

**Peter Crooks, Timothy Parsons, eds..** *Empires and Bureaucracy in World History: From Late Antiquity to the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 496 pp. \$34.99, paper, ISBN 978-1-316-61728-1.

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In this rich collection of essays edited by Peter Crooks and Timothy H. Parsons, historians working on diverse regions and eras examine the relationship between the establishment and running of empires and bureaucracy. The central question linking the diverse essays is how empires were actually governed, through an assessment of the importance of bureaucratic rule to enduring imperial control over conquered territories and peoples. There are sixteen wide-ranging essays: on Song China, the Abbasids, the Incas, and the Ottomans; on the Roman and Byzantine Empires, the Carolingian, Angevin and other medieval European empires, and finally, the modern Napoleonic, Spanish, French, and British colonial administrations. All of the essays are, in fact, densely packed and tightly summarized snapshots of long-term scholarship and historiographic debates on imperial and administrative history within these particular fields. It is impossible in this brief review to engage each of them individually or do each of them justice. Together, they make the volume as a whole a valuable one-stop world-historical reference on the historiography of imperial administrations.

The detailed introduction by the editors lays out the aims and conceptual foundations of this “collaborative effort to explore power and limits

of bureaucracy in historical empires across space and time” (p. 3). The two main categories, empire and bureaucracy, are defined as follows. Empire is approached as an “extended and durable polity in which a core society exercises formal and authoritarian power over subordinated peoples of outlying territories gained or maintained by coercion” (p. 4) Bureaucracy, in turn, is defined as “routine administrative activity delegated to office holders (who are often, but not always, professional career administrators), conducted on the basis of records (though not always written records), with some differentiation and specialization of offices that are organized hierarchically and are reliant on systems of communications” (pp. 17-18). The editors emphasize imperial bureaucracies as different from those in national states, and argue against the tendency to see the former as merely extensions or enlarged versions of the former. The key difference identified between the two is that while state bureaucracies draw their legitimacy from the principle of uniformity across the governed population, imperial ones derive theirs from the principle of difference. Imperial bureaucracies, thus, have a greater need to regulate the fragile equilibrium between the integration and fragmentation of conquered territories into the imperium, and the absorption

and exclusion of conquered peoples into the mainstream of imperial society. This fundamental instability within imperial forms of rule is described as the Goldilocks paradox, where one cannot have an empire without a bureaucracy, but too much bureaucracy does not allow an empire to remain for too long (p. 28). The overall goal of the volume, thus, is to juxtapose and compare these regulatory and balancing efforts within the formal governance mechanisms of various imperial formations from a world-historical view, while steering clear of an overarching explanatory framework.

Some persistent themes run through the essays in the book. The first is the focus on the mechanisms, conditions whereby, and degrees to which native elites were integrated into imperial governance. For example, Istvan T. Kristo-Nagy's essay on the Abbasid Empire in early Islamdom details this integration through religious conversion, marriage, and a systematic military and civil recruitment. Chris Given-Wilson's essay on the fifteenth-century Inca Empire shows that it was through an absorption of native religions into the Inca rituals of sun-worship and distribution of conquest spoils. In Song China, and in the Ottoman, Napoleonic and later British imperial bureaucracies (in essays by Patricia Ebrey, Karen Barkey, Michael Broers and Deana Heath, respectively), we read that it was through various forms of institutionalized education and examination, established recruitment channels, and acculturation into diverse elite imperial codes and ethics. Several essays also explore the grey area between direct and indirect rule, especially the processes and consequences of the transition from the delegation of authority to existing conquered elites to a more formal, institutionalized bureaucracy. Indeed, examining the overlapping zones and contradictions between direct and indirect rule, the imperial core and the colonial peripheries, rulers and ruled, and between formalized rules and dis-

cretionary power is one of the volume's central concerns.

This is also the volume's empirical strength, as the essays richly detail the problems and pitfalls of viewing the general trajectory of imperial bureaucracy as a linear progression from conquest to tribute extraction to formalized direct administration, and of the assumption that the deepening of bureaucratization brought greater imperial stability. Instead, the essays offer what the editors term a more "lumpy" process with jumbled timelines and unexpected outcomes. To cite just one example, the central argument of Frederic Cooper's essay is that the intensification of formal bureaucratic rule in postwar French Africa, far from securing the future of French colonial rule, actually hastened its exit. French imperial efforts to move away in the postwar period from its traditional reliance on native chiefs toward a new generation of elite African politicians led it to also move away from previous categorizations of native people on the basis of race or tribe, and all the arbitrary rule and discretionary violence that the system supported. Its efforts to bolster new categories of citizens and workers, however, created spaces for African social movements to articulate a range of claims and subjectivities, including, eventually, independence.

This focus on contradictions through empirical detail, formal institutions of governance, and the "vulnerabilities and contradictions" (p. 8) of imperial bureaucratic power is a move away from the Foucaultian emphasis on colonial governmentality that has highlighted the definitive role of the colonial state in producing the particular forms of modernity in the former Asian and African colonies of the erstwhile European empires. Indeed, the need to delink the easy and simplistic linkage between rational bureaucracies and the modern state is emphasized through the essays on the thoroughly governmentalized Inca and Song Empires, and the arguments against Foucaultian governmentality figure largely in the essays on

the modern British and French Empires. Deana Heath's essay argues, for instance, against the Foucaultian view of the British colonial state in India as monolithic and governmental, in the sense of being concerned about the welfare and productivity of its citizens; instead, she highlights its perpetuation of the rule of racial difference and torture, and the role of subordinate Indian judicial and police functionaries in exercising arbitrary, violent power.

The engagement with Weberian categories, however, forms one of the most significant threads running through the entire volume. Weber's evolutionist framework, with the rational-bureaucratic form undergirding modernity and the modern state, forms an extreme contrast with the characterization by Franz Kafka of bureaucracy as the ultimate meaningless and routine exercise of modern petty power. While the editors suggest at the outset that these Weberian and Kafkaesque extremes are themselves blurred in the historical examination of imperial bureaucracies, several of the essays rely heavily on Weber's archetypes of charismatic, patrimonial, and rational-bureaucratic to frame their analysis of particular institutional forms and transitions, whether in the late Roman (essay by Michael Whitby), the Byzantine (essay by John Haldon), or the Napoleonic and Ottoman imperial bureaucracies. While at times some forms do appear to be shoe-horned into a Weberian discussion, Sam Whimster's afterword to the volume brings together all the Weberian threads into a critical and insightful discussion of the relevance of Weber's bureaucratic archetypes to a historical study of empires across space and time, and more broadly, to the characterization of legitimacy and the (limits to the) exercise of imperial power.

Interspersed with these broad institutional and conceptual concerns are the twists and turns and minutiae of individual empires and policies, which prompt questions and concerns about imperial bureaucracies that do not find any space in

this volume. For reasons of space, I will mention but two. Kristo-Nagy's brisk elaboration of civil, military, and judicial institutions in the Abbasid state includes a fascinating, if brief, discussion of the importance of paper to early Islamic bureaucracy, of Arabic administrative manuals and the self-awareness of bureaucratic practice revealed in them, and of tensions among different kinds of "men of the pen," such as those working with figures and those in charge of crafting correspondence and diplomatic prose. Similarly, Given-Wilson's essay highlights the bureaucratic efficiency and economy of the Inca Empire of the fifteenth century, spread across a narrow longitudinal, but extremely vertiginous area along the South American Pacific coast. It recorded astonishingly precise information about its subject populations, produce, as well as history through the non-alphabetic quipus, devices of knots and threads. These mnemonic quipus, with their system of knots differentiated by color and size were legible as data to specialist keepers, and were effective at keeping detailed numerical records for administering the forced labor and migration of populations from one conquered area to another. Given-Wilson also argues that they lent themselves easily to the form of communal property prevalent in the Inca Empire; interestingly, even though the quipus could easily be adapted to chronological history, the Incas used chronology more as a way of regulating labor, tribute, and royal ritual rather than narrativizing history.

These particular essays highlight the relationship between technologies of record-keeping and the nature of bureaucratic rule in different historical eras and regions. They prompt further thinking, from different spatial and temporal perspectives, about the imbrication of memory (or indeed, different forms, techniques, and skills of archiving and narrativizing the past) and the production and exertion of bureaucratic power. To what extent did differences between various technologies of record-keeping, such as those between oral, written, or non-alphabetic forms, or those

between papyrus, stone inscriptions, or paper, or indeed, across different scripts and languages, shape the nature of imperial bureaucratic rule in various world-historical settings?

The most surprising omission is the discussion on questions of how language may or may not have influenced the relationship between bureaucracy and empire. Almost everywhere, imperial conquest and bureaucratic reforms brought changes in the languages of record-keeping, reframed linguistic hierarchies, and absorbed native, conquered elites within multilingual scriptoria. Scribal skills, whether of language or numeracy, expressed in alphabetic writing or in material mnemonic devices, were embodied, specialist skills that were not easily replicable. Indeed, one of the features of the transition from patrimonial to rational bureaucracy was this urge to make such skills easily transferable and replicable through institutionalized patterns of training and recruitment. This involved the transformation of methods of education and pedagogy that, in turn, deeply impacted the use and importance of languages within the state and bureaucracy, and the actual documentary forms and writing practices in use within them. These patterns were of course part of the modernization of not just imperial administrations, but also national states, but, in keeping with the volume's overall argument, were all the more relevant to imperial contexts predicated on the rule of difference. These aspects of the lived everyday experience of bureaucrats find little discussion across the volume. The editors of this rich and valuable volume make a methodological plea for specialists on particular empires to look beyond their own particular archives and contexts. Focusing on the forms, languages, and inscriptional practices, indeed the very making of the documents that make up the "tainted archive" (p. 10), can perhaps provide another methodological approach to a social and cultural history of imperial bureaucracies across space and time.

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