

Fernández-Armesto, Felipe: *Pathfinders. A Global History of Exploration*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company 2007. ISBN: 978-0-393-06259-5; xviii, 428 S.

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Reviewing a work that has received so much praise over the past two years always presents a difficult task. One only has to turn to the back cover of the current paperback to see the many accolades bestowed upon Felipe Fernández-Armesto's latest work. Most prominently, his *Pathfinders* received the prestigious World History Association Prize in 2007, an honor that openly acknowledges the global reach of the work under consideration. Moreover, although the book lists him as teaching at Tufts University, Fernández-Armesto's prolific output was recently honored by an appointment as the William P. Reynolds Professor of History at Notre Dame University.

The teaching and research of world history has experienced a glut of introductory texts in recent years and novel approaches from which to tell a global narrative are becoming rare. Fernández-Armesto's work succeeds in this regard as he selects a particular topic – exploration – that carries transnational overtones. To fashion such a global framework for exploration Fernández-Armesto builds on his extensive work in the Iberian expansion and the Atlantic Ocean. Exploration, the author argues, is after all, a human affair and can thus be engaged for a global human narrative. According to the author, human global history is about two major stories: „The first is the very long one of how human cultures diverged ... The second is the main subject of the book: a relatively short and recent story of convergence...” (p. 1) On the surface such a statement might be unsurprising. Placed in the context of exploration, however, the issue of divergence and convergence transcends hemispheric or continental histories that seemingly favor certain parts of the globe over others. His story, however, is truly global in that it follows the divergent expansion of *Homo sapiens* out of Africa in his first chapter (*stretching*) before turning to the sub-

ject of human convergence.

The next two chapters (reaching and stirring) alternate maritime and terrestrial expansion. Fernández-Armesto pays close attention to the Austronesians of the Pacific, the Thule Inuits and Norsemen in the Arctic and Atlantic, and the important decoding of the monsoon system governing the Indian Ocean. His chapter on terrestrial expansion centers on the famed Silk roads network culminating in the Mongol reach. Fernández-Armesto alternates abstract historical concepts with captivating anecdotes to enliven his narratives. Readers thus gain insights into a Japanese woman's maritime diary as well as Ming China officials' puzzlement over the arrival of the giraffe. Subsequent chapters, four and five (springing and vaulting), find Fernández-Armesto in his historical element. The separation of maritime and terrestrial expansion can still be maintained as he discusses the emergence of the first global transoceanic empires. Similarly, his acclaimed biographies on Columbus and Vespucci, as well as numerous other works on the Iberian expansion take center stage in these chapters. Twelve out of seventy citations mention Fernández-Armesto, highlighting his gargantuan contribution to this topic. This unparalleled wealth of knowledge that enters these sections cannot be found in other parts of this work. But Fernández-Armesto should be permitted to entertain and debunk statements about the historical figures that are dear to his research without resorting to arguments of favoritism. Despite attempts to suggest different periodizations in world history, the fifteenth century with its important contribution to maritime expansion should not be displaced from the global narrative.

Chapters six and seven (girdling and connecting) address commercial and scientific connections that dominate the Age of Sail. Although the emphasis remains maritime with the Iberian penetration of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the clear distinction between oceanic and terrestrial expansion that governs earlier chapters dissipates when Fernández-Armesto discusses the Spanish conquests or the exploration following river systems. An important section on indigenous guides (pp. 239-242) alerts the reader that such an expan-

sion was not entirely European in origin nor did it operate in entirely unknown terrain. Chapter eight draws on Fernández-Armesto's expertise in cartography as the outlines of the world slowly started to coalesce between 1740 and 1840. Myths on unknown continents in the Pacific were finally laid to rest, bothersome deficiency diseases – especially scurvy – solved to satisfaction, and longitude ceased to be a supreme concern with the introduction of functioning chronometers. The initial push into the colder regions of the Arctic and Antarctic provides a smooth transition to the last chapter that chronicles the penetration of the final frontiers to the twenty-first century. It is a „chapter of endings... Horizons have shrunk, frontiers closed. Adventure has become elusive... If Space exploration ever puts humankind in touch with nonhuman cultures in other galaxies, I suppose I shall have to add another chapter, and admit that pathfinders who have peopled these pages did not complete the work of laying down all the gangways of cultural convergence“ (p. 399-400).

Fernández-Armesto can be reassured that such an astral convergence is not going to happen without having a renewed human divergence over the next centuries. His book thus has the distinct advantage in that it has a distinct beginning and end, a rare occurrence indeed for any history text. But there are many other attributes to his work. The accessibility of his language, the flow of his narratives, and the outstanding use of illustrations are just a few that come to mind. Personally, I believe the strength of this work to be twofold. On one hand *Pathfinders* provides a compelling global narrative of exploration that is extremely useful in the burgeoning nature of world history surveys, and in addition, each individual chapter is grounded enough to be integrated into more specialized history classes. It is in this matter that Fernández-Armesto's classic will find fruitful applications for some time to come.

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