

Winfried Böttcher (Hg.), Die »Neuordner« Europas beim Wiener Kongress 1814/1815, Baden-Baden (Nomos) 2017, 252 S., ISBN 978-3-8487-2291-4, EUR 49,00.

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Winfried Boettcher has produced a rather useful volume of biographical essays on the participants in the Congress of Vienna of 1814–1815. The list of those included seems fairly comprehensive and twenty-eight diplomats and rulers representing England, Austria, Prussia, Russia, France, Spain, Portugal and Sweden are included. The Congress itself is set in historical perspective with its historical background clearly explained as well as an attempt to delineate its future historical significance. The historiography has gaps but is still extensive and includes works in a variety of languages. Overall the book should be of interest and use to both students and scholars.

There is no space in this brief review to give a critique of all the historical figures involved. Most essays are well written and include accounts of the historical careers of those involved both before and after the Congress. This makes their activities at the Congress itself all the easier to comprehend and evaluate. The career of Wellington is an example of a particularly well balanced portrait. However, the essay on Metternich contains a couple of errors. He and his family are said to have fled to Vienna to find a new home there in the summer of 1814 (!) and in 1809 he is said to have encouraged war with France. I don't know whether the author reads English, but he should have read my »[Metternich and Austria. An Evaluation](#)« ([Basingstoke, 2008](#)), for a more accurate account of Metternich's position.

One of the longest but least successful essays in the book is the chapter on Talleyrand, who is pictured not merely as a man of resolute liberal principles, a champion of justice in international affairs but perhaps the greatest diplomat of all times. This is simply nonsense. In the words of the American ambassador to revolutionary France, Gouverneur Morris, the man was »polished, cold, tricky, ambitious and bad«. For a start, he was notoriously corrupt. The future French foreign minister, Louis Bastide, in his 1838 biography of him listed the 15 million francs worth of bribes he took in the three years 1797–1799. Meanwhile, in 1794, he had been expelled from England, not on account of French émigré opposition to his liberal principles, but on account of his secretly encouraging a French invasion of his host country while pretending to be simply a private citizen. The man could never be trusted and rightly nobody ever did so. He betrayed Napoleon's order of battle to the Austrians in 1809 for a huge sum of money and offered Napoleon's secrets to Alexander I of Russia, with whom he conspired against his sovereign at Erfurt in 1808.

Little wonder Napoleon denounced him as »shit in a silk stocking«. He had already betrayed his Church, the British and now



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the French. Nor was this because he believed in self-determination for all peoples as the author of the chapter under discussion seems to believe. He was determined that France should have her natural frontiers, particularly the Rhineland and that she should dominate Germany and Italy. Austria, he thought, should be tied to the Danubian Principalities and Russia to Asia. France should also control the Mediterranean. However, he had little success as foreign minister, resigning from that ministry under both the Directory and Napoleon since no one listened to him. He had no success under Louis XVIII either. No one at Vienna believed his nonsense about legitimacy. The powers after all had for years all recognised the upstart Napoleon and his family as rulers of most of Europe. Besides they all knew of his treason to France and could have destroyed him at any time. In fact the British complained that he was a nuisance at the Congress and solved Italian problems behind his back in direct negotiations with Louis XVIII in Paris. Friedrich von Gentz wrote of the »absolute nullity of the French representatives« at the Congress and Henry Kissinger later dismissed Talleyrand's supposed key role there as a myth. He again resigned as foreign minister when the allies ignored his protests about the Second Treaty of Paris. All in all, this chapter of the book is sheer nonsense.

This does not mean that the book is worthless. Most chapters are worth reading and many provide biographical information that is difficult to come across without wide reading – and between the covers of one volume.



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