

BOOK REVIEW

## Simona Boscani Leoni, Sarah Baumgartner and Meike Knittel (eds.), *Connecting Territories: Exploring People and Nature, 1700–1850*

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*Connecting Territories: Exploring People and Nature, 1700–1850* explores global actors and methodologies involved in the early collection and creation of natural and anthropological knowledge. It illustrates how knowledge about people and nature was standardized and centralized through local and global networks in a time of transition into Western ‘modernity’. As European colonial actors became more interested in the natural world, they developed methodological tools to better understand territories to further both scientific and economic aims. Influenced by these colonial qualitative and quantitative methods, European elites went on to develop their strategies for governance by surveying their own landscapes and people. The red thread of these global connections begins in the editors’ introduction with a quote by Swiss physician Johann Jakob Scheuchzer: ‘We cannot investigate one territory without knowing the other ones. I sometimes needed to look for Switzerland in the Indies and for the Indies in Switzerland’ (p. 8). Indeed, the volume’s uniqueness lies within its contributions drawing direct as well as thematic connections between Switzerland’s ‘European hinterlands’ and the world. The volume’s ten contributions go on to reveal the deep connections and exchanges involved in the collection and creation of natural-history knowledge both in Europe and in the extra-European world from India to South America.

The influence of Alix Cooper’s *Inventing the Indigenous: Local Knowledge and Natural History in Early Modern Europe* (2007) is clear. Cooper explains that in the early modern period, Europeans began to look not only outwards, but also inwards, paying attention to the ‘Indigenous’ natural knowledges within Europe that were profoundly influenced by the places in which they were to be found. As information was gathered, ‘distinct spaces’ were created, defined and gathered accordingly (p. 1). This is most clear in Barbara Orland’s chapter on Alpine landscapes of therapeutic tourism, in which the Alps were culturally constructed to represent superior physical and mental health. Whey cures, despite being non-traditional, were marketed as quintessentially Alpine products through medical discourses that exalted a fabricated local knowledge.

Certainly, the knowledge- and place-making processes at play in Switzerland during this time relied heavily on genuine local knowledge, often collected through strong local networks and centralized by economic-patriotic societies based on British, French and German royal societies. For instance, the Zurich Physical Society, the subject of Sarah Baumgartner’s chapter, used quantitative and qualitative strategies such as

censuses, questionnaires, tables, interviews and travel journals to trace population numbers, gather agricultural data and investigate ways to support economic growth. With help from local pastors, this elite-led body used centralized data about people and nature to surveil and govern non-elite populations. Martin Stuber's chapter similarly investigates how the Economic Society of Bern led surveys of populations and natural resources in the Bernese region. This included gathering information through pastors on the uses of wetlands in order to better economically exploit them, whether through conservation, drainage or privatization. As illustrated by these authors, Swiss elites were able to use economic societies to collect, centralize and use local knowledge to both economic and political ends, often by gathering local information through pastors who acted as community leaders.

As explored in Simona Boscani Leoni's chapter, ideas about data gathering for governance and the centralization of knowledge and power were in fact imported into Europe from the colonial South American context. Spanish colonial instructions for travellers and questionnaires as a means of data collection about people, lands and resources were used in state and empire building in sixteenth-century Spain, and later appropriated to fit British and Continental (Swiss and Italian) contexts. Questionnaires were sent to Indian villages to collect information about the economic 'potential' of the land, as well as the customs of the inhabitants (p. 29). While local knowledge was used by elites to extract economic and natural knowledge of the land, these efforts also produced racialized anxieties about local knowledge being withheld. Stefani Gänger's chapter reveals the trope of the 'secretive Indian' who seeks to 'conceal' knowledge of medicinal plants, material heritage, resources and the land. This trope was in part perpetuated by cosmopolitan Creoles in an attempt to carve out roles as mediators. Once again, the manipulation of discourses surrounding local knowledge was used as a political and economic tool.

Overall, this volume succeeds in its endeavour to draw global connections and comparisons between the collection and use of local knowledges about people and nature, making it a thought-provoking resource for historians of natural history and science. Linked to a Swiss National Science Foundation-funded University of Bern project led by Simona Boscani Leoni titled *Cultures of Natural History: Main Actors, Networks and Places of Scientific Communication in the Early-Modern Period (2013–17)*, this edited volume sits within the growing field of historical study investigating the role of Switzerland and Swiss actors within the wider global eighteenth- and nineteenth-century contexts. Related projects sponsored by the Swiss National Science Foundation are also under way in Switzerland, including the University of Lausanne's *Moral and Economic Entrepreneurship: A Collaborative History of Global Switzerland (1800–1900)*, promising more high-quality scholarship on the global history of Switzerland. As a Brill open-access title, this edited volume is widely accessible, offering a valuable comparative survey of the global development of methodologies, networks and knowledge around people and landscapes in the long eighteenth century.