

Niccolò Valmori, *Banking and Politics in the Age of Democratic Revolution* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2023, 315 pp., ISBN 9781802077636).

The age of revolution between 1770 and 1830 marks the transition from the early modern period to modernity: in more and more countries in North America and Europe, constitutions were enacted that demonstrated a transition to new ideas of political representation. At the same time, the economic system adapted to societal change, and with it the banking and financial system. Niccolò Valmori's book explores what this process of change looked like, using the example of the three financial centres of London, Paris and Amsterdam (the latter less often in the focus of analysis than the first two). The author concentrates on the period between the 1780s and the Congress of Vienna. The three financial centres are examined in their close interdependence. Valmori does so by applying the concept of 'embeddedness', which means that he sees bankers (both merchant and private) and stockbrokers as closely interwoven in transnational networks in the fields of trade, family and politics. He is particularly interested in the changing relationship between the worlds of finance, politics and public opinion. In order to trace this relationship, the author selects a number of individuals and institutions that were characterised by their common 'business culture'.

The eight chapters of the book focus on different decades within this period, but also different geographical and thematic areas. We learn about the typical banker operating between trade and financial business, as a figure socialised in different financial systems with their specific financial and political institutions; the politicisation of (public) finance in England in the 1790s, especially concerning the appropriate amount of public debt; and the Terror to which bankers were subjected during the French Jacobin regime, which was fed by the deeply rooted mistrust for the financial world felt by parts of society. The Napoleonic wars brought remarkable chances for profit, for example in equipping the armies, but also extended risks because the political situation was highly volatile and bankers could no longer rely on the legal system nor customary practices of financial business. Diversification was one strategy to deal with these risks, for example by exploring new markets such as the USA or the diamond trade, as British merchant banker Alexander Baring did with great success. Another field of Valmori's interest concerns the relationships between bankers and politicians, as chapter seven illuminates their mutual dependencies in different fields of action. While politicians were able to support the banking business with recommendations or information, they were also dependent on loans to adequately fulfill their representational

duties. In the last chapter, Napoleon's interconnection with the Banque de France is used as an example to focus on the fragile ties between state power on the one hand and the bank's striving for autonomy on the other. We also learn that Napoleon received well-informed daily reports about the state of the Paris stock exchange, despite or perhaps because of his deep-rooted aversion to financial actors. After his defeat, the negotiations about state loans between the European governments and the issuing houses (the more prestigious, the better) were an important battlefield at the Congress of Vienna upon which the strong interconnections between the worlds of politics and finance were also negotiated.

The author reconstructs the financial practices and discourses about the rules of the financial world using rich source material, both printed (newspapers, pamphlets, memoranda) and archival (correspondence and business documents, most from the Baring Archive and the Hoare's Archive in London), which is partly used for the first time. On the one hand, this abundant use of sources makes the study lively and interesting to read. On the other hand, there is the impression that it is the surviving archival documents that determine the structure of the book: the author moves from one rich collection to the next without establishing convincing connections between them. The common thread does not always become clear.

In the book's conclusion, the author suggests that there was a decisive change in the relationship between the financial world and politics in all three financial centres: while politicians increasingly recognised the need for financial experts to be autonomous and understood 'the need to listen to the voice of economic interest before taking political decisions' (280), bankers were increasingly willing to accept certain regulations in order to become 'a constructive but controlled force within society' (284). But the fact that the Banque de France was regulated by the government does not mean that this also applied to the many other banks, particularly in France and the Netherlands. Bankers observed political developments in prior periods, too; and politicians depended on investors for their political decisions already earlier, as Youssef Cassis demonstrated in 2007. Indeed, in his work on British banking, Ranald C. Michie shows important continuities with the period before 1780 alongside undisputed changes, while much of the contributions to the 2018 *Oxford Handbook of Banking and Financial History* locate the revolutionary change in the financial world in the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus, it remains questionable if the period under investigation was really the turning point suggested by Valmori. Maybe a more consistent and continuous application of the concept of embeddedness, which is applied rather superficially throughout the study without taking a closer look at the underlying sociological concepts, could have sharpened his thesis.

The book assumes very specific knowledge of, for example, the history of the early USA, the French Revolution, Napoleon's reign and the history

of Haiti at the beginning of the nineteenth century. For all researchers and students who bring this knowledge with them, the book is a stimulating read, whether they are interested in the history of the discussion about the appropriate level of national debt or in the interconnections of the French revolutionaries, the Directory or Napoleon to money. We also learn about the meaning of taxation issues for financial business, and about European investments in the young United States. Anyone interested in the beginnings of the professionalisation of the banking business or the risk management of financiers around 1800 should pick up this study, too.

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