

Michael Zeuske, *Afrika–Atlantik–Amerika: Sklaverei und Sklavenhandel in Afrika, auf dem Atlantik und in den Amerikas sowie in Europa*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022. 329 pp. (Cloth US\$80.99)

Like Michael Zeuske's massive 1300-page *Handbuch Geschichte der Sklaverei* (2019), his *Sklaverei: Menschheitsgeschichte von der Steinzeit bis zur Gegenwart* (2018), and his *Sklavenhändler, Negereros und Atlantikkreolen* (2015), the volume under discussion here is an outgrowth of his long-running German Research Council (DFG) sponsored projects on the macro-and microhistory of slavery.

Zeuske is the doyen of the vibrant current German-language scholarship on slavery and other forms of "extreme asymmetrical dependency" (a term coined under his aegis). Although only two of his books have been translated into English (a biography of Bolívar and a microhistory of the Amistad case, based on an entirely new set of documents), Zeuske is also one of the most important contemporary voices in the history of Atlantic slavery: a voice that is—and always has been—a provocative one. (Readers of the *NWIG* may recall his 1997 article on the less-than-savory postindependence career of Miguel Barnet's Esteban Montejo, "El Cimarrón," which elicited a near apoplectic response from Barnet. For the full exchange, see *NWIG* 71: 265–89.) *Afrika–Atlantik–Amerika* is no exception.

Zeuske has several axes to grind with contemporary slavery scholarship: first, the emphasis on Europe's centrality in what many (after Dale Tomich's seminal 1988 intervention) now have come to call the "first slavery"; second, the underestimation of Africa's crucial role in the commodification of human bodies; third, the still reigning overemphasis in slavery studies on Britain and Angloamerica; fourth, the "hidden Atlantic" that fed much of the "second slavery" and thrived on the hollow discursivity of legal abolition; and, finally, the continuities of situations of unfreedom from the end of formal emancipation to our present day.

Key to it all is Zeuske's rejection of a legalistic nominalism that sees "slavery" only where situations of "extreme asymmetrical dependence" are underwritten by legal codes—such as in the historiographically "hegemonic" case of Rome and situations where neo- or pseudo-Roman slave codes were involved. Even in the case of the early Iberian Atlantic (circa 1400–1650), however, formal colonial slavery thrived on a variety of African and Indigenous American forms of unfreedom, most importantly the transformation of pre-Atlantic African institutions of unilateral dependence into machines for the export of human commodities.

Neither is a focus on official European policy all that helpful. As Zeuske argues, Iberian entrepreneurs (often socially marginalized cosmopolitans) be-

came “junior partners” to rising African merchant elites in organizing the violent extraction and Atlantic transfer of human bodies. On the Atlantic, too—and the Spanish “asiento” notwithstanding—smuggling, piracy and illicit trade were the norm rather than the exception during the entire period of the legal slave trade, and it is certainly striking that what Zeuske calls the postabolition “hidden Atlantic” (between 1808 and circa 1900) accounted for at least two million African captives illegally imported into the by-then-industrialized “second slaveries” of Cuba and Brazil.

Zeuske offers a similarly useful corrective when he argues that even though the fully capitalistic “second slavery” emerged in Barbados and Jamaica, and British slavers became the major traders in the eighteenth century, Iberian/Iberoamerican slaving—increasingly a South-South business—was responsible for at least two thirds of the 11 million enslaved Africans landed in the Americas. In the end, the historical overemphasis on northwestern European slaving and slavery in Britain’s North American colonies and the United States of America obscures more than it reveals.

Zeuske’s final concern pertains to the hollowness of official abolitionist rhetoric, the myth that legal slavery ended globally with the emancipation of Brazil’s slaves in 1888, and the indisputable fact that legal emancipation often marked a difference that made little difference in the lives of the formerly enslaved. Again, Euroamerican myopia is a major part of the problem. Oman abolished slavery only in 1970, Mauritania (however equivocally) in 1981, and in 1995 it was discovered that Mississippi had never ratified the 13th Amendment to the U.S. constitution. But as Zeuske argues, formal slavery often merely shaded into different legally circumscribed (or altogether informal) arrangements of forced labor and extreme dependency—from U.S. sharecropping and convict leasing systems to cocoa and shrimp production in Ghana and Vietnam, the systematic rightlessness and abuse of migrant labor exposed in the controversies over the soccer world cup in Qatar, and on to the multiple illegal trafficking systems that crisscross the globe.

There are matters to quibble with in Zeuske’s account—and Africanists may be the ones to find themselves most critical of it. But for Caribbeanists Zeuske’s provocations should—once hopefully translated into one of the hegemonic languages of slavery and abolition scholarship—be ample food for thought.

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