Michael Zeuske

Amistad: A Hidden Network of Slavers and Merchants. Princeton NJ: Markus Wiener, 2014. 262 pages. (Paper US\$ 26.95)

One of the most exciting frontiers in research currently being explored by historians of the Atlantic world is the Spanish slave trade from Africa to the Americas. Although the first and last slaving voyages took place under Iberian flags, most of the historiography and demographic analysis of the Atlantic slave trade has until recently concentrated on the participation of British, French, and Dutch agents. This focus on Spanish traders is crucial both for the understanding of the history of slavery and abolitionism in the nineteenth century and for the reassessment of Spanish imperial history in particular.

Michael Zeuske's *Amistad* is a reinterpretation of the famous slave rebellion in June 1839 on a small schooner off the coast of Connecticut. The important legal case about it in U.S. courts has generally been interpreted as a victory for abolitionists. Yet Zeuske shows that it also exposed deep layers of slave smuggling, and he uses the story of the *Amistad* rebels and their captors as a starting point to penetrate what he calls the "hidden Atlantic." His exemplary research uncovers the intricacies of the Atlantic networks of slavers and merchants, which were at the base of the rise of financial global capital in the nineteenth century.

The interesting term "hidden Atlantic" is meant, first, to signal the conceptual effort to expose the links between slavery and capitalism and, second, to bring to the fore both the African and the Iberian South Atlantic regions to complement the well-known history of the Anglo-Atlantic. Thus, it also constitutes a historical gateway into the shifts and changes of slavery and the slave trade in the nineteenth century, when aside from a change in roles, the mechanisms, goals, and results of slavery were transformed. Indeed, it was precisely in the nineteenth century that the Iberian powers gained preeminence in the slave trade and expanded their plantation economies based on enslaved labor. This happened in spite of (or precisely because of, says Zeuske) the Anglo-American policy of abolition.

Amistad fits neatly with the recent work of a number of scholars. Dale Tomich's 2004 book, *Through the Prism of Slavery: Labor, Capital, and the World Economy*, for example, theorized the crucial transformation of slavery in the nineteenth century as the rise of the "second slavery," a process about which Zeuske comments: "Only after 1820 did the possibility of extending the slavery enclaves into the interior of the Americas and Africa emerge from the connection between capital accumulation, mass slavery, plantation agriculture, and the new blessings of industrial modernity (above all, railways and

steamships, industrial agriculture)” (pp. 31–32). In Josep Fradera and Chris Schmidt-Nowara’s edited volume of 2013, *Slavery and Antislavery in Spain’s Atlantic Empire* (in which Zeuske co-authored a chapter with Orlando García Martínez), we find the pioneering work of authors who are rethinking the nineteenth century from the perspective of the Spanish world, particularly antislavery, by including the phenomenon of the rise of slavery in Cuba. Ada Ferrer’s 2014 book, *Freedom’s Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution*, develops this argument further and delves into both the contrasts and the specific links between the Haitian Revolution and the expansion of the Cuban sugar industry. And the 2015 reassessment of the Slave Trade Database by Alex Borucki, David Eltis, and David Wheat (“Atlantic History and the Slave Trade to Spanish America,” *American Historical Review* 120:433–61) is another remarkable sign that the field of the Spanish slave trade is transforming the history of the Atlantic world; their inspiring work also suggests that there is still much to be done in that direction.

Indeed, the work on the slave trade in the nineteenth century is as challenging as it is urgent, given that from 1820 to almost 1870 the trade in humans to fuel U.S., Cuban, and Brazilian plantations was done as contraband. In spite of the slave dealers’ attempts to leave no tracks, Zeuske has patiently and elegantly recovered crucial aspects of the context in which the *Amistad* rebellion took place and linked them to broader processes and events from Africa and Europe to the Americas and the Caribbean.

The book is an expanded English edition of Zeuske’s *Die Geschichte der “Amistad”*, published in 2012. The excellent translation by Steven Rendall makes it a very readable book that will be accessible to wide audiences, scholars specialized in slavery and Atlantic studies, and students at all levels. It has an interesting structure, as the story moves from the most well-known parts of this history (the *Amistad* case in popular history), and the most central actors in it (the abolitionists and captives), to its less-known but equally relevant aspects (the slavers, Africa, and Cuba).

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