

do overcome the traditional totalitarian model.

Lastly, Cambridge University Press must be complimented for including both a bibliography and an index, which detail the abundance of materials used by the authors. One can only wish the edition a large readership.

William Beinart / Lotte Hughes: *Environment and Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007, 395 S.

Rezensiert von
John R. McNeill, Washington D.C.

Beinart and Hughes have written the first general survey of the environmental history of the British Empire. The book is a companion to the five recently published volumes in the Oxford History of the British Empire, which, despite their formidable bulk, have almost nothing to say about soils, forests, irrigation, disease, wildlife conservation or any other environmental theme. The book stands as a useful addition to the Oxford series, and as an implicit, gentle rebuke to it.

Beinart and Hughes are both Africanists, and the book shows it. Beinart is well-known as the author of several works, not all environmental histories, on South Africa. Hughes, less well-known as yet, has written on the Maasai under colonial rule. The parts of the book that deal with Southern and East Africa generally show a greater contextual awareness and rely

more on sources from the time periods under consideration than do the other parts, which generally rely heavily on the most recent and prominent scholarship. This is an observation not a criticism; every broad survey is written this way.

The authors clearly state that their aim is not to cover the whole environmental history of the British Empire, but instead to explore certain themes within that subject. In their words, the book is a “synthesis, exploring commodity frontiers, environmental change, diseases, conservation ideas, urban environments, visual images of nature, and political ecology over the long run.” (vii). They present stories of environmental change, of nature conservation, and of the politics of access to resources in several parts of the British Empire. Some of the smaller corners come in for little treatment, and some of the important ones are deliberately left out (such as Ireland) or mentioned only in passing (Nigeria). By and large, India, South Africa, East Africa, Australia and Canada provide the bulk of the examples and cases.

The authors must rely on published sources for a book of this scope. By and large they have seized the low-hanging fruit. The literature on the Canadian fur trade, for example, easily accessible and of high quality, serves as the basis for a crisp summary of that episode. Some newer work, done after this book was drafted, shows some additional interesting aspects, such as the reliance of Canadian First Nations on beaver ponds as insurance against drought. The depletion of the beaver meant greater vulnerability to periodic drought on the prairies. The chapters on India focus on forestry and irrigation, the best developed subjects in Indian environmental his-

tory; the sole chapter on the West Indies deals with sugar plantations. Beinart and Hughes have chosen efficiency in this synthesis, which has the virtue of introducing students to the most important themes in existing literature, but it at times seems a bit unadventurous. There is very little in the way of comparison to other European empires of the same centuries. Some sections read a bit like a student survey-of-the-literature essay: Giblin said, this, Iliffe said that, and so forth. Mind you, some much admired scholars routinely write in this fashion.

Perhaps the two books this one most resembles are John Richards' *The Unending Frontier* (2003) and Alfred Crosby's *Ecological Imperialism* (1986). Like Richards, Beinart and Hughes organize their book mainly as case studies involving one theme in one colony. They have a few exceptions, such as chapters on postcolonial urban environments or on the 1890s plague pandemic. And, like Richards, they present many rather short chapters – 19 to be precise. Unlike Richards, they leave climate change out of the story and do not roam outside the British Empire and the English-language historiography. Crosby's book has for twenty years cast a tall shadow in the small field of imperial environmental history. Beinart and Hughes regard its influential arguments sympathetically, but are keenly aware of its limits. They include a few themes that neither Richards nor Crosby bothered with, such as conservation ideas, imperial science, and cultural representations of nature. But in its scope, scale and approach, their book deserves to be compared with these two illustrious predecessors.

It also deserves more and better maps than it has (which I imagine was the publisher's decision). There is but one map, of the British Empire as it stood in the 1920s. It is a Mercator projection, showing Greenland larger than South America or Africa. There are no maps to help the reader understand where the rubber plantations in Malaya were, or the sheep pastures in Australia. There are too few illustrations as well. A section on photography and painting of nature in the British Empire has no illustrations. To the publisher's credit, however, the book has very few typos, and the handful of illustrations are reproduced well.

The book is mainly about the final century of the British Empire. Early chapters on Caribbean sugar and Canadian fur just about exhaust the treatment of subjects before 1800. Most of the other chapters focus in on the years 1850-1970 or so. This is perhaps justified, in that the age of industrial imperialism was the most environmentally turbulent, and some of their preferred themes, such as imperial science, clearly climaxed in the 20th century.

For a book that seems directed at students and others coming to the subject without a deep background in the literature, it is curious that the book has no conclusion. Its Introduction admirably lays out the themes to be explored, and defends the decisions of inclusion and exclusion, but there should have been a summary of the lessons of the book and the arguments that wind through it.

All this carping aside, this book serves its stated purpose as a synthesis of the environmental history of the British Empire very well. Its judgments seem to me reli-

able and sober, which is not universally the case in environmental history.

Siegfried Ulbrecht / Helena Ulbrechtová (Hrsg.): Die Ost-West-Problematik in den europäischen Kulturen und Literaturen. Ausgewählte Aspekte / Problematika Východ – Západ v evropských kulturách a literaturách. Vybrané aspekty (Arbeiten des Slavischen Instituts. Neue Reihe, Bd. 25), Prag / Dresden: Slovanský ústav AV ČR / Neisse Verlag 2009, 794 S.

Rezensiert
von Markéta Křížová, Prag

The publication focuses on the mutual relationships of European cultures and literatures (with accent laid on the binary opposition of “Slavic” and “non-Slavic” cultural phenomena). The voluminous collection (798 pp.) of articles written by authors of diverse nationalities and institutional affiliations represents one of the first results of work of the new Department of the history of Slavic studies and Slavic literatures, established in 2003 within the Slavic Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences. As is stated in the introduction of the editors, Siegfried Ulbrecht and Hana Ulbrechtová, the project arose out of the need, perceived acutely by the members of the Department, “to follow up with the heritage of the Czech comparative literary studies and at the same time to respond actively to the present-day develop-

ment of literary and cultural studies in Europe”. Thus the traditional accent on the problems of history of various Slavic languages and literatures (with special attention devoted to the problem of Russian literature) is being enriched by confrontation of the Slavic cultural systems with cultural manifestations from other European regions. “This method, so common in European Slavic studies, is only marginally realized in the Czech milieu, due to the strong fixation of researchers to Czech-Slavic context,” stated the editors. (p. 13) Thus, the dichotomy East-West in great majority of articles overlaps with the dichotomy Slavic-German, with attention dedicated also to the specific posing of Central Europe between these two great cultural complexes.

This binar opposition of Slavic vs. German, born out of the nineteenth-century struggle for national independization of Czech face to face the German “threat”, represents one of the conservative traits of the volume. Equally traditional view embodies the fact that “culture” in the preponderant majority of articles means strictly “high culture”, and above all, literature. In fact, the two words are used almost synonymously, even though Hana Ulbrechtová in her opening article (mentioned in greater detail below) repeatedly stated that “the “East-West” concept cannot in any case be reduced to the subject of research of a comparative examination of literatures.” (p. 39) However, the truth is that most of the contributors tried to embed the literature in the broader context of culture and politics.

Last but not least, national state and national culture (literature) are considered as basic reference points of historical as well as cultural studies of the volume.