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**ESTHER SAHLE. *Quakers in the British Atlantic World, c.1660–1800*. People, Markets, Goods: Economies and Societies in History 18. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2021. Pp. 218. \$25.95 (paper).**

*Quakers in the British Atlantic World* is an important study of the Quaker mercantile community in eighteenth-century London and Philadelphia. Quaker prominence and success in business and industry is well-known, but Sahle argues that a historiographical myth surrounds the reasons for the movement's economic success. This has traditionally been explained by three factors. First, Friends' business ethics that gave Quaker merchants a reputation for honesty and fair dealing, making them trustworthy trading partners. Second, by a formal structure that disciplined members who failed to settle their debts. And finally, by close kinship ties arising from a strict doctrine of marital endogamy. All of this suggests a culture of Quaker exceptionalism: that there was something unique about Quaker structures, morals, marital formation, and business practices that explain their prominence in commerce during this period. But was this really the case?

Adopting a comparative and empirical approach to the Quaker communities of London and Philadelphia, Sahle interrogates the extent to which principles of Quaker business ethics, discipline, and marital endogamy translated into the actual business practices of Quaker merchants. Over eleven chapters, Sahle offers an important intervention into a scholarship "rooted in a flawed methodology" (9). After an introduction and outline of the origins and history of the Society of Friends, chapter 3 focuses on the merchant communities that evolved in the port cities of London and Philadelphia. Sahle effectively shows that while Quaker merchants were numerically prominent and that the scale and reach of their overseas networks set them "apart from others," they were not disproportionately wealthy (53). The chapter underscores the importance of communal bonds in establishing trading contacts and

emphasizes the wide variety of trading endeavors in which Friends were involved. This included commercial activities not consistent with the movement's testimonies, especially trade involving weapons and slave-produced goods, as well as the buying and selling of slaves.

Chapter 4 compares Quaker business ethics alongside those of their Anglican and other nonconforming contemporaries. Sahle shows that Quakers and non-Quakers shared similar ethical concerns, especially about covetousness and the vices associated with it. More discussion about Friends' stance toward luxury and the rigors with which they enforced their testimonies on "plainness" would have enhanced the tentative conclusion that, even if these business ethics were shared, Friends may have followed these moral codes "with more vigor than others" (74).

Chapters 5 to 8 question the extent to which the meetings in London and Philadelphia enforced matters relating to business integrity in practice. Employing meeting minutes and records of disownment, Sahle shows a "dramatic" increase in the policing taking place in Quaker communities from the mid eighteenth century. She regards the numerical increase in sanctions as symptomatic "of a deep-reaching institutional change" (95). New offences for which members faced condemnation, especially for bankruptcy and the holding and trading of slaves, also emerged in the period after 1750. All of this, Sahle concludes, suggests a greater concern with the outward appearance and status of the movement than with a distinctly Quaker moral code.

Chapter 9 "Marital endogamy" focuses on another important aspect of Quaker discipline: the marital arrangements of Quaker merchants and the penalties members faced for marrying outside the Society. As in previous chapters, Sahle shows that the frequency and rigor of Quaker discipline increased in the later eighteenth century. However, this more uncompromising attitude toward transgression did not mark Quakers out as exceptional. In

fact, Quaker meetings, as Sahle suggests, “did not comprehensively enforce marital endogamy, either before or after 1750.” Instead, they simply became “more sensitive to breaches of the discipline after 1750” (153). This point, while astute, stands in tension with the communal preoccupation that surrounded endogamy, even before the mid eighteenth century. Moreover, acknowledging the challenges that offenders faced for breaching Quaker marriage procedure was a missed opportunity, especially given the difficulties that would arise from publicly condemning their choice of spouse. It was also not clear how such unions affected the Society’s reputation enough to drive an increase in disownments during this period.

Chapter 10 “War and Political Crisis” provides a partial explanation to the question of change over time and why the period after 1750 marked such a turning point in the attitudes toward discipline. It achieves this through an incisive analysis of the impact of the Seven Years War (1756-1763). This important event, which resulted in the Quakers losing power and influence in Philadelphian politics, shaped how Quakers administered sanctions against their members. In the aftermath of the conflict, there was a need within Quakerism to counter accusations of “dishonesty, avarice and violence” (171). This resulted in “an increased concern over Friends’ collective reputation,” (155) which helps to explain some of the motivations for reform across the British Atlantic. However, Sahle does not fully account for the shift in attitudes that had also been taking place in London. Neither does she explore how the American Revolution also affected the Society’s reputation in the later eighteenth century. Indeed, as Sarah Crabtree has shown, the neutral position adopted by Quakers during this conflict had a significant impact on the movement’s reputation. More detailed investigation of the Wars of Independence, as well as the emergence of other Quaker ideas and practices, such as their increasing commitment to philanthropy after 1775, would have

added additional depth to this part of the argument. (Crabtree, *A Holy Nation: The Transatlantic Quaker Ministry in an Age of Revolution* [2015], esp. 32–60, 135–164).

Sahle's work makes an important case for historians to question assumptions about the reasons for Quaker success in trade over this period. The volume of source material consulted is impressive, as is the creative deployment of non-Quaker sources to answer complex research questions about Quaker distinctiveness, among them sermons, apprentice records, merchant databases, and slaveholding records. Above all, *Quakers in the British Atlantic World* is important for pushing historians of the movement to look beyond sectarian divisions and fully embed the history of Quakerism within larger cultural trends and economic developments. This is a study that will thus be of immense interest not only to scholars of early Quakerism, but also to those working in the fields of eighteenth-century economic and social history. It is beyond doubt that the rich empirical analysis of Sahle's study, especially the wealth of information it provides about the nature and impact of early Quaker codes of discipline, will serve as an important source of reference for future historical research.

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