Cause: Atlantic Commerce and Maritime Dimensions of the American Revolution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

⁶³ Delbourgo, “Divers Things”; Kevin Dawson, “Enslaved Swimmers and Divers in the Atlantic World”, *Journal of American History* 92 (2006), pp. 1327–1355; Melchisédec Thévenot, *The Art of Swimming: Illustrated by Proper Figures with Advice for Bathing*, London, 1699, sig. [A11]^r; quoted, *ibid.*, 1333.

⁶⁴ Rediker, “History from Below the Water Line”, 286.

of 1872–76.⁶⁵ The invention of sonar allowed much deeper investigation and led, in the 1950s, to the great achievement of Marie Tharp and Bruce Heezen in mapping the mid-Atlantic ridge – a breakthrough not just for sub-Atlantic history but also for the emergent theory of plate tectonics.⁶⁶ More than half a century later, the Atlantic, like much of the rest of the world's deep oceans, still remains largely uncharted territory – an inner space awaiting scientific exploration but ripe for historical investigation as well.

The world beneath the waves of the Atlantic may be the least developed form of Atlantic history for the moment. However, it is likely to burgeon as oceanic history becomes more deeply shaped by environmental history. The non-human history of the Atlantic – the historical study not only of its other creatures, but of its waters and winds and how they have in turn interacted with human activity – is only likely to expand, as we can already see from recent work on Caribbean hurricanes, for instance.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, the world beneath the waves – shipwrecks, drowning, the imagining of the depths – is already attracting literary attention.⁶⁸ The submarine realm may be the final frontier for Atlantic history but advances in history from below the waves in other oceanic historiographies suggest its time will soon come, especially as it combines with emerging work on the exploitation, management and

⁶⁵ Richard Ellis, *Deep Atlantic: Life, Death, and Exploration in the Abyss*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996; Helen Rozwadowski, *Fathoming the Ocean: The Discovery and Exploration of the Deep Sea*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005; Richard M. Corfield, *The Silent Landscape: The Scientific Voyage of HMS Challenger*, Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2005; Michael S. Reidy, *Tides of History: Ocean Science and Her Majesty's Navy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008; Reidy and Rozwadowski, "The Spaces In Between: Science, Ocean, Empire", *Isis* 105 (2014), pp. 338–351.

⁶⁶ Bruce C. Heezen, Marie Tharp and Maurice Ewing, *The Floors of the Oceans*, vol. 1, *The North Atlantic*, special paper 65, New York: Geological Society of America, 1959; Hali Felt, *Soundings: The Story of the Remarkable Woman who Mapped the Ocean Floor*, New York: Henry Holt, 2012.

⁶⁷ Greg Bankoff, "Aeolian Empires: The Influence of Winds and Currents on European Maritime Expansion in the Age of Sail", *Environment and History* 23 (2017), pp. 163–196; Matthew Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624–1783*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009; Stuart B. Schwartz, *Sea of Storms: A History of Hurricanes in the Greater Caribbean from Columbus to Katrina*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015.

⁶⁸ For example, Steve Mentz, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean*, London: Continuum, 2009; Mentz, *Shipwreck Modernity: Ecologies of Globalization, 1550–1719*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

governance of the oceans in other fields.⁶⁹ When it does, it will be one more means to join Atlantic history with adjacent oceanic history. To see the promise of that conjunctive turn, we now turn finally to my third and last additional concept, *extra-Atlantic* history.

Extra-Atlantic History

Extra-Atlantic history is the history of the Atlantic told through its linkages with other oceans and seas. On its eastern side, it opens into the Mediterranean; on the western shore, only the Isthmus of Panama, less than 80 kilometres at its narrowest, separated it from – or linked it to – the Pacific before the digging of the Panama Canal. Like the Pacific, the Atlantic is part of the Great Ocean Conveyor Belt and its climate is subject to the variations of the El Niño/Southern Oscillation.⁷⁰ At its southern extremes, the Atlantic joins the Pacific, the Indian Ocean and the Southern Ocean; and thanks to climate change and the retreat of the ice, the widening Northwest Passage will soon link the Atlantic with the Pacific through the Arctic Ocean again. As sub-Atlantic history reveals, the oceanographic connections among the oceans ensure that any attempt to separate them will be artificial and constraining: there is a myth of oceans as well as a myth of continents. The means to bust such myths is by acknowledging those continuities: oceans connect.⁷¹ Atlantic history connects to many other oceanic histories. If taken in isolation, its own history might simply appear to be arbitrarily infra-oceanic. And if the Atlantic is too large to capture some historical processes, it is certainly too small to encompass those that operated on interoceanic, transregional and global scales.

From the fifteenth century onwards, historical actors would never have mistaken the Atlantic for a discrete oceanic realm. For Columbus, what would later be known as the Atlantic was a gateway to Asia, an alternative to a Mediterranean and trans-continental route increasingly blocked by the Ottoman Empire. His successors in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who sought a northwest passage likewise assumed the Atlantic was not bounded and landlocked. Throughout the early modern world, globetrotting cosmopolitans – sailors, soldiers, merchants, clerics, pilgrims and the like – moved between oceanic worlds, the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic and Indian

⁶⁹ John Hannigan, *The Geopolitics of Deep Oceans*, Cambridge: Polity, 2016.

⁷⁰ Zalasiewicz and Williams, *Ocean Worlds*, p. 89.

⁷¹ Kären E. Wigen and Jessica Harland-Jacobs (eds.), “Oceans Connect”, *special issue*, *Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (1999); Rila Mukherjee (ed.), *Oceans Connect: Reflections on Water Worlds across Time and Space*, Delhi: Primus, 2013.

oceans.⁷² Slave traders and planters who carried forms of staple production and of enforced labour from the Mediterranean and the Atlantic islands across the ocean assumed, like promoters of import substitution for goods like wine, olives and silk, from Richard Hakluyt to John Locke and beyond, that climate connected the Atlantic Americas with the lands around the Mediterranean in southern Europe and North Africa. With the large-scale extraction of silver from mines in Mexico and Peru, the first empire on which the sun never set – the Spanish Monarchy – became the vehicle for the first circuit of early modern globalisation with the Manila galleons as its conveyor belt from 1571 to 1815.⁷³ When the Philippines were administered from the viceroyalty of New Spain, it was clear even by the late sixteenth century that the Hispanic Atlantic world extended deep into the Pacific. Indeed, in the eyes of European powers well into the eighteenth century, the North American continent remained a geopolitical bridge between the Atlantic and Pacific worlds.⁷⁴

The political economy of empires and transnational trading companies likewise shaped the linkages between the Atlantic and other oceanic regions. The English East India Company could not have functioned in the Indian Ocean without its Atlantic outpost on St Helena; its Scottish successor and competitor, the short-lived Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies of the late seventeenth century, proposed a bi-hemispheric vision of global trade centred on the Isthmus of Darién (hence its popular name, the Darien Company).⁷⁵ Until the opening of the Suez Canal, the Cape of Good Hope was the pivot between the Atlantic world and the Indian Ocean, a “tavern of the seas” where empires joined and oceans connected: up until 1869, the two oceanic worlds could not be distinguished.⁷⁶ Commodities such as rice,

⁷² Alison Games, “Beyond the Atlantic: English Globetrotters and Transoceanic Connections”, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 63 (2006), pp. 675–692; Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560–1660*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

⁷³ Dennis O. Flynn, and Arturo Giráldez, “Born with a ‘Silver Spoon’: The Origin of World Trade in 1571”, *Journal of World History* 6 (1995), pp. 201–221.

⁷⁴ Paul W. Mapp, *The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713–1763*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

⁷⁵ Philip J. Stern, “British Asia and British Atlantic: Comparisons and Connections”, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 63 (2006), pp. 693–712; Stern, “Politics and Ideology in the Early East India Company-State: The Case of St. Helena, 1673–1696”, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 35 (2007), pp. 1–23; Douglas Watt, *The Price of Scotland: Darien, Union and the Wealth of the Nations*, Edinburgh: Luath, 2006.

⁷⁶ Kerry Ward, “‘Tavern of the Seas’? The Cape of Good Hope as an Oceanic Crossroads during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries”, in Bentley, Bridenthal and

indigo and breadfruit were transplanted from the Indian and Pacific oceans into the Atlantic as staples for settlers and the enslaved and as products for intercontinental commerce; the tea dumped into Boston harbour on the eve of the American Revolution came from China to North America in East India Company ships. Later demands for labour especially after emancipation, drew Chinese and Indian workers into the region, joining Atlantic migration to global circuits of migration and transportation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁷⁷ It was only in the twentieth century that the Atlantic was perceived to be a “world”, entire of itself, and distinct from global history more generously conceived. Now is the time to reconnect it to that broader history, and to bring Atlantic history out of almost one hundred years of solitude.

All three of these newer Atlantic histories, infra-Atlantic, sub-Atlantic and extra-Atlantic, expand and deepen Atlantic history, both in time – beyond its default boundaries within early modern history – and in space: beneath its surface, across its waters and into the broader reaches of the World Ocean as a whole. By drawing methods and inspirations from other oceanic histories, they may help to bring Atlantic historiography into a more productive and enduring dialogue with oceanic history *tout court*. If Atlantic history does have a future, it will be as a subset of world history viewed through the lenses of oceanic history.⁷⁸ We are all global oceanic historians now – even the avowed Atlanticists among us.

Harvard University

Wigen, *Seascapes: Maritime Histories*, pp. 137–152; Gerald Groenewald, “Southern Africa and the Atlantic World”, in Coffman, Leonard and O’Reilly, *The Atlantic World*, pp. 100–116.

⁷⁷ Adam McKeown, “Global Migration, 1846–1940”, *Journal of World History*, 15 (2004), pp. 155–189; Donna R. Gabaccia and Dirk Hoerder (eds.) *Connecting Seas and Connected Ocean Rims: Indian, Atlantic, and Pacific Oceans and China Seas Migrations from the 1830s to the 1930s*, Leiden: Brill, 2011; Reed Ueda, *Crosscurrents: Atlantic and Pacific Migration in the Making of a Global America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

⁷⁸ As argued by various historians in recent years: for example, Peter Coclanis, “Atlantic World or Atlantic/World?”, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 63 (2006), pp. 725–742; Lauren Benton, “The British Atlantic in a Global Context”, in Armitage and Braddick, *The British Atlantic World*, pp. 271–289; Canny, “Atlantic History and Global History”; Cécile Vidal, “Pour une histoire globale du monde atlantique ou des histoires connectées dans et au-delà du monde atlantique?”, *Annales HSS* 67 (2012), pp. 391–413.

