
BUCHBESPRECHUNGEN

Claire Laux / François-Joseph Ruggiu / Pierre Singaravélou (eds.):
Au sommet de l'Empire. Les élites européennes dans les colonies, XVIe–XXe siècle / At the top of the Empire. European elites in the colonies, 16th–20th century (= Enjeux internationaux / international issues, Bd. 5), Brüssel: Peter Lang Verlag 2009, 326 S.

Rezensiert von
Mairi MacDonald, Toronto

In the second introductory chapter of this rich and interesting collection of papers, François-Charles Mougel proposes that the work be seen as an approach towards a “global history of the colonial world,” that one might dare to call “post-post-colonial studies” (p. 36).¹ The book is admirably broad in scope and, in its focus on empirical case studies, it does avoid the reductionist binary of dominant/dominated that lies at the heart of some post-colonial studies. However, it seems unlikely that its focus on European colonial elites will distract scholarly attention from the impact of colonial rule, either on the colonized or on the colonizer. This is not to say that the case studies are anything short of fas-

cinating. As Claire Laux, François-Joseph Ruggiu and Pierre Singaravélou point out in their introductory explanation of the approach taken in the chapters and at the conference at which they were first presented, the comparative method offers a number of fruitful analytical avenues to examining the social history of a dominating class. They define “elites” as “individuals in a given location who enjoy both mastery of local forms of power ... and the social recognition that goes with it” (p. 20). The essays consider three main types of colonial elites: people in the metropole who interest themselves in the empire; metropolitans sent to administer, exploit or people the empire; and so-called créoles, whom they define as members of the local elite that were born in colonized areas. Laux et al. posit that the unique qualities of imperial elites are their polyvalence and their mobility (p. 24). By polyvalence, they mean that elites frequently occupied a number of roles simultaneously, a reaction to both material and demographic constraints. Thus an administrator may be at once judge, prosecutor, police officer and diplomat. This should not come as a surprise to any student of Europe’s colonial empires, which seemed determined (at least at some times and in some places) to extract the greatest possible material benefit for the metropole at the lowest pos-

sible cost. More surprising, perhaps, is the mobility of colonial elites, both between colonies and the metropole, and among the colonies themselves.

As the editors point out (p. 25), the essays also show the interesting possibilities of comparison over time and space. For instance, L. H. Roper's examination of the Anglo-American elite in the Thirteen Colonies (and the Caribbean) offers an interesting contrast to Donald Fyson's consideration of the fate of Quebec's francophone elites after their conquest by the United Kingdom in 1761. Roper posits that in his mobility, his power and his limitations Sir John Yeamans is "a highly representative member in general of [pre-revolutionary Anglo-American] political culture" (p. 143; emphasis in original). Yeamans epitomizes a geographic and social mobility, as well as the transfer of ideas and techniques for dealing with the fundamental fact of both Barbadian and southern American plantation economies: their reliance on enslaved African labor. Fyson focuses on a very different elite: the creole – but not métis – francophone elite in Quebec or Lower Canada during the period between its conquest by the United Kingdom in 1761 and its union with Upper Canada in 1841. This elite continued to enjoy social mobility and a degree of privilege, but were restricted by religion, geography and, especially, by language.

Roper and Fyson, together with many of the other contributors to this volume, perform a most useful service. They summarize the post-colonial historiographies of the colonies in question, seeking and finding cogent explanations for why the stories of these elites have been ignored or misinterpreted. Indeed the volume can serve

as an excellent introduction to post-colonial historiographies – in these two cases, emphasizing the exceptional nature of the elite and the "nation" each created; in most of the other cases, focusing on metropolitan historiography.

The volume contains eleven chapters, six in English and five in French, plus the two introductory reflections and a conclusion from Pierre Guillaume (all in French). It does, indeed, range from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries: from Youri Akimov's exploration of Siberian warlords to the rather frustrated efforts of Mussolini and of Belgium to ensure that the "right sort" of elite would populate and control their brief imperial excursions in Ethiopia and Congo, explored respectively by Gian Luca Podestà and by Amandine Lauro and Valérie Piette. Martin Thomas provides an admirably clear exploration of the nature of the "colons" in France's North African empire, especially in Algeria. Along the way the papers take in Anglo-India (Elizabeth Buettner), modern Portuguese colonies (Mafalda Soares da Cunha), Dutch Indonesia (Elsbeth Locher-Scholten and Leonard Blussé), and the "imagined" elites of the German colonial empire (Winfried Speitkamp). Though not always edited to a standard that will prove satisfactory to the native English-speaker, the papers succeed admirably in illustrating both the diversity and the commonality of the elites of Europe's far-flung empires.

Guillaume's conclusion returns to the current battle in French scholarship over post-colonial studies. He is at pains to point out that there is no political agenda in the label "elite": it is simply a sociological observation. Nevertheless, and despite the excellent avenues for future research

that he sketches out, it seems unlikely that either this volume or this line of inquiry can defuse the emotional, political tension embedded in “post-colonial” studies. His last suggestion, to research the role of European elites in the evolution of the erstwhile “colonized”, now developing nations – comes closest to grappling with that tension. Some very good work has already been done in this regard.² Though it promises to shed light on the transition from colonial to post-colonial, however, it has not yet transcended the binary of dominating-dominated – at least not in the popular, post-colonial, imaginary.

Notes:

- 1 All translations from the French are mine.
- 2 For example, see J. M. Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert. Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism*, Athens OH 2007.

Michael Borgolte / Julia Dücker / Marcel Müllerburg / Paul Predatsch / Bernd Schneidmüller (Hrsg.): Europa im Geflecht der Welt. Mittelalterliche Migrationen in globalen Bezügen (= Europa im Mittelalter, Bd. 20), Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012, 283 S.

Rezensiert von
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Auch die mediävistische Geschichtswissenschaft hat sich in den vergangenen Jahren verstärkt globalhistorischen Fragen zugewandt. In diesem Zusammenhang sind nicht nur Fernhandelsbeziehungen untersucht worden, sondern auch Reise-

berichte, expandierende Reiche, imperiale Konzeptionen, unterschiedliche Zentren und ihre jeweiligen Peripherien sowie nicht zuletzt auch Migrationen. Vieles hiervon ist zwar auch schon von der älteren Forschung behandelt worden, doch geschieht dies in jüngerer Zeit verstärkt im Hinblick auf neuere Ansätze der Geschichtswissenschaft, die nicht mehr von „etablierten“ Hierarchien oder vermeintlich klaren Zivilisations- bzw. Kulturgrenzen ausgeht.

Der anzuzeigende Sammelband dokumentiert die Vorträge, die auf der Berliner Abschlussagung des DFG-Schwerpunktprogramms „Integration und Desintegration der Kulturen im europäischen Mittelalter“ gehalten wurden. Das genannte SPP 1173 wurde über zwei Perioden hinweg von der DFG gefördert und umfasste insgesamt 24 Einzelprojekte aus 14 Disziplinen, die an über 20 verschiedenen deutschen Universitäten angesiedelt waren. Während der zwei Förderperioden sind zahlreiche Qualifikationsschriften abgeschlossen worden, daneben entstanden mehrere Sammelbände, die die Ergebnisse einzelner Tagungen und einer Frühlingsschule dokumentierten. Das abgelaufene Schwerpunktprogramm dürfte die mediävistische Forschung in vielen Fächern nachhaltig geprägt haben. Die beteiligten Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftler haben durch ihre Zusammenarbeit in interdisziplinär zusammengesetzten Arbeitsgruppen vielfältige Anregungen erhalten, die ihnen neue Perspektiven eröffnet haben.

Das Thema des Abschlussbandes ist geschickt gewählt, denn Migrationen sind ein Thema, dessen Bedeutung einerseits in der Gegenwart stark zunimmt und dementsprechend in der globalgeschichtlich ausgerichteten Forschung verstärkt