

SUGGESTIONS AND DEBATES

Citizens without Nations: A Review Dossier

EDITORIAL

In the autumn of 2018, Maarten Prak's book *Citizens without Nations: Urban Citizenship in Europe and the World c.1000–1789* was published by Cambridge University Press. Contrary to the traditional interpretation, which identifies the French Revolution as the birth of modern citizenship, and thus a European invention that subsequently conquered the world, Prak extends the concept in time and space. He does this by tracing its roots back to membership of a variety of urban organizations in the Middle Ages. In the third part of his book, he explores similar forms of early urban civic organization in Asia and the Americas and to what extent these constitute a genealogy of citizenship similar to the European form. By systematically analysing the function of guilds, merchant associations, neighbourhood organizations, and militias, Prak paints on a much broader canvas than most studies on citizenship. And thanks to his comparative approach, he shows both surprising continuities and ruptures, in time and in space. Most importantly, he stresses how fundamental social networks are in human societies and how, through the expression of citizenship, they have become crucial elements of cooperation and democracy. His book pertains not only to the role of institutions in long-term social and economic developments during the last millennium, but also speaks to topical debates about the nature of democracy, which – as argued by the author – in a number of respects has been weakened by the transition to a form of modern national citizenship after the French Revolution, and the simultaneous suppression of local citizenship practices.

In November 2018, the book was discussed at a “Meet the Author” session of the American Social Science History Association (SSHA) conference in Phoenix, Arizona. Three of the four scholars who commented on the book's thesis have reworked and expanded their presentations into contributions to this review dossier.¹ Commenting on Prak's bold endeavour, expressing both admiration and criticism, they represent a wide global and historical range, engaging with the questions raised by the book. These include whether

1. Wayne te Brake (Purchase College, New York) also commented during the session on 10 November 2018, which was chaired by Philip Hoffman (Caltech, California).

it is indeed possible to detect and identify forms of citizenship in early modern Chinese cities, contrary to the Weberian interpretation, and how to understand the much deeper roots of citizenship practices in South America, compared with the northern part of that continent. And what about Africa: why is it missing in Prak's analysis, and how could it be integrated? What are the implications of Prak's thesis for the Great Divergence discussion?

These and other questions formed the ingredients of an intense discussion, which is brought together in written form in this review dossier. Maarten Prak responds to the discussion in a rejoinder. We hope that these reactions will serve as inspiration for further research and as fire dust for ongoing debates in global history.

Editorial Committee