

CENTRE FOR HISTORY AND ECONOMICS

French Empires

Cambridge Harvard Mellon Project

Saltmarsh Study, King's College

Wednesday 1 August 2007, 16.00

Participants:

Andrew Arsan, Chris Bayly, Susan Bayly, Isabel DiVanna, Richard Drayton, Tom Hopkins, William Nelson, William O'Reilly, Gabriel Paquette, Pernille Røge, Emma Rothschild, Christophe Salvat, Ruth Scurr, David Todd, Richard Tuck.

Regrets: Gareth Stedman Jones, Robert Tombs, Megan Vaughan.

Emma Rothschild introduced the objectives of the project, in relation to exchanges of ideas within and across empires, and to the prospects for a global history of France. She emphasized connections to other work at the Centre, including on the digitization of history, and the possibilities for increasing access to archival and other resources in relation to French history. She mentioned three subjects where the Centre was planning future work; on uses of information in ancien regime France and the French colonies; on the economic ideas of the Napoleonic period; and on debates over free trade, slavery, and slave law in the mid 19th century.

Susan Bayly, Richard Drayton, David Todd, William Nelson and Emma Rothschild presented their current work on French Empires and suggested potential areas for the project to study. Bayly Having worked on colonialism and its cultural legacies in both India and Vietnam, Bayly is now using anthropological and historical perspectives to explore issues of memory and cultural transformation in postcolonial Hanoi. For the project, she proposed recruiting contributors from former colonies such as Vietnam, Algeria, Senegal and Guinea. This would add an element of interdisciplinarity to the project, as well as a concern with the processes of ideological and cultural appropriation which transformed significant regions of the empire into critical spaces of the post-1945 socialist world system. It should be fruitful to explore the colonial system's intellectual and cultural afterlife by focusing on decolonisation as a process involving Asian and African

nationalists' far-reaching engagements with the empire's distinctive repertoire of revolutionary and socialist modern/mission civilisatrice ideologies.

Drayton's current interests focus on the globalization of France in 17th and 18th century. He has explored the transformation of metropolitan France in general, and the French ports in particular. He is also writing a history of the Caribbean world. Recently, Drayton has forged ties with French academics at Université Paris I where he participates in a project on French Imperial Historiography together with Christophe Charle, Philippe Minard, and Pierre Singaravélou. He also collaborates on aspects of empire with François-Joseph Ruggiu at Université Bordeaux III, and Allan Potofsky, Emmanuelle Sibeud and Ann Thomsen at Université Paris VIII. These scholars could be interested in the 'French Empires' Project.

Todd's previous work investigated debates on international trade in 19th-century France, including discussions of France's economic relations with French Caribbean islands and its new Algerian colony. For the French Empires Project, he identified two potential topics to pursue. One project could be concerned with ways to bridge the gap between France's first and second colonial empire. It would be particularly interesting to analyze the influence of Napoleon, who abolished serfdom in Egypt and reinstated slavery in older colonies. A second project could examine French, British and Spanish imperial ideologies. How did imperial ideologies emerge in a national context and how did they travel across empires? Todd exemplified his suggestion with a reference to the imperial ideas of the Saint-Simonian movement and stressed the value of studying individuals who worked behind the scenes of empire, including Michel Chevalier.

Nelson followed up on Todd's idea about bridging the gap between the first and the second empire. He highlighted that a similar gap exists in the history of ideas and its transition from the 18th to the 19th century. Seeing the year 1763 as a point of departure, Nelson suggested analysing ideas of race and human rights, their development and their roles in shaping the next wave of empire. Projects could trace how ideas on animal breeding, racial policies, the malleability of human bodies and the sciences, more generally, migrated between colonies like St. Domingue and the Metropole. Nelson described this undertaking as a 'rewriting of the history of the French Enlightenment' with colonies and the empire incorporated into that story.

Rothschild's current interests include the globalization of the history of France. Her forthcoming book concentrates on Turgot in Angoulême, the French expedition to Guyana in the 1760s, and his period at the Ministry of the Navy. Her ideas for the 'French Empires' Project include exchanges across long distances within and across empires. How did people extend the idea of an idea? How did ideas move between different individuals and categories of individuals?

After these introductory remarks, the meeting turned into an open discussion with the goal of selecting themes for the project as well as discussing possible organisational formats. It was emphasised that the word "empire" had multiple and fluctuating meanings, but that this was not uninteresting. The themes that had generated excitement thus far included the transition from the first to the second empire, "the long 1763" (in Richard Tuck's expression), Napoleon and Empire, the global history of France, decolonization, and the afterlife of empire in a socialist world. To this Rothschild added the idea of exploring international institutions before and including the United Nations, and their relation to French ideas.

There was an extended discussion of the articulation between France's continental, overseas and informal (cultural) empires. There was also interest in the continuity between French imperialism in Europe and overseas (especially across the Mediterranean), and of the enduring connections within French empires, such as between the Middle East and Africa.

The thematic focal points were thought to suggest a certain periodisation. Drayton suggested a particular emphasis on the periods 1763, 1789-1815, 1848, and 1918-1945. Bayly added to this the period of decolonisation and nation building in Algeria, Vietnam or the Western Hemisphere and proposed tying such issues to ideas on development.

Participants then gave a short summary of their work and interests. Isabel DiVanna is starting a research project on the legacy of French positivism in Brazil, in particular referring to the anti-slavery movements of 1860-1880. Scurr is interested in Roederer, Napoleon and the German question. Tom Hopkins' PhD examines ideas on colonies in France, 1814-1848. He is currently looking at perceptions of the Haitian Revolution. Pernille Røge's PhD analyses French imperial interests in Africa between the Seven Years' War and the French Revolution. Christophe Salvat suggested re-evaluating Morellet's writings on the East India Company. Gabriel Paquette works on reform in the Spanish and Portuguese empires and is organising a Workshop entitled 'Enlightened Reform in Southern Europe and its Atlantic Colonies, c.

1750-1830'. Andrew Arsan's PhD investigates Lebanese migration to West Africa in the 20th century. He is interested in studying protectorates and mandate systems.

It was hoped that part of the project could take place in France, either in Paris, Bordeaux or Aix. Going to Aix could, in turn, further the project on 'the digitization of history'. It would be important element to connect the project to the interests of other scholars at Cambridge, including Christopher Clark (the 1850s) and Adam Tooze (the political economy of international cooperation in the 1920s), and at Harvard, including Mary Lewis (legal disputes in Tunisia in the late 19th century) and Henrietta Harrison (French charitable organizations in China.) Others who might be invited to participate included Keith Baker, Christophe Charle, Laurent Dubois, Susan Petersen, Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau, Dominique Rogers, Londa Schiebinger, and Jacob Soll.

Still under the topic of organisational issues, Drayton proposed a bi or tri-termly reading group to study historiographical debates on the French Empires. More generally, a bibliography could be composed and listed on the Project website. There was some discussion of the *Bibliographie annuelle de l'Histoire de France*. It was agreed that Emma Rothschild and David Todd would prepare a tentative schedule of meetings, which would be circulated to participants for comments.