

Justin Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic, 1750-1807* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 352 p. ISBN 978-11-0702-585-1.

In recent years, historians have increasingly argued that labor systems of the early modern and modern period have much more in common than scholars have previously acknowledged. Justin Roberts' *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic, 1750-1807* is an exceptional addition to this novel way of thought.

Roberts demonstrates how labor relations on plantations in the eighteenth-century British Americas were transformed by new management techniques, which turn were influenced by Atlantic discourses originating in the Enlightenment. According to Roberts, the agricultural improvement movement was reinforced by the abolitionist critique of slavery. Planters became convinced that moral and economic progress was compatible with the achievement of higher rates of productivity through a revolutionized management of slaves. By blending history of slave labor with business history, the author illustrates why innovative labor management was a double-edged sword; progress went hand in hand with expanding control of the slaves' lives.

Throughout the book, Roberts provides a historical-comparative analysis of plantations in Virginia, Jamaica and Barbados. According to the author, historians have too often overlooked the work logs of these plantations. Through these work logs and complementary sources, Roberts specifies how management strategies evolved over time. He discusses, for example, the introduction of time discipline, new accounting techniques, gang labor organization, a shift from patriarchy to paternalism, increasing discipline and supervision through plantation health care, and how all these adjustments affected the lives and behavior of slaves and their communities. The innovations were, in content, all shaped by Enlightenment thought, and dispersed throughout the Atlantic region, albeit sometimes differing in form, depending on aspects like weather, climate, crops and whether the regions had to deal with the wishes of a metropolis.

In a remarkable manner, Roberts fuses three historiographies; the history of (slave) labor, the history of management and the history of the Enlightenment. The study offers a critique of elements that are usually associated with Enlightenment thought, such as freedom and autonomy, by pointing out that this era was not so much an 'enlightened age' for contemporary subordinate groups. In addition, Roberts revolts against historians of slavery that have overemphasized an autonomous culture and unified community of slaves in the last half of the twentieth century. *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic* presents a return to a holistic view of slavery. According to the author, slavery was a labor system that corresponded to other labor systems throughout the Atlantic region. This perspective fits neatly in the recent tradition of global labor history studies.

By analyzing the daily routines and the organization of institutions such as plantations, Roberts can point to a convergence between different regions within the Atlantic that lasted until the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. Through comparison, the author unfolds connections. Even more significant is the value of the study for management history. Until very recently, scholars have typically placed the origins of labor management within the modern period of industrial capitalism. Roberts provides the first large-scale study within an Atlantic scope that depicts highly evolved management techniques in the early modern plantation societies of the Americas. This is a powerful perspective, because it expands the chronological as well as the geographical scope within the discipline of management history. Roberts exposes the Enlightenment, expands the history of management and integrates slavery in a general history of labor relations. The fact that he is able to do so while operating in an Atlantic context, is the greatest merit of his study and a surely a groundbreaking one. However, despite the ambitious scope of the study, some fundamental components are left out too easily.

While Roberts' analysis of the micro level and meso level is accomplished in an excellent fashion, the connection of these two levels to the macro level is often not that clear. Roberts argues that scholars can avoid debating whether slavery is consistent with capitalism, by focusing on labor systems. Yet, a labor system is part of a larger socio-economic system. This system goes largely unnoticed in the book, where it could have provided a framework to connect all regions of the Atlantic, as other authors have demonstrated. Next to this structural omission, the circulation of knowledge, such as Enlightenment thought and managerial techniques remain somewhat vague. Were these forms of knowledge transferred from the British metropolis to the colonies, or the other way around? Or was the Atlantic a site of mutual exchange? Obviously, working on such an extensive project within an Atlantic scope pushes every historian to prioritize some elements over others. Nevertheless, the book offers a fascinating viewpoint of how slavery can be integrated into the discipline of global labor history and how mechanisms of labor control have evolved over time.

Dennis van Lammeren
University of Amsterdam

Herman Langeveld *De man die in de put sprong. Willem Schermerhorn 1894-1977* (Amsterdam: Boom 2014) 624 p. ISBN 978-90-8953-277-0.

Met de publicatie van de biografie over Willem Schermerhorn (1894-1977) hebben praktisch alle twintigste eeuwse Nederlandse premiers hun biografie. Aan Jan de