

support, develop and disseminate high-quality research about the architectural and urban history of the African continent and the African diaspora.”

### After History's Hegemony

Whenever someone asks me, what do I mean by “global”?—a question frequently posed by graduate students, eager to be on the right side of history—I wonder why they do not ask, what do I mean by “history”? One cannot write a “global history” and assume any of the usually comfortable securities, even when it comes to the word *history*. “Global” forces the word *history* into an awkward space between onto-epistemic horizons. So let me just quickly give an example.

The Catalan Atlas of 1375 depicts Musa I (ca. 1280–ca. 1337) seated on a throne and holding a golden orb (Figure 5). Musa was no random African potentate. In fact, he might well have been one of the richest men in the world. In 1324, he made a pilgrimage to Mecca accompanied by a procession that included sixty thousand men wearing brocade and Persian silk, an array of heralds, and twelve thousand slaves, each carrying gold bars weighing 1.8 kilograms (4 pounds). Musa’s pilgrimage was perhaps the most awe-inspiring transcontinental display of wealth in history. But what we know comes only from Islamic sources, which obsess mostly about the gold. There are no documents that point to what Musa brought back from Mecca, nor do our histories that talk about Musa raise this question—even speculatively. This is important since the purpose of this journey was not just to pray at Mecca, but also to go on an extensive shopping trip. Musa had to strengthen his alliances with neighboring chiefs. He had to work with elders, warriors, and slave providers of various sorts and ranks. He had to grease the transportation system, particularly the system relating to salt and copper that he also controlled. Everything had to be organized and managed not just at the point of a spear but also through gifts, exchanges, speeches, rituals, and sacrifices of various sorts, calibrated in just the right way. For this, Musa needed cattle, silks, beads, furniture, Egyptian cloth, iron objects, incense, and on and on. In turn, this meant that he had to make careful plans for the acquisition of these items as he traveled both to and from Mecca. But without documents, we can only speculate.

Musa was not an exception to the rule, but one of thousands of variants across the chiefdom continuum. If we could amend the Catalan Atlas, we would add the contemporaneous Zimbabweans building vast palace complexes; the Javanese who controlled the shipping lanes between India and China; the Polynesians celebrating huge feasts on elaborately constructed platforms on the island of Nan Madol; the Mongolians who built a sprawling capital

called Karakorum; the Scandinavians who made Gotland, off the coast of Sweden, one of Europe’s leading entrepôts; the Cham in Vietnam who built an extensive mortuary temple complex, known as Mỹ Sơn; and the Khmer who raised a huge city and spectacular temples in the forests of Cambodia. The list continues without end.

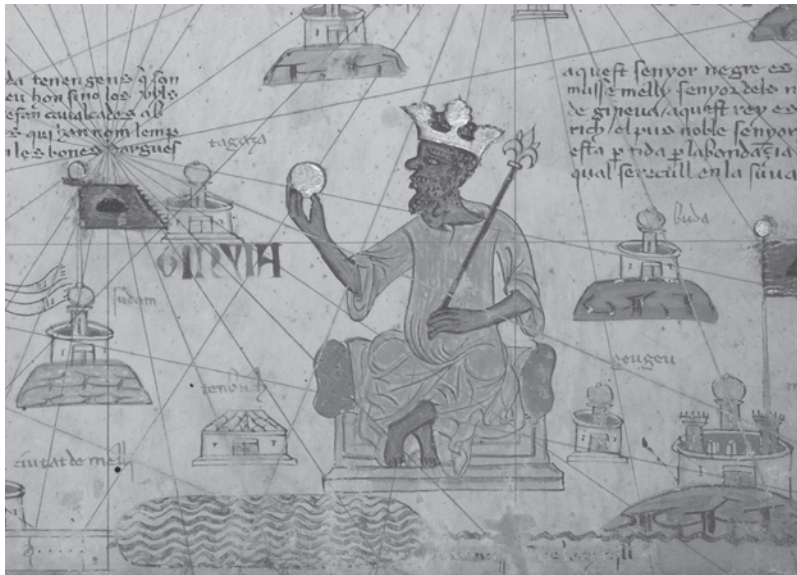
Today we would include these places in our global histories, but in many cases, all we know comes from archaeology, which gives us an extremely limited and often skewed perspective onto the past. Ethnography has its own limitations, and even indigenous bodies of evidence, because they often focus on dynasties, battles, and genealogies, offer practically no insight into the day-to-day workings of the economy or into decision-making processes, much less into issues about the perception and definition of society, culture, and landscape. As we start to multiply the problems around how to write a history in these situations, the word *history* begins to sound premature and downright arrogant.

The academic problems are real. Why, for example, does Janet Abu-Lughod not make a single reference to Musa or to the world of the Bantu or even mention the word *chiefdom* in her book *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350*, when these were all fundamental parts of the world system at that time?<sup>1</sup> The reason is that she uses only published documents. As a result, her book misses a lot, quite a lot.

If we seek truth in documents—certainly laudable—we miss the necessities of breadth. If we want “voice” we are forced into the ethnographies of presentism and miss the subvoices of depth, and if we want historical fiction to fill in the gap, well, we will need to change our ideas about publishing and tenure. We come in this way to history’s negative dialectics as the unsignified signifier of history’s bounded condition within its own modernity.

So, one could propose, maybe we should use a different term rather than *history*, one that is more ambiguous and self-implicatory, one that does not lead us into rabbit holes of historiographic guilt, disciplinary confusion, and authorial anxiety. I am open to suggestions, but in my own work, I love the idea that one has to write oneself into the historiographic problematics to find possibilities of research in the same breath as finding and theorizing its liminal impossibilities.

I will close with a remarkable observation by the fifteenth-century philosopher Leonardo Bruni, who contends that “the world has very many corners; it has as many as there are in the world.”<sup>2</sup> It is an intelligent and witty thought. The world is of course round and has no corners. It is us—moderns—who give the world its “corners” when we make our maps to better understand the world, but these corners are neither real nor stable. They change continuously to produce knowledge and yet also to falsify it. The



**Figure 5** Abraham Cresques (attributed), Catalan Atlas, 1375, sheet 6 out of 12, detail showing Mansa Musa sitting on a throne (Département des Manuscrits, Bibliothèque Nationale de France).

issue is not about the crisis of representation, but about the difficulty of understanding the unrepresentable in the space beyond the corners.

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## Notes

1. Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
2. Leonardo Bruni, *Lettere familiari*, vol. 2, trans. Laurence Bernard-Pradelle (Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2014), pt. 8:2, cited and translated by Katharina N. Piechocki, “Cartographic Translation: Reframing Leonardo Bruni’s *De interpretatione recta* (1424),” *I Tatti Studies in Italian Renaissance* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2017), 42.

## Buildings of the Ocean: Ephemerality and Monumentality

It is no secret that the first sixteen editions of Sir Banister Fletcher’s *History of Architecture* (1896–1954) did not include a single entry on Australia, New Zealand, or any part of Oceania.<sup>1</sup> The first references to this region did not appear in any edition of *Banister Fletcher* until a decade after the author’s death. This would seem to confirm our belief in Fletcher’s dismissal of everything beyond the canon. Arguably, the omission was not personal. Throughout Fletcher’s lifetime, no architectural history survey textbooks addressed Oceania. Beset by colonial politics, the region and its geographical subdivisions—Australasia, Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia—seemed a clutter of imperialist forces impossible to disentangle. But World War II changed the order of things, when many islands gained independence. In 1953, the British Western Pacific Territories also relocated to the Solomon Islands, and the United States officially declared Hawaii its fiftieth state in 1959.<sup>2</sup> With the new geopolitical boundaries, Australasia came to comprise former colonies of

England; Melanesia, colonies of England and France; and Guam and Hawaii, territories of the United States.<sup>3</sup> Cultural politics ensued, as did the culture industry. The Beatles toured Australia and New Zealand in 1964, followed by the Rolling Stones in 1965.<sup>4</sup> In 1966, Lyndon Johnson arrived, making the first state visit by an incumbent U.S. president. Ten years later, R. A. Cordingley, editor of the seventeenth edition of *Fletcher’s History of Architecture* (1976), duly included a page-long section on Australia and New Zealand. Although Cordingley’s intervention was significantly shorter than the latest three-part expansion in the twenty-first edition, edited by Murray Fraser (2020), it marked the first time a region below the 10 degree southern latitude line earned its own chapter in an architectural history survey textbook.<sup>5</sup>

Evidently, the region has one underlying geopolitical problem: imperialism sanctions both its absence and its presence. As such, recentering Australasia in global architectural history is not simply a matter of increasing the number of subject entries, chapters, or pages; to do so would be to put aside one set of imperialist geopolitical designations to take up another. Quantified architectural history cannot resolve the region’s historical conditions embedded in the enduring division between Indigenous-precolonial and imperialist-modern.<sup>6</sup>

Rather, rebalancing the region with global equity will require reexamining the current shape of architectural history. The conventional Eurocentric platform in architectural history instantiates a geocultural model of a region whose cultures exist in close proximity, distinguished by traceable, coherent sequences of change in form. In 1893 Alois Riegl spoke of origins and transmission, and three years later Banister Fletcher and his son began touting the development of style as varying by regions; by the early twentieth century Wilhelm Worringer put forth the concept of regional characteristics, while later architectural