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Book Review

Cent ans d'histoire des outre-mers. SFHOM, 1912-2012. Edited by Hubert Bonin, Bernard Droz and Josette Rivallain. Paris: Publications de la Société française d'histoire des outre-mers. 2013. 659 pp. €20.00. ISBN: 978 2 8597 0052 2.

Colonial history was an academic child of colonialism, and many predicted that decolonisation would mean the end of the sub-discipline. In Britain and France, in particular, it had become particularly unfashionable to claim this historiographical heritage in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, the predicted death practically never happened, in particular because new generations of historians undertook to 'decolonise' colonial history. In the case of the society of which the present volume celebrates the hundredth anniversary, this Phoenix-like resilience was achieved through a series of revealing name changes: called the *Société d'histoire des colonies françaises* upon its creation in 1912, it is today the *Société française d'histoire des outre-mers* (SFHOM). Its most significant output throughout its history, its academic journal, also underwent phases of metamorphosis: the *Revue de l'histoire des colonies françaises*, launched in 1913, became the *Revue d'histoire des colonies* in 1931, before being turned into the *Revue française de l'histoire d'outre-mer* (right in the middle of the decolonisation period: 1959). It only took its current and more neutral title of *Outre mers. Revue d'histoire* in 1999. Seizing the opportunity of the centenary of the SFHOM, this volume offers fascinating insights into one of the major academic organisations linked to the history of 'Greater France' (alongside the *Académie des sciences coloniales*, founded in 1923, now the *Académie des sciences d'outre-mer*). It also provides the reader with a useful overview of the state of the field in French academia, from an exceptionally wide variety of perspectives.

The organisation of this imposing book in five parts allows the editors to cover a wide range of topics, in varying length, depth and innovativeness, with some making extensive use of new archival sources and offering new interpretations, whilst others adopt a more synoptic vision which provides useful summaries, but is not necessarily innovative in itself. Such a broad spectrum of methodological approaches and historiographical traditions is the hallmark of such ambitious projects: we have here thirty-nine chapters brought under the same dust cover. In order to marshal this wide range of expertise, the book opens with essays by two of the co-editors, Hubert Bonin and Josette Rivallain, looking specifically at the centenary of the SFHOM, broaching not only the methodological problems posed by a commemorative volume of this nature, but also its long-term legacy.

The second part of the volume offers a snapshot of the domestic and international situation of colonial matters at the time when Alfred Martineau launched the Society. Two chapters set the scene by looking at the French governmental structures in place at the end of the *Belle époque*, giving a good idea of the backdrop against which the Society was born. The reader is reminded of the often uneasy triangle between the ministries of the Navy, the Colonies and War in 1912 France, which oscillated between competition and complementarity. A short biographical chapter on French ministers of

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