

sectarian tensions and a new wave of anti-Shi'ite hostility outside the community. At a March 2014 forum at the American University of Beirut, Mona Harb noted how, with a wave of car bombs launched by Sunni extremist groups fighting the Hizbullah-backed regime in Syria, Dahiya increased security in public spaces, which shut down flows of both leisure visitors and long-time researchers.

———Waleed Hazbun, American University of Beirut

Nicholas Tackett, *The Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy*. Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series, no. 93. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014.

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Nicholas Tackett's sharp study of the Tang aristocracy is enough to make some who have studied the aristocracy of early medieval Europe salivate. He has used abundant and recently unearthed funerary inscriptions to map the spatial distribution of power among China's elite families. From this fecund evidence, he illuminates a bipolar aristocracy: On one side was an endogamous national elite from among the great families that was concentrated in the capital corridor, dominated the exam system, and monopolized the highest offices in the national and provincial bureaucracies. On the other was a socially separate provincial elite limited to lower provincial offices. The success of the former, small elite in dominating China from the center throughout the Tang era also became its downfall. When the capital corridor was wasted during Huang Cho's long, pitiless sack during the 880s, the national Tang elite was literally decapitated, thereby giving way to the empowerment of the provincial aristocracies of the succeeding Song period.

Tackett's conclusions offer a striking parallel to work done on the continuity of the European aristocracy. Long ago Gerd Tellenbach, father of the contemporary study of the medieval aristocracy, distinguished a Carolingian imperial aristocracy from the regional and local aristocracies. His most brilliant student, Karl Schmid, looking beyond the biological continuity of the aristocracy, proposed a change in "consciousness" between the ninth and twelfth centuries, when new realities transformed how the elite remembered themselves, often forgetting their most illustrious ancestors among the imperial aristocracy.

Laborious prosopographical methods are necessary to elucidate the European aristocracy because of the lack of autonomous, self-expressions of family in the early Middle Ages, the single-name patterns of the period, and arbitrary orthography. Tackett, by contrast, has material which specialists in other regions can only dream of. The Tang epitaphs impart long family narratives that claim ancestry from great clans and the imperial service of forbears going back to the Han dynasty, and detail recent genealogies stretching back

six generations. These inscriptions exist in such abundance that Tackett has been able to subject them to detailed statistical analysis.

Nothing of the sort exists for early medieval Europe in either type or abundance. Almost all records are ecclesiastical, and even the few extant lay texts were preserved by monasteries. The closest parallel to Tackett's material I can think of would be Venantius Fortunatus's sycophantic poems, many of them epitaphs, which celebrate the ancestry of Merovingian-era aristocrats from ancient Roman noble houses. His claims, though, lack supporting genealogies and are not so discursive. Even archeologically attested epitaphs offer no solution, imbued as most are with hopes for the next world.

Tang inscriptions can be understood as a bracing contrast, able to throw the European aristocracy into brighter relief. Tackett himself notes some of the differences, such as the importance of landholding in Europe, though one can add to that the local quality of power in the West, even for imperial aristocrats. Yet Europe's lack of self-expressions of family consciousness and genealogy is not just an ecclesiastical contamination of the sources; European aristocratic memories were bound to an Augustinian conception of divine order intentionally oblivious of detailed pedigrees.

Conversely, Tackett's work might benefit from heeding the work of Europeanists on consciousness and memory. Tackett seems to believe that the claims made in epitaphs were basically true, even if some might be fictive. Reading between the lines of his study, however, the expressions of radical continuity of imperial service in epitaphs, extending to the preceding dynasties, seem to express a selective memory useful to the Tang present.

———Hans Hummer, Wayne State University

Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

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Like the people of Kahnawake, Audra Simpson's *Mohawk Interruptus* defies all constraints of simplification. Kahnawake, a Mohawk community just outside of Montreal, represents what Simpson calls a "nested sovereignty" (11), geographically, historically, and legally embedded in Canada yet nevertheless distinct. First and foremost, Kahnawake:ronon (people of Kahnawake) are sovereign. The primary avenue through which this sovereignty emerges is, according to Simpson, "refusal," which manifests itself in shared historical memory, political demonstrations, and everyday practices (or non-practices) of the people. Refusal stands as a useful counterpoint to "recognition," a core facet of Canadian multiculturalism (Taylor et al. 1994; see Povinelli 2002 on the Australian case). With its focus on indigenous agency and everyday practices, refusal may be a more productive conceptual tool than is