

Diaspora Entrepreneurial Networks: Four Centuries of History. *Edited by Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, Gelina Harlaftis, and Ioanna Pepelasis Minoglou.* Oxford: Berg, 2005. xxii + 440 pp. Maps, tables, references, index. Cloth, \$84.95; paper, \$28.95. ISBN: cloth, 1-859-73875-3; paper, 1-859-73880-X.

Reviewed by Claude Markovits

This volume is an attempt to combine diaspora studies, an ever-expanding field, particularly in the United States, with the study of entrepreneurial networks, a less flourishing domain, in a broad historical perspective. The outcome of two conferences held in Corfu and Buenos Aires in 2001 and 2002, respectively, it was conceived of also as an homage to Dutch-Australian maritime historian Frank Broeze, whose untimely death deprived that field of further studies by a prominent scholar. An article by Broeze on a Scottish merchant in Batavia, previously published in a Dutch version, provides an intriguing epilogue to the collection, which consists of eighteen articles. These have been arranged chronologically under the two headings of “diasporas” in “early modern” and in “modern” Eurasian trade, the cutoff date being approximately 1750, followed by a separate section entitled “Perspectives on Diaspora.” While the series claims to cover the entire Eurasian area, it is heavily tilted toward the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The three “classical” diasporas of the Greeks, the Jews, and the Armenians occupy pride of place, with a total of eight contributions, while the little-known Maltese trading diaspora gets one slot. On the other hand, there are only two papers on the Chinese, one on the Japanese, and two-thirds of one on the Indians. This geographic imbalance would not be a problem if the collection did not claim, as the editors do in their introduction, “to lay the foundations for new directions in the study of diaspora entrepreneurial networks by soliciting a broad range of case studies from varying regions and periods” (p. xviii). Given its heavy emphasis on groups that have already been the object of many studies, it is difficult to see how the book really opens up new directions of research. A more coherent theoretical framework could have helped, but, at this level, the book slightly disappoints. It seems to assume a certain equivalence between diasporas, on the one hand, that are defined in mostly “ethnic” terms (Jewish, Armenian, Greek, Chinese, Parsi) and,

on the other hand, that are trading and entrepreneurial networks, whose bases are often much narrower, linked as they are to particular regions, localities, or ethnic subgroups. The articles in the third section, which deal specifically with basic definitions, do not help to dispel the confusion: Gabriel Sheffer's contribution, "The Profile of Ethno-National Diasporas," is difficult to reconcile with Anthony Reid's "Diaspora Networks in the Asian Maritime Context."

Rather than treat this book as a focused contribution to the problematic of "trade diasporas," a paradigm that has perhaps outlived its utility since it was first formulated by the late Abner Cohen in 1971 in his seminal contribution, "Cultural Strategies in the Organization of Trading Diasporas" (in Claude Meillassoux, editor, *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa*), it seems more appropriate to see the volume as a fairly disparate, but empirically rich, collection dealing with various aspects of trade history. I shall briefly present my own favorite selections from the compilation: Jonathan Israel's broad survey, "Diasporas, Jewish and Non-Jewish and the World Maritime Empires," confirms this scholar's unrivaled mastery of the history of the major trading networks operating at the crossroads of the Iberian and Dutch maritime empires from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. William D. Wray's contribution about the little-known and short-lived Japanese mercantile diaspora of the early seventeenth century is a useful reminder that blind alleys are of as much interest to the historian as stories of flamboyant success. The two detailed studies of Greek merchants and shipowners in the late sixteenth century by Mario Fusaro and of the Maltese mercantile network by Carmen Vassallo are rich in useful insights. William Gervase Clarence-Smith's extraordinarily detailed description of Middle Eastern entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia throws new light on a little-known aspect of these businessmen. Chiara Betta's clear outline of the history of the Baghdadi Jewish network in Asia and of its drift from India to China, although hardly novel, is one of the few contributions to deal with Southern and Eastern Asia. Rajeswary Brown's devastating exposé of the "fatal conceit of Chinese financial capitalism in contemporary Indonesia" is an exciting departure from the usually laudatory tone of most accounts of business diasporas. Most of the other articles also have something interesting to say, and, for sheer informative value, the collection ranks high among recent publications on the topic. My reservations bear mostly on what I find

is a gap between the claims of the editors and the actual contribution made by the volume to the ongoing theoretical debate on diasporas, networks, and trade.

Claude Markovits is senior research fellow at the National Center for Scientific Research in Paris. He is the author of numerous books and articles on the history of the Indian merchant world, including The Global World of Indian Merchants: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama (2000).