
H-France Review Vol. 13 (September 2013), No. 146

Michael B. Miller, *Europe and the Maritime World: A Twentieth-Century History*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. xvi + 435 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$99.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-107-02455-7.

Review by Stephen L. Harp, University of Akron.

Europe and the Maritime World reveals just how far both the historiography on modern Europe and Michael Miller himself have come in the past thirty years. There are strong continuities, of course; Miller's first book on the nineteenth-century department store, *The Bon Marché* still astounds in the way that it combines business history, social history, and a sort of cultural history *avant la lettre*.^[1] Miller's latest book is global in approach even if western Europe is the point of embarkation, reflecting the development of world history today--global, yet still often Eurocentric. Once again Miller is doing business history with an eye for social relationships and business culture; here the Boucicauts of nineteenth-century Paris have been replaced by those men in western Europe and across the globe who ran twentieth-century maritime trade.

The strengths of this work are manifold, but two fundamental contributions come to the fore. First, Miller encourages readers to think about modern Europe from the perspective of the sea. Despite much attention to the early modern Atlantic world, historians of modern Europe continue to assume the importance of masses of land, both in Europe and in empires in Africa and Asia. Second, Miller engages the now substantial literature, both scholarly and quasi-popular, on globalization. Here he makes many points, the most important of which may well be that generalizations about globalization are easy and thus rife. Miller, for his part, pays close attention to the ports, companies, and individuals who created and maintained the maritime networks that made empire and an earlier Europe-dominated form of globalization possible in the first place. Along the way, Miller makes clear that globalization was of course not new to the late twentieth century, much as it did change in that period. Moreover, Miller qualifies a usual counter-narrative that there was a sort of globalization before World War I, followed by a "deglobalization" in the early twentieth century, and an ultimately triumphant globalization at the end of the century. He finds instead important continuities since the late nineteenth century, whatever the impact of protectionism, world wars and economic depression, and the rise of the Soviet Union.

The first part of the book describes the ports, norms of shipping, shipping companies, trading companies and some of the commodities traded (notably coffee and wool), the intermediaries or "middle men" across the continents, and the culture of maritime trade. The functioning of Europe's most important ports--Rotterdam, Antwerp, London, Liverpool, Hamburg, Le Havre and Marseille--forms the backbone of the story. As in the analysis of various shipping and trading companies, Miller has an eye on the practical. How did business work? How were relationships formed and nurtured? How did companies, such as Harrisons & Crosfield, form links between investors, plantation owners, and shippers? How were ships loaded? With rich detail, Miller traces the development and evolution of liners (which hauled much cargo, particularly manufactured goods in regular service between, for example, Rotterdam and the Dutch East Indies) as well as tramp steamers (which hauled mostly bulk goods, especially coal to coaling stations throughout the world before the conversion to diesel fuel). Most lines ran between metropolises and colonies or between Europe and current or past European settler colonies, such as

between Liverpool and North America, with comparatively little cross-trade (such as between a port in one European country and a colony dominated by a different European country). Miller has discovered a well-developed network of global trade, made possible by cooperation between shipping companies and trading houses, even though most shipping companies did not, until the second half of the twentieth century, run their own ships in both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

The second part of the book considers the important transformations of the twentieth century: World War I, economic depression in the 1930s, World War II and its aftermath, the effects of decolonization, and later developments of passenger air travel and containerization. Before all else, Miller describes the continual adaptation of shippers and traders to the blockade of Germany and Austria-Hungary, the Allied effort to transport men, military materiel, and foodstuffs from the western hemisphere to western Europe, and the loss of ships during the wars. While the Depression hit hard, idling many ships, companies and men adapted nonetheless and persisted. Far from “deglobalization” during the early twentieth century as a result of war and depression, Miller gives many examples of how shippers continued to find niches and profit. For instance, Dutch shipping firms, established to conduct trade between the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies, were hit particularly hard by Indonesian independence. But they quickly expanded into cross-trade, and the port of Rotterdam became the most important port in Europe, stretching all the way from the city to the sea. There oil shipments from the Middle East grew precipitously after World War II.

The most important change came in the form of jet travel and shipping containers, beginning in the late 1950s. Passenger jet service wiped out the demand for passenger liners, some of which were creatively redeployed as cruise ships as leisure travel expanded. Miami, which had never been much of a port, became the primary port of departure for cruises in the usually calm waters of the perpetually sunny Caribbean. Among shipping companies, freight grew continually after World War II. Oil tankers dominated bulk shipping. More importantly, beginning in 1956, metal shipping containers replaced the wood and metal pallets introduced on a major scale by the US Army during the war. Soon ships required very few men to load or unload. The balancing of loads could be done by computer. There was no repacking of goods as even pallets often necessitated. Cargo goods in various states of production and assembly could be moved, at incredibly low cost, throughout the globe. Historic shipping companies and agents consolidated and took on bland names of modern-sounding “logistics” companies; Harrisons & Crosfield became Elementis. Longshoremen disappeared, as did those old hands whose expertise in properly loading a vessel had averted its capsizing. Ships now accommodated containers and grew ever bigger in the process. No development, at least since the development of the steamship, had a greater impact on world shipping than containerization.

In what will come as a surprise to readers of H-France, despite Miller’s specialty in French history, France is by no means at the center of this story, a fact attributable to limitations of the sources for France as well as the second-tier status of French ports, even Le Havre and Marseille. In addition to the usual national and local archives that one would expect, Miller has done considerable work in shipping companies’ holdings, which provide rich and often fascinating sources. Those sources are more plentiful for British, Dutch, German, and Belgian firms. Miller also interviewed more than three dozen former employees.

One of the most interesting chapters is entitled “culture.” Here Miller shows the ways that those men involved in maritime trade saw themselves and their companies. His descriptions of career trajectories, international contacts, and the role of clubs are fascinating. Given the title of the chapter and the European origins of the men described (and interviewed), it is somewhat surprising that these men do not appear to have articulated much of a masculine identity. There is description of deal-making over excessive drink and, to a limited extent, roughness on the docks. But gender has little place here; there are no tales of women at home or abroad, no condemnations of homosexuality at sea or in port, no

characterizations of enemies or rivals as effeminate, no gendering of language at all in the construction of these men's identities.

Similarly and even more surprisingly, there appear to have been no easy generalizations about the colonized or recently independent which served to construct European identities of these men. Some men, just like those here, owned and sailed the ships that hauled "coolies." Miller finds maritime men to be a "bridge" (p. 130) between the West and the Rest as so many of the men lived much of their lives outside Europe. At one point, Miller does note that in the Middle East in the late 1960s "Bedouins had a habit of disappearing from both car and car payments after crashing their Chryslers in the desert" without attribution (p. 303). Surely this observation came from an employee of a shipping or trading company and is not Miller's own appraisal of typical Bedouin behavior. What else did these maritime men say about the men and women they came in contact with throughout the globe? It may well be, as Miller claims, that the men were human links between Europe and the colonies, and later the former colonies. But the men in question were near the top of a global social hierarchy. How did they construct cultural notions of self and other in order to understand and justify that reality? It seems as though they said nothing about that. I kept wondering if records had been gleaned by companies or individuals interviewed were careful about what they said about the periods of empire and decolonization.

This is a very good book; many readers tired of the usual topics of research will deeply appreciate Miller's contribution (Anglophone scholars of Europe are more herd-like than we often realize). As in his earlier work, Miller does not paint by number, filling in spaces about something we already mostly understand, with the lines of interpretation already drawn by others; rather, he has portrayed a maritime reality little known and rarely considered by most of us who came of age in the era of the jumbo-jet and shipping containers. His is an interesting tableau. Unfortunately, Cambridge University Press is charging too much for the book, a fact that could prohibit much course adoption even at the graduate level. That is too bad, as Miller's scholarship is quite solid, and he has an eye for quite telling detail that, as in the case of the now classic *Bon Marché*, could attract many readers over many years.

NOTE

[1] Michael B. Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981). See also Miller, *Shanghai on the Metro: Spies, Intrigue and the French between the Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

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