

constraints highlighted especially in the first section of the volume.

Although the various contributions indicate the relevance of certain common dimensions of analysis (e.g. space, practice, modernity, subjectivity), the editors' explicit aim to reflect on "conceptual instruments" and to elaborate upon an "adequate theoretical framework" (Moser, p. 3) for the study of cultural mobility is neither realised systematically nor coherently. The introduction to the volume is telling in this respect: instead of outlining the elements of a common conceptual framework for all the contributions, it illustrates with concrete examples the variety of meanings mobility can acquire as an aesthetic experience in the way it is evoked and materialised through contemporary artwork exhibited at the spectacular complex of the Inhotim Institute in Brazil that, unfortunately for the reader unfamiliar with the site, remains decontextualised with respect to its specific socio-political location and history. More helpful in giving an orientation are the short overviews at the beginning of each of the two parts of the volume, although the introduction of the second part and the conclusion of the volume by Pascal Gin are so heavily loaded with theoretical references that the specific value and particular perspectives provided by the contributions become somewhat lost.

With regard to bringing forward a transdisciplinary approach to the study of cultural mobility – instead of introducing a minimal definition of art (Moser, p. 5) – it could have been more helpful for the reader if the editors had reflected on the significance of their own disciplinary location in the fields of modern languages,

comparative literature, cultural transfer and translation studies for advancing the study of particular, namely artistically mediated cultural dimensions of mobility. Nevertheless, the cross-perspective on Brazil and Canada turns out to be particularly fruitful not only with regard to a comparison of historical and contemporary forms of mobility, but also because the contributions relate to a broad range of theoretical debates on globalisation that bring together francophone and anglophone traditions of critical thought. Not the least in this respect, the volume is a worthwhile and inspiring contribution to a field of transdisciplinary interest and growing cross-disciplinary exchange.

Karl Kaser: *The Balkans and the Near East. Introduction to a Shared History* (= *Studies on South East Europe*, Bd. 12), Wien: LIT, 2011, 405 S.

Reviewed by
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The increasingly lucrative textbook market targeting large undergraduate "introductory" (and mandatory) courses has spread to the study of "World History" over the last decade. Evidence of the greater sensitivity to teach college-age students how to think of an integrated world includes a competitive explosion in world history textbooks. Most authors aim to decentering the Euro-Atlantic world in favor of a more inclusive narrative of human exchange. A subgenre of this movement has been the growing in-

terest in regional studies. This has included identifying the Mediterranean, Indian, Pacific and Atlantic Oceans as conduits for productive inter-communal exchanges. Authors have successfully argued that these exchanges blur once impermeable cultural boundaries separating “continents” and “religious traditions.” Karl Kaser’s recent book reflects the best of this revisionist pedagogical spirit. What *The Balkans and the Near East: Introduction to a Shared History* does differently is fuse the Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean worlds into a common narrative that moves well beyond antiquity and the seemingly permanent break caused by the rise of Islam in the early 8th century. Indeed, Kaser’s most welcome project hints at the possibilities for such integrative thinking and finally bridging gaps between “East and West.” In seventeen tightly written chapters, Kaser reinforces a basic claim that “[u]nlike any other region in the world, Eurasia Minor ... shares a joint history, if we define ‘joint history’ as embeddedness [sic] in politically superior structures over long periods of time.” (p. 2) Taking a thematic approach to elaborate on assertions that this area between the Tigris and the Danube rivers shares a common heritage that extends from antiquity to the present, Kaser crafts a narrative that appropriates a vast body of earlier scholarship. As rightly pointed out in the introduction, most scholarship has fixated on telling stories from within neatly defined “Area studies” at the expense of providing a meaningful combined story. As such, Kaser’s book is an invaluable first step to conceptually preparing English-speaking undergraduate students to think beyond conventional boundaries. He does this by discussing themes that may help

appreciate what shaped these regions as a singular unit across millennia. Be it “power and dominance” in the first chapter, the environment in chapter 3 or the sciences and technology throughout, Kaser neatly threads topics of discussion that could easily be adopted in the classroom.

What this reviewer finds especially useful is the heavy emphasis on the shared heritage Muslims of these interconnected regions share with their predecessors, be they other faiths of “the book” – Christians and Jews – or even the pagans of antiquity. While this reviewer has much to quibble about the selection of secondary readings the author provides after each tightly written chapter, the very fact that Kaser offers such a service needs acknowledgement. In this respect, the author may have been more helpful if he actually linked the works listed in the chapters’ bibliographies with the actual content. It may be too much to ask non-specialist instructors and undergraduate students to figure out for themselves which books are relevant to the issues they found especially intriguing. That being said, the service does provide a good foundation for any aspiring young historian to start her own development.

For all the good intentions, the book does have some crucial flaws that the reader cannot ignore. Trying to infiltrate a highly competitive “market” in trans-regional/world history textbooks requires considerable investment in time and, unfortunately, money. To produce one of those shinning, sleek textbooks requires considerable resources, something Kaser personally could not bring to the project and the publisher clearly did not wish to offer. From the start it is clear this book enjoyed minimal financial investment, leaving the

appearance of the book pale in comparison to comparable books on the market. The book almost looks rushed and amateurish in respect to many of the images and overall design. This reviewer has seen undergraduate students produce better looking papers with their computers. Considering this, one wonders if there was any production support at all provided to the author. Even if none was forthcoming, we must fault Kaser for not mastering basic production skills to offer images that are clear. Far too many pictures throughout the book offer nothing but frustration to the reader: not only are they illegible, but become a distraction because of the poor quality.

This issue of production extends to the prose. Dr. Kaser must appreciate that no matter how fluent he is in English, it is not his mother-tongue. The text seriously needs a native-speaking copy editor, one who is given full authority to rewrite Kaser's book. First, the text is written almost exclusively in the "passive" voice. As such, any professor assigning this book risks undermining every freshman writing course her student takes. As any writing teacher will explain, overuse of the "to be" passive voice subverts the English language and reads poorly. In this regard, any book that aspires to compete with the larger productions, at a minimum, needs careful copy-editing. This equally applies to Kaser's occasional use of phrases that work in German but only undermine the reader's confidence in the quality of the book's arguments when literally translated into English. Likewise, the requisite definite and indefinite articles – *the/a/an* – often goes missing in this book.

In the end, this book can really only cater to an advanced reader who would supple-

ment more simplistic, but sleeker productions, with Kaser's thoughtful suggestions about how to integrate these long separated regions. Instructors should not assign this book to students, but use it as a guide to help them translate Kaser's useful elaborations and informed linkages to their classroom. In short, the unfortunate sloppiness and poor production leaves Kaser without a larger audience. That said, I can recommend this book to the previously mentioned instructor who is looking for ways to supplement the narratives found in mainstream textbooks with a particularly Balkan perspective. It offers an angle to discussing larger Mediterranean (and world) history that has long needed attention; hopefully in future projects, publishers can invest greater resources to help scholars like Kaser produce a competitive alternative to the mainstream textbooks he clearly hopes to correct.

Lucas Elmenhorst: Kann man national bauen? Die Architektur der Botschaften Indiens, der Schweiz und Großbritanniens in Berlin, Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2010, 239 S.

Rezensiert von
Ralf Dorn, Darmstadt

Wirft man einen Blick auf einige der leer stehenden Botschaftsbauten die derzeit in der ehemaligen Bundeshauptstadt Bonn zum Verkauf stehen¹, so könnte man ver-