

Letter from the Editors

This issue opens with an interview with emeritus professor Robert Ross. He not only talks about his long, varied, and international research career in African History, but also about the founding years of *Itinerario*, of which he was one of the first editors.

Somewhat unusually, this issue's research section consists of not one dossier, but two. The first dossier, entitled 'Cosmopolis and Vernacular', showcases three articles on Southeast Asia in a setting of transregional religious traditions. These papers were first presented at the annual Cosmopolis Conference, held at UGM in Yogyakarta in June 2014. The main aim of this conference was to situate on-going religious interactions in the Indonesian Archipelago in a wider regional context, comparing and connecting Indonesian cases with other areas in the Indian Ocean world. Many of the conference papers looked for such linkages in the broad cultural 'cosmopoleis' (Indic, Arabic, Theravada-Buddhist and Sinic) that overlap in the Indonesian archipelago. In understanding religious identity-formation, contributing transnational connections are often ignored. The conference therefore sought to convene papers that foregrounded religious (re)construction as the result of human interaction across the entire Indian Ocean region through trade, labour, and pilgrimage. According to the conveners, this perspective would offer historical and global depth to what has so far been treated mainly as regional experience.

Although each of the three contributions in this dossier explores religion between the 'Cosmopolis' and the 'Vernacular', they take very different approaches. First, Ronit Ricci examines the history of writing in Java by looking at scripts as sites of religious, cultural and political power. Moving beyond the idea that scripts are primarily technical devices in the service of meaning, Ricci explores the creation of letters' themselves to think about cultural and religious transformations. The origin, persistence or, conversely, disappearance of scripts, can tell us much about shifting religious agendas, community memory, the relationship of the foreign to the local, and particular literary cultures.

Next, David Kloos delves into the literary culture of Aceh between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. His article discusses the early modern Acehnese epic tradition, in order to demonstrate the emergence of an individualized Muslim ethics. From the late seventeenth century onwards, a protracted decline of Acehnese royal power initiated a process of political fragmentation, as well as the gradual integration of particular locales into a fast globalizing region. This shift coincided with the emergence of religious teachers (*ulama*) as a new and influential social group. Kloos shows that through these changes, the Acehnese epic tradition shifted from a

dominant cosmological model based on ritual hierarchies to a paradigm of reflexive ethics based on individual responsibility to God.

The third contribution by Ryan Crew provides us with a global microhistory of a Moluccan prisoner of the Mexican Inquisition by the name of Alexo de Castro, arrested on suspicion of being Muslim in 1643 in Manila. Based on evidence from Philippine, Mexican, and Spanish archives, Crew uses the transpacific trial of De Castro to look at conversion, *mestizaje*, and ethno-religious exclusion in the early modern Hispano-Asian Pacific world. The article uncovers efforts of the Inquisition to police religion among cosmopolitan new Christians: not only mestizos like De Castro, but also Indian-Moluccan Christians, converts from Judaism and their descendants, as well as other Asians. Interestingly, the story of the trial also lays bare how neophytes, mestizos, and foreigners navigated Spanish anxieties regarding caste and religion and manipulated them for their own ends. In this way, a narrative unfolds of the possibilities as well as limits of cosmopolitanism on transpacific frontiers.

The second dossier of this issue also looks at translations from the global to the local, but from a completely different perspective: the constitutional activities of seventeenth century trading corporations, and how these activities served as cultural bridges between global and local settings. Both dossiers represent the sort of research *Itinerario* seeks to publish, and form an excellent demonstration of thematic range that the journal's mission statement makes possible.

The dossier on Corporate Constitutionalism is the outcome of a debate around the work of William Pettigrew, founder of the Centre for the Political Economies of International Commerce, who investigates what corporate constitutionalism might yield for historians interested in rival European trading corporations. In turn, he asks how this approach might help create a fully realized global history of corporate constitutionalism – by examining, for instance, how the corporate conduction of constitutional change from the local to the global altered extra-European state constitutions. Through his examination of the English case, Pettigrew offers hypotheses for broader analysis. He contends that trading corporations were both constitutional bodies and constitutional actors who negotiated written and unwritten constitutions to manage their internal affairs and their relationships with state interlocutors. These constitutions both transcended and blurred the boundaries between person and society, state and market, subjection and sovereignty, global and local. The trading corporation's constitutional status and its constitutional powers provided it with the means to impersonate the state and govern trade; to subordinate itself to state power; and to operate between state jurisdictions. From the seventeenth century onwards, these transnational and constitutional characteristics played an important part in the development of corporate trade and national and international constitutions.

Pettigrew's contribution is intended to generate discussion within the discipline. Questions could be raised about the limits this type of analysis offers in terms of including extra-European viewpoints, or the histories of violence that are part of

much of the European company trade in Asia. Five shorter statements therefore follow this piece, written by scholars representing different disciplinary backgrounds. In this way, the forum offers a broad-ranging reflection on the theme. David Armitage, Paul Halliday, Vicki Hsueh, Tom Leng and Phil Stern offer their views on the corporate constitutionalist approach from historiographic, legal, political, and *longue durée* perspectives. We are convinced, however, that this forum offers opportunity for further questions and comments. The Editors will therefore moderate an online debate between William Pettigrew and *Itinerario's* wider readership in early 2016 – please watch the journal's social media pages for further details.

As the journal approaches its fortieth anniversary, the Editors have decided to showcase these two dossiers as a broad overview of 'Itinerario' research: histories of global interaction covered from a localized cultural perspective - as is the case in the 'Cosmopolis and Vernacular' dossier - as well as a global political and economic perspective through the growth of European trading companies, as demonstrated by the dossier on 'Corporate Constitutionalism'.

The Editors