

## Letter from the Editors

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We open this issue with an in-depth interview with Natalie Zemon Davis. Amongst many other things, she talks about the happy accidents and unexpected inspirations of archival research, her predilection for narratives of people on the margins and ‘boundary crossers’, and the importance of doing public history. She also issues a call to scholars of the early modern period to bring as wide as possible a mentality to the reading of sources, irrespective of the region one studies. The editors hope that this issue of *Itinerario* reflects that wide mentality.

Natalie Lawrence contributes an article on the symbolic resonances of natural history objects brought to early modern Europe. She focuses on scaly mammals: the ‘Old World’ pangolin and the ‘New World’ armadillo, and the way their biogeographies became entangled. Lawrence uses their reception and treatment as a lens through which to view particular early modern European fascinations and anxieties in new global relationships. In a co-authored contribution, Jos Gommans and Ineke Loots focus on the ethnohistory of Johannes Hoornbeeck, a Dutch Protestant theologian. His *De conversione Indorum et Gentilium* contains biblical and classical scholarship, but also the latest ethnographical information from travellers and missionaries of his time. Gommans and Loots shed light on Hoornbeeck’s surprising openness to and treatment of heretical views. Next, Erica Heinsen-Roach takes us to seventeenth century North Africa, and the careful diplomacy and mediation required in Dutch commercial expansion in the western Mediterranean. Focusing on agents’ engagement with local conditions and customary practices, she sheds light on Dutch interaction with the Maghreb far beyond official treaties and alliances.

In ‘Belonging in Africa’, Gunvor Simonsen re-examines creolization in the African Atlantic and highlights the complexities and challenges of crossing cultural divides. For Frederik Svane and Christian Protten, two Euro-African men born on the Gold Coast in the early eighteenth century, Creole conditions resulted in identity practices that ranged from the complete rejection of African culture to a celebration and redefinition of the significance of African origins in the Atlantic world. Next, Richard Guy analyses the accounts of four mutinies and wrecks of Dutch East India Company ships, and shows how the accounts link spatial protocols on ship to proper social order. Without fail, the narratives present the Indies as a dangerous physical and moral testing ground, from which the ship provides a vital protective barrier, but only if the crew act with disciplined solidarity and show seamanlike virtues of cohesion and perseverance. Finally, Charles Wheeler takes us to a different trading community: the

Minh Hương, a powerful interest group of Chinese descent in Vietnamese commerce, colonization, and politics between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Focusing on Minh Hương identity formation, he shows how they evolved from a merchant diaspora into a powerful merchant-bureaucratic class, and argues that they deserve greater consideration in the literature on merchant cultures in world history than has hitherto been the case.

With a new *Itinerario* year also comes a new cover image. In 1699, at the age of fifty-two, groundbreaking naturalist Maria Sybilla Merian undertook an expedition to Surinam with her younger daughter Dorothea to study South American flora and insects. Her *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium* documented the life cycles of Surinam's insects and contained detailed botanical information on their habitats. First published in 1705, more drawings were added to later editions, including by Merian's elder daughter Johanna. Our cover design is based on a drawing from one such later edition by Cornelis Markee, published ca. 1763. For those who would like to know more, we refer back to the interview with Natalie Zemon Davis in this issue: Merian is one of the key figures in Davis' 1995 book *Women on the Margins*.