

# 1 Empires, Bureaucracy and the Paradox of Power

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Discernable across the flux of history is a persistent trend: the proclivity of human groups to establish large-scale and durable political formations that rule over subject populations of different ethnicities, religions and cultures – in short, to build empires. On this narrow point, scholars appear to have achieved consensus.<sup>1</sup> But having gained power, usually through violent conquest, how did empires rule over different peoples across vast expanses of space and time? Or to recalibrate the question with the particular concerns of the present volume in mind: how did relatively small numbers of imperial bureaucrats govern large numbers of subordinated peoples? Dane Kennedy has aptly described this as ‘one of the most persistent conundrums to arise from the study of Western Imperialism’.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, we can amplify his observation: this administrative sleight of hand is a conundrum of *world* history. It is also a matter with an urgent contemporary resonance. The past decade has witnessed a surge of work on the subject of empire inspired by what might be termed the ‘imperial turn’ in contemporary world affairs. Much of this literature swirls around a deceptively simple question: ‘what is an empire?’ Any satisfactory answer must take account of political structures and forms of governance – of how real empires actually *ran*. This book represents a collaborative effort to advance our understanding of these issues by exploring the power and limits of bureaucracy in historical empires across a broad canvas, from ancient Rome to the dismantling of European empires after World War II.

<sup>1</sup> John Darwin describes empire as the ‘default setting’ for large-scale political formations until the past two centuries (*After Tamerlane: the global history of empire since 1405* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), p. 23), a phrase echoed in Ashley Jackson, *The British empire: a very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 11; and Mrinalini Sinha, ‘Projecting power: empires, colonies, and world history’, in Douglas Northrop (ed.), *A companion to world history* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 263. See also Lieven, *Empire*, p. xvi (‘[empires] are one of the commonest forms of state in history’); Howe, *Empire*, p. 1 (‘a great deal of the world’s history is the history of empires’); Goldstone & Haldon, ‘Ancient states’, p. 19 (‘[the] typical formation by which large territorial states were ruled for most of human history’); Burbank & Cooper, *Empires*, p. 8 (‘[empires] played a long and critical role in human history’).

<sup>2</sup> Dane Kennedy, ‘Imperial history and post-colonial theory’, *JICH* 24:3 (1996), 357.

Such chronological and geographical scope, not to mention the range of disciplinary backgrounds and theoretical dispositions represented among our authors, is unusual in a book of this sort. It is quite deliberate. We explicitly reject the notion that an unbridgeable chasm separates historicist and generalist positions, ‘splitters’ and ‘lumpers’.<sup>3</sup> Our methodological point of departure is that a diachronic approach to the history of empires is mutually enriching for all the sub-disciplines involved, and that it is possible to engage in long-range comparison while attending closely to geographical specificity, human agency and change over time. The objective is not to provide a ‘comparative history’ but rather what Frederick Cooper has called, in another context, a ‘history that compares’ – that is, a history that compares while retaining a high level of sensitivity to the specifics of time and place and refrains from invoking a totalizing explanatory framework that elides the varied experiences of the past.<sup>4</sup>

We begin by considering the contested nature of the keywords at the heart of the book – ‘empire’ and ‘bureaucracy’ – and examine how they can be put to work together in pursuit of meaningful comparisons across time and between cultures without ‘sweeping the particular under the global’.<sup>5</sup> To clarify the problem of conceptualization, we make a basic distinction between concepts as *analytical categories* and concepts as *historical ideas*.<sup>6</sup> Our working concept of empire as a category of analysis is as follows: *an extended and durable polity in which a core society exercises formal and authoritarian power over subordinated peoples of outlying territories gained or maintained by coercion*.

Bureaucracies played a role (albeit more often in aspiration than result) in providing empires with a means of articulating social power and marshalling resources in regions remote from the imperial core. In pursuit of these ends, imperial bureaucracies were authoritarian, extractive and backed by violence.

<sup>3</sup> For a recent argument for the importance of long-range historical analysis, see Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The history manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); David Armitage, ‘Horizons of history: space, time, and the future of the past’, *History Australia* 12:1 (2015), 207–25.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Cooper, ‘Race, ideology, and the perils of comparative history’, *AHR* 101:4 (1996), 1122–38 (quotation at 1135).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> What we refer to, for the sake of clarity, as ‘historical ideas’ would in German scholarship fall under the banner of the ‘history of concepts’ (G. *Begriffsgeschichte*), a discipline associated especially with Reinhart Koselleck. A distinct approach to ‘historical concepts’ is that of the so-called Cambridge school of political thought, led by J. G. A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner, on which see Kari Palonen, ‘The history of concepts as a style of political theorizing: Quentin Skinner’s and Reinhart Koselleck’s subversion of normal political theory’, *European Journal of Political Theory* 1:1 (2002), 91–106; Melvin Richter, *The history of political and social concepts: a critical introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). For an application of these approaches to the concepts ‘empire’ and ‘imperialism’, see Helge Jordheim and Iver B. Neumann, ‘Empire, imperialism and conceptual history’, *Journal of International Relations and Development* 14:2 (2011), 153–85.

But, for all that, their capacity to rule directly was often limited by the tiny numbers of bureaucratic personnel, by the problem of communications and, most of all, by the difficulty of ruling ‘different’ peoples who do not want to be ruled, the troublesome subjects that Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) described as a ‘seething, whining, weakly hive, impotent to help itself, but strong in its power to cripple, thwart, and annoy the sunken-eyed man who, by official irony, was said to be “in charge” of it’.<sup>7</sup> It is Kipling’s acknowledgement of the ‘official irony’ of his invented bureaucrat’s position that gives this passage its particular valence. The imperial bureaucrat is the local representative of the might of empire, yet he appears ludicrously ineffectual because his real latitude for the exercise of power is so restricted.

Here the mask of imperial power is let slip, bringing us face to face with an inherent paradox or contradiction in how bureaucracy operates on the scale of empires, as opposed to states. While the development of a bureaucratic apparatus, however minimal, was required to consolidate formal control over territorial acquisitions, it also acted in certain circumstances to undercut imperial power. Common to all the empires discussed in this volume was the challenge of maintaining a treacherously unstable equilibrium between integration and fragmentation, between assimilation and differentiation. The balance was liable to be upset precisely because empires are dynamic not static: they change in response to internal tensions and external pressures of various kinds – political, military, religious, cultural, economic. ‘More bureaucracy’ is often the solution of the bureaucrat faced by change. In point of fact, these chapters show how the expansion of bureaucracy can destabilize imperial power because the attempt to rule directly alienates the very elites without whose compliance imperial rule would have been impossible in the first place.

## I

*America has no empire to extend or utopia to establish. We wish for others only what we wish for ourselves – safety from violence, the rewards of liberty, and the hope for a better life.*  
– George W. Bush (2002)

*Unlike the old empires, we don’t make these sacrifices for territory or for resources. We do it because it’s right.*  
–Barack Obama (2011)<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The phrase occurs in Kipling’s short story ‘The education of Otis Yeere’ (first published 1888, later collected in *Wee Willie Winkie and other stories*).

<sup>8</sup> Graduation speech at West Point delivered by President George W. Bush, 1 June 2002 (<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html>); remarks by President Barack Obama and the First Lady on the end of the war in Iraq, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, 14 Dec. 2011 ([www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/12/14/remarks-president-and-first-lady-end-war-iraq](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/12/14/remarks-president-and-first-lady-end-war-iraq)).

Empires are very much a hot topic at present in the ‘public sphere’. Much of the interest was prompted by a debate that was visible even before September 11, 2001, but which grew exponentially after that date, concerning the merits and existence of an ‘American empire’.<sup>9</sup> In large part, the literature on America-as-empire can be characterized as a twenty-first-century form of pamphleteering by hand-wringing policy wonks and chest-pounding public intellectuals from all sides of the political spectrum. Its interest is primarily as a specimen of contemporary Anglo-American ideology rather than as a substantive contribution to the study of empire. But amid the noise and haste, learned and instructive interventions have set the present conjuncture in its historical and comparative context.<sup>10</sup> For the wider community of scholars, the importance of the debate on an ‘imperial America’ is that the rising tide of interest in empire has raised all boats. Especially notable is the appetite for collaborative comparison.<sup>11</sup> The most adventurous works responding to this trend amount to surveys of world history through the analytical frame of ‘empire’. This represents a significant reorientation of existing explanatory frameworks. As more than one scholar has commented, placing the emphasis on empire has the virtue of diverting attention from the ‘rise of the nation-state’, a reading of the past which, even at its most sophisticated, tends to teleology.<sup>12</sup>

The novelty of the present collection is the conceptual coupling of ‘empire’ with ‘bureaucracy’. The value of the pairing lies in a two-part claim: first that bureaucracy is basic to the subject matter of imperial history, and second that it

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Howe, ‘The slow death and strange rebirths of imperial history’, *JICH* 29 (2001), 131–40. Already in the 1990s, the then-recent collapse of the Soviet Union excited interest in the ‘end of empires’: Barkey & von Hagen, *After empire*; Alexander Motyl, *Imperial ends: the decay, collapse, and revival of empires* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> For works that are especially successful in setting America in the context of the comparative history of empire, see Charles S. Maier, *Among empires: American ascendancy and its predecessors* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Dane Kennedy, ‘Essay and reflection: on the American empire from a British imperial perspective’, *International History Review* 29:1 (2007), 83–108; Alejandro Colás, ‘Open doors and closed frontiers: the limits of American empire’, *European Journal of International Relations* 14:4 (2008), 619–43; Paul A. Kramer, ‘Power and connection: imperial histories of the United States in the world’, *AHR* 116:5 (2011), 1348–91; Julian Go, *Patterns of empire: the British and American empires, 1688 to the present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Important examples include Alcock *et al.*, *Empires*; Frédéric Hurllet (ed.), *Les empires, antiquité et moyen âge: analyse comparée* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2008); Walter Scheidel (ed.), *Rome and China: comparative perspectives on ancient world empires* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Dina Rizk Khoury and Dane Kennedy, ‘Comparing empires: the Ottoman domains and the British Raj in the long nineteenth century’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27:2 (2007), 233–44; Bang & Bayly, *Tributary empires*. For a review article, see Phiroze Vasunia, ‘The comparative study of empires’, *JRS* 101 (2011), 222–37.

<sup>12</sup> A. G. Hopkins, ‘Back to the future: from national history to imperial history’, *P&P* 164 (1999), 198–243, esp. 201–7; Frederick Cooper, ‘Empire multiplied: a review essay’, *CSSH* 46:2 (2004), 247–72, at 247; Frederick Cooper, ‘States, empires, and political imagination’, in Cooper, *Colonialism*, pp. 153–203.

is especially useful to the comparativist. Bureaucracy was an essential component of imperial rule. However informal or absent-minded an empire may be in its beginnings, and this itself is often the subject of controversy, there will arrive what has been termed the ‘hour of the bureaucrats’.<sup>13</sup> Empires typically began with military conquests, but a conquest must entrench itself with an institutionalized system of ruling the vanquished population, other than assimilation, if it is to result in an empire. Once established, imperial bureaucracies sought to coordinate, even if they could not entirely control, the means of coercion, the means of persuasion and the means of production – the three constituent elements of social power identified by W. G. Runciman.<sup>14</sup>

The second part of our claim concerns utility. For the comparativist, the virtue of the coupling of bureaucracy with empire is that it provides a common point of reference transcending time and place when identifying continuities in how different peoples have been ruled differently.<sup>15</sup> By bringing the analysis of bureaucracy to an imperial scale, the volume helps us perceive a fundamental distinction in the nature of rule in empires and states, specifically a key difference in the nature of the problems with which the bureaucracies of empires and states respectively had to contend. Here the spatial context of power is important, notably the predicament of imperial functionaries and intermediaries stretched and pulled between the vagaries of politics at the imperial core and the realities of ruling on the periphery. But the difference was more than simply one of scale. It was also one of function. Whereas state bureaucracies draw legitimacy from the uniformity of their rule, imperial bureaucracies were frequently predicated on the ‘rule of difference’ and required a legitimizing ideology of rule premised on the inferiority of the governed.<sup>16</sup>

The emphasis in this volume is on the formal institutions of imperial governance. Much of the most influential scholarship on empire since the 1950s has explored the informal aspects of imperial rule, sparking interpretations as widely divergent as Robinson and Gallagher’s ‘imperialism of free

<sup>13</sup> The term is that of Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: a theoretical overview* (Princeton: M. Wiener, 1997), p. 25. Osterhammel’s analysis only concerns colonial empires after 1500, but this phrase seems germane to earlier empires also.

<sup>14</sup> See W. G. Runciman, *A treatise on social theory*, vol. II: *substantive social theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 12, for coercive power, ideological power and economic power, and their respective ‘means’. Cf. the four ‘sources’ (ideological, military, economic and political) of social power described in the conceptual introduction of Michael Mann, *The sources of social power*, vol. I: *A history of power from the beginning to A.D. 1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 22–7.

<sup>15</sup> ‘The concept of empire presumes that different peoples within the polity will be governed differently’ (Burbank & Cooper, *Empires*, p. 8).

<sup>16</sup> For a seminal discussion, see Edward W. Said, *Culture and imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), esp. the description of ‘the *imperium* as a protracted, almost metaphysical obligation to rule subordinate, inferior, or less advanced peoples’ (quotation at p. 10).

trade',<sup>17</sup> Foucault-inspired 'postcolonial discourse theory'<sup>18</sup> and the transcendent and de-territorialized 'empire' of Hardt and Negri.<sup>19</sup> These interpretations share common ground in their concern to show that the full reach of imperial power extends far beyond formal institutions. Informal empire was often more sustainable and effective, and was certainly cheaper, than formal empire. But the focus on bureaucracy assists us in locating the vulnerabilities and contradictions in the very nature of imperial rule, rather than seeking them at the penumbra. It compels us to reconsider formal empire and then account for its weaknesses.

Renewed emphasis on formal empire might well be interpreted as a return to fundamentals. It would, however, be unfortunate if this were understood as sounding a retreat to top-down imperial history. Constitutional, diplomatic and administrative history once provided the dominant mode in the historiography of empires, as of individual nation-states. This approach was already falling from favour by the mid-twentieth century with the rise of social, and later cultural, history. Viewed in this light, the historiography of imperial institutions resembles an aged Cinderella, memories of whose illustrious presence at the ball linger on, though in her dotage she is unglamorous and overlooked. Our application of the term 'bureaucracy' is intended to provide more than a facelift. The primary objection to the older historiography is not that it was dry as dust (though it often was), but rather that it was narrow in its range of interests. Too often metropolitan imperial history has been 'armchair' imperial history. Bureaucracy carries with it a broader range of application than conventional history of administration. The term encourages us to think beyond administrative technicalities to how bureaucracy operated as part of the social systems and political cultures of empires.<sup>20</sup> This requires us to raise our eyes beyond the metropolitan administration and to explore the articulation of power on the peripheries, the 'lived experience' of imperial bureaucratic rule, the identity of bureaucrats, the role of bureaucracy in shaping historical memory and creating a shared imperial space, and the social and ideological impact of bureaucracy on subject peoples.

<sup>17</sup> John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, 'The imperialism of free trade', *Economic History Review* 6:1 (1953), 1–15.

<sup>18</sup> By way of introduction to a vast literature, see Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: an historical introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001); and for a positive assessment of what postcolonial theory offers conventional imperial historiography, see Dane Kennedy, 'Imperial history and post-colonial theory'.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). For an insightful discussion of Hardt and Negri, see Alejandro Colás, *Empire* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), ch. 5.

<sup>20</sup> For discussions of bureaucracy as part of broad social and political processes, see Eugene Kamenka, *Bureaucracy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); David Beetham, *Bureaucracy*, 2nd edn (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996), esp. ch. 2.

## II

**Scope and Content of the Collection**

This book takes as its subject the operations of bureaucracy – however minimal or intensive – in historical empires. Individual chapters examine different component parts of the bureaucratic engine, but across the collection, the chapters suggest how the imperial machine functions (or, as often as not, malfunctions) as an interlinked system of rule. We do not seek to isolate ‘bureaucratic empires’ as a particular category deemed suitable for comparison on the basis of an *a priori* assessment of similitude.<sup>21</sup> Nor do we pretend to be comprehensive in our coverage of empires since Late Antiquity – something that no single volume could reasonably hope to achieve.<sup>22</sup> Instead we aim for representative coverage while being purposefully eclectic in our choice of examples and in our embrace of plural methodological and theoretical positions. The studies presented here are not restricted by historical era, by geography or by economic structure – the most common denominators of empires in the existing scholarly literature. Instead the volume considers within a single analytical frame ancient and modern empires, Western and non-Western empires, land empires and seaborne empires, tributary empires and commercial empires. Parts III and IV of the book, which are ordered chronologically, explore the bureaucracies of Western empires. Running through these chapters are two strands. The first explores empire-building within mainland Europe and the projection of European power overseas. Among the empires that receive attention here are Rome and its twin descendants in the Middle Ages – the Byzantine empire in the East and the Holy Roman Empire in the West, the Spanish and Napoleonic empires in the ‘age of expansion’, and the French overseas empires in the era of the ‘new imperialism’ (c.1880 onwards). A second strand of essays, woven through Parts III and IV, examines the British empire and its precursors, with contributions on the Angevin empire (1154–1204) and England’s overseas empire in the late Middle Ages (1259–1453), colonial North America, the British Raj, and decolonization in British Africa after World War II. The chapters in Part II place the dynamics of Western empires in world-historical perspective by providing examples of non-Western and non-literate imperial bureaucracies: Song China, the Incas, the early Arabic caliphates and the Ottomans.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Historical bureaucratic empires’ are the focus of the analysis in Eisenstadt, *Empires*.

<sup>22</sup> Among the more obvious omissions are (in the ancient world) the Assyrian, Babylonian, Achaemenid, Athenian and Egyptian empires, for which see Morris & Scheidel, *Dynamics*; Eric H. Cline and Mark W. Graham (eds.), *Ancient empires: from Mesopotamia to the rise of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and from period c.1000 CE to the twentieth century, the Malian, Safavid, Mughal, Portuguese, Dutch, Russian, Soviet and Japanese empires.



While the volume makes a virtue of bringing together subjects that are normally kept apart, we do not make light of the formidable obstacles presented by the comparative history of empires. Two interrelated difficulties are worth highlighting. The first concerns evidence. The archives and records that provide the fodder for much historical research are themselves the physical residue of the historical bureaucracies that are the object of this enquiry. Archival evidence is biased in at least three ways. The records privilege the viewpoint of the conquerors over the conquered; they survive in greater abundance for more recent eras; and they are dramatically skewed towards the temperate West.<sup>23</sup> The quantity of surviving evidence affects our assumptions about past societies more than we often acknowledge. Societies with fewer written records (whether medieval Western or more recent non-Western societies) are far more likely to be depicted by empire-builders or subsequent historians as ‘backward’ and uncivilized – as *pre-‘modern’*. Mass survival of documents is seductive in an equally problematical way: it encourages us to confide in the normative power of the ‘state’.<sup>24</sup>

A second difficulty arises from qualitative assessments about the sophistication of one imperial bureaucracy as against another. We should not assume that historical bureaucracies sought to maximize control in the manner attributed to the modern territorial state; it follows that it is not necessarily a sign of ‘failure’ if imperial bureaucracies did not achieve the same level of penetration into their respective societies.<sup>25</sup> The imperial bureaucracies surveyed in this volume varied widely in terms of size, complexity and ‘rationality’ across the two millennia explored by the book.<sup>26</sup> The contrasts are most starkly visible *between* empires: witness the extremes of the rational bureaucracy of the Song (with more than 30,000 officials and perhaps some 200,000 more clerical staff) as against the administration of the medieval German Reich, whose officials can be measured in dozens not hundreds, or the more familiar contrast between the bureaucratized transatlantic empire overseen by the Spanish

<sup>23</sup> Archives in non-temperate climates are doubly disadvantaged. Without proper preservation policies, paper will become dust in a tropical climate within one or two centuries; but it is precisely in such climate zones that disparities in contemporary economic development make it difficult to implement the policies necessary for preservation (*Lost memory: libraries and archives destroyed in the twentieth century*, UNESCO Memory of the World Programme (Paris, 1996), p. 31). Deliberate ‘weeding’ of old documents might also be the policy of bureaucrats in need of space: see Richard Britnell, ‘Pragmatic literacy beyond Christendom’, in Britnell (ed.), *Pragmatic literacy, east and west, 1200–1330* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1997), esp. pp. 186–8, for a comparative discussion of archival conservation and ‘weeding’ in the Latin Christendom, Song China, Kamakura Japan and the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate.

<sup>24</sup> On this point, see the discussion by Gillingham (Chapter 9, pp. 197–9) and Crooks (Chapter 11, pp. 256, 270, 276) of the ‘precociously bureaucratic’ medieval English ‘state’; and also Heath (Chapter 15, pp. 365–9) and Cooper (Chapter 16, pp. 392–3) on the ‘modern’ colonial state.

<sup>25</sup> A point brought out by Given-Wilson (Chapter 4, p. 96) and Scales (Chapter 10, pp. 247–9).

<sup>26</sup> On rationalities, see David d’Avray, *Rationalities in history: an essay in weberian comparison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).



monarchy and the ‘bureaucratically challenged’ empire of the British in North America. Without due caution, long-range historical comparison becomes a parlour game. The later Roman empire was staffed by a civil service of perhaps 34,000,<sup>27</sup> precisely the same size as the modern-day civil service of the European Commission, which is itself dwarfed (contrary to popular myths about a Brussels festooned in red tape) by the bloated national bureaucracies of the constituent states of the European Union.<sup>28</sup> This is a nice coincidence, but an absolute comparison between late Rome and the European Commission tells us little of significance, just as direct comparisons between Rome’s military power and that of present-day America are virtually meaningless. It is *relative* comparison that is significant.<sup>29</sup> By recent standards, later Roman bureaucracy was modest. But the fact remains that, as Michael Whitby shows in Chapter 6, late Roman bureaucracy bulked large relative to that of the ‘undergoverned’ or ‘proto-bureaucratic’ early empire, and indeed compared to many later empires surveyed in this volume.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, while debates may rage among Sinologists about the efficiency or otherwise of Chinese government, it is hard to gainsay Patricia Ebrey’s observation that ‘when the Chinese bureaucracy is viewed in comparative terms . . . it was remarkably well-organized and effective’.<sup>31</sup> Historical phenomena cannot be properly assessed when abstracted from the peculiar circumstances of time and place. Indeed, as Bruce Berman has remarked: ‘it is precisely [the] peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of a society that may be the most important thing shaping its historical development and contemporary significance.’<sup>32</sup> By the same token, imperial societies cannot be fully understood unless specialists are willing to extend their gaze beyond the borders of their own particular empire.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Kelly, ‘Emperors, government and bureaucracy’, in Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey (eds.), *CAH*, vol. XIII: *The late empire, A.D. 337–425* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 163, n. 132. See also Whitby (Chapter 6, p. 130).

<sup>28</sup> The figure of 34,000 is for the Commission of the enlarged EU representing 28 countries. The civil service of the United Kingdom in 2011 was 498,433 (Office for National Statistics, Civil Service Statistics, 2011: [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778\\_237745.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_237745.pdf)); that of France more than 2 million, with 40,000 serving the city of Paris alone. For a comparison between the European civil service and the public administrations of the constituent national governments of the EU, see the remarks of the vice president of the European Commission, Maroš Šefčovič, ‘A European civil service fit for the 21st century’ (Speech 12/249, European Policy Group, Brussels, 10 May 2012): [http://ec.europa.eu/civil\\_service/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/civil_service/index_en.htm).

<sup>29</sup> As argued by Kennedy, ‘On the American empire from a British imperial perspective’, 108.

<sup>30</sup> Garnsey & Saller, *Empire*, p. 20 (quotation). Although note Whitby’s important qualification concerning ‘uncosted’ administrative contributions (for example, of the cities) in the Roman republic and early empire (Chapter 6, pp. 139–40); and for the corollary of this, that in the late Roman empire (fifth and early sixth centuries CE) centrally appointed officials tended to be local aristocrats, see Chris Wickham, ‘Tributary empires: late Rome and the Arab caliphate’, in Bang & Bayly, *Tributary empires*, pp. 205–13, at 210.

<sup>31</sup> See Ebrey (Chapter 2, p. 47).

<sup>32</sup> Bruce J. Berman, ‘“A palimpsest of contradictions”: ethnicity, class, and politics in Africa’, in *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 37:1 (2004), 13–31, at 17.

## III

**Empire and Bureaucracy as Keywords**

The organizing concepts around which all the chapters in this volume revolve are keywords in the sense intended by Raymond Williams: words that are as slippery in meaning as they are indispensable because of their general significance in contemporary culture and society. Historical, scholarly and popular usages encrust around such words, endowing them with discrepant meanings that render them sluggish when deployed in specialist analysis. But keywords are too useful to be dispensed with because (to paraphrase Williams) the problem of their meanings is inextricably bound up with the problem that the words themselves are used to discuss.<sup>33</sup> To invent new terms or brandish previously discarded alternatives clouds as much as it clarifies. An alternative is to heed the advice of Susan Reynolds, who has exhorted scholars to distinguish carefully between words, concepts and phenomena – that is, the words we employ, the concepts or ideas that lie behind those words, and the historical phenomena to which those words and concepts are taken to apply.<sup>34</sup> A first step is to distinguish ‘our’ words – that is, the terms of analysis we use together with their associated concepts – from the words and concepts that appear in the historical record. For convenience, we describe this as a difference between *analytical categories* and *historical ideas*. While the analytical category and historical idea are often related, they are not commensurate with each other, and making the distinction clear helps us avoid a number of conceptual pitfalls.<sup>35</sup>

This procedure is crucial precisely because the classical idea of a concept with a fixed definition is a will-o’-the-wisp.<sup>36</sup> In the case of empire, there is no consensus in the current scholarly literature as to what single feature links all those entities that described themselves, or have been described, as empires;

<sup>33</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), esp. p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> Reynolds, ‘Empires’, 151. Her approach is set out more fully in Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and vassals: the medieval evidence reinterpreted* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), esp. pp. 12–13.

<sup>35</sup> This approach gains theoretical ballast from the distinction made between *etics* and *emics* (or external or internal perspectives) in other disciplines that engage in cross-cultural analysis, notably linguistics and anthropology. The two approaches are complementary, and neither can claim precedence over the other. For discussion, see J. W. Berry, ‘Emics and etics: a symbiotic conception’, *Culture and Psychology* 5:2 (1999), 165–71; Thomas N. Headland, Kenneth L. Pike and Marvin Harris, *Emics and etics: the insider/outsider debate* (London: Sage Publications, 1990).

<sup>36</sup> Gregory L. Murphy, *The big book of concepts* (Cambridge, MA; London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2002): Murphy’s discussion shows that at a very basic level, human conceptual knowledge, ‘a phenomenologically simple cognitive process . . . turns out to be maddeningly complex’ (quotation at p. 2). By way of introduction, John Wilson, *Thinking with concepts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), remains useful.

nor is there consensus as to the necessary and sufficient conditions that should make up a definition. In extended usage, empire has become a metaphor for extremes of power, normally carrying a negative connotation. Still more problematic is the fact that the word is taken to imply universality. Empire does not, however, translate universally. This is clear from the briefest glance at the nomenclature of the large non-Western polities surveyed in Part II of this book: the Arabs' *Dār al-Islām* ('the abode of Islam'), the Incas' Tahuantinsuyu ('land of four parts'), the Chinese *tianxia* ('all under heaven') the Ottoman's 'domains of the House of Osman'.<sup>37</sup> These terms are not in any sense direct equivalents of the historical idea of empire in the Western tradition, whose genealogy can be traced back to the Latin *imperium*, originally denoting the power of command vested in a Roman magistrate. It was only gradually, by the close of the principate of Augustus in the first century CE, that *imperium* came by extension to signify a territorial empire composed of the lands under the control of the Roman people.<sup>38</sup> Once it had emerged, the territorial conception of empire proved enduring, following distinct paths of evolution both in the East (where it passed from Byzantium to the Ottomans and the Russians) and in the West, surviving the collapse of Western provinces in the fifth century CE, to be revived with the coronation of Charlemagne (d. 814) as emperor on Christmas Day 800.<sup>39</sup> What became known as the Holy Roman Empire was only destroyed a millennium later in 1806 by Napoleon I, who in turn appropriated the ideology and iconography of empire.<sup>40</sup> But to classify as empires only those polities that were content to describe themselves as such would be reductive, and not only because 'empire denial' is so common<sup>41</sup> but more importantly because we would be left with an absurdly Eurocentric category restricted to the past two millennia. The usage would even be restrictive within continental Europe. Latin Christendom knew only one emperor, so while the Plantagenet kings of England were content to bask in the reflected glory of past

<sup>37</sup> See pp. 32, 60, 81, 114. For further discussion of nomenclature in non-European 'empires', see John Gilissen, *La notion d'empire dans l'histoire universelle* (Éditions de la librairie encyclopédique, 1973), pp. 787–9. There are studies of non-Western empires in Maurice Duverger, *Le concept d'empire* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1980); and for a series of Eurasian case studies, see Bang & Kołodziejczyk, *Universal empire*.

<sup>38</sup> J. S. Richardson, 'Imperium romanum: empire and the language of power', *JRS* 81 (1991), 1–9; J. S. Richardson, *The language of empire: Rome and the idea of empire from the third century BC to the second century AD* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), esp. ch. 6.

<sup>39</sup> See Bachrach (Chapter 8, p. 170); and also Dimitar Angelov and Judith Herrin, 'The Christian imperial tradition – Greek and Latin', in Bang & Kołodziejczyk, *Universal empire*, ch. 6.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Koebner, *Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961); Anthony Padgen, *Lords of all the world: ideologies of empire in Spain, Britain and France, c.1500–c.1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); James Muldoon, *Empire and order: the concept of empire, 800–1800* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999).

<sup>41</sup> As Michael Mann observes in 'American empires: past and present', *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 45:1 (2008), 7–50, at 8.

empires, they did not formally style themselves as emperors.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, the name upon which the Spanish Habsburgs settled for the assemblage of lands over which they ruled was not the Spanish ‘empire’ but the *monarquía española* – the Spanish monarchy.<sup>43</sup> Rome itself, during one of the most vigorous phases of its imperial expansion under the republic, was the archetypal case of an ‘unlabelled empire’ – a political system (whether inside or outside the Western tradition) that does not call itself an empire but which falls into the analytical category of ‘empire’.

Faced with these complexities, some historians sidestep the issue of definitions altogether and apply the ‘quack test’ espoused by Felipe Fernández-Armesto (consciously or unconsciously echoing Niall Ferguson): ‘if it looks like an empire, walks like an empire and quacks like an empire, you don’t need to define it as such.’<sup>44</sup> A related approach is to adopt what Kathleen D. Morrison wryly dubbed the “‘pornography definition” of empires – I can’t say what they are, but I know one when I see one’.<sup>45</sup> An alternative is definitional abstinence. As Dominic Lieven has averred: ‘Empire is a fine subject, peopled by leopards and other creatures of the wild. To reduce all this to definitions and formulas is to turn the leopard into a pussycat, and even then into an incomplete but misshapen pussycat with three legs and no tail.’<sup>46</sup> Lieven’s approach holds some attraction for historians, who are instinctively chary of homogenizing disparate historical experiences. The danger is that in the effort to avoid producing a three-legged feline, we find ourselves, like Alice in Wonderland, pondering a grin without a cat – a political formation that identified itself as an empire or which drew on the imperial idea but which does not really belong in the analytical category of empire because it has stopped short of, or passed through, ‘empire-dom’ in the course of its political development.

Rather than ducking the issue of definitions, we propose to reformulate the underlying methodological problem. Concepts are intellectual constructs, tools intended to assist the analysis of phenomena. Treating concepts as things in themselves creates an illusion of absolute categories, which in turn leads to fruitless debates over classification. Outside the modelling of the social

<sup>42</sup> See Crooks (Chapter 11, p. 255). <sup>43</sup> Elliott, *Empires*, p. 119; and Storrs (Chapter 12, p. 293).

<sup>44</sup> Felipe Fernández-Armesto, ‘Imperial measures’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 June 2010. Ferguson applied the ‘quack test’ in a public debate with Robert Kagan held at the American Enterprise Institute on 17 July 2003: ‘If it quacks like a duck, it probably is a duck. If it quacks like an empire, it probably is an empire’ ([www.aei.org/article/foreign-and-defense-policy/is-the-united-states-an-empire-article-1/](http://www.aei.org/article/foreign-and-defense-policy/is-the-united-states-an-empire-article-1/)).

<sup>45</sup> Kathleen D. Morrison, ‘Sources, approaches, definitions’, in Alcock *et al.*, *Empires*, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Lieven, *Empire*, p. 417. Likewise Eric Hobsbawm concluded that indefinability poses relatively little practical difficulty when it comes to making comparisons: ‘Like Walter Bagehot’s “nation”’, Hobsbawm declared, ‘our “empire” is recognizable even when we can’t define it . . . I don’t think these definitional obscurities need get in our way when we actually discuss our subject’ (Hobsbawm, ‘The end of empires’, in Barkey & Von Hagen (eds.), *After empire*, p. 12).

sciences, historical empires only ever existed as particular forms of rule which for convenience we place into an analytical category. The task is not to define the word 'empire' prescriptively so as to declare alternative usages out of bounds but rather to make some basic distinctions that clarify how the concept is to be understood for present academic purposes – in other words, to define the category of cases that are to be compared.

We have defined the analytical category of empire as 'an extended and durable polity in which a core society exercises formal and authoritarian power over subordinated peoples of outlying territories gained or maintained by coercion'. Empire, in this usage, is a 'family resemblance concept' embracing a disparate class of cases across many centuries, both modern and pre-modern, both Western and non-Western.<sup>47</sup> Our definition contains two core elements: an expansive, often unbounded, political structure and formal asymmetrical power relations between the dominant social group and its subject peoples. This distinguishes empire from the concept of the state as a territorially bounded polity in which peoples are ruled more or less uniformly.<sup>48</sup> It is also distinct from 'hegemony', a word with the potential to cause confusion because all too often it serves as a fig leaf for empires in denial. Even when hegemony is used as a real concept, it has the potential to produce semantic chaos. At least three distinct meanings are in current use: ideological preponderance (as in Gramscian hegemony), informal influence (as in the British informal empire or, latterly, American 'soft power') and primacy over other theoretically equal powers (a usage found principally in international relations and political science).<sup>49</sup> All three are distinct from our analytical category of empire.

Bureaucracy is the younger of our keywords. Originally coined in 1765 (Fr. *bureaucratie*) to refer to a malady afflicting French government, the word quickly established itself as a term of disparagement for overbearing and

<sup>47</sup> An idea in the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein: although members of a family may not all have one feature that is exactly alike, their relations give rise to a general likeness which is recognizable (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen: Philosophical investigations*, ed. and trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, 4th edn (Chichester: Blackwell, 2009), §§66–7). On family resemblances, see Michael Forster, 'Wittgenstein on family resemblance concepts', in Arif Ahmed (ed.), *Wittgenstein's philosophical investigations: a critical guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>48</sup> For a useful definition of the 'state' in the ancient world, see esp. Haldon (Chapter 7, p. 150 n. 4).

<sup>49</sup> For the various wider uses of 'hegemony', see Thomas R. Bates, 'Gramsci and the theory of hegemony', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36:2 (1975), 351–66; Geraldo Zahran and Leonardo Ramos, 'From hegemony to soft power: implications of a conceptual change', in Inderjeet Parmar and Michael Cox (eds.), *Soft power and US foreign policy: theoretical, historical and contemporary perspectives* (Routledge: Abingdon and New York, 2010), ch. 2, pp. 12–31; Immanuel Wallerstein, 'Three hegemonies', in Patrick O'Brien and A. Clesse (eds.), *Two hegemonies: Britain 1846–1914 and the United States 1941–2001* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2002), p. 357. For a specialist application of the term 'Napoleonic hegemony' in the historiography of the *Grand Empire* of Napoleon I, see Broers (Chapter 14, p. 346 n. 6).

inefficient officialdom.<sup>50</sup> It was received into English in the early nineteenth century with the precise meaning of ‘office tyranny’, and during the nineteenth century English writers tended to reserve the term to deprecate the ‘bureaucracy-ridden’ states of continental Europe.<sup>51</sup> In this respect, the career of ‘bureaucracy’ as an attack word has much in common with ‘imperialism’, which first appeared in English in denunciation of the second French empire of Napoleon III (1852–70).<sup>52</sup> And like ‘imperialism’ (which Sir Keith Hancock famously declared to be ‘no word for scholars’), ‘bureaucracy’ has occasionally been deemed to be so polyvalent and laden with negative associations that it is unfit for scholarly use.<sup>53</sup>

‘Bureaucracy’ gained acceptance as a word for scholars through the sociology of Max Weber (1864–1920), whose work casts a long shadow on all subsequent studies.<sup>54</sup> In his major and unfinished work of synthesis *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (‘Economy and society’), Weber sought to provide the tools for a comparative analysis of social power, notably a series of ideal-types – ‘ideal’ in the sense of existing as an idea or archetype. As Sam Whimster discusses in Chapter 18, the elements of the ideal type were intensified to throw into relief the salient features of real historical examples, which Weber maintained never occur in a pure form.<sup>55</sup> The most famous of these ideal types was bureaucracy, which Weber set within a tripartite classification of ‘legitimate domination’ composed of traditional, charismatic and legal-rational

<sup>50</sup> Martin Krygier, ‘State and bureaucracy in Europe: the growth of a concept’, in Kamenka and Krygier, *Bureaucracy: the career of a concept*, p. 22. See also the comments of Haldon (Chapter 7, p. 147).

<sup>51</sup> One of the earliest occurrences in English recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* dates from 1818 and has a colonial connotation: ‘Mr. Commissioner [*sic*], like his elder brothers, characteristically represented the BUREAUCRATIE, or office tyranny, by which Ireland has been so long governed’ (Lady Morgan, *Florence Macarthy: an Irish tale*, 4 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1918), vol. II, part 1, p. 35). John Stuart Mill referred to the ‘bureaucracy-ridden nations of the Continent’ (Mill, *Considerations on representative government* (London, 1861), p. 85).

<sup>52</sup> Koebner, *Imperialism*, pp. 1–2. Subsequently the idea of ‘imperialism’ generated a large theoretical literature from the classic formulations of Lenin (Marxist) and John A. Hobson (liberal) onwards: see discussion in P. J. Cain and Mark Harrison (eds.), *Imperialism: critical concepts in historical studies* (London: Routledge, 2001); Patrick Wolfe, ‘History and imperialism: a century of theory, from Marx to postcolonialism’, *AHR* 102:2 (1997), 388–420.

<sup>53</sup> W. K. Hancock, *Survey of British Commonwealth affairs*, vol. II (London, 1940), pp. 1–2. Cf. Martin Albrow, who recommends jettisoning the term ‘bureaucracy’ while continuing to conduct research on the underlying subject matter (Albrow, *Bureaucracy*, p. 125). A more optimistic assessment of the potential of the term is provided in Beetham, *Bureaucracy*.

<sup>54</sup> Notably on structural functionalism, especially the work of Talcott Parsons (1902–79) and two of his students: Robert K. Merton (1910–2003) and the systems theorist Niklas Luhman (1927–98). On the role of Parsons as translator of Weber, see Keith Tribe, ‘Talcott Parsons als Übersetzer der “Soziologischen Grundbegriffe” Max Webers’, in Klaus Lichtblau (ed.), *Max Webers ‘Grundbegriffe’. Kategorien der kultur- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Forschung* (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006), pp. 337–66.

<sup>55</sup> See Whimster (Chapter 18, pp. 437–41).

authority.<sup>56</sup> Bureaucracy in its pure ideal-typical form was a ‘structure of domination’ characteristic of legal-rational forms of authority, closely associated with ‘modernity’, and distinct from patrimonial administration, which Weber depicted as personal, traditional and normally premodern. Bureaucracy’s success was attributable to its technical superiority to all other forms of organization. It was a precision instrument for achieving goals, the pinnacle of formal or ‘means-end’ rationality (G. *Zweckrationalität*).<sup>57</sup>

Despite Weber’s canonical position and subsequent influence, his ideal type never monopolized the conceptual history of bureaucracy. At almost precisely the same moment as Weber’s image of bureaucracy as a ‘frictionless machine’ was published, Franz Kafka (1883–1924) conjured up in fiction a counter-image of a dystopian bureaucracy in his final and unfinished novel *Das Schloß* (‘The castle’). Kafka’s bureaucracy is the very essence of irrational obsequiousness and inefficiency, dysfunctional precisely because of its insistence on hierarchies and its unwillingness to countenance the possibility of error – an idea possibly significant in studying the fall of empires because a slow bureaucracy cannot adapt swiftly to exogenous forces.<sup>58</sup> Yet another usage takes us back to the original sense of bureaucracy as a form of rule (Gk. *kratos*) – that is, rule by the bureau – as opposed to bureaucracy as an instrument of rule. The distinction between bureaucrats as ‘decision-making personnel’ and not just ‘decision-implementing personnel’ is especially likely to become blurred in politics of the scale of empires, where communications are frequently slow or uncertain.<sup>59</sup> Imperial bureaucrats, in other words, were often agents in their own right; they were not simply cogs in the machine of imperial administration.

These various images of bureaucracy may appear to be discrepant, but each has a number of features that together form the analytical category of ‘bureaucracy’ with which the contributors in this book engage. Bureaucracy here refers to *routine administrative activity delegated to office holders (who are often, but not always, professional career administrators), conducted on the basis of*

<sup>56</sup> MWG, 1/22–4: *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Die Wirtschaft und die gesellschaftlichen Ordnungen und Mächte. Nachlass* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), pp. 157–234; Weber, *E&S*, vol. 1, ch. 3; and *ibid.*, vol. II, ch. 11; the latter discussion appears also in Weber, *FMW*, ch. 8.

<sup>57</sup> Weber, *E&S*, vol. II, p. 973: ‘The fully developed bureaucratic apparatus compares with other organizations exactly as does the machine with the non-mechanical modes of production. Precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction and of material and person costs – these are raised to the optimum point in the strictly bureaucratic administration.’ For further discussion of the ideal type, see also Whimster (Chapter 18, pp. 437–8).

<sup>58</sup> Randy Hodson, Andrew W. Martin, Steven H. Lopez and Vincent J. Roscigno, ‘Rules don’t apply: Kafka’s insights on bureaucracy’, *Organization* 20:2 (2013), 256–78.

<sup>59</sup> The distinction between ‘decision-making’ and ‘decision-implementing’ personnel forms part of the organizational schema of S. E. Finer’s three-volume work on the history of government: see esp. the conceptual prologue in Finer, *The history of government from the earliest times*, vol. 1: *ancient monarchies and empires* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 35–7.



records (though not always written records), with some differentiation and specialization of offices that are organized hierarchically and are reliant on systems of communications.

## IV

### Imperial Bureaucracies: Power and Vulnerability

It was Talleyrand, the foreign minister of Napoleon I, who remarked in the course of a lecture on empire that ‘The art of putting men in their place is perhaps foremost in the science of government.’<sup>60</sup> Imperial bureaucracy was more alchemy than science. It was the art of transforming conquered populations into obedient subjects – of keeping people in their place (figuratively, but also sometimes quite literally through the regimentation and control of space) when they did not want to be ruled. A substantial literature on the ‘colonial state’ has emphasized the transformative power of colonial projects. The case studies presented in this volume suggest that the norm was a more tangled imperial administrative structure and hit-and-miss bureaucratic process. Moving rather schematically outwards from the centre, the chapters suggest a general tendency towards a small and ramshackle organization at the imperial core; uncertain connections between metropole and colonies resulting in ‘negotiation’ rather than top-down imperative control; bureaucrats on the peripheries unable to penetrate too far without undermining their own authority; indigenous peoples displaying some capacity to turn bureaucracy to their own advantage; and, finally, the assimilation or acculturation of the conquerors giving rise to fears of ‘contagion’ spreading from the peripheries back to the imperial core. Cumulatively, these points bring out the paradoxical vulnerability and limitations of imperial bureaucracies.

At the most general level, the chapters call into question the assumptions underpinning certain grand narratives of historical development. One point that many historians and sociologists imbibed from weberian sociology is that bureaucracy, in its fully fledged form, is the handmaiden of ‘modernity’ and the destiny of the modern (and, by implication, Western) state.<sup>61</sup> Max Weber himself was a vigorous proponent of Germany’s expansionist ambitions, and bubbling under the surface of his work are assumptions that are Eurocentric and

<sup>60</sup> F. *L’art de mettre des hommes à leur place est le premier, peut-être, dans la science du gouvernement* (Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, *Essai sur les avantages à retirer des colonies nouvelles dans les circonstances présentes* (Paris, 1840), pp. 330–1).

<sup>61</sup> On this aspect of Weber’s work, see Andreas Anter, *Max Weber’s theory of the modern state: origins, structure and significance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), esp. pp. 78–9; Ken Morrison, *Marx, Durkheim, Weber: formations of modern social thought*, 2nd edn (London: Sage Publications, 2006), esp. p. 375.

grounded in the era of the ‘new imperialism’.<sup>62</sup> His concern to trace the patterns of historical development that gave rise to the modern state imbued his work with ‘a sometimes infelicitous evolutionary flavour’.<sup>63</sup> In the hands of neo-weberians, the development of bureaucracy and Western rationality has been elaborated into a linear narrative of the state’s ‘origins’ and ‘rise’, reaching its apotheosis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>64</sup> Critics of state power have inadvertently returned the compliment to the power of the state by invoking Foucault’s concept of ‘governmentality’ to account for a ‘colonial modernity’ that was supposedly ushered in by Western imperial projects.<sup>65</sup>

This abiding linkage between bureaucracy, ‘modernity’ and the state is an association that this collection seeks to complicate and subvert by reconsidering the relationship between empire-building and state-formation. First, our case studies of imperial bureaucracies (plural) as opposed to bureaucracy (singular) suggest that any narrative of institutional developments should be lumpy, not linear. The wider realm of the Plantagenet kings of England in the late Middle Ages was, for instance, arguably more intensively supervised by the crown and its ministers than the early modern British empire in North America or, for that matter, the archaic chartered companies that ‘modern’ nation-states of Europe revived as a means of governing on the cheap in the era of the new imperialism.<sup>66</sup> This is not to deny the extraordinary, almost exponential, increase in the number of officials employed by nation-states from the late nineteenth century, or the capacity of the state to reach into the very pockets of its citizens with little resistance.<sup>67</sup> But these

<sup>62</sup> ‘Weber sought world equality for Germany as a respectable colonial empire’ (Wolfgang Mommsen, *Max Weber and German politics, 1890–1920*, 2nd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 68–90, 137–41, quotation at 138).

<sup>63</sup> As observed by C. A. Bayly and P. F. Bang, ‘Introduction: comparing pre-modern empires’, *Medieval History Journal* 6:2 (2003), 169–87 (quotation at 184). For Weber’s own attempt to ‘scotch the idea that he was offering an evolutionary account of stages of bureaucratization’, see Whimster (Chapter 18, p. 441). Taken together, two of the better-known attempts to apply Weber’s sociology to the study of empires form a ‘stages of development’ narrative: Kautsky’s ‘aristocratic empires’ (which are traditional) give way to Eisenstadt’s ‘historical bureaucratic empires’: Eisenstadt, *Empires*; John H. Kautsky, *The politics of aristocratic empires* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

<sup>64</sup> The most sophisticated work in this vein is Michael Mann, *The sources of social power*, vol. II: *the rise of classes and nation-states, 1760–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), esp. chs. 11–14, ‘The rise of the modern state, parts I–IV’. Randall Collins describes how ‘Mann’s account of the rise of the modern state is congruent with Weber’s theory of the rise of bureaucracy’, in Collins, ‘Mann’s transformation of the classic sociological traditions’, in John A. Hall and Ralph Schroeder, *An anatomy of power: the social theory of Michael Mann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), at p. 27. For the literature on the medieval origins of the modern state, see Crooks (Chapter 11, p. 256 n. 25, p. 258 n. 41, p. 259 n. 42).

<sup>65</sup> See Heath (Chapter 15, pp. 366–9) and Cooper (Chapter 16, pp. 392–3). For Foucault’s 1978 lecture on this topic, see Foucault, ‘Governmentality’, esp. p. 103, where the modernization perspective is expressed clearly.

<sup>66</sup> See Crooks (Chapter 11, pp. 254–5).

<sup>67</sup> Mann, *Sources of social power*, vol. II, ch. 13, ‘The rise of the modern state: III. Bureaucratization’, pp. 444–509.

developments were not transposed onto imperial possessions in a systematic way. Even in the ‘age of bureaucracy’, which coincided with the spate of annexations that occurred in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, European empires were often a-modern, or de-modernizing, in their governing practices.<sup>68</sup> The bureaucratization of empire in Africa had scarcely begun at the close of World War II; as late as 1950 in French West Africa, the administration’s ability to record basic statistical information about its subject population (registers of births and deaths) was startlingly restricted, embracing only those resident within 10 kilometres of a recording centre.<sup>69</sup> That such limitations in colonial knowledge could exist in a ‘modern’ empire makes it seem all the more remarkable that the *quipucamayocs* of Tahuantinsuyu (the specialist cadre of Inca bureaucrats) could achieve such high levels of information retrieval in respect of demographics and commodities using their mnemonic system of knots (*quipus*).<sup>70</sup> Clearly a linear narrative of ever-increasing bureaucratic complexity on a grand march towards modernity will not do.

A second long-range observation is that territorially bounded ‘states’ did not burst out into empires when they passed a certain threshold of institutional cohesion and development – the point Kimberley Kagan has dubbed portentously the ‘imperial moment’.<sup>71</sup> The trajectory of political development was normally much more complicated than a simple state-to-empire transformation. The bureaucratic apparatuses of metropolitan states and their dependencies were often heavily imbricated, developing in interaction with each other, so that drawing too sharp a distinction between the two distorts historical reality. At the imperial core, the bureaucracy dedicated specifically to the empire was frequently incoherent when it was not in fact inchoate. Official descriptions of administrative functions are a poor guide to administrative practice because they were so often written by bureaucrats eager to inflate their own power and prestige. They provide, at best, a normative statement of how the system *ought* to work. The *Notitia dignitatum*, which enumerates the major offices in the later Roman empire, appears to describe a well-ordered and hierarchical system, but it scarcely captures the messy realities of administration or the capacities of those at the centre of the empire to project their will onto the provinces.<sup>72</sup> In the case of

<sup>68</sup> Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *The age of bureaucracy: perspectives on the sociology of Max Weber* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974). See Cooper (Chapter 16, p. 411) and Parsons (Chapter 17, p. 412).

<sup>69</sup> See Cooper (Chapter 16, p. 408). <sup>70</sup> See Given-Wilson (Chapter 4, pp. 87–91).

<sup>71</sup> Kimberly Kagan (ed.), *The imperial moment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), esp. pp. 10–11, seeks to identify and explain the moment of transition at which state behaviour changed and ‘states’ became ‘empires’.

<sup>72</sup> Sam Barnish, A. D. Lee and Michael Whitby, ‘Government and administration’, in Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward-Perkins and Michael Whitby (eds.), *CAH*, vol. xiv: *Late Antiquity and successors, A.D. 425–600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 166. See also the schematic of Byzantine administration discussed by Haldon (Chapter 7, pp. 157–8). For an analysis of intellectual models of administration put forward by scribe-administrators of the Islamic empire, see Kristó-Nagy (Chapter 3, pp. 76–8).

Britain, the bureaucracy charged with overseeing the empire remained small and cross-cutting into the twentieth century. In 1903, the Colonial Office had a staff of 113, and its role was supervisory rather than directive, administrative authority being vested in the governor 'on the spot'.<sup>73</sup> The supervision of other parts of the empire was divided among several departments including the Dominions Office (which became a separate office in 1925), the Foreign Office, the Admiralty (responsible for St Helena) and the India Office. Rather than the core acting as an incubator for empire, it was sometimes the process of empire-building itself that stimulated bureaucratic growth.<sup>74</sup> It follows from this that the institutions of the core society were not exported to the peripheries in any sort of straightforward way. Imperial rule was a palimpsest. Overlapping patterns of indigenous and imported bureaucratic practice resulted in a confusing tangle as conquerors adapted themselves recursively to local conditions or relied on knowledge and expertise of existing bureaucrats. The co-option and repurposing of existing administrative systems are most obvious in the case of nomadic or 'kinetic' empires that conquered sedentary societies – the Arab conquest of large tracks of territory from the Sāsānian and eastern Roman empires in the seventh century, or the Mongol conquest of the southern Song which resulted in the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368).<sup>75</sup> But continental Europe was itself a palimpsest of imperial formations every bit as much as it was a melting pot of nation-states. Napoleon's obsession with regenerating the imperial space of Charlemagne was perhaps only surpassed by Charlemagne himself and his concern (or, at least, that of his medieval spin doctors) with the renewal (*L. renovatio imperii*) of the Roman empire in the West.<sup>76</sup>

A general tendency was for bureaucratization to kick in as empires moved from tributary extraction to control of labour and direct taxation, which required more detailed knowledge of subject populations.<sup>77</sup> Increases in profitability

<sup>73</sup> The idea that colonies might be administered directly from London was considered a 'rank heresy': see Ronald Hyam, 'Bureaucracy and trusteeship in the colonial empire', in Ronald Hyam, *Understanding the British empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 213 (quotation).

<sup>74</sup> See Gillingham (Chapter 9, p. 199) for the argument that the Angevin empire can be cited in favour of the idea of empires as 'nurseries of bureaucracy'. See also Crooks (Chapter 11, pp. 258–9).

<sup>75</sup> For the Islamic conquests, see Kristó-Nagy (Chapter 3, pp. 63–5); and on the Song–Yuan transition, see esp. John W. Dardess, 'Did the Mongols matter? Territory, power, and the intelligentsia in China from the northern Song to the early Ming', in Paul Jakov Smith and Richard Von Glahn (eds.), *The Song–Yuan–Ming transition in Chinese history* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2003), ch. 3. On 'kinetic empires', see Pekka Hämäläinen, 'What's in a concept? The kinetic empire of the Comanches', *History and Theory* 52 (2013), 81–90.

<sup>76</sup> See Bachrach (Chapter 8, pp. 170–1); Jean Tulard, 'L'empire napoléonien', in Duverger (ed.), *Le concept d'empire*, ch. 11; and Michael Broers, 'Napoleon, Charlemagne, and Lotharingia: acculturation and the boundaries of Napoleonic Europe', *HJ* 44:1 (2001), 135–54.

<sup>77</sup> On colonial knowledge, see Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge: the British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

resulted in a desire by metropolitan governments to tap wealth directly or shift costs to the peripheries through more bureaucratic oversight. As a result, the colonial state might become a testing ground for a more rigorous and penetrative bureaucratic rule that would have been quite unacceptable to the domestic population of the metropolitan nation-state.<sup>78</sup> The results were neither expected nor intended. As Len Scales comments perceptively: ‘The proliferation or perpetuation of bureaucracy is no more a necessary symptom of an empire’s health than limited institutions reliably indicate its impending collapse.’<sup>79</sup> In the case of both colonial North America and the possessions of the Spanish monarchy in South and Central America, the intrusiveness of the core ultimately broke down the ‘ties that bound’ the settler or creole populations to the monarchies, dispelling what Jack P. Greene calls ‘metropolitan charisma’.<sup>80</sup> Likewise European empires in twentieth-century Africa unravelled during the phase of bureaucratic expansion after World War II.

Systems of communications might themselves form part of that metropolitan charisma.<sup>81</sup> The Roman network of roads and bridges, estimated to have spanned some 100,000 kilometres, was lauded by a poet in the second century CE: ‘By cutting through mountains you have made land travel feasible; you have filled the deserts with way-stations, and you have civilized everything with your lifestyle and organization.’<sup>82</sup> In fact, the roads were constructed in the first instance to facilitate troop movements and secondarily the transmission of information – in other words, to overcome a problem with which all empires have to contend: the tyranny of distance.<sup>83</sup> Land empires have sought to control space through the development of physical infrastructures (roads and bridges) and courier systems. Using the *cursus publicus*, a Roman courier might expect to cover 80 kilometres in a day overland riding in relays.<sup>84</sup> All roads in the ancient world may have led to Rome, but in the Andes the 40,000 kilometres of

<sup>78</sup> C. A. Bayly, *Imperial meridian: the British empire and the world, 1780–1830* (London; New York: Longman, 1989); Elizabeth Kolsky, ‘Codification and the rule of colonial difference: criminal procedure in British India’, *Law and History Review* 23:3 (2005), 631–83; Jon E. Wilson, *The domination of strangers: modern governance in Eastern India, 1780–1835* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), esp. p. 4: ‘Many characteristics of “British” political modernity emerged in colonial India before they occurred in Britain itself.’

<sup>79</sup> See Scales (Chapter 10, p. 248).

<sup>80</sup> See Greene (Chapter 13, pp. 337–43); and see also Storrs (Chapter 12, pp. 315–17).

<sup>81</sup> For the figure of the Roman emperor minted on coinage as a ‘resonant symbol of emperor-wide scope, which by itself provided the empire with a measure of the “symbolic glue” that it had lacked under the Republic’, see Carlos F. Noreña, *Imperial ideals in the Roman west: representation, circulation, power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 324

<sup>82</sup> Richard J. A. Talbert, ‘Roads not featured: a Roman failure to communicate?’, in Susan E. Alcock, John Bodel and Richard J. A. Talbert (eds.), *Highways, byways, and road systems in the pre-modern world* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 239.

<sup>83</sup> Neville Morley, *The Roman empire: roots of imperialism* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), p. 82.

<sup>84</sup> C. W. J. Eliot, ‘New evidence for the speed of the Roman imperial post’, *The Phoenix* 9 (1955), 76–80.

Inca roads and bridges converged at Cusco.<sup>85</sup> As Chris Given-Wilson describes, the fleet-footed *chasquis* of the Incas could carry messages in relay at a rate of more than 200 kilometres per day – four times faster than the Spaniards could complete the same journey on horseback.<sup>86</sup> The ʿAbbāsīd dynasty achieved even more impressive speeds with the *barid* (postal system): in one instance, the journey from Baghdad to Mecca (c.1,650 kilometres) was recorded as being covered in four days (410 kilometres per day).<sup>87</sup> The problem of controlling far-flung subject peoples was not, however, wholly resolved by the communications revolution brought about by the telegraph and telephone, nor indeed, latterly, by instant satellite communication.<sup>88</sup> Improvement in communications and the regimentation of knowledge disrupted local channels of affective communication and impaired the ability of the rulers to ‘listen in’ on native society.<sup>89</sup> Meanwhile, higher levels of superintendence from the metropole brought under critical scrutiny the corrupt or kleptocratic tendencies of the empire’s own officials, when those were the very practices that provided local imperial bureaucrats and settler elites with a stake in the perpetuation of imperial rule in the first place. Finally, the communications and media revolutions occurred concurrently with (and, indeed, may have been a causal factor in) the hardening of collective solidarities and identities.<sup>90</sup> The result was that the rule of subject peoples became more difficult, and empires become more unstable, even as the capacity to implement direct bureaucratic rule increased.

Even with investment in communications, few empires (if any) had the human or economic resources to communicate with their subjects directly. Power was, therefore, delegated to or mediated through local power brokers, whether settlers or natives or even imperial bureaucrats themselves. The idea of a ‘negotiated empire’ is not a phenomenon attributable simply to the weakness of government in premodern eras.<sup>91</sup> The great majority of the empires

<sup>85</sup> Catherine Julien, ‘The Chinchaysuyu road and the definition of an Inca imperial landscape’, in Alcock *et al.* (eds.), *Highways, byways and road systems*, ch. 7.

<sup>86</sup> See Given-Wilson (Chapter 4, p. 94).

<sup>87</sup> Adam J. Silverstein, *Postal systems in the pre-modern Islamic world* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 191–2, although the necessary dependence on literary sources for this evidence makes the reliability of the figures uncertain.

<sup>88</sup> For further discussion of media and the ‘bias of communication’, see Whimster (Chapter 18, pp. 448–50).

<sup>89</sup> The phrase is that of C. A. Bayly in his seminal study: *Empire and information: intelligence gathering and social communication in India, 1870–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), esp. p. 3.

<sup>90</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, revised edn (London: Verso, 1994); and for the impact of a literate culture for a conquered population: Jack Goody, *The logic of writing and the organization of society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 126, discussed by Given-Wilson (Chapter 4, p. 101 n. 55).

<sup>91</sup> Greene, ‘Negotiated authorities’, pp. 1–24; Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy (eds.), *Negotiated empires: centers and peripheries in the Americas, 1500–1820* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

represented in this collection had to employ local interpreters, tax collectors, policemen and soldiers to govern cheaply and effectively. As John Lonsdale remarked of British rule in twentieth-century Africa: 'power could not be exercised without giving some of it away.'<sup>92</sup> In the early 1900s, there were at least a thousand Indian subordinate officials for each Indian Civil Service officer in the British Raj, and districts were so large that administrators might only visit a village once in five years.<sup>93</sup> A strict dichotomy between indirect and direct rule is, therefore, somewhat misleading. It is better to imagine a continuum of institutionalized forms of negotiation. The continuum is discernable in the case of China under the Song, when the civil service was far larger and more 'rational' than any contemporaneous bureaucracy in the West. Even so, the functionaries of the Song could not penetrate far into a society of 100 million persons, while in its southern territories the Song shared power with some 350 local chiefdoms.<sup>94</sup> Such 'bridle and halter' agreements were a commonplace part of the pragmatics of imperial rule. Frederick Lugard (1858–1945) dubbed the system as it pertained in the British dominions 'indirect rule', depicting local intermediaries as vessels of legitimate 'traditional' authority, even though they were essentially imperial creations occupying the lowest rung of the imperial administration.<sup>95</sup> Long before such expediencies became an officially enunciated maxim, effective and long-lasting administration depended on the ability of empire-builders to recruit allies from subject populations, whether they be the 'cooked' chiefdoms of the southern Chinese frontier, the *curacas* of Tahuantinsuyu, or the tribal 'chiefs' of the British empire. Even the *Grand Empire* of Napoleon I, which was exceptional in its attempt to impose an 'unbreakable model' of French administrative and legal practice throughout its conquered territories and satellite kingdoms, had to compromise at the lower echelons of the administration.<sup>96</sup>

Of course, the idea of negotiated authority can easily be carried too far. Systems of cooperative administration obscured the implicit violence that served as the undergirding of imperial bureaucracy.<sup>97</sup> One party to the 'negotiation' was frequently able to hold the other at the end of a spear or a bayonet – an asymmetry in power relations brought out clearly in the

<sup>92</sup> John Lonsdale, 'The European scramble and conquest in African history', in Roland Oliver and G. N. Sanderson (eds.), *The Cambridge history of Africa*, vol. vi: *from 1870 to 1905* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 751.

<sup>93</sup> See Heath (Chapter 15, p. 376). <sup>94</sup> See Ebrey (Chapter 2, p. 48).

<sup>95</sup> Lugard, *Dual mandate*. For work on 'indirect rule', see Robin Jeffrey, 'The politics of "indirect rule": types of relationship among rulers, ministers and residents in a "native state"', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 13 (1975), 261–81; Colin Newbury, 'Patrons, clients, and empire: the subordination of indigenous hierarchies in Asia and Africa', *JWH* 11:2 (2000), 227–63.

<sup>96</sup> See Broers (Chapter 14, p. 349).

<sup>97</sup> For salutary comments to this effect concerning the Spanish monarchy, see Carlos Marichal, 'Rethinking negotiation and coercion in an imperial state', *HAHR* 88:2 (2008), 211–18.



memorials that Caesar Augustus had erected to his own memory across the Roman empire at his death in 14 CE: ‘When foreign peoples could safely be pardoned, I preferred to preserve rather than to exterminate them.’<sup>98</sup> The chillingly conditional nature of the clemency offered by Augustus brings to the fore the utility of the threat of violence in imperial rule. Violence was inherent to empire because most empires began with military conquest and were consolidated with terror and repression. In Charles Maier’s aphorism: ‘The lifeblood of empires was blood.’<sup>99</sup> Explicit manifestations of violence became less frequent, however, once imperial rule became routinized, and imperial regimes that had to employ spectacular punitive violence on a regular basis were actually betraying their vulnerability. The implicit threat that overt resistance or defiance of imperial authority would be met with lethal force allowed a small number of bureaucrats and their local proxies to assert their authority over vastly larger subject populations. ‘Every conquered people needs a revolt’, Napoleon commented in 1806 to his brother Joseph (1768–1844), because the revolt could be answered with an exemplary punishment, massacre and licenced sexual violence that would cow the population and pave the way for the introduction of administrative reform.<sup>100</sup> Once the reforms had been introduced, the *gendarmérie* brigades, formidably staffed with French veterans of the wars, served as a strong arm to enforce the rule of thinly spread civilian bureaucrats.<sup>101</sup> Police brutality was likewise (as Deana Heath shows in Chapter 15) a quotidian aspect of British rule in the Raj. The fact that policing was delegated to local intermediaries allowed English magistrates to attribute the practice of torture to local conditions, which in turn ‘served to perpetuate a mode of violence that the colonial regime was allegedly pledged to eradicate’.<sup>102</sup>

Violent repression, and imperial rule in general, had a strong gendered dimension. Excepting the employment of female social welfare experts in the post–World War II French and British empires, imperial bureaucrats were almost always men. This male dominance within imperial bureaucracies should not obscure the fact that women played an integral role in most systems of imperial rule. As conquest gave way to bureaucracy, administrators formed intimate relations with subject women to forge alliances and better understand local cultures.<sup>103</sup> The eighteenth-century employees of the English East India Company often learned Indian languages by taking mistresses, whom they

<sup>98</sup> *Res gestae divi Augusti*, 3.2.      <sup>99</sup> Maier, *Among empires*, p. 20.

<sup>100</sup> Quoted in Philip G. Dwyer, ‘Violence and the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars: massacre, conquest and the imperial enterprise’, *Journal of Genocide Research* 15:2 (2013), 117–31, at 122.

<sup>101</sup> See Broers (Chapter 14, p. 350).      <sup>102</sup> See Heath (Chapter 15, p. 390).

<sup>103</sup> On the ancient world, see esp. Walter Scheidel, ‘Sex and empire: a Darwinian perspective’, in Morris & Scheidel, *Dynamics*, ch. 7.

referred to colloquially as ‘sleeping dictionaries’.<sup>104</sup> Some company employees married these women, but this became increasingly uncommon by the nineteenth century, when missionary criticism and pseudo-scientific racism rendered intimate cross-cultural relationships socially unacceptable. At the very least, these sorts of bonds dangerously blurred the distinction between ruler and subject. Consequently, some imperial regimes tried to limit the risks of cultural and political contagion by employing married bureaucrats. As Michael Broers describes in Chapter 14, wives often played a central, albeit informal, role in governing subject populations, advancing their husbands’ careers and limiting the contacts of male bureaucrats with female ‘natives’.<sup>105</sup> Once the Suez Canal reduced transit times from Britain, respectable young women travelled to India each autumn on the ‘the fishing fleet’ to find husbands amongst the ranks of the Indian Civil Service and Indian Army officer corps. Protecting these metropolitan women from allegedly dangerous subject men consequently made gender a central buttress of the boundary that defined subjecthood. In reality, imperial bureaucrats still had intimate relations with subject women. In the French empire, it remained common practice for a young civil officer to learn local languages and cultures by taking a mistress. The British Colonial Office, by contrast, formally outlawed concubinage in 1909 on the grounds that ‘it is not possible for any member of the administration to countenance such practices without lowering himself in the eyes of the natives, and diminishing his authority to an extent which will seriously impair his capacity for useful work.’<sup>106</sup> This official warning that sex with subject women risked ‘disgrace and official ruin’ did not put an end to the practice in the British empire. Looking back on his career as an administrative officer in colonial Kenya, Terence Gavaghan (d. 2011) acknowledged that his immediate superiors encouraged him to learn Swahili by taking a mistress, and he wistfully recalled learning about sex from African women.<sup>107</sup> In earlier eras, rulers tried to limit the bureaucratic complications of sexual intimacy by employing eunuchs and celibate clerics as administrators, but Gavaghan’s testimony demonstrates that official expectations of administrative chastity were unrealistic in the contemporary era.

These patterns of cultural exchange blurred the boundaries between ruler and ruled. ‘Through conquering we have been conquered’, lamented Pliny the Elder (d. 79 CE), expressing a fear common among empire-builders that the cultural mores of their more numerous alien subjects would come to envelop

<sup>104</sup> Though, as Ronald Hyam notes, ‘the linguistic competence of the British in India was never much improved, and all mixed-blood Eurasians became English-speaking’ (Hyam, *Empire and sexuality: the British experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 115).

<sup>105</sup> See Broers (Chapter 14, pp. 359–62).

<sup>106</sup> Hyam, *Empire and sexuality*, p. 157; and Ronald Hyam, ‘Concubinage and the colonial service: Silberrad and the Crewe circular, 1909’, *Understanding the British empire*, ch. 15.

<sup>107</sup> Terence Gavaghan, *Of lions and dung beetles* (Devon: Arthur Stockwell, 1999), pp. 35, 81.

the conquerors themselves.<sup>108</sup> István Kristó-Nagy describes in Chapter 3 the process of mutual assimilation and cultural synthesis between the Arab conquerors and their subjects that resulted in the new Islamic empire.<sup>109</sup> From acculturation of conquerors on the periphery, it was but a short step to ‘contamination’ of the metropole itself. The eighteenth-century ‘nabobs’ (employees of the East India Company) shocked domestic sensibilities when they returned to Britain with an appetite for Indian hookahs, food, clothing, entertainments and women.<sup>110</sup> But there was more to these concerns than xenophobia. Unencumbered by the ethical and legal constraints of metropolitan society, imperial administrators could give free rein to ambitions and appetites that might have appeared unseemly, corrupt or even criminal at home. Critics worried that these imperial vices might contaminate the metropole and threaten the established social and political order of Britain itself. Edmund Burke (1729–97) expressed the fear most clearly when he brought impeachment proceedings against the former governor-general of Bengal, Warren Hastings (1732–1818): ‘[Company servants] not only bring with them the wealth which they have, but they bring with them into our country the vices by which it was acquired.’<sup>111</sup> The political theorist Hannah Arendt drew a similar conclusion more than a century later in noting that Britain remained a liberal democracy during the new imperial era by keeping politically ambitious men such as Cecil Rhodes (1853–1902) and the other new empire-builders carefully sealed off in the periphery.<sup>112</sup>

## VI

### The Goldilocks Paradox

Taken collectively, the chapters in this volume raise fundamental questions about temporality and imperial lifespans. Some recent work on empire has sought to shift attention from the theme of ‘decline and fall’ to an explanation for the endurance and adaptability of certain empires.<sup>113</sup> In Song China, as in

<sup>108</sup> Pliny, *Natural history*, 24.5.5. Pliny was paraphrasing Horace (d. 8 BCE), quoted in Kristó-Nagy (Chapter 3, p. 64). Cicero and Seneca expressed similar sentiments (Benjamin Isaac, *The invention of racism in classical antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 225).

<sup>109</sup> See Kristó-Nagy (Chapter 3, p. 55).

<sup>110</sup> Tillman W. Nechtman, *Nabobs: empire and identity in eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>111</sup> P. J. Marshall, *The impeachment of Warren Hastings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 191 (quotation).

<sup>112</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The origins of totalitarianism*, 2nd edn (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), p. 155.

<sup>113</sup> Goldstone & Haldon, ‘Ancient states’, esp. p. 8; Barkey, *Empire of difference*. See also comments by Barkey (Chapter 5, pp. 105, 107), Whitby (Chapter 6, pp. 141–6), Haldon (Chapter 7, pp. 149–50, 167–9), Scales (Chapter 10, pp. 240–7) and Storrs (Chapter 12, p. 295).

Late Rome and its Byzantine successor state, well-established bureaucracies served, to some extent, as a cohesive force binding the empire together. Bureaucracy might also provide what John Haldon calls ‘resistance’, that is, flexibility in times of stress that enabled the political structure to withstand crisis.<sup>114</sup> Significantly, however, assimilation and incorporation had proceeded far enough in these cases that the empires in question were evolving into big societies or territorial states.<sup>115</sup> In other instances, imperial bureaucracy showed itself to be brittle, with the most recent European empires boasting some of the poorest records of exercising power in a sustainable way. As Eric Hobsbawm once observed, the period between the scramble for Africa and decolonization occurred within the lifetime of a single individual: Winston Churchill (1874–1965).<sup>116</sup> In this sense, the distinction between the mechanical and dystopian images of bureaucracy found in Weber and Kafka represents a false antithesis. The point is not that imperial bureaucracies were more kafkaesque than weberian, but rather that the attempt to rule directly, to override local power structures, was destabilizing and created tensions that pushed the course of political development in one of two directions: either towards the absorption of subject peoples and territories into an enlarged core or alternatively towards fragmentation and colonial independence.

The paradox or contradiction of imperial rule may thus be voiced in the form of a Goldilocks argument: ‘You can’t have an empire without a bureaucracy, but too much bureaucracy and you won’t keep your empire for very long.’ This ‘Goldilocks paradox’ provides a heuristic for comparison because the degree of bureaucratization required for an empire to maintain a balance between integration and fragmentation, between assimilation and differentiation, was variable according to time, place and culture. When added to other factors, such as the strength of indigenous solidarities and the impact of exogenous political forces, the Goldilocks paradox helps explain why some empires endured for centuries, while, in the contemporary world, empires seem set to fail almost before they begin.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>114</sup> See Haldon (Chapter 7, p. 149).

<sup>115</sup> See comments by Ebrey (Chapter 2, pp. 31–3, 37), Whitby (Chapter 6, p. 146) and Haldon (Chapter 7, pp. 150–3, 169).

<sup>116</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Looking forward: history and the future’, in Hobsbawm, *On history* (London: Abacus, 1998), p. 65.

<sup>117</sup> For a wide-ranging discussion of this theme, see W. G. Runciman, ‘Empire as a topic in comparative sociology’, in Bang & Bayly, *Tributary empires*, ch. 5.