
BULLETIN

1984

German Historical Institute London
Bulletin 1984

HORST GRÜNDER, *Christliche Mission und deutscher Imperialismus. Eine politische Geschichte ihrer Beziehungen während der deutschen Kolonialzeit (1884-1914) unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Afrikas und Chinas*, Paderborn, Schöningh 1982, 444 pp.

KLAUS J. BADE (ed.), *Imperialismus und Kolonialmission. Kaiserliches Deutschland und koloniales Imperium*, Wiesbaden, Steiner 1982, xiii + 333 pp.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s when historiography in the Federal Republic of Germany took a fresh view of many old subjects and discovered a fair number of new ones, research on Germany's imperial involvement with the non-European world promised to become a major growth area of historical writing. Hans-Ulrich Wehler not only put forward a widely debated theory of social imperialism as a manipulative strategy for engineering domestic consensus under the conditions of a socio-economic crisis, but also provided the standard narrative account of the acquisition by the Reich of colonies in Africa and the Pacific. Around the same time, Helmut Bley, Karin Hausen, Rainer Tetzlaff, Detlev Bald, Albert Wirz and others published monographs dealing with internal conditions in Germany's African possessions (apart from Togo which was treated in Arthur J. Knoll's book of 1978). By contrast, West German historians showed little interest in Germany's position in the Far East and the South Seas; here, the most important work was done by historians in Britain, the United States and Australia. Compared to the creative outburst of the 1968-72 period, the later seventies were lean years in (West) German imperial and colonial historiography. An outstanding achievement was Klaus J. Bade's book on Friedrich Fabri (1975), clearly the one major research project to emerge from the Wehler debate. Bade challenged Wehler's views on several important points, while approving of his basic approach; perhaps most importantly, he analysed the role of colonial issues during Bismarck's last years in office, the anti-slavery agitation of 1888 and the final *Kanzlerkrise* of 1889-90. Bade's basic concern, like Wehler's, was with colonialism at home, with interest groups and parliamentary politics, with domestic problems and their ideological perception, with propaganda and power in the Kaiserreich. Beside this kind of mainstream imperial history and its offshoot, the study of colonialism on the spot, a third line of inquiry took longer to emerge: a comparative examination of the long-term impact of 'Western' expansion on Afro-Asian societies or, more generally, the pre-history of the contemporary Third World. Some work in this field was done by area specialists, mostly in the social sciences and the orientalist disciplines. Rudolf von Albertini and Wolfgang J. Mommsen were almost the only general historians to draw attention to the supreme importance of the subject and its implications for universal history.

The obvious next step would be to combine imperial, colonial and Third World history, and in doing this, Horst Gründer's *Habilitationsschrift* and the volume of essays edited by Klaus J. Bade may inaugurate a new departure from the parochial traditions of German historiography. Missionary history provides an ideal opportunity for this sort of multi-faceted approach. Although the Christian missions were part and parcel of the colonial set-up, they predated colonialism and also survived it, as Ernst Dammann demonstrates in his contribution to the Bade volume. Few factors equalled the missions in their unsettling effects on Afro-Asian societies, yet few proved as stimulating for their modern transforma-

tion. In spite of a fundamental affinity in outlook and purpose between the missions and the secular representatives of Europe overseas, co-operation between the two remained ambiguous to the end. The question of national allegiances was never definitely settled, neither in the case of the Catholic church nor in that of the Protestant missions: British and American missions, to some extent, continued to operate in the German 'protectorates', whereas German missionaries were allowed to resume their activities in many of the lost colonies after the First World War. Missionaries, as a rule, shared their fellow-Europeans' dismissive attitudes towards the heathen and barbarian 'natives', but their trust in the wisdom of God's creation stopped them short of the blatant racism that characterised, above all, the settler and planter mentality. While the missionaries insisted on patriarchal guidance and were not always averse to condoning grosser forms of exploitation, in their view the indigenous people had at least a chance of spiritual salvation and material improvement. The missionaries by and large represented a comparatively benign face of colonialism and this was precisely what helped to make the system work.

Missionary history, written in the context of what Bade calls the 'colonial situation', is a juggling act which tries to keep many balls in the air at the same time. Horst Gründer makes it plain from the outset that he is dealing with its political aspects only. He omits theological questions and says little about recruitment patterns, finance, day-to-day work at the grassroots level, and about the sociology of African and Chinese converts. Even so, his account is an extremely complex one, and the inclusion of these additional aspects would possibly have expanded the topic beyond all manageable proportions. Gründer has sifted through an enormous amount of missionary literature and has inspected more than three dozen archives. In his first chapter (which, in a shortened version, also appears in the Bade volume) he introduces the various Protestant missionary societies and discusses the admission of Catholic missions in the aftermath of the *Kulturkampf*. The second chapter, on the relations between the missions, now seen as a generic entity, the colonial movement and the state, draws the threads together and makes a number of basic assertions which are illustrated in abundant detail in the following chapters devoted to Africa and China.

On the basic question of how much conflict and how much co-operation there was between the missions and the colonial state, Gründer comes down in favour of the 'alliance of interests' thesis. As far as missions opposed colonial policies it was in order to denounce individual 'excesses' rather than to call into question the fundamentals of the system. Gründer argues convincingly that the state made use of the missions as pioneers of penetration, as buffers against anti-colonialist criticism at home, as purveyors of legitimacy and, above all, as educators of the 'natives' in the sense of instilling the virtues of obedience, loyalty and discipline, and of providing the minimum of skills required for labour to benefit alien entrepreneurs and, indirectly, the economy at home. Still, as the excellent chapter on Africa shows, the missions did not bow to every whim of the colonial administration and expatriate interests but in conflict situations took sides in a predictable way. Their ideal was a community of peasant proprietors producing cash crops in an environment sheltered from the influence of paganism, the hated Islam and the European settlers who were apt to reduce the Africans to 'proletarian' status. Practical considerations (plantation workers would be much less accessible to

missionary endeavours than peasant communities) were intimately linked with the pre-capitalist utopia of a godfearing agrarian society. In the end, however, the unintended results of missionary activity prevailed: in the name of Western traditionalist concepts, indigenous traditions were ruthlessly swept away; in addition, missionary education, especially after the turn of the century, undermined the very stability it was intended to preserve. The grafting of an alien culture, however traditional it might appear in European terms, on to 'traditional' African societies upset the entire socio-cultural equilibrium and sparked off a process of change that was ultimately to cut the ground from beneath the colonial system to which the missions had largely tied their own fate.

Gründer rightly points out that the European intruders did not encounter a 'passive' Africa, let alone China. As he puts it in the language of fashionable theories of imperialism: 'The degree of political organisation and of cultural consistency in peripheral societies determined the political relationship and the kind of political dependence that developed between Europeans and the nations at the periphery' (p. 347). This concept is admirably put into practice in Gründer's discussion of the African, and especially the East African situation. It is applied somewhat less stringently to China. The author has a firm grasp of Germany's East Asian diplomacy, and his portrait of the appalling Bishop Anzer of the Catholic Steyl mission is one of the highlights of the book. But the reasons for the amazing Chinese resistance to the missionary onslaught remain obscure and the Chinese folk traditions which lay behind the 'xenophobia' of the Yihetuan, the 'Boxers' would have merited a more penetrating analysis. Also, the 'cultural invasion' of the West after 1900 cannot adequately be discussed without reference to the American and British missions whose influence in China by far surpassed that of the small band of German missionaries. This would obviously have exceeded Gründer's limited aims. It does not impair the stature of his book as the pioneering study of German missionary colonialism.

Of the fourteen essays assembled by Klaus J. Bade, five are concerned with topics that are also covered in Gründer's book. Invariably, they are less detailed, but some of them, especially Arthur J. Knoll's paper on Togo and Rainer Tetzlaff's brief article on German East Africa, bring out basic structures in sharp relief. Lothar Engel on South West Africa, Renate Nestvogel on Cameroon and Karl J. Rivinius on the Catholic mission in Jiaozhou provide somewhat more narrative accounts. The most interesting group of papers in the volume is that dealing with missions in the Pacific. Peter J. Hempenstall draws on case studies to illustrate the effects of missionary penetration on the indigenous society of New Guinea: the implantation of new sources of authority and patronage, the formation of new group ties and the emergence of syncretistic belief systems. John A. Moses examines the peculiar situation in Samoa where Protestant missionary work was carried out by the London Missionary Society, and the German Governor, Wilhelm Solf, had to grapple with a minor *Kulturkampf* between them and the French Marists. Stewart G. Firth contributes a brilliant paper on the Boston Mission in the Marshall Islands. There, the German colonial administration relied on the collaboration of the traditionally omnipotent chiefs, whereas the American Congregationalists established autonomous and self-governing church committees which functioned as vehicles for emancipation from traditional rule and proved successful in organising resistance to the government and its ally, the

monopolistic Jaluit Company. The second part of the volume is rounded off by Ernst Dammann's instructive chapter on German missions in the former colonies during the two World Wars.

The centrepiece of the first part is Klaus J. Bade's eloquent article on the versatile Friedrich Fabri, summarising his earlier work on that key figure of the Bismarckian colonial scene. Niels-Peter Moritzen uses the *Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift* as evidence for the colonial concepts of the Protestant mission. Robert Hoffmann begins his article with an interesting discussion of the social setting of the Catholic missionary revival in the early nineteenth century, but then strays into more superficial remarks on the period of imperialism proper.

To the general historian, the most instructive chapter will doubtlessly be the editorial introduction ('Imperialismus und Kolonialmission: das kaiserliche Deutschland und sein koloniales Imperium'). In thirteen pages, Klaus J. Bade gives a succinct overview of Germany's 'colonial imperialism', a textbook piece that leaves, of course, much unsaid, but hardly any relevant aspects untouched. He then goes on to sketch the most important issues related to 'the mission in the colonial situation'. Many of the issues mentioned are taken up by the other authors later on in the volume; others remain on the agenda for future research. Bade buries the conflict between 'Eurocentric' and 'periphery-orientated' interpretations of colonialism: on the one hand, the step beyond an exclusive focus on European expansion is irreversible, on the other, reaction at the periphery presupposes something that can be reacted against. This is certainly true. But it is not the whole story. The history of imperialism is not coterminous with colonial history; a comprehensive approach would also have to include non-colonial imperialism, the 'semi-colonial' penetration of the Asiatic empires and of the Latin American and Caribbean countries. On the 'metropolitan' side it would have to take note of the United States and Japan. And finally, it would have to assume a long-term perspective on the history of the non-Western world and on the evolution of the capitalist world-system. Start from Columbus, and wherever you look, you will find a missionary.

JÜRGEN OSTERHAMMEL

GHIL