

Sebouh David Aslanian

A Life Lived Across Continents: The Global Microhistory of an Armenian Agent of the *Compagnie des Indes Orientales*, 1666–1688

In 1666, French finance minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert hired Martin di Marcara Avachinz, an Armenian merchant who had lived in Iran and India, as an agent for his newly established *Compagnie des Indes Orientales*. In 1669, shortly after the Armenian had secured a royal edict from the sultan of Golconda to set up a French trading center in the port of Masulipatam, he was summarily arrested, tortured, and sent to France by his superior François Caron. This article provides a close reading of the legal briefs or factums produced during the sensational trial that followed Marcara's release from prison in 1675. In tracing a "global microhistory" of his life across continents, it seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of early modern long-distance trade in the Indian Ocean, comparing the network of the CIO and other joint-stock corporations with the "stateless" nature of the trade diaspora of Armenian merchants from the township of New Julfa on the outskirts of the Safavid capital Isfahan. Finally, the article considers the role of factums in early modern France and explores how the "exceptionally normal" story of Marcara's life provides a useful window onto French perceptions of the Orient and the fear induced by communities such as Armenian and Indian merchants, bankers, and brokers.

Darío G. Barriera

Governing the Countryside: Microsocial Analysis and Institutional Construction in Late Eighteenth-Century Río de la Plata

At the end of the eighteenth century, the Hispanic Monarchy imagined new solutions for governing its territories between the south of the Amazon, the Strait of Magellan, and the Andean cordillera. Populated by farmers and shepherds, these huge rural areas remained poorly known to the authorities. Yet among the reforms conducted in America by Charles III—including the adoption of the intendency system—none tackled the administration of the countryside head-on. This problem is key for two reasons. First, most of the population of the Río de la Plata lived in rural areas. Second, the enormous distances that separated these areas from the urban centers where representatives of the Monarchy resided (Santa Fe, Buenos Aires, or Madrid) posed a challenge that the authorities had to face in order to govern these populations. Shifting from a "top-down" perspective to a ground-level analysis attentive to local dynamics makes it possible to shed new light on how

these spaces far removed from the centers of power functioned. Through the micro-historical analysis of a series of institutional transformations affecting the Río de la Plata, this article shows how subjects came to participate in the government of their region, mobilizing their networks to create a community and institutions on a local scale.

Jessica Marglin

Nationality on Trial: International Private Law across the Mediterranean

This article uses a single, transnational legal case that played out between Italy and Tunisia in the 1870s and 1880s to tell a truly global history of international law—that is, one that goes beyond the boundaries of the West. *Samama v. Samama* was a fabulously complicated case that dragged on in Italian courts for almost a decade. The crux of the legal arguments concerned the nationality of Nissim Samama, a Jew born in Tunis; Samama's nationality, in turn, would determine which legal system regulated his estate. The Italian civil code enshrined respect for the national law of a foreigner, but such foreigners were presumed to be Western. A case involving the national law of Tunisia and the status of Jews called the very foundations of the international legal system into question. In putting Samama's nationality on trial, the case opened up debate over fissures in the emerging theory of international law: How could non-Western states like Tunisia fit into an international legal order? How did Islamic law intersect with international law? What was the status of Jewish nationhood in a world increasingly based on exclusive nationalities? The Samama case offers access to the voices of European international lawyers debating the ambiguities of their field, as well as those of Maghrebis articulating their own vision of international law. The resulting arguments exposed tensions inherent to an international legal system uncomfortably balanced between universalism and Western particularism.

Roberto Zaugg

The King's Chinese Spittoon: Global Commodities, Court Culture, and Vodun in the Kingdoms of Hueda and Dahomey (Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries)

As key players in the transatlantic slave trade, the monarchies of Hueda and Dahomey (in modern-day southern Benin) connected themselves to global commodity flows. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, imported merchandise fueled practices of conspicuous consumption and ritualized largesse, the performance of which was pivotal in consolidating their rulers' power. Focusing on specific items (tobacco, porcelain) and behavioral practices (smoking, spitting), this article examines how these goods were materially and symbolically integrated into courtly culture and associated with the religious beliefs and ritual practices of Vodun. In order to track recurring aspects of courtly scenography, to compare the signification of bodily practices in different parts of the world, and to identify material links engendered by global trade, it combines microhistorical investigation based on written records with archaeological findings, anthropological observations, and the analysis of visual sources and sculptural artifacts. The essay argues that royal palaces constituted crucial laboratories of aesthetic change and new cultures of elite consumption. In this process, exogenous elements not only enriched the material culture of the palaces, celebrating the monarchs' global splendor; they were also charged with new meanings that inscribed foreign goods and related practices into specifically regional cultural codes.

Christel Freu

Writing Labor History Today: A Critical Note on the Case of the Roman Empire

Three recently published books raise the question of labor in the Roman Empire. The present article aims to investigate the sources privileged by historians, the scale of observation on which their analysis is situated, and the theoretical assumptions that guide them. These reflections show that there are multiple ways of writing labor history, currently divided into different subfields which do not always communicate with one another. Thanks to new readings of ancient literature and epigraphy and the contribution of papyri and archaeology, the traditional history of work and trades has been widely renewed. An important line of questioning examines the reasons for the high degree of trade specialization in the Roman Empire, as well as the existence of a true division of labor. Archaeology helps us understand the technologies and processes of production, making it possible to establish a typology of the socioprofessional identities, from employers to employees, that existed in the shops and workshops of the Roman world. A quite different approach investigates the organization of labor from a macroeconomic perspective, seeing it as a force mobilized by employers: comparisons between the productivity of slaves and that of free workers have been replaced by analyses of the transaction costs of free hired labor versus servile manpower. Finally, debate continues between historians who consider that the labor market of the Roman Empire was limited by clientelist networks and servile labor, and those who describe a free-market economy where labor had become a commodity.

Catherine Kikuchi

Competition and Collaboration in the Venetian Book World from 1469 to the Early Sixteenth Century

The early history of printing in Europe is one of great economic and commercial success, but also of significant risks taken by those involved. The supply of paper, essential to the functioning of a press, could cause conflicts and required constantly available capital: the profitability of the book industry depended on the growth of the market. In Venice, anyone could set up as a printer, creating competition that was strongly criticized by printers and booksellers in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. This prompted them to formulate the economic risks they faced in *supplica* addressed to the Venetian authorities, and to conceptualize the realities of their situation, especially in terms of competition. This word, always used in a pejorative sense, is nevertheless rare in both theoretical and practical documents of the time. However competitive this economic milieu was, it was counterbalanced by the necessity of collaboration, a phenomenon that can be studied through social network analysis. Trust was restored through the constitution of dense collaborative networks, in which competitors became partners. Yet this also enabled some actors to establish strong *consortia*, leading to the kind of oligopolistic economy typical of industries without state regulation.