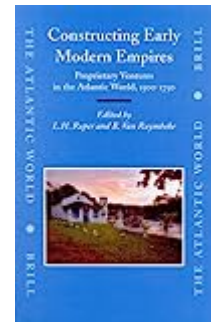


L.H. Roper, Bertrand Van Ruymbeke. *Constructing Early Modern Empires: Proprietary Ventures in the Atlantic World, 1500-1750.* Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007. 423 S. \$155.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-15676-0.



Reviewed by Susanne Lachenicht

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (April, 2010)

L.H. Roper u.a. (Hrsg.): Constructing Early Modern Empires

With this edited volume L.H. Roper and Bertrand Van Ruymbeke present aspects of proprietorship in the Portuguese, Spanish, French, Dutch and English overseas empires. They find that "considering the centralization of authority that began to take place in early modern Western Europe, the continuing delegation by the Dutch Republic, England, France, Portugal, and Spain of the responsibility for colonial administration generates particular interest".(p.2-3)

All five empires delegated considerable power to individuals such as William Penn, Lord Willoughby or George Calvert, first Lord Baltimore, or to chartered companies such as the Compagnie des Cent Associés in New France or the Dutch West India Company for New Netherland. Colonial ventures were riskful and expensive. Royal charters delegating risks and power still left the rising nation-states in Europe with the option to reassume power in the colonies if the private ventures failed or if the colonies became too precious to leave them to the initial grantees. This was the case with many colonies in the Atlantic world including New France in the 1660s or Virginia already in 1624.

The Spanish and Portuguese empires do not make up the bulk of the collection: Mickaël Augeron and Laurent Vidal investigate the role of the first donatory captaincies in creating colonial Brazil. Olivier Caporossi focuses on the Adelantos and Encomenderos in Spanish America which were a much more than within the English and the French empires a under direct royal authority.

Chapters three to six focus on proprietorship in the French colonial context with Leslie Choquette's essay on French North America, Cécile Vidal's on French Louisiana and Philip Boucher's on the Caribbean. In his contribution on French Proprietary Companies in West Africa Kenneth J. Banks deals with the other, the black aspect of the Atlantic. All four contributions do not offer radically new insights into proprietorship in the French colonies (most of the authors have already done this elsewhere) but are indispensable for the comparative approach.

Chapters seven to nine, and eleven and twelve deal with individual and collective proprietorship in the developing British Empire: Sarah Barber writes about Lord

Willoughby of Parham in the Caribbean, James O'Neil Spady on Georgia, David Dewar on colonial New Hampshire, Maxine N. Lurie on New Jersey and L.H. Roper on South Carolina.

Dutch ventures in the Atlantic world are dealt with in Jaap Jacobs's essay on "Dutch Proprietary Manors in America: the Patroonship in New Netherland".

While the comparative approach to Atlantic proprietorship provides new insights into what could be described as early modern models for the building of empires, the editors claim, that "the historiography of early modern empires has tended to overlook proprietorship" (p. 8) or exclusively focused on the English colonies is not entirely true. Not only Marcel Trudel, Gustave Lanctot and Lucien Campeau have published large volumes on aspects of proprietorship in New France Campeau, Lucien, *Les finances publiques de la Nouvelle-France sous les Cent-Associés, 1632-1665*, Montreal 1975; Lanctot, Gustave, *L'administration de la Nouvelle France*, Paris 1929; Trudel, Marcel, *The Beginnings of New France*,

1524-1663, Toronto 1973; idem, *Histoire de la Nouvelle France*, 2 vols., Montreal 1963, 1966. ; A. A. Marques de Almeida and Antonio Carreira have done so for the Portuguese empire. Marques de Almeida, A.A., *Capitais e capitalistas no comércio da especiaria: o eixo Lisboa-Antuárpia, 1501-1549*. Aproximação a um estudo de geofinança, Lisbon 1993; Carreira, Antonio, *As companhias pombalinas de Grão-Pará e Pernambuco e Pará*, Lisbon 1983. Also, the contributions's bibliographies make evident that research on proprietorship, although mostly carried out from one national perspective, has drawn some attention over the last decades.

The reader might wish for a more thorough reflection of why proprietorship has often been considered a failure. Why do narratives about failure still dominate research on private ventures in the Atlantic world? In the building of five early modern empires proprietaryship seems to have formed the essential basis for appropriating the Atlantic world without risking the rising nation-states's economies and hegemonial interests in Europe herself.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

Citation: Susanne Lachenicht. Review of Roper, L.H.; Van Ruymbeke, Bertrand, *Constructing Early Modern Empires: Proprietary Ventures in the Atlantic World, 1500-1750*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. April, 2010.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=30132>

Copyright © 2010 by H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved. This work may be copied and redistributed for non-commercial, educational purposes, if permission is granted by the author and usage right holders. For permission please contact H-SOZ-U-KULT@H-NET.MSU.EDU.