H-Net Reviews
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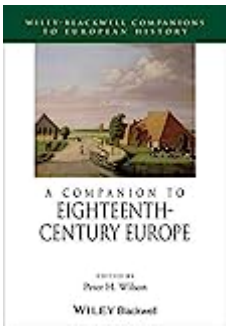

Peter H. Wilson, ed. *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Europe.* Blackwell Companions to European History. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2008. xiv + 592 pp. $199.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4051-3947-2.

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Published on H-German (January, 2010)

Commissioned by Susan R. Boettcher

The New Eighteenth Century

A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Europe is a recent installment in the growing list of volumes in the Blackwell Companions to European History series. Edited by Peter Wilson, a distinguished political and social historian of early modern Germany, the handbook is comprised of thirty-one essays written by specialists from the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, continental Europe, and North America. On the whole, the volume provides a masterful, up-to-date introduction to the state of research in the numerous subfields it covers.

Wilson's introduction gives the theoretical rationale for the volume, defending both the concept of Europe and the period 1700-1800 as meaningful historiographical delimiters. Wilson grounds the idea of Europe in the consciousness of educated eighteenth-century Europeans themselves, who, he argues, shared a sense of belonging and a common set of beliefs and aspirations despite their religious and political divisions. In defending the chronological time frame of the volume, Wilson engages with arguments for a "short" and a "long" eighteenth century, respectively, but ends up endorsing 1700 and 1800 as significant, if rough, cut-offs from the standpoint of Europe's wider impact on the world. (Most, but not all, of the volume's contributors tacitly accept these parameters.) These years, Wilson contends, saw the development of distinctive institutions and cultural practices that became characteristic of modernity. As European states achieved an unprecedented concentration of technological, economic, and military power, they were able to project influence around the globe, in the process transforming Europe itself. One expressed aim of the handbook, then, is to highlight connections between Europe and other parts of the globe. This goal is met chiefly through the inclusion of several articles focusing directly on Europe's interaction with the world, rather than through the incorporation of an explicitly international dimension in each individual contribution.

A second aspiration of the volume is to take the "cultural turn" in historiography fully on board without displacing older concerns about economic, social, political, and diplomatic history. The introduction sounds a curiously ambivalent note, however, about the impact of

new research agendas. While lauding the new cultural history's focus on individual experience and perception, "discourse," gender, identity, and non-elite cultural practice, Wilson notes the potential, if unintended, consequences of such paradigms as "Atlantic world" and "public sphere" to reduce European history to that of its northwestern corner and its urban middle classes. Seeking to avoid this pitfall, the volume casts a wide net, considering Europe's diverse populations and devoting more space than textbooks typically do to the continent's northern, eastern, and southern regions. Though no single historiographical approach dominates, cultural history serves as a leaven throughout many of the essays, often refocusing established questions and approaches. Little or no attempt, though, has been made to impose unity or an overarching narrative.

The handbook is organized into five parts, starting with thematic essays on environment, society, economics, and culture before shifting to political, national, and international issues. Part 1, "People, Production, and Consumption," begins with a data-packed chapter on environment and climate by Dennis Wheeler, a geographer. Wheeler charts general climatological trends, including a warming spell in the first half of the century, but emphasizes regional variation and the difficulties involved in correlating temperature changes with mortality rates and economic developments. Deborah Simonton takes a historiographical tack in her article on gender. While up-to-date and useful on such topics as intimacy, workplace-, and political culture, the article suffers from being rather jargon-laden. Marcus Cerman's chapter on rural economy and society emphasizes the diversity of Europe's peasantries and argues, with the grain of recent scholarship, that rural populations played an active role in market economies by innovating and specializing in response to commercial pressures and opportunities. "Manufacturing, Markets, and Consumption," Beverly Lemire's article, considers the impact of the century's "consumer revolution" across social classes and on the broader European economy. Marc Schalenberg contributes a brief and interesting survey of towns and their inhabitants, while Hamish Scott stresses the vitality and coherence of Europe's nobility on the eve of the French Revolution. The section is rounded off with a fine article on poverty by the editor, arguing that the eighteenth century saw "the rise of the poor," a widening of the gap between those who benefited from commercial expansion and those who did not. While no individual article is devoted to the middle classes, whose "rise" has often been taken to be emblematic of the century, they receive ample attention in other contributions in this section and, indeed, the volume as a whole.

Part 2, "Cultures," opens with an original contribution by Michael Schaich, who shows how research in the last twenty years has modified JÃ¼rgen Habermas's seminal study on the origins of the public sphere. Schaich argues convincingly that the decisive moment in the emergence of the public sphere occurred not in eighteenth-century England, but rather in the "news revolution" in early-seventeenth-century Germany. In a fine chapter on Enlightenment thought, Thomas Munck unsurprisingly stresses the fracturing of the pre-1970s consensus about its unitary nature, while Mary Lindemann's article on medicine and public health largely steers clear of historiographical debate to provide a lucid narrative survey of key eighteenth-century developments. A strong essay on religion by Joachim Whaley underlines the degree to which a spate of recent work calls into question old assumptions about the eighteenth century's supposed secularization and desacralization. This perspective is echoed throughout the volume, with a number of contributors emphasizing the continuing vitality of religious institutions and practice throughout the period. In a piece rich in historiography, Beat KÃ¼min considers the fraught nature of the concept of "popular culture" and recent attention to the importance of sociability patterns. Mark Berry chooses to focus his chapter on the arts on relating "representational culture" (ballet, opera, architecture, painting) to changes in the public sphere as well as on depicting the stylistic transition from Baroque to classicism in painting and music. Mirroring entrenched patterns of research, and to some extent validating Wilson's cautions in the introduction, this entire section tends to concentrate on northwestern and central Europe (with Whaley on religion a partial exception).

The third and longest part of the volume, "State and Society," surveys the political structure and main themes in political history of distinct regions in a generally chronological framework. Reflecting the editorial goal of giving more space to the European "periphery," the section begins in the east, with Russia (Lindsey Hughes) and Poland-Lithuania (Jerzy Lukowski) before moving to a chapter on the Holy Roman Empire, Austria, and Prussia (Wilson, again), Scandinavia (Michael Bregnsbo), the Dutch Republic (J. L. Price), the Italian States (Gregory Hanlon), Spain and Portugal (Christopher Storrs), France (Michael Rapport), and Britain and Hanover, sensibly considered together (Torsten Riotte). Though fairly traditional in approach, most articles contain striking insights. Wilson, for example, rejects the Whiggish ten-

dency to see the rise of the Austrian and Prussian nation-states as the century's key developments and emphasizes the enduring vitality of the Holy Roman Empire throughout the century. Bregnsbo challenges the penchant to write the history of Scandinavia from the perspective of modern borders and instead underscores the political effects of the composite nature and far-flung reaches of the Danish-Norwegian and Swedish kingdoms.

Part 4, "International Connections," consists of four essays that make explicit the global perspective championed in Wilson's introduction and which up to this point has generally remained implicit or absent. Andrew C. Thompson's chapter, "Diplomacy and the Great Powers," contains an illuminating discussion of the culture of diplomacy and the rise of the five first-rank political powers but retains an intra-European focus. With Molly Greene's article, "Islam and Europe," the horizon expands to take in the Ottoman Empire and the mutual impact of European-Ottoman cultural and material exchange, diplomatic relations, and war. Greene cautions against overestimating European influence in the Ottoman Empire in the 1700s, but underscores the implication of European power in the Ottoman crisis that had emerged by century's end. Imperialism and colonialism form the subject of a stimulating chapter by Philippe R. Girard. Reflecting new scholarly trends, Girard emphasizes the complex and multiple impulses–beyond simple greed and creed–driving European expansion as well as the multifaceted interplay between Europeans and the peoples with whom they came into contact. "Fusion and collaboration, not just confrontation and domination" marked the imperial enterprise, and very often, Girard contends, Europeans did not have the last word (p. 416). Jan Glete rounds off the section with a wide-reaching essay befitting its subject, "Europe and the Sea," which reminds readers of the profound significance of Europe's geographical status as a huge peninsula for international contact, communication, trade, plunder, and war.

Part 5, "Politics and the State," returns to political history, this time considering themes from an international angle. In a panoramic chapter on dynasticism and the world of the court, Clarissa Campbell Orr underlines the continuing importance of royal courts to political life and the central role of dynastic claims in driving European states into war. Backed up by a slew of recent research, Ronald G. Asch's essay on absolutism and royal government vigorously contests the "myth of absolutism," arguing that beyond the spheres of war, foreign policy, and high politics, governments across Europe remained much weaker–and much more dependent on the cooperation of nobility and other elites–than they claimed, and have been believed by historians, to be. Ciro Paoletti penetrates what he sees as the still-alive-and-well prejudices and preoccupations of post-Napoleonic military history to offer a lively survey of eighteenth-century warfare. In a chapter on participatory politics, David M. Luebke draws on a number of recent studies to make a convincing case that common people, while holding on to communal norms and expectations, were able to challenge political authorities effectively through both petition and rebellion, and bring about change. The volume is rounded off with a deft article by Alan Forrest, "The French and European Revolutions," which assesses the relationship between the upheavals in France and America and the "revolutionary climacteric" that touched much of Europe in the century's closing decade.

Given the vastness of the topic and the range of historiographical approaches represented, there is little obvious unity to the volume beyond the logic imposed by its organization. Several themes, however, crop up repeatedly. While some overtly postmodernist preoccupations appear to be on the wane–the editor, for example, rejects the value of Foucauldian deconstruction for understanding the nature of crime, deviancy, and social control (p. 117)–many of the essays implicitly or explicitly challenge the Whiggish master narratives that shaped much of the twentieth century's historical writing about the eighteenth century. Old assumptions about secularization come in for repeated criticism, as do preoccupations with locating the origins of nineteenth-century nation-states and the penchant to read social and political developments, both in France and elsewhere, through the lens of the French Revolution. In everything from climate to culture to the state of peasantries, contributors stress regional diversity, a trend reinforced by the editorial decision to give more space to the continent's periphery.

The volume includes eight clear maps, several two-tone illustrations, and extensive, up-to-date bibliographies. The book's unseemly price makes it likely that it will be consulted mainly in libraries. Its primary audience will no doubt include beginning researchers and graduate students, and perhaps advanced undergraduates seeking to orient themselves to historiographical problems in a particular field. It will also prove useful to classroom teachers designing or updating courses on eighteenth-century and early modern Europe. But thanks to its many state-of-the-art contributions, even specialists in the period are bound to find it a highly informative, reliable, and stimulating resource.

Citation: Eric Carlsson. Review of Wilson, Peter H., ed., *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Europe*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. January, 2010.

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