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**Europe's Infrastructure Transition: Economy, War, Nature** by Per Högselius, Arne Kaijser, and Erik van der Vleuten (review)

**Charles David Jacobson**


In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by

**Charles David Jacobson**

*Europe's Infrastructure Transition: Economy, War, Nature.* By Per Högselius, Arne Kaijser, and Erik van der Vleuten (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) 454 pp. \$90.00 cloth \$29.95 paper

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On May 6, 1994, Queen Elizabeth II of England and President François Mitterrand of France ceremonially inaugurated the Channel Tunnel—a highly expensive assemblage of underground and underwater passages and steel railroad tracks that promised to afford a new and deeper level of connectivity between the island nation of Great Britain and the continent of Europe. Barely twenty years later, in a referendum held on June 23, 2016, a majority of British voters determined that at least some aspects of this greater connectivity were not so desirable, voting to withdraw from the European Union. [End Page 547]

This ambitious and wide-ranging survey of the development and use of European infrastructures from c. 1850 to 2000 takes as a central concern the tensions between their perceived promise for increasing wealth and for enhancing peaceful interchange among peoples and nations and the more complex ways in which these technological systems have actually been deployed. Topics discussed include the ways in which railroads, telegraphs, and other transport and communication technologies helped to shrink space and time and the actions taken by governments to channel and constrain this connectivity through such means as constructing border fences and reconfiguring railroad lines to run through only a few border-control points. East Germany even deployed devices to derail trains exiting the country without permission of authorities. The authors also address the evolution of infrastructure systems and the logistics of war; the relationships between basic infrastructure and system building in various industries (for example, communications infrastructure and the financial industry, coal gas manufacture, and the chemical industry); efforts to map and intensify the use of land, water, air, and electromagnetic resources; and initiatives to preserve natural ecosystems through urban green belts, linked systems of nature preserves, and other strategies.

In disciplinary terms, the book builds upon a strain of history of technology scholarship developed by Thomas P. Hughes (to whom the volume is dedicated) and others that is concerned with the “study . . . of large technical systems and their interaction with society” (xxiii). As such, the historical account is highly attentive to the social and political, as well as the material, elements of technological systems. The authors also explore the links between the history of different infrastructures and the shaping of such disciplines as meteorology—for instance those between weather observatories and telegraph networks in the emergence of an increasingly sophisticated

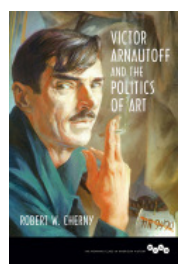
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“meteorological knowledge system” starting in the nineteenth century (313).

The book features findings from a range of disciplines, including geography, business history, economic history, planning history, and social studies of science and technology, though sometimes in a superficial manner lacking in analytical bite. As a case in point, a promising geographical discussion of financial flows and stock exchanges would have benefited from a more systematic discussion of the relationships between specific financial and infrastructural developments. Moreover, a bibliographic essay would have afforded the means for a deeper engagement with the subjects discussed.

That said, this book is an impressive example of how scholarship that engages with a wide range of disciplines can present a richly textured account of how the world in which we all live, for good or for ill, came to be the way it is. [End Page 548]

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**Environmental Decision Making and DDT Production at Montrose Chemical Corporation of California**

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Catholics. The efforts of the two Christian religions seem similar in such areas as intensive catechization or “social disciplining” but dramatically different in their attitudes toward begging and clerical marriage (704–717). In this context, he claims that “the question of success . . . misleads more than enlightens” (713), and asserts in his epilogue that “to ask whether the Reformations changed the world for better or for worse is . . . a legitimate question that most historians prefer to avoid” (757). An avoider, this reviewer prefers instead to praise Eire’s rich insights about “de-sacralization,” a far-reaching consequence of Protestantism, which should not be confused with “secularization,” an undeniable hallmark of modern Europe (747–754).

Given Eire’s relentlessly religion-centered model, it is not surprising that, apart from Urban VIII putting Descartes on the Index nineteen years after Urban’s death (661), the rare errors that have crept into this extremely long text usually concern political figures. Eire is untrustworthy on the Low Countries: He misnames a Burgundo-Habsburg prince as “Philip the Bold” (165), mistakenly asserts that Charles V inherited Alsace (166), and scrambles the Netherlands regents after Margaret of Austria (547). He also reports that Emperor Frederick II, who died in 1250, defeated Bohemian Protestants in 1620 (519), and invents the nonexistent French “town of Labourd” (646).

Eire’s enormous bibliography suffers from three drawbacks. It is relentlessly monoglot; linguistically, Europe has lost control of the European Reformations. It is top-heavy with recent titles, many of them unfamiliar to me. Most importantly, it offers readers no guidance about the relative importance of a title. Despite its length, it has a few surprising omissions, one being Bethencourt’s comparative survey of the major state inquisitions.<sup>3</sup>

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