



David Richardson, Anthony Tibbles, Suzanne Schwarz, eds. *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007. xii + 315 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84631-066-9.

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## Slavery, Abolition, and Liverpool

The year 2007 saw Liverpool much in the news with the opening of the new museum on transatlantic slavery. But academic historical studies of Liverpool's particular involvement in the transatlantic were surprisingly few until this timely volume emerged from a conference organized in 2005 by the editors on behalf of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire and the National Museums Liverpool. The three editors exemplify three of the most influential approaches informing slavery scholarship: economic history, regional history, and public history. David Richardson, now director of the Wilberforce Institute at Hull, coauthored the all-important Cambridge Database Project on the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which has done so much to inform subsequent slavery scholarship, including the ten essays in this present volume. Professor at Liverpool Hope University and past president of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, Suzanne Schwarz, in her own research in the Sierra Leone Company, indicates that an engagement with local studies need not preclude, and indeed can promote, a more nuanced understanding of the way global institutions, such as the transatlantic slave trade, functioned—a point, echoed by various authors throughout the volume. Anthony Tibbles, director of Merseyside Maritime Museum and a leading force behind both the Transatlantic Slavery Gallery at Merseyside and the new International Slavery Museum in Liverpool, knows better than most the importance of solid substantive historical research in shaping popular representations of Britain's slaving past.

Their collective introduction ably sums up the state of slavery scholarship since Peter Hair and Richard Anstey's 1976 collection of essays, *Liverpool, the African Slave Trade and Abolition*. They chart the way quantifiable economic approaches and developments in Information Technology revolutionized the field, and consider the subsequent emphasis on cultural context and

human agency. The prose is solid rather than soaring. These opening pages should prove invaluable to undergraduates wanting a quick but well-informed overview of contemporary historiographical debates in the field of transatlantic slavery.

Eight of the ten chapters relate directly to Liverpool. The two that do not are fine studies in their own right. Trevor Burnard's essay on "African Ethnicities in 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Jamaica" serves as a useful corrective to easy generalizations about the ethnic origins of Jamaica's enslaved and maroon populations, and provides a measured consideration of the debates over African cultural survival in the Caribbean. Schwarz's analysis of the policy and practice of the Sierra Leone Company initially seems more tolerant than it might be of Zachary Macaulay's social conservatism and the company's disgraceful treatment of John Clarkson and the Nova Scotian settlers, but, in the end, it offers a fair critique of their approach. Her trenchant analysis of the company's operations in Africa answered many of my own questions about how this antislavery colony worked and why it was forced to compromise with European and African slave-trading interests, and her explication of the ideological underpinnings of the company is equally illuminating, calling to mind many of the assumptions of today's ethical consumerist and fair trade movements. One could see a good undergraduate seminar utilizing that aspect of her chapter.

The eight remaining chapters focus on various aspects of Liverpool's slave-trading and abolitionist experiences. Ken Morgan argues that Liverpool was more than simply a slaving port. Its dominance of Britain's slave trade from the 1740s must be seen as part of a more general urban expansion that derived, in part, from its particular geographical advantages—which intriguingly included its proximity to the tax-free Isle of Man. Morgan points, too, to the energy and astuteness of its merchants

who, among other things, effectively exploited the region's hinterland to provide trade goods and personnel, and whose proactive penetration of new markets in both Africa and the Americas took full advantage of new credit arrangements, which further facilitated their trade. His piece, seen in conjunction with his earlier work on Bristol, provides illuminating comparative insights and signals many of the themes taken up elsewhere in the book.

Morgan's allusion to the penetration of African markets is, for example, further developed in Paul Lovejoy and Richardson's fascinating chapter on "African Agency and the Liverpool Slave Trade," which stresses the role that trust and networking played in the relationship between African and Liverpool slave traders. The authors chart the way different regimes in west and west central Africa spawned contrasting cultures of credit governing the trading of slaves. In Sierra Leone and the Windward Coast, where traders tended to be of European or mixed-race origin, Liverpool traders cultivated trust based on personal relations. In Bonny in the Bight of Biafra, where power was centralized in the hands of the indigenous ruler, they had recourse to the more impersonal mechanisms of the established regime to enforce trading arrangements. Between these two contrasting models was the more decentralized set-up in Old Calabar, where pawnship (the pledging of humans as collateral for debt) was the main mode of guaranteeing credit.

Morgan's discussion of the importance of American markets is a theme less developed in this collection. But though the Chesapeake was not a major destination for Liverpool slavers, Lorena Walsh outlines in clear and well-illustrated detail the role Liverpool merchandise played in the slave and tobacco trades there.

Some of the factors that made Liverpool well placed to gain a dominant role in the slave trade are discussed in Stephen Behrendt's work on "Human Capital in the British Slave Trade." This piece bristles with rich comparative detail as it demonstrates how, by 1760, Liverpool had, in contrast to Bristol and London, attracted a "reservoir of slave-trading expertise" in the form of skilled mariners, experienced captains, and trained surgeons, which, along with its specialist ships, allowed the port to consolidate its dominant position (p. 88).

Melinda Elder delineates the relationship that Liverpool had with the port of Lancaster and the rural areas around Morecambe Bay. She demonstrates the importance of this relationship for the growth of Liverpool as a slaving port. Elder's carefully researched and often

prosopographical approach makes this a densely written but revealing essay full of interesting case studies, including, of course, that of James Penny, after whom Liverpool's "Penny Lane" was named.

Similarly, much detailed information about over two hundred Liverpool merchants, c. 1750-1800, can be found in David Pope's chapter on "The Wealth and Social Aspirations of Liverpool's Slave Merchants." Pope trawls an impressive array of local sources, though their fragmentary nature often renders it impossible for him to draw confident conclusions about the backgrounds, aspirations, and slaving connections of those under study. Yet, the information he has gathered, particularly the tables he supplies on slaving merchants, paves the way for future findings.

In her more schematic study on the impact of the slave trade on eighteenth-century Liverpool, Jane Longmore, like Pope, is cautious about disaggregating the wealth derived from the slave trade from other sources of commercial wealth. Nevertheless, she does argue that the slave trade played "a crucial role in the growth of the domestic economy" of the city and suggests that about one in eight of the population were reliant on the trade by 1790 (p. 242). The evidence, incomplete though it is, suggests, she says, the importance of the slave trade in stimulating such early industrial enterprises as the copper industry, textiles, and the pottery trade. Her concluding remarks, that abolition destabilized the manufacturing sector, "leaving Liverpool with the predominantly semi-skilled and unskilled workforce which was to lie at the heart of so many of its future problems," leaves the reader wanting to know more (p. 246).

Brian Howman, in his discussion of abolitionism in Liverpool, may have slightly overstated the significance of the earlier, less well-documented campaign leading up to 1807. Yet, he does a real service in relating the story of the radical campaigner Edward Rushton, who stands in gloriously stark contrast to his more posh and more pusillanimous colleagues in the antislavery movement.

This is not a populist book; some of the chapters are more fluently written than others. The absence of maps (Elder's chapter was the only one to offer one) is particularly regrettable. Nevertheless, this is a book of substance that offers both new insights and information, and which, at its best, contextualizes the city in its regional and its global context. As such, it enriches our understanding both of Liverpool's and Britain's involvement in the transatlantic slave system.

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