Political Economy in Empire/Empire in Political Economy

*New Insights from Intellectual and Imperial History**

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Books under review

Alimento, A., and K. Stapelbroek (eds.), *The Politics of Commercial Treaties in the Eighteenth Century. Balance of Power, Balance of Trade* (Cham 2017).

Kapossy, B., et al. (eds.), *Commerce and Peace in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge 2017).

Reinert, S., and P. Røge (eds.), *The Political Economy of Empire in the Early Modern World* (Basingstoke/New York 2013).

Introduction

For the longest of times, commerce and empire have been held to reside in perfect isolation from one another. Conceptually, peaceful commerce starkly opposed the discord of empires. In that same vein, political economy – the tool of commerce – was often considered the natural counterpart of warfare – the tool of empire. In many regards political economy was – and still is – considered an appealing alternative to empire, if not the antidote for the evils of imperialism. Despite this conceptual antagonism, the acquisition of empire by European maritime states was in most regards strongly intertwined with generating profits – often at the

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expense of human life and well-being. Empire-building and profit-generating were, as a result, seldom discussed in isolation.[1]

Given this context, the long eighteenth century (ca. 1660-1830) has proven to be a fruitful period of analysis. In the first place, this period witnessed a shift in how political economy was understood. The conventional 'reason of state' – a discussion of policy quite particular to European kingdoms – made way for a theory of international society for which the question of empire – that is to say, the overseas territories – had become the central component of analysis. Secondly, the shift of political economy into a fully-fledged discipline occurred against the backdrop of accelerating European overseas expansion.[2] As early modern European empires embraced the globe, success in international trade became 'a matter of the military and political survival of nations'.[3] Istvan Hont treated this particular eighteenth-century conjunction between politics and the economy in his seminal *Jealousy of trade. International competition and the nation-state in historical perspective*. The 'jealousy of trade', Hont argued, signalled 'that the economy had become political' and that 'global market competition [was inaugurated as] a primary state activity'.[4] Hont considered the jealousy of trade the principal explanation for why eighteenth-century writers were preoccupied with economic rivalry as a facet of intensifying political conflict. It was after all the century in which 'the interdependence of politics and the economy first emerged as the central topic of political theory'. As such, the science of political economy came into the world.[5]

The historical examination of political economy was traditionally the domain of historians of economic thought. Since the early twentieth century, countless monographs have been published on the 'evolution' of economic thought throughout the ages – e.g. from the Ancient Greeks to the Chicago School or from the 'pre-Adam Smith' epoch to Keynes.[6] As Donald Winch has put it, somewhat unapologetically:

1 S. Reinert and P. Røge, 'Introduction. The political economy of empire', in: S. Reinert and P. Røge (eds.), *The political economy of empire in the Early Modern World* (Basingstoke/New York 2013) 1-7, there 1-3.

2 R. Koebner, *Empire* (Cambridge 1961); A. Pagden, *Lords of all the world. Ideologies of empire in Spain, Britain, and France c. 1500-1800* (New Haven 1995); D. Armitage, *The ideological origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge 2000).

3 I. Hont, *Jealousy of trade. International competition and the nation-state in historical perspectiv*e (Cambridge 2005) 5.

4 Ibidem, 5-6.

5 Ibidem, 4.

6 R.E. Backhouse, *The Penguin history of economics* (London 2002); H.W. Spiegel, *The growth of economic thought* (Durham 1971); M. Blaug, *Economic theory in retrospect* (Cambridge 1985).

> Traditionally, historians of economic thought have [...] been economists writing for the edification or entertainment of fellow economists [...]. The tribe has chiefly been interested in genealogical questions treated teleologically: how did economics arrive at its present state, where this can either be seen as the latest end point in a triumphant history of modern sophistication or as cause for concern?[7]

Using Quentin Skinner's typology of errors, Erik Åsard would in all likelihood point out that hallmark publications in the history of economic thought often fail to avoid the mythologies of doctrines, of coherence, of prolepsis, and of parochialism.[8] Many of these studies have, furthermore, paid little to no attention to the circulation of ideas, non-canonical thinkers, and extra-European actors and perspectives.[9]

Until recently it was widely assumed that the rise of the European science of political economy might be understood through the exclusive examination of European phenomena. For that reason, it was by and large accepted that inquiry into themes relating to empire would not produce worthwhile insights that might help better understand the rise of an intrinsically 'pan-European' science. This might explain why the 'Enlightenment' has received such overwhelming attention, and is often still described as a defining development unique to eighteenth-century Europe.[10] The compartmentalisation of 'domestic' and 'colonial' histories of, say, Great Britain, the Netherlands, or the Iberian Peninsula has in all likelihood affirmed and reinforced this blind spot. Social and economic historians, however, have produced a wide range of studies on the political economy of empire. These studies move beyond the perceived intellectual antagonism between political economy and empire in applying key concepts from political economy to European economies, which are understood to be regionally and globally interconnected and interdependent.[11]

7 D. Winch, 'Intellectual history and the history of economic thought. A personal account', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History of Ideas* 6:12 (2017) 1-18, there 4.

8 E. Åsard, 'Quentin Skinner and his critics. Some notes on a methodological debate', *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift* 2 (1987) 101-116, there 102-103.

9 S. Moyn and A. Sartori, 'Approaches to global intellectual history', in: Idem, *Global intellectual history* (New York 2013) 3-30, there 4-5.

10 J. Mokyr, *The enlightened economy. An economic history of Britain 1700-1850* (New Haven 2012); J.I. Israel, *A revolution of the mind. Radical enlightenment and the intellectual origins of modern democracy* (Princeton 2010).

11 J.D. Tracy (ed.), *The political economy of merchant empires. State power and world trade 1350-1750* (Cambridge 1991); M. Fusaro, *Political economies of empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean. The decline of Venice and the rise of England, 1450-1700* (Cambridge 2015).

Another aspect to this socio-economic perspective is that the inherent European-ness of phenomena is being critically reassessed. However, what these studies do to a lesser extent is connect thinking about the science of political economy with the actual political economy of European empires. The result is that, on the one hand, many intellectual historians and historians of economic thought have often ignored the colonial and non-European world. Yet on the other hand, imperial, social, and economic historians have only on occasion connected their imperial narratives with the political economic ideas of (and their implementation by) historical persons.[12]

Through the combined efforts of a new generation of imperial and intellectual historians, however, inquiry into the contentious relationship between 'political economy' and 'empire' has 're'-emerged, both its ideas and praxis.[13] And although not entirely new, the bridge between political economy and empire – between intellectual history and imperial history – is in many regards an innovation. Strongly inspired by their colleagues in Atlantic history, the history of globalisation, the history of economic thought, and the subsequent 'global turn' in these fields as well as in social and economic history, historians of European early modern and modern history have started exploring trans-European and even cross-empire aspects of the dynamic relationship between intellectual history and the various histories of global trade and conquest. By exploring the generation of knowledge, the circulation of ideas, and the application of policy within Europe, these historians are attempting to lift the veil on the mechanisms driving empire – and vice versa. The (re-) emergence of the examination of the political economy of empire has been facilitated by the aforementioned 'global turn' already undergone by other historical disciplines and subfields. While this 'global turn' has provided answers to some problems, it has also created new problems – such as the translatability and transferability of meaning and concepts, as well as the limits of intellectual 'entanglements' made possible by increased but uneven global integration.[14]

12 C.R. Boxer, *Salvador de Sá and the struggle for Brazil and Angola*, 1602-1686 (London 1952); P. Linebaugh and M. Rediker, *The many-headed hydra. Sailors, slaves, commoners and the hidden history of the revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston 2001); P.J. Stern and C. Wennerlind (eds.), *Mercantilism reimagined. Political economy in Early Modern Britain and its empire* (New York 2014).

13 S.A. Reinert, *Translating empire. Emulation and the origins of political economy* (Cambridge (MA)/ London 2011).

14 Moyn and Sartori, 'Approaches to global intellectual history', 10, 12-15.

The books under review focus on the long eighteenth century and are a small selection of a growing stream of publications examining, *inter alia,* the rise of political economy as a 'trans-European science'. These volumes are also either implicitly or explicitly analysing the intertwined nature of political economy and empire. Published in 2013, *The Political Economy of Empire in the Early Modern World* set out to explicitly and comparatively explore the interactions between the 'new' discipline of political economy and Europe's 'new' overseas interests. The editors were in all likelihood responding to the challenge posed by Samuel Moyn's and Andrew Sartori's *Global Intellectual History* – published the same year – to combat Eurocentricity by reassessing the European-ness of political economy through applying a 'global lens'.[15] The two other volumes under review, *Commerce and Peace in the Enlightenment* and *The Politics of Commercial Treaties in the Eighteenth Century*, both published in 2017, respond to new insights in intellectual and political history and seek to respectively reassess central ideas to the 'Enlightenment' and the nature of commercial treaties. The implications of these studies, however, are far-reaching. Analysing the relationship between the diverse forms of European empire-building project and the production, emulation, adaptation, and circulation of ideas on how to govern the body politic and its overseas territories is difficult and has already given rise to a great deal of debate. For instance, Sophus Reinert's emphasis on the protectionist measures taken by European states in the brutal competition for global power is reigniting the debate on (neo-)mercantilism and rattling the intellectual foundations of the nineteenth-century 'liberal world order'.[16] Although quite insular, these debates are far from over, and will have consequences for other, related historiographies such as the Great Divergence and the Rise of the West – historically the domain of (global) social and economic historians.

So far, these debates have enjoyed a limited but steadily growing following in Dutch academia.[17] In view of intellectual and imperial histori-

15 See notes 10 and 14.

16 P.R. Rössner, 'Heckscher reloaded? Mercantilism, the state and Europe's transition to industrialization (1600-1900)', *The Historical Journal* 58:2 (2015) 663-683.

17 G. Oostindie and J.V. Roitman (eds.), *Dutch Atlantic connections, 1680-1800. Linking empires, bridging borders* (Leiden/Boston 2014); A. Schrikker, 'Visions of Dutch empire – Introduction', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 132:2 (2017) 77-78; R. Koekkoek et al., 'Visions of Dutch empire. Towards a long-term global perspective', *Idem,* 79-96; A. Fitzmaurice, 'The Dutch empire in intellectual history', *Idem,* 97-109; S. Legêne, 'The European character of the intellectual history of Dutch empire', *Idem,* 110-120.

ans delving into historical problems relating to the social, cultural, economic, and political mechanisms that underlie global and globalizing systems, there is indeed ample reason to familiarise ourselves with this new and exciting literature. The eclectic and innovative insights these scholars bring to the table have provided the means to restart and overhaul the classical debates on empire and political economy on substantively new terms. This is all the more applicable now that both the rise of political economy and early modern empires are increasingly studied through a global lens. Owing to the intellectual, colonial, and economic centrality of the Dutch Republic in global history, Dutch academia has much to gain from becoming well-versed and participating in these debates.[18]

Mission Statement. The Political Economy of Empire

The first book under review, *The Political Economy of Empire in the Early Modern World,* stood out in that the editors, Sophus Reinert and Pernille Røge, sought to show how economic policy was rooted in a trans-European science and how that science, political economy, responded to problems associated with empire.[19] Its inception was the result of a renewed interest for the interplay between political economic ideas and the rise of European overseas empires, and part of a broader and on-going 'global turn' in the subfield of intellectual history. By reconnecting the divergent historiographies of intellectual and imperial history, the authors were the first to embed the creation of the trans-European science of political economy within a context of early modern empire.

The book is divided into two sections and is composed of nine chapters, featuring contributions on the Dutch Republic, the Iberian, French, and British empires – all written by relatively young scholars. The first five chapters deal with the theory of political economy: Jan Hartman and Arthur Weststeijn on the brothers De la Court's 'mercantilist' ideas; Pernille Røge on the French physiocratic school's vision on overseas territories; Thomas Hopkins on Adam Smith's theory on the colonial struggle for independence; and Gabriel Paquette on British ideas and the

18 S. Pincus, 'Rethinking mercantilism. Political economy, the British empire, and the Atlantic world in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *The William and Mary Quarterly* 69:1 (2012) 3-34.

19 Reinert and Røge, 'Introduction', 1-7.

Iberian political economy. The fifth chapter by Sophus Reinert bridges the gap between the two sections, between theory and praxis. The final four chapters deal with the practical aspects of economic policy for empire: Giles Parkinson on how London financed imperial warfare; Claire Levenson on gift exchange between the British and the Yamacraw tribe; James Lees on the British fiscal military politics in Bengal; and Bertie Mandelblatt on food provisioning in the French Caribbean.

In the foreword, Richard Drayton claims that 'no other study before [...] has so explicitly and comparatively explored the interactions of the new political economy and Europe's new overseas interests'.[20] The first part of the edited volume is certainly comparative. It could, however, have delved deeper into the mechanisms of generation, circulation, emulation, and adaptation of ideas and the implementation of economic policy *sur terre* – as addressed in the different chapters of the second section. Furthermore, the introduction effortlessly ties together political economy and empire at a theoretical level, but does not engage with the chapters that follow. As a result, it is not always clear how chapters connect or relate to one another; this applies all the more so for comparisons between the two sections. This is a missed opportunity, and could have been remedied by expanding an otherwise very short introduction (only seven pages) or by adding a concluding chapter tying together the chapters in a coherent narrative.

The Political Economy of Empire in the Early Modern World nevertheless does an excellent job at exploring the dynamic relationship between theory and praxis, between the developing science of political economy and the practical aspects of *the* political economy. This removes the ideas from the intelligible realm – a place intellectual historians have a tendency to remain – and shows how they were historically employed in a global arena of statecraft. That being said, I full-heartedly support Reinert in advocating a stronger emphasis on historiographically neglected but regularly translated 'mercantilists'. In his quantitative chapter on translations, he argues that 'we should study the canon historically, not history canonically'. The other chapters nevertheless focus on more familiar suspects (e.g. Adam Smith and the physiocratic school) and make the claim for more research on their respective topics.

What I believe we should take away from this groundbreaking publication is the significance of imperial 'peripheries' for the development of economic thought. As Paquette puts it in his highly recommend-

20 R. Drayton, 'Foreword. Of empire and political economy', in: *Idem*, vii-xi, there viii-ix.

ed chapter on British ideas and the Iberian political economy: 'Colonies were not merely laboratories where ideas generated in the metropole were clumsily applied'.[21] Colonists had varying but nevertheless considerable agency in generating knowledge and applying ideas regarding the political economy of empire. Other chapters also strongly emphasize the exchanges occurring between the 'metropole' and its 'periphery' – categories that are always context-dependant. With the exclusion of Levenson's article on gift exchanges, however, the chapters in this edited volume do not provide non-Europeans, natives, locals, and 'exotic others' with a platform to participate in political economy. While Reinert and Røge admit that the volume places a strong 'focus on the political economy of Europe's Atlantic empires', they nevertheless claim that these case studies are 'enriched and made more trenchant by being put in a comparative global context' – an overly ambitious claim considering the absence of a global context.[22]

Despite its flaws, *The Political Economy of Empire in the Early Modern World* had the appeal of a mission statement, and, in that regard, presented a clear research agenda for the next decade. Furthermore, the volume offered young scholars an opportunity to chart new territory and to announce the direction in which they believed imperial and intellectual history should head. As a whole, the essays did not advocate dismissing the centrality of canonical thinkers for the generation, circulation, emulation, and adaptation of ideas about political economy. Yet their approach also recognized the importance of other – sometimes neglected – thinkers and actors, and how they influenced the political economy of empire(s). The approach put forward by the authors of this volume has no doubt paved the way for more research on examining the production or '*generation* [...] of political and economic ideas' in Europe, its empires, and beyond.[23]

The Balance of Power. Commerce and Peace

The second book under review, *Commerce and Peace in the Enlightenment,* differs considerably from the previous volume in that its editors – Béla Kapossy, Isaac Nakhimovsky, and Richard Whatmore – wish to reassess En-

21 G. Paquette, 'Views from the South. Images of Britain and its empire in Portuguese and Spanish political economic discourse, ca. 1740-1810', in: Idem, 76-104, there 78-79.

22 Reinert and Røge, 'Introduction', 3.

23 Paquette, 'Views from the South', 97.

lightenment debates about the concept of 'perpetual peace' by examining 'how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theorists of international order approached the conduct of the European states and empires of their time'.[24] Of particular interest is how these theorists who lived during the long eighteenth century theorized on 'perpetual peace' in relation to economic rivalry and the rise of public finance; or in other words, how to disentangle the 'race' for prosperity from the struggle for power. The ideas put forward by these eighteenth-century theorists had the potential to radically change perceptions on fundamental aspects of society such as what 'political economy' or an 'interstate system' meant. This volume promises to excavate the interactions between ideas and praxis, between solutions to philosophical problems and the implementation of political economic policy.

The book is composed of twelve chapters and is chronologically organized, featuring contributions on canonical thinkers from across Western and Central Europe. In the introduction, Kapossy et al. tie together the subsequent essays via an overarching framework on 'perpetual peace': from Enlightenment inception, through nineteenth- and twentieth-century reception, to their ambitions to include how theorists thought about the economy. The first six essays cover the period running up to the French Revolution: Mark Somos on James Harrington's imperial project to conquer Europe; Isaac Nakhimovsky on Voltaire's ideas to turn Europe into a great republic of states; Koen Stapelbroek on Isaac de Pinto's 'system' of luxury; Christopher Brooke on the impact of Carthage and Rome's ancient rivalry on the application of *raison d'état* to the sphere of international trade; Sophus Reinert on Cesare Beccaria's publications on ('capitalist') 'socialists' *avant la lettre*; and Eva Piirimäe on the Kant-Herder debate and achieving international peace. The remaining five essays cover the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars and beyond: Iain McDaniel on Scottish perspectives upon republican government and international peace; Richard Whatmore on how the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars changed perspectives upon Britain; Béla Kapossy on the Karl Ludwig von Haller's reception of Rousseau; Edward Castleton on Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's 1861 *La Guerre et la Paix*; and, finally, Duncan Kelly on Locke's prerogative power in certain strands of modern German political thought.

Commerce and Peace in the Enlightenment does a brilliant job at exploring the relationship between the idea of 'perpetual peace' and commerce, and how intellectual attempts at making peace were deeply en-

24 B. Kapossy et al., 'Introduction. Power, prosperity, and peace in Enlightenment thought', in: B. Kapossy et al. (eds.), *Commerce and peace in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge 2017) 1-19, there 10.

tangled with conceptualisations of an international order and society sometimes at odds with peace. Furthermore, the essays convincingly demonstrate that the international order of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was to a large extent founded upon schemes and doctrines conceived of during the long eighteenth century. Kapossy et al. argue in the introduction that '[s]tudents of politics and of international relations have tended to ignore the variety and the depth of the approaches to the relationship between commerce and peace that characterized the Enlightenment'.[25] The book is certainly rich in variety and depth. However, it could have explored more thoroughly the application or implementation of the ideas on commerce and peace. Because the essays rarely engage with the employment of ideas, the book at times risks the 'so-what' pitfall that is sometimes associated with intellectual history. That being said, the thinkers discussed are canonical in that they are considered central to European political thought; their impact does therefore rarely require an explanation.

In the afterword, Michael Sonenscher summarises: 'Much of this collection is about how, particularly in the eighteenth century, thinking about politics also involved thinking about the economy.'[26] And that '[…] in the nineteenth century, thinking about the economy also came to involve thinking about politics.'[27] The former development he attributes to the legacies of the European maritime and Ottoman empires of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, as well as the military revolution and the drive of competition. The latter is the result of the division of labour, technical and institutional specialisation, and occupational and political differentiation. Although this passage might state the obvious, it nevertheless summarizes what the edited volume under review is at its core conveying to its audience. Whereas *The Political Economy of Empire in the Early Modern World* advocated the significance of 'peripheries' for the development of economic thought, *Commerce and Peace in the Enlightenment* underlines, first, the centrality of the metropole in developing and implementing political economic thought, and second, the centrality of the commerce of empire in developing ideas to bring peace to the international order. Although most chapters focus on the usual suspects (e.g. Locke and Kant), this edited volume also presents unfamiliar thinkers (e.g. Harrington and De Pinto) that could redefine the historio-

25 Ibidem, 2.

26 M. Sonenscher, 'Afterword. Peace, politics and the division of labour', in: *Idem,* 335-343, there 335.

27 Ibidem, 338.

Illustration 1 The personified East Indian Company receives gifts. Jan Caspar Philips, 1730. Title page in: T. Salmon, Hedendaagsche historie, of Tegenwoordige staat van alle volkeren, 1730 *(source: Rijksmuseum RP-P-OB-60.091, http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.164017).*

graphy of the political economy of empire.

Commerce and Peace in the Enlightenment aims to readdress established debates by incorporating the diverse element of commerce and consequently stirs a new flavour into an older mix of political thought. The political economy of empire is touched upon throughout in a number of ways. However, the relationship between 'political economy' and 'empire' is often absent. As a whole, the essays strongly advocate the centrality of the canonical thinkers in the history of political thought and leave little room for less-known thinkers and the circulation and generation of ideas beyond a European intellectual elite. The approach nevertheless recognizes the importance of revisiting canonical thinkers to challenge older interpretations and to tie together – more coherently than before – their ideas into a 'trans-European science' of political economy.

The Balance of Trade. The Politics of Commercial Treaties

The Politics of Commercial Treaties in the Eighteenth Century. Balance of Power, Balance of Trade, the final book under review, seeks to develop a new paradigm for thinking about the political economy of the international order in the eighteenth century by taking (bilateral) commercial treaties as its point of departure. In view of intensifying state centralisation and growing bureaucracies, bilateral commercial treaties had the power to increasingly steer and shape economic activity in Europe, in overseas territories, and beyond. This volume deals extensively with the practical manifestations of the wider intellectual problems experienced by major political writers across Europe to devise a system of interstate trade in which the principles of reciprocity and equality were combined to produce peaceful and sustainable economic development. And it is these problems and their proposed (and at times implemented) solutions that had a significant and sometimes insignificant impact on local and regional economies, as well as on global commodity chains and (inter)dependent economies worldwide – often transcending the boundaries of European empire.

The book is composed of fifteen essays that tackle a wide range of European states, and in particular follow the attempts by the Dutch Republic, France, Great Britain, Portugal, Spain, the Habsburg Empire, the Kingdom of Sardinia, Russia, and Prussia to conclude 'combinations of

treaties as part of comprehensive political economic visions'.[28] The essays in this volume are developed from the insight that treaties had to be 'good' in order to endure the test of time and that the treaty-producing process functioned according to 'waves' of innovative political economic visions and practices – these roughly being the 1710-1720s, the 1740-1750s, and the 1780-1790s.[29] In the introduction, Alimento and Stapelbroek review the historiography of commercial treaties and argue that previous research does not recognise the major conceptual development according to which these 'treaties were adopted and rejected for regulating international trade and politics' in the eighteenth century.[30] The bulk of the essays deal with treaties and policy running up to or related to the Peace of Utrecht of 1713: Moritz Isenmann on Jean-Baptiste Colbert's vision on international commercial competition; José Luís Cardoso on the Anglo-Portuguese Methuen Treaty of 1703; Doohwan Ahn on the conduct of British foreign policy between 1710-1713; Virginia Léon Sanz and Niccolò Guasti on the *Asiento* treaty between Spain and Great Britain; and Olga Volosyuk on the role of Spanish and Russian commercial relations in mediating warfare.

Then there are a number of essays that deal with attitudes and ideas over a longer period of time: Stapelbroek on the impact of Dutch attitudes towards commercial treaties with France for the history of global trade politics; Éric Schnakenbourg on the idea of an international or general law of commerce; Antonella Alimento on French diplomatic solutions for international competition. The next four essays deal with the diplomatic instability of the mid-eighteenth century: John Shovlin on the impact of treaty negotiations on European empires in the East Indies; Marco Cavarzere on Frederick II of Prussia's idea of a balance of power based on trade; Christopher Storrs on the court of Turin's unwillingness to conclude trade treaties; Christine Lebeau on trade treaties within the Imperial context of the Habsburg Monarchy. The final three essays deal with the period prior to the French Revolution and its aftermath: Pascal Dupuy on French receptions of the Franco-British commercial treaty of 1786; Paul Cheney on the impact of trading regimes on Haiti's commercial treaties; and finally, Marc Belissa on French debates about commercial treaties between 1792-1799.

28 A. Alimento and K. Stapelbroek, 'Trade and treaties. Balancing the interstate system', in: A. Alimento and K. Stapelbroek (eds.), *The politics of commercial treaties in the eighteenth century. Balance of power, balance of trade* (Cham 2017) 1-76, there 13.

29 Ibidem, 15-16.

30 Ibidem, 3.

In the introduction, Alimento and Stapelbroek argue that they seek to bridge the gap between competing political and institutional perspectives – between 'the methodological preferences of International Relations and Public Choice economics' – by exploring the theoretical and practical tensions between the balance of power and the balance of trade from an intellectual history perspective.[31] In that regard, *The Politics of Commercial Treaties in the Eighteenth Century* does a good job at navigating these issues by emphasizing the agency of actors and how they brought their ideas into the political arena of commercial treaties. It also successfully explores how changing and new ideas on political economy were entangled with the 'waves' of innovation that determined the treaty-producing process. Although the volume is presented as a critique of state-centric narratives and the dominance of Franco-British diplomatic relations in historiography, the essays nevertheless focus exclusively on inter-state relations. Moreover, the bulk of the chapters reaffirm the centrality of France and their diplomatic *siècle de traités*. A number of chapters on trade treaties between European states and their African and Asian counterparts would have been a welcome addition. Cheney's chapter on Haitian Revolution, for example, did an excellent job at discussing the complicated and unequal processes that are part of treaty-making. These processes are particularly significant when involving treaties with colonizing powers and the 'metropole'.

In contrast to *The Political Economy of Empire in the Early Modern World*, the essays in the volume under review give a sense of emergency to British commercial empire and hegemony. Great Britain is presented as a top-priority for eighteenth-century diplomats and negotiators, for they perceived it to be an unstoppable rising star. Furthermore, the tension between the ideas of 'perpetual peace' and the 'jealousy of trade', as discussed in *Commerce and Peace in the Enlightenment*, play a smaller role in the considerations and negotiations of diplomats. In fact, the bottom line might be that the balance of trade was subservient to the balance of power, that the idea of an international order or society was used in order to conceal hegemonic power struggles. Empire, however, is throughout considered a central component of negotiations. The book underlines and reinforces the importance of territories in the hearts and minds of diplomats and negotiators, and as the eighteenth century progressed – matching developments in the science of political economy – production and population also came to play a critical role in treaty-making. The article by

31 Ibidem, 10.

Illustration 2 The Mughal emperor Shah Alam hands a scroll to Robert Clive, the governor of Bengal, which transferred tax collecting rights in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the East India Company, August 1765. Benjamin West, 1818 (source: British Library https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/04/east-india-company-original-corporate-raiders).

Léon Sanz and Guasti on the treaty of Asiento, for instance, describes how inter-state treaties significantly impacted the fortunes of empires. Shovlin presents a very similar case for the fortunes of the East India Companies.

The Politics of Commercial Treaties in the Eighteenth Century uniquely analyses bilateral commercial treaties as instruments for both trade and peace, as a means to contain (or cushion the effects of) war by controlling the balance of trade between states. Despite its few shortcomings, the book has much to offer and pushes the debate on the political economy of empire into the domain of diplomacy and institutions, which were traditionally reserved for political and economic historians. It recognizes how ideas on political economy do not exist in a vacuum, and how these ideas found expression in diplomacy and treaties that would have serious consequences for state and empire. Although the centrality of Great Britain and France is rarely disputed, the methodology and insights presented in this volume enriches our understanding of the balance of power and the balance of trade by widening the scope from 'a focus on individual treaty-making states to the general mosaic of modalities of trade patterns'.[32] This scope also invites a far-reaching investigation of

32 Ibidem, 13.

the circulation and generation of political economic ideas that underlie the 'waves' of innovation and determine the treaty-making process.

Conclusion

Through the combined efforts of a new generation of intellectual and imperial historians, the political economy of empire has re-emerged as an eclectic, innovative, and interdisciplinary subfield. As is often the case with revived subfields, new insights answer as many old questions as they create new problems, whether theoretical or methodological. The three books under review show great promise for what is to come: each exploring, reassessing, and revising the historiographical *status quo* through new and at times radical insights. However, these studies are also exemplary for the hurdles to be overcome by historians working on (topics closely related to) the political economy of empire – all the more so when compared to new insights and standards in global history.

A problem that all volumes suffer from is an almost unapologetic focus on Europe and the Atlantic World. No more than two chapters shed light on European East India Companies. That being said, there is growing attention for Southern and Eastern Europe, as well as Latin America and the Caribbean complex. Reinert and Røge encourage the inclusion of non-Europeans and extra-European states, and Alimento and Stapelbroek also advocate a research agenda that is inclusive of North African and South Asian states. Still, the subfield has much to gain from extending its focus to the African and Asian continents.

This ties into the second hurdle: how the subfield has thus far silenced 'non-Europeans', subalterns, and the ('exotic') 'other'. The books under review are – in one way or another – an attempt to understand the rise of a trans-European science in relation to the development of ideas and policy. Only *The Political Economy of Empire in the Early Modern World* explicitly does this against the backdrop of accelerating European territorial expansion. It is surprising that the essays failed to question the inherent European-ness of political economy, or of similar ideas relating to peace, commerce, and treaties. Historians working on the political economy of empire should be wary towards and seek to reassess colligatory terms such as 'Enlightenment' and 'trans-European science'. One way to go about this is by giving the voiceless a voice. How did South Indian thinkers, diplomats, and leaders consider political economy and

how does it relate to their ideas on empire? What of the great gunpowder empires spanning from the Balkan to the Bengal? Were the administrators of the Middle Kingdom considering similar ideas on how to maintain peace within the realm? And what of the Japanese, Javanese, and Polynesians, not to forget about the vast constellation of African (proto-)states? The list goes on.

The third hurdle is a greater willingness to think in terms of circulating ideas – a circulation that goes beyond a European intellectual elite such as, for instance, the Republic of Letters and the 'diffusion' of their principal ideas. The political economy of empire *also* exists outside the manuscripts of European thinkers. The essays in *The Political Economy of Empire in the Early Modern World* are sensitive to this problem, and advocate the examination of how ideas come into the world, are spread and adapted, turned into 'new' ideas and also into policy. In his chapter on British ideas and Iberian political economy, Paquette advocates a more refined and inclusive definition of the 'circulation of ideas' that is inclusive of 'peripheries'. There, too, knowledge is created, ideas circulate, policy is adapted and implemented. By recognizing that knowledge is uneven but nevertheless diffuse, and that ideas circulate across borders, between 'peripheries', and at times even circumvent the 'metropole', it will be possible to come to a better understanding of the circumstances that facilitated the rise of political economy. Furthermore, by recognizing the significance of 'localized knowledge', it will also be possible to explore political economic ideas beyond the shores of Europe and its empires, and onto extra-European shores and places not yet 'discovered' by Europeans.

None of these remarks are meant to detract from the significant contributions made by each of the books under review here. The countless case studies presented in these volumes are a testament to historical variety, a uniqueness and an unwillingness to be generalized. It could, however, be worthwhile to explore a wider angle, to zoom out towards the 'global'. By positioning the political economy of empire within a broader debate still, that on global history, it becomes apparent how these case studies touch on fundamental aspects also relating to imperial, social, and economic history. Is political economy a trans-European science, limited to 'Enlightened' Europe? If so, could analysing this science help better understand the growing intellectual breach between 'the West' and 'the Rest'. Specifically, could this study contribute towards understanding how and why 'intellectual commensurability' across Eurasia suddenly ended sometime during the late seventeenth and early eigh-

teenth centuries? Furthermore is political economy part of a larger 'scientification' aimed at asserting and intellectually weaponizing the category of 'empire' as the eighteenth century came to a close? To answer such vast and complex questions is daunting, but any attempt might contribute to lifting the veil on the numerous and multifarious mechanisms driving empire and globalisation in the early modern period.

About the author

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