

Call for Papers
ECR & Doctoral Research Conference

Valuing empires in the 19th and 20th centuries

09-10 November, 2022
Centre of History, Sciences Po Paris

Principal Organizers:

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Francophone studies in imperial and colonial history have long explored the overarching topic of economic activity in empires, with some expressly tying it to the political economic context of their era [Suret-Canale, 1961 ; Marseille, 1984 ; Bouvier *et al.*, 1986]. The economic aspects of empires however were relatively abandoned by the literature on colonial and imperial history between the 1990s and 2000s [notable exceptions are Bonin *et al.* (dir), 2008 ; Lefeuvre, 1997 ; Etemad, 2000], as these fields began to enter into close dialogue with post-colonial theories which were more concerned with the cultural dimension of empires [Cooper & Stoler, 1997; Sibeud, 2007]. The great success that colonial and imperial history has gained in anglophone academic circles also began by taking less interest in the economic history of empires, but economic practices, theories, and knowledge have recently come under the analytical scope of these fields [see Cooper 1996 ; Goswami 2004 ; Tomlinson 2014 ; Young 2018 ; Todd, 2021].

This conference seeks to contribute to this burgeoning conversation by bringing together two other fields with the economic history of empires: the new history of capitalism and environmental history. These two fields have been particularly dynamic over the past decade. The new history of capitalism ardently defends adopting methods from social, cultural, and political history to better make sense of contemporary economic events [Barreyre & Blin, 2017], while further contributing to the revival of capitalism as a key concept in the social sciences [Kocka & Van der Linden, 2016; Piketty, 2019; Lemerrier & François, 2020]. Initially criticized for not providing a definition for the term capitalism, the field has since - and under pressure from some scholars - begun to conceptualize it as “any economic form of life in which the economic logic of the capital process has become both habitual and dominant.” [Levy, 2017] As Johnathan Levy argues, the capital

process infers attribution of “a pecuniary value [to legal property] in expectation of a likely future pecuniary income” [idem.].

Environmental history has since its beginning sought to situate interactions between humans and the environment at the heart of historiographic debate. It has notably examined the processes through which natural resources have acquired an economic value, all the while exploring the degree of agency that natural elements such as water, animals, fire, etc. have in the history of human societies. [Blackbourn, 2006; Baratay 2012; Pyne, 2019]. Consequently, these historians have for the past two decades been interested in colonial societies where policies favoring natural resource extraction eventually led to both ecological degradation and sometimes violent coercion of the colonized [Grove, 1994; Beinart & Hughes, 2007; Ross, 2017; Blais, 2019].

This conference thus endeavors to analyze how imperial expansion both led to - and was led by - processes of attributing economic value to natural resources found outside the metropole (land, timber, minerals, sea products, grain, livestock, etc.). Its main ambition is therefore to reexamine imperial history as the extension of Levy’s “capital process” to provide an opportunity to study the means through which empires are valued in both nominal and real terms. By valued we evoke the concept of *mise en valeur* in French, that was used during the heyday of colonialism [for example, Sarraut, 1923] and which now echoes the same terms as the current historiographical debate. In using this term, we wish to highlight the processes by which empires acquired an economic value after natural resources were identified within their imperial boundaries. But while this conference proposes to look at european overseas empires, it also seeks with great interest contributions on continental empires such as the Russian, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian empires [Dullin, 2021; Türesay, 2013; Judson, 2021] as well as on the American or Japanese empires [Moore, 2017; Fedman, 2020]. Focusing on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it encourages candidates to submit both specific case studies, as well as comparative studies that examine longer periods of time and/or historiographic debates.

For this conference, we would be particularly interested in papers that focus on:

- Actors, techniques, and objects involved in the economic valuing of empires.
- Consequences and/or conflicts arising from valuing imperial societies.
- The reciprocal relationships between environments of imperial territories and their insertion into a globalized commodity market.

If interested, please submit a 100-500 word abstract & a short bio by
15 June 2022 to valuing.empires@gmail.com

Should you have any questions, feel free to contact Evan Bonney at evan.bonney@sciencespo.fr