CONCLUSION

To write a history that views the Baltic—and Sweden in particular—from the perspective of the Atlantic may seem perverse. After all, Sweden's experience of the Atlantic was largely indirect. The American colony of New Sweden (*Nya Sverige*) had been founded amid high hopes in 1638, but Swedish control of the lower Delaware valley was short-lived.¹ The territory was surrendered to the Dutch in 1655, who lost it in turn to the English. Swedish-speaking Lutheran communities lived on in Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey, but they were just one, increasingly minor element in a colonial scene dominated by English and Welsh Quakers, Scots-Irish Presbyterians, German Pietists of different stripes, and Africans whose spiritual beliefs stood apart from those of their north European masters.² Swedish endeavour on the African coast was equally fleeting. Louis De Geer, no less, was among the promoters of the Swedish West India Company (*Guineakompaniet*), established in 1649 to force an entry into the booming slave trade, but the forts that were established along the Gold Coast in the 1650s did not endure. The last of them was seized by the Danes in 1663.³ Sweden's imperial presence in the Atlantic was not renewed until the 1780s, when Gustav III, exploiting the diplomatic fallout from the American Revolution, acquired the tiny Caribbean island of St Barthélemy.

This was a sorry record, one that compared unfavourably not just with the colonial giants of the Atlantic world, such as Spain or Portugal, but with Nordic neighbours such as Denmark. The Danes not only ousted

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¹ Stellan Dahlgren and Hans Norman, *The rise and fall of New Sweden: Governor Johan Risingh's journal 1654–55 in its historical context* (Uppsala, 1988).

² Although note the argument presented in Terry G. Jordan and Matti Kaups, *The American backwoods frontier: an ethnic and ecological interpretation* (Baltimore, 1989) that the lower Delaware valley was the 'cultural hearth' from which the characteristic practices of American frontier life emerged. And these, it is claimed, were brought across the Atlantic by Savo-Karelians who settled in New Sweden in the 1640s and 1650s. Their expertise with the felling axe, their ecologically wasteful forms of agriculture, their notched log style of domestic architecture, their preference for hard liquor over beer, and their zest for personal violence all endured in frontier culture. In such a way the Swedish imprint on American life was profound.

³ György Nováky, *Handelskompanier och kompanihandel. Svenska Afrikakompaniet 1649–1663. En studie i feodal handel* (Uppsala, 1990).

the Swedes from their African bridgehead, they maintained a presence in the Caribbean throughout the eighteenth century; the modest but steady slave trade of Copenhagen's *Vestindisk-Guineiske Kompagni* linked the two theatres. Sweden had nothing to compare even with this. The Swedes were not alone in experiencing territorial disappointment, of course. The Dutch lost substantial colonial possessions in both north and south America in the seventeenth century, but they remained a significant trading power in the Atlantic long after their settlements in Pernambuco and the Hudson valley had passed into other hands.⁴ Likewise, the wreck of Britain's north American empire in the 1780s did not seriously diminish British maritime prowess. The same could not be said of the Swedes. Swedish shipping played virtually no part in transatlantic commerce until the very end of the eighteenth century.

Given all of this, it might be thought fanciful to add a 'Swedish' Atlantic to the list of conceptual Atlantics already in circulation. Yet Sweden in the eighteenth century had an unmistakeable Atlantic dimension, as this book makes clear. That Sweden's 'Atlanticism' was articulated via Britain, her principal trading partner, did not make it any the less vital, merely singular. And it would to be perverse to deny Atlantic credentials to Stockholm when historians are willing to consider entirely landlocked locations such as the upper Mississippi valley as lying within the ocean's orbit, or to see a city like Lima, whose citizens gazed out across the Pacific, as an important node of the Atlantic slave trade. Conversely, the 'Atlanticity' that can be ascribed to Sweden cannot plausibly be extended to Russia, even though Russian exports of iron, timber, and timber products exceeded those of her Baltic rival by the mid-eighteenth century. To be sure, goods left the quays of St Petersburg and Riga for Atlantic destinations in great number, but the commercial filiations that joined Russian producers to Atlantic consumers had none of the delicacy or precision that characterised their Swedish equivalents. Forgemasters at Gammelbo, let it be remembered, adjusted their daily practice in direct response to signals from African markets; their counterparts in the *Vallonbruk* were taught to answer to the demands of steel makers in Birmingham and Sheffield. Workers in the Urals, by contrast, made iron bars without the least regard for the shapes or sizes that Atlantic consumers required. Besides, the mind-set of the Russian court had

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⁴ Pieter Emmer and Wim Klooster, 'The Dutch Atlantic, 1600–1800: expansion without empire', *Itinerario*, 2 (1999), 48–69.

no pronounced Atlantic orientation. Russian imperial ambitions were continental rather than oceanic. The colonial frontier was driven east and south: into Siberia or toward the Black Sea. Russia was connected to the Atlantic world, but it did not belong to it.

To grant Sweden—but not Russia—a place in the new Atlantic History is therefore allowable. But like all episodes in Atlantic history, Sweden's 'Atlantic moment' had a distinctive chronology. Bar iron from *Bergslagen* appeared on west European markets from the 1620s, but it was not until the 1660s and 1670s, when London became their foremost destination, that exports took on an Atlantic inflection. Significantly, the escalation of exports to London coincided with the great leap forward in Britain's Atlantic commerce brought about by the Navigation Acts of the 1650s and 1660s. By 1700 Swedish iron played an indispensable role in the projection of British power in the western ocean. The merchant fleet and Royal Navy alike owed their seaworthiness to bolts and hoops of Swedish iron, not to mention Swedish tar. It mattered not whether the vessels were built in Shadwell or Salem, Massachusetts; their timbers were shaped by adzes and axes that had been edged with steel of Swedish ancestry. And the British-made hardware and 'toys' that circulated around the ocean either embodied Baltic iron or had been crafted with tools that did.

Bar iron from *Bergslagen* retained a central role in Britain's industrialising economy for the remainder of the eighteenth century, until puddling and rolling changed the entire foundation of malleable iron production. The coal technology revolution in Britain dealt Swedish iron a body blow, but the response of Swedish exporters was to redouble their Atlantic orientation not to abandon it. Now, in the early nineteenth century, as they directed their exports towards markets in the United States, Swedish producers and merchants became direct participants in an Atlantic iron trade rather than adjuncts to the British, as formerly. As a result, Swedish iron production kept a distinctively Atlantic flavour into the 1840s, long after Russia's iron industry had turned in on itself to serve Eurasian markets.

But to bring yet another part of the globe into the Atlantic's embrace is to invite difficulties. 'Atlanticity' is now being ascribed to so many communities, cultures, and commodities that the capacity of the Atlantic History paradigm to bear ever more historiographical freight is open to question. It is in danger of slumping beneath the explanatory demands made upon it. As the study of Atlantic History has progressed, so it has become clear that the integrative, centripetal forces that pulled together

peoples, things, and ideas from the continents that bordered the ocean did *not* make the Atlantic basin a place apart. On the contrary, the early modern Atlantic was being drawn into a tighter relationship with other zones of the world economy. Whilst Mexican silver was shipped across the Atlantic to fill the royal treasury in Spain, it also exited Mexico to the west, leaving Acapulco for Manila, where it was exchanged for silk, porcelain, and lacquer wares. And much of the silver that was docked at Cadiz was trans-shipped for Asia. (Sweden's tiny East India Company made its own contribution to the drain of bullion to the east: her ships invariably tied up at Cadiz to take on board the silver *piastres* needed to buy tea at Canton).⁵ America and Africa, in other words, combined to bring Europe closer to Asia.

The number of European vessels that ventured east of the Cape of Good Hope was, of course, relatively small in comparison with those that rode the Atlantic, but those that did navigate the Indian Ocean found it flush with shipping of all sorts. Indeed, historians of the Indian Ocean insist that the dynamic interconnectedness that Atlantic historians see as peculiar to their ocean in the early modern era was far from unique. Similar sorts of maritime interaction were to be found in the Arabian sea, along the east coast of Africa, in the Bay of Bengal, and—pre-eminently—amid the sea lanes that linked the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea.⁶ This thriving commerce only tended to register in European minds when Bohea tea was served in middle-class parlours, ideally in 'china' cups, and to register principally as an Asian contribution to the business of the western hemisphere. Yet the trade of the Indian Ocean also intruded into the Atlantic when Gujarati textiles or cowries from the Maldives were traded on the Guinea coast. The instinctive reflex of Atlantic historians is to treat the commodity chains that originated in south Asia as tributaries of an Atlantic system. But might not the Atlantic be viewed with equal justice as an arm of Asian commerce?

This is to say that the Atlantic History paradigm that has enlivened historical discussion for the last twenty years is too enclosed—too

⁵ Christian Koninckx, *The first and second charters of the Swedish East India Company (1731–1766): a contribution to the maritime, economic, and social history of north-western Europe in its relationship with the Far East* (Kortrijk, 1980), pp. 120, 126–27, 189–98.

⁶ See Sushil Chaudhury and Michel Morineau (eds), *Merchants, companies and trade: Europe and Asia in the early modern era* (Cambridge, 1999); Om Prakash, *European commercial enterprise in pre-colonial India* (Cambridge, 1998).

enclosed in the sense that the Atlantic basin was part of a global system and is best appreciated in its global setting. That Atlantic History had epochal extra-Atlantic ramifications is something that historians of China are keen to point out. The New World provided Europeans with material resources that were denied to east Asians. The Americas supplied immense quantities of food and fibre to European consumers—resources that could not have been found within Europe itself: rice from Carolina or cotton from Georgia. The bounty of the New World, in other words, generated for the most part by coerced labour, allowed a growth in Europe's non-agricultural workforce and a growth in European industrial production. And it did so without precipitating a catastrophic decline in European living standards. China did not benefit from the same windfall. Continued growth implied a movement onto marginal land or an over-exploitation of lands already used to raise food or industrial raw materials. Diminishing returns set in and in the nineteenth century China succumbed to ecological degradation and Malthusian crisis.⁷ Atlantic History is therefore a planetary rather than a hemispheric phenomenon: it underlay the 'great divergence' of East and West.

Yet if the Atlantic History paradigm is in one sense too closed off, it is in another sense a little too open. There is tendency among many historians of an 'Atlanticist' bent to play down the obstacles to economic and social interaction within the Atlantic theatre, opting for concepts and metaphors that bring collegiality or adaptive collaboration to mind ('community', 'conversation', 'Atlantic creole'). Yet obstacles there were. The ocean was ringed by institutions and structures designed expressly to thwart interchange between rival political systems. Smugglers might subvert them and religious visionaries try to disregard them, but they were there nonetheless. British commercial success during the lifetime of Graffin Prankard—roughly speaking the years between the Glorious Revolution and the Seven Years' War—was built upon fiscal centralisation, naval might, and the ruthless exclusion of foreign shipping from colonial trade routes. It proved a happy combination, allowing for a massive growth in Atlantic trade, of which the *Baltick Merchant's* annual expedition to South Carolina was one small expression. The record of

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⁷ Kenneth Pomeranz, *The great divergence: China, Europe, and the making of the modern world economy* (Princeton NJ, 2000), chapters 5 and 6.

competitor states that could not boast the same fiscal efficiency (France) or protectionist rigour (the United Provinces) was inferior.⁸

So, systems of power placed limits on what was possible, as Swedes well knew. After the loss of *Nya Sverige* and the surrender of *Guineakompaniet's* African forts Sweden's direct link to the western ocean was lost. Henceforth her 'Atlanticism' was contingent upon British mediation. Swedish commentators were uncomfortably conscious of this and sought to override British influence by imitating Britain's own protectionist code. The *Produktplakat* of the 1720s drew unashamedly on the Navigation Acts, and the boost it gave to Swedish shipping was appreciable. But nothing could dislodge the grip that British merchants had established on Swedish iron. Although British ministers fretted at what they saw as over-dependence on Baltic supplies of iron and naval stores, the truth was that Sweden's iron makers stood in a subordinate position to British merchant capital.

The concept of 'conversation' has been profitably employed to explain how Madeira wine, one of the most successful Atlantic commodities of the eighteenth century, arose out of a dialogue between its producers and consumers—the product was refined in terms of its flavour, appearance and packaging in response to shifts in consumer taste around the ocean's circumference.⁹ The concept is less successfully applied to Swedish iron. The major 'Orground' brands underwent changes in the ways they were manufactured and marketed, but these changes did not stem from a conversation; they arose from exchanges that had a curt, peremptory tone to them. And if most of Sweden's iron exports were contracted for by British merchants the chances of exploring alternative markets were limited. Much to his dismay, Reinhold Angerstein found few items of Swedish provenance on the quayside at Cadiz when he visited the port in 1752. The iron was mostly Spanish and the steel '*Azero de Venetia*'—Alpine steel shipped from Venice.¹⁰ Angerstein made hopeful estimates of the markets that Swedish commodities could win

⁸ David Ormrod, *The rise of commercial empires: England and the Netherlands in the age of mercantilism, 1650–1770* (Cambridge, 2003).

⁹ David Hancock, 'Commerce and conversation in the eighteenth-century Atlantic: the invention of Madeira wine', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXXIX, 2 (1998), 197–219.

¹⁰ Anders Florén and Göran Rydén, 'Sketches of Spain: the journey of Reinhold Rücker Angerstein, 1752', in K. Benson, M. Mörner, and I. Söhrman, (eds), *Spanish-Swedish relations from the mid-seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century* (Göteborg, 2002), pp. 291–305.

in the Iberian Atlantic—markets that could be fed via the fleets that sailed to Havana, Vera Cruz, Cartagena, and Buenos Aires—but for as long as Sweden's iron exports remained under the mercantile control of British factors Angerstein's hopes were to be unfulfilled. And so it proved. British hegemony in Stockholm was immovable.

The iron that left Stockholm's *Jernvåg* had, of course, a profound impact on the British Isles, the point of departure for a still wider Atlantic world. It did so, as we know, by providing an essential raw material for the makers of hardware and other ferrous articles, and by providing it in bulk. But it was not just a question of quantity; it was the *quality* of Swedish iron that played a quite decisive role in the British Atlantic. By monopolising the supply of 'Orground' iron in the early eighteenth century British merchants facilitated a growth in English steel making. Indeed, the existence of such an industry in Sheffield and elsewhere depended *entirely* on the command that British factors were able to establish over iron from *Leufstawerken* and *Strömbergswerken*. Had it been otherwise, English steel making must have perished and the hardware trades languished for want of steel. A comparison with France, Britain's great adversary, is instructive. French industrialists, *savants* and state officials were intent on developing a steel sector to match Britain's, but misplaced economic nationalism led them to forswear the use of Swedish 'Orground' iron.¹¹ Réaumur, whose *L'art de convertir le fer forgé en acier* (1722) was a major contribution to metallurgical science, saw no call for Baltic iron.

I have said before that, if it should be necessary to resort to the irons of Sweden, the inconvenience would not be great, as it can be had in our ports at approximately the same price as our own. But we are far from this necessity. I have tried the irons of several forges in Berry and have been very successful with them. I am experienced with good iron from Nivernais...¹²

Réaumur went on to list a further six French provinces whose forges could supply iron worthy of conversion to steel. But it was not so. By

¹¹ J.R. Harris, *Industrial espionage and technology transfer: Britain and France in the eighteenth century* (Aldershot, 1998), pp. 205–21.

¹² [René Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur], *Reaumur's memoirs on iron and steel* (1722: Chicago, 1956), p. 120. Réaumur (1683–1757) was best known as an entomologist whose *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des insectes*, published in six volumes between 1734 and 1742, was the model for Charles De Geer's own eight-volume study of the same title, published between 1752 and 1778.

spurning the appropriate inputs, French steel makers could do no more than stumble forward. A refusal to acknowledge Sweden's potential sapped at France's Atlantic endeavours; a willingness to exploit Baltic resources strengthened Britain's.¹³

As the case of 'Orground' iron suggests, the growth of imperial power in the Atlantic depended upon trade—more specifically, upon trade as contemporaries understood the term. Trade, as Daniel Defoe insisted, was an amalgam of 'Dealing and Manufacturing'; it comprised commodity chains that stretched from wharf to warehouse to workshop and on again.¹⁴ This book has applied Defoe's dictum to the international iron trade. Historiographically, the iron trade has long been disregarded, yet—as has been demonstrated here—Baltic iron, the most widely traded of irons, was an integral part of the eighteenth-century Atlantic world. To be fully appreciated, however, the iron trade must be understood on the terms that Defoe proposed, as the unity of making and exchange. Only by tracing the passage of metallic matter from mine to furnace bank, from casting house to forge, and on into the commercial maelstrom of the Atlantic can the pervasive presence of Baltic iron be revealed. It was there in the guns and blades that provided the Atlantic with its violence; it was to be found in the scientific instruments or burnished gewgaws that lent finesse to the Atlantic world. Baltic iron, in one form or another, penetrated to the furthest reaches of the ocean. Little of this was apparent to the Walloon forgers who heaved spark-scattering blooms of iron onto the floor of the Great Forge at Leufsta, but as they dragged the blooms to the hammer block they set in train a world-changing process.

¹³ Pierrick Pourchasse, 'Problems of French trade with the North in the eighteenth century', paper presented at the annual conference of the Economic History Society, 1 April 2006: <http://www.ehs.org.uk/ehs/conference2006/Assets/IIDPourchasse.doc>

¹⁴ Daniel Defoe, *Plan of the English commerce. Being a complete prospect of the trade of this Nation, as well home as foreign* (2nd edn., London, 1737), p. 3.