
REZENSIONEN | REVIEWS

Vitus Huber: Beute und Conquista.
Die politische Ökonomie der Er-
oberung Neuspaniens, Frankfurt am
Main: Campus Verlag 2018, 432 S.

Reviewed by
Constanze Weiske, Göttingen

Vitus Huber's recent contribution titled "Booty and Conquista" is presenting a rich and insightful reassessment of European colonization. Focused on the so-called *Conquista* of New Spain between the 1520s and 1542/1543, this monograph aims to offer "a new explanation for the world historical process of the *Conquista*" and in particular "a sharper view on [..., its] preconditions, procedures and manifestations" in order to illuminate "the blind spot of previous research" (p. 359). Selectively compared to other colonial spaces, Huber frames his examination conceptually as a political economy of the Spanish appropriation process in contemporary Mexico. In particular, the author examines the practices and discourses of booty acquisition and distribution, as well as the narrative strategies of the Spanish

conquistadores before the Spanish Crown in order to justify their shares.

Starting with the assumption that previous explanations of the Spanish appropriation in the Americas were either focused on its "medieval, feudal character" or as "emerging early capitalist configurations", which would have had "disguised the constitutive entanglement of both", the historian of the early modern period argues that Spain's *Conquista* of New Spain is best explained by having a closer look on the distribution of booty among the 20 conquistadores of New Spain (p. 32), since the procedure and result of this distribution process have had "resulted in dynamics, which had mainly determined the further course of the conquest" (p. 167). Accordingly, Huber conceptualizes his research as a political economy of the *Conquista*, defined as "specific entanglement of political and economical schemes of incentive and reward", which would have had "decisively determined the terms of behaviour and utterances of the actors" (p. 24). Therefore, booty is defined in a broader sense, encompassing precious metals and lands "on which the [Spanish] Crown raised the claim of the Quinto Real" and thus "specifically numbered [her] share" (p. 157), but also enslaved Indigenous Peoples and encomiendas. Also considered are "medium to long-term social betterment by

honour, title and ennoblement qua act of grace” (p. 24, see also pp. 171–172).

Based on historical sources collected in both Spain (Archivo General de Indias in Sevilla and Simancas, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Biblioteca Nacional de España, and Real Academia de la Historia in Madrid) and Mexico (Archivo General de la Nación, Archivo General de Notarías de México, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia), Vitus Huber in three subsections of the book consequently traces the process of booty acquisition, distribution and justification, namely chronological order (I.), agreement (II.) and transfer (III.). Arguing that booty had presented a “constitutive element” in the formation of conquistadores groups (pp. 106–113), the historian, in particular, examines the “resulting dynamics on the side of the conquistadores” (pp. 167–168). In particular highlighted is the case of Hernan Cortés, who had mobilized his group in Cuba, before embarking to San Juan de Ulúa in Yucatan on 21 April 1519 and marching to Tenochtitlan on 16 August 1519 (p. 105).

Moreover, Huber reviews various subsequent cases of booty distribution following the logic of distributional justice in terms of gold, silver, precious metals and slaves in Michoacán (Mexico-City), Nicaragua/Panama-City, Cajamarca, Cartagena, and Santa Marta between 1522 and 1538. Those cases are finally set into comparison with the practices of the *Reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors. He concludes that both the *Conquista* of New Spain and the *Reconquista* of Iberia are structurally equal in practices and postulates while the distribution of the encomiendas in New Spain emerged

in a “modified” form (p. 234). Moreover, transfer practices from Iberia to New Spain occurred in terms of the so-called Quinto Real. Derived from the practices of the *Reconquista* and, surprisingly, presumably originated from pre-Islamic, respectively Arabic booty practices, Huber argues that this share of a fifth had played a “central function” during the *Conquista*, since it was legitimizing the forays and power of the Spanish Crown (pp. 58–59).

Finally, the historian of the University of Bern turns to the shift from the economy of booty to the economy of grace. Accordingly, the logic of the economy of grace had been applied in the narratives strategies of the conquistadores to justify their shares before the Spanish Monarchs and had resulted “in the extension of colonial offices and entities” (p. 32). In addition, Huber points to the particular relevance of the economy of grace in the distribution of land, which was applied by the Spanish Crown since 1531, as the European monarchs had treated the “conquered lands” as an “integral component of the property of the Castilian Crown” and distributed them among its subjects as usufruct either as “graceful donations” (*donativos graciosos*) or “royal mercies” (*mercedes reales*) (p. 215). In contrast, Hernan Cortés had conducted the first distribution of land in New Spain according to the logic of booty distribution (p. 215). Consequently, Huber emphasizes the relevance of the economy of grace as “constitutive for the territorial expansion and the process of *empire building*” (p. 223, Italics in Original), which however remains unquestioned in terms of the lawfulness of those Spanish “conquest” practices in the light of the European colo-

nial law of the time, in particular the legal writings of Francisco de Vitoria.

In sum, the book presents an insightful and rich perspective on Spanish practices during the colonization of New Spain, but remains as the authors states “inevitable eurocentric” in character, since Europe would have had presented “the starting point of the schemes of incentives and rewards of Spanish expansion” (p. 32), while the historical sources are limited in what they tell us about indigenous peoples. Though acknowledging current trends of the New Conquest History of Matthew Restall and the efforts of transnational and global history to revise Eurocentric narratives, Huber is limiting his considerations about indigenous peoples to their role in the Spanish booty practices of the *repartimiento* and *encomienda* (pp. 175–185; 225–235) and as partners of alliances with the Spanish conquistadores, in particularly the Triple Alliance of the Aztecs (pp. 97–103). Thus, the variety of indigenous peoples in the research area remains little reflected and their position as equal and sovereign actors neglected. Likewise, the Eurocentric perspective becomes visible in the unquestioned treatment of the concept of “Conquista”, the uncritical acceptance of the Spanish conquest myth and unaddressed question of the lawfulness of Spanish colonial (land) acquisition practices according to the then valid Spanish colonial law and the corresponding Indigenous Peoples’ law.

Jeremy Black: Geographies of an Imperial Power. The British World, 1688–1815, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2018, 308 S.

Rezensiert von
Benedikt Stuchtey, Marburg

Jeremy Black ist ein beneidenswert produktiver Historiker, dessen Liste allein an Buchveröffentlichungen nahezu 120 Titel beinhaltet (Stand Sommer 2019). Darunter sind Bücher über den Holocaust und den Kalten Krieg, die Sklaverei, die Grand Tour in Italien, historiographiegeschichtliche Studien und Gesamtdarstellungen der britischen Geschichte. Will man gleichwohl einen Arbeitsschwerpunkt ausmachen, so liegt dieser zum einen in der Militärgeschichte und zum anderen im „langen“ 18. Jahrhundert Großbritanniens zwischen Glorreicher Revolution und Wiener Kongress.

Auch der vorliegende Titel wendet sich dem Britischen Empire zu und bleibt der klassischen eurozentrischen Sichtweise verhaftet, weil die Rahmendaten kaum die nicht-europäische Perspektive auf die Geschichte der „British World“ berühren. Im Mittelpunkt der Aufmerksamkeit steht entsprechend ein „metropolitan“ Vorgehen insofern, als Black die Frage stellt, wie sich die britische Macht und imperiale Autorität weltweit aufgrund der im „Mutterland“ ansässigen und sich im Laufe des 18. Jahrhunderts zunehmend professionalisierenden Geographie durchsetzte. Die Durchdringung Nordamerikas, Irlands