

Leisure and Elite Formation

Elites and Modernity

Elitenwandel in der Moderne

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Leisure and Elite Formation

Arenas of Encounter in Continental Europe, 1815–1914

Edited by
Martin Kohlrausch, Peter Heyrman, Jan De Maeyer

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Contents

Martin Kohlrausch, Peter Heyrman, Jan De Maeyer

Elites and leisure: arenas of encounter in Europe, 1815–1914

An introduction — 1

Jan-Hinnerk Antons

Changing elites – persistent arenas

The seaside resort of Heiligendamm and its international dimension — 19

Botakoz Kassymbekova

How did the Russian elite discuss southern resort leisure during the fin de siècle

Nice or Crimea? — 37

Tomasz Pudłocki

Leisure time or another field of the intelligentsia mission?

Austrian Galician university professors and high school teachers on holiday at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries — 57

Christa Spreizer

Women's arenas of encounter

The London and Berlin Lyceum Clubs — 79

Gabriele B. Clemens

Art market and art enjoyment

Elitist designs and pretentious passions for collecting — 99

Matthieu Brejon de Lavergnée

Creating male elites in a Catholic context

Leisure and practices of charity in 19th-century Paris — 119

Heinz Reif

The cosmopolitan city as the city of horsemen

The Union Klub Berlin from 1867 to 1914: a pioneer of elite change? — 143

Tito Forcellese

Italian aristocrats and their involvement in sports institutions, 1894–1914 — 165

Cosmin-Ștefan Dogaru

The Romanian Jockey Club and Conservative Club

Places of leisure and sociability for the Romanian elites (1875–1914) — 179

Index of persons — 191

List of Authors — 197

Martin Kohlrausch, Peter Heyrman, Jan De Maeyer

Elites and leisure: arenas of encounter in Europe, 1815 – 1914

An introduction

The term elites has acquired a new, albeit notorious, prominence in recent years. The political upheavals in the United States and Great Britain, as well as the rise of populist movements in most continental European countries, have been explained as well as motivated by anti-elitism. The fact that the meaning of the term “elites” remains rather vague in the discourse of its opponents has probably contributed to its currency as a token of a new social question. While criticism of elites, though mostly less radical, is certainly not new, the notion of elites as something dynamic is in essence a phenomenon of modern history. With the demise of the ancien régime raising the question of who held the commanding heights of the administration, the military and political institutions became just as important as cultural struggles over the dominant values of quickly transforming societies. The question of who belonged to the new elite turned into a crucial theme throughout Europe after the Napoleonic shake-up of the continent. Unsurprisingly then, the question of whether the 19th century was characterized by a demise of the old aristocracies and the rise of new bourgeois elites, or if instead the old noble elites were in principle able to defend their positions until the First World War has attained considerable prominence in historiography. While the main narrative of social and political history assumed a constant, only occasionally impeded growth in relevance of the “modern” groups of an economically successful bourgeoisie and the profiteers of technological modernization, Arno Mayer, in his classic study, stressed the “persistence of the Old Regime”.¹ Mayer’s revisionist thesis has been nuanced, most notably by Dominic Lieven’s work on the aristocracy in Europe in the 19th century and David Cannadine’s study on “The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy”.²

This volume will not, in the narrower sense, address the question of whether the 19th century was marked by a successful defense by the aristocracy of its position or rather by the decline of this very group – the more so as the answer to a large degree is a matter of perspective. The more interesting – and relevant – question seems to us how and to what extent a new, composite elite emerged.³ This means that we need to ask to what extent the old elites were willing and able to integrate newcomers, and to what extent new groups managed to ascend into the top echelons in substantial

¹ Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War*.

² Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe*; Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy and Id., Aspects of Aristocracy*.

³ Reif, *Adel, Aristokratie, Elite*; Holste, Hüchtker and Müller, *Aufsteigen und Obenbleiben in europäischen Gesellschaften*; Kurgan, *Permanence et recomposition*.

numbers and without giving up their own values. Of course, this is not a new research question. In particular for the case of Germany the question of whether the bourgeoisie was feudalized or managed to push its interests through has been of central importance in historiography, partially as a projection of 20th-century experiences.⁴ The somewhat fabricated British model of a composite elite as a precondition for the success story of British liberalism and parliamentary rule was contrasted with the alleged failure of the German bourgeoisie to challenge the established noble elites which consequently paved the way to Germany's ascendancy in the 20th century.⁵

This volume intends to move beyond an assumption of old and new elites understood along the lines of a zero-sum game, in which the main question is about winners and losers and in which the 20th century forms the main criterion. We understand elites as a dynamic entity, which was characterized by the adaption of established groups, in particular the nobility, and the rise to new status by new functional and economic elites in the 19th century. Accordingly, the 19th century saw both phases of a narrower definition of elites as well as a more open use of the term or related terms.⁶ Therefore the volume proposes to understand the interchange of elites in more complex ways, paying attention to the blurred zones which cannot easily be qualified as belonging to either tradition or future. Moreover, we would like to stress the relevance of new or altered forms of sociability which, because of their novelty, to a certain degree form gaps in historiography.

When studying discourses on elites it is striking how dynamically the term elite came to be reinterpreted and how the term turned into an essentially open concept during the 100 years before the First World War. This also implies that we cannot rely on a clear-cut definition of elites, as this group was subject to substantial changes in our time frame. The groups we cover here include the nobility and in particular the high aristocracy as well as the up-and-coming economic, financial and technical elites, whose status rested on fortune and income and partially on knowledge and diplomas.⁷

Elites and leisure

This book proposes to look at a mostly neglected dimension of elite interchange in the long 19th century, namely the arenas of encounter in the world of leisure. The

⁴ Blackbourn and Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History*.

⁵ Malinowski, *Their Favorite Enemy*.

⁶ In this we follow the point of departure of the long-term research network, Encounters of European Elites in the 19th century, in the framework of which also the conference on which this collection of essays is based took place. See <http://www.eece.eu/project.htm>. See also: Ciampani and Tolomeo, The need for an interpretive framework in the history of European Élités.

⁷ Kohlrausch and Trischler, *Building Europe on Expertise*, 55–65.

transformation of elites in the 19th century and the concept and phenomenon of leisure have hardly ever been systemically collated.⁸ This is astonishing for a number of reasons. First, the notion of leisure was closely associated with the aristocracy, the leisured classes. This was true both in a positive sense of self-perception, of being above the prosaic needs of professional life and being able to devote time and money to “gentlemanly” activities. But the association of old elites and leisure was also a key concern in the criticism that the rising groups, the bourgeoisie, formulated to contest the establishment. In a time formed and given shape by new financial and technical elites, who defined themselves through their hard work and education, the notion of leisure became almost necessarily suspicious.

This tension has been classically addressed, in a scholarly way but also from the viewpoint of an engaged contemporary, by Thorsten Veblen.⁹ Veblen regarded the nobility’s (“the leisure class” in his words) potential to devote their lives to unproductive activity and their capacity for conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure as the very essence of nobility. He criticized modern societies – such as the US – for still being dominated by representatives of a value system he regarded as both outdated and harmful. And Veblen accurately foresaw – and embraced – a rise of specialized scientists, technicians and the like.

Our understanding of leisure, however, is broader and not normatively charged. We see leisure not as a new phenomenon, coming up only in the 19th century, but as a phenomenon which gained much more social and cultural relevance in the 19th century. For our context, leisure understood in this way is also relevant as it was in many respects not yet well defined and highly dynamic. New forms of leisure still had to gain shape and could thus be formed flexibly. Hunting, for example, as a traditionally (and judicially somewhat exclusively) noble activity became more inclusive by the end of the 19th century, but in a conflict-riddled way.¹⁰ Moreover, the scope of what could be regarded as leisure activities is extremely broad and has blurred boundaries. We should also not forget that these leisure activities – not least because they often corresponded with a more and more capitalist production structure – reproduced class and gender differences.

In this volume, and for the sake of better grasping the transformation of elites, we look at a small section of a much broader picture, though we will employ a broad notion of leisure, including such practices as sports, recreation, the occupation with the arts and certain religious and charitable practices. We also focus on locally defined social activities. Of course, the new exclusive horse races emerging in the

⁸ The otherwise very instructive essay collection Conze and Wienfort, *Adel und Moderne*, does not contain a relevant entry.

⁹ Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*.

¹⁰ Stressing the still largely aristocratic character of hunting: Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, 363–369. Charlotte Tacke, however, argues for Italy and Germany that hunting, by the late 19th century, could well be considered an arena of encounter of aristocratic and bourgeois groups: Tacke, “*Nobilitierung*” von Rehbock und Fasan. *Jagd*.

19th century were hardly democratic events by 21st-century standards, and the same is true for the rise of spa resorts or the occupation with the arts as a leisure activity. Yet these activities did not clearly belong to a specific estate in the way that, for example, specific professional sectors and careers such as the upper echelons of the military were associated with the nobility in many countries.

In essence, the leisure activities treated in this volume only emerged in the period under scrutiny, the 100 years between the Congress of Vienna and the outbreak of the First World War. This is, at least, true for continental Europe, which will form the geographic framework of our volume. The United Kingdom was in many respects a forerunner in the development of sports as well as the example set by the lifestyle of its elites.¹¹ The Ascot horse races, in many respects providing a model for the examples we treat here, were established in the 18th century, but gained their modern form in the 19th century. The Cowes sailing race, another important model, was founded in 1826. The fact that Great Britain experienced neither a revolutionary rupture with extreme consequences as in France nor the deep impact of Napoleon's policies on the clerical and noble elites in large parts of continental Europe helped to turn the British examples into a model of successful transition. This, however, also reflects the fact that the challenges of restoration, repositioning and adaption were far more expressed for the old elites in continental Europe.¹² For this reason as well, the contributions to this volume will predominantly deal with continental Europe. Moreover, in order to capture the dynamics in question while at the same time making sure not to lose track of their background and impact, we will confine ourselves to specific places which we refer to as arenas of encounter.

The concept of arenas – shaping spaces of encounter

This book investigates a specific category of places, “arenas” where old and new elites could get together, where these groups not only met and interacted but also forged the rules and conventions for new elites. As new or transformed places of encounter, these arenas allowed for contacts of elites in less formal ways than, for example, the court, the church hierarchies or the military. In order to fulfill this function, they needed to embody a transnational character, have a certain perdurability and, at least partially, function as ideological meeting points. In these places not only could elite groups merge, but they could do so in settings less formal than in established fora, and around topics and themes which could, in the broadest sense, acquire social meaning.

¹¹ Cunningham, *Time, Work and Leisure*. For British sport as a model: Eisenberg, “*English sports*” und *deutsche Bürger*.

¹² Broers, *Europe after Napoleon*.

The places which we believe meet these criteria belong in the wider sense to the world of leisure. We assume that these arenas are not only a symptom of how elites socialized but also that they turned into an important agent of elite formation themselves. These arenas, we argue, gave momentum to the fusion of old and new elites. What characterizes them was their leisure character, which was attractive to both the old elites and their traditional pastimes and values and those of the new elites. Horse racing, to give one example, connected well to noble cavalry and hunting traditions and the nobility's – alleged – intense bond with nature. Moreover, equestrian sports, as well as for example sailing, were not purposeful in the professional sense and thus lent themselves well to ideals of the old nobility which new groups tried to emulate. It was only at first glance paradoxical that the new professional elites could also identify with these races, since in particular their competitive character, the deep professionalization that sport underwent in the 19th century and the status-displaying character of the races suited the new elites well. The clear framework set in such arenas, with controlled competition, a mixture of acceleration and deceleration, of professionalism and sociability, of modernity and tradition spoke to the needs of established and newcomer groups. While the establishment could demonstrate its willingness and ability to keep up with modern developments, the newcomers could acknowledge publicly that they had “arrived”.

The fusion of high aristocracy and sport is particularly noteworthy. Sport and the command of the latest technologies established a new sort of competition which was at odds with older standards and hierarchies of descent. Briefly before the Great War in Germany the Baroness Spitzemberg noted how strange a thing the passion of aristocratic boys was for technology, for cars and airplanes.¹³ This was the *zeitgeist*, she admitted, but not in line with older noble traditions, not noble by nature and too cosmopolitan. Spitzemberg's irritated remarks point, however, to a rather manifest phenomenon. There are myriad high aristocrats and royals who lent their names as honorary members or patrons to the numerous prizes and associations mushrooming in the 19th and early 20th century, such as the *Kaiserlicher Automobil-Club* in Germany or the Royal Automobile Club in Britain, to organize car races and many other kinds of sportive events. To name just one example, the Prince Heinrich Tour, named after the brother of Kaiser Wilhelm II, stopped in 1911 in Nordkirchen, the impressive new castle built by the Arenberg family, whose head was himself an avid supporter of aviation and the automobile.¹⁴ A similar phenomenon was the *Kaiserpreis* auto race held in 1907 and the *Herkomer Konkurrenz*, another racing event organized from 1905 onwards, which was attended, for example, by Prince Heinrich of Prussia, Duke Ludwig of Bavaria, the Princess of Isenburg, the Duke of

¹³ Vierhaus, *Das Tagebuch der Baronin Spitzemberg*, entry of 19 Dec. 2019, 565.

¹⁴ On Arenberg's engagement, which also included being vice-president of the imperial aero-club: Goujon, *Le gotha à l'heure des nations*, 802, 818–825.

Arenberg, Prince Josef of Battenberg, the Duke of Bojano and Lord Montague of Beaulieu.

Miriam Schneider has demonstrated this pattern of merging old prestige and new ambitions convincingly for what she calls “sailor princes”, second-in-line princes in various European countries who more or less became professional sailors in the last decades of the 19th century. The concept of the sailor prince suited the dynasties which had to prove that they were in line with the demands of a new time such as professionalism, technology and sportive leisure and the tastes of a bourgeois public. The old elites could thus acknowledge their willingness to modernize, while the new elites happily embraced the idea and sought closeness to the sailor princes.¹⁵

The arenas we look at generally circled around events which the old elites had helped to define and for which they partly set the rules. At the same time the dynasties rendered their prestige in a symbolic way to the rise of particular new elites. Many of the arenas profited directly or indirectly from royal involvement, for example, the Cowes regatta mentioned earlier. Similarly to the way in which the British royals engaged themselves on the Isle of Wight, Wilhelm II in Germany lifted the Kiel week (founded in 1882) to a new level when he started to regularly attend the event immediately after ascending to the throne.

The fact that these arenas were international in character made a royal presence even more attractive – for both sides. And royal presence further internationalized the respective events in that they attracted new visitors from abroad, but also in that the dynasties were international by background. The dynastic networks, as those of the high aristocracy, were European in character. These families could use the emerging arenas to renegotiate their place vis-à-vis the nation. This also held true for the royal families. In the case of Wilhelm II, what could be called substitute courts included the so-called Nordlandfahrten, travels on the imperial yacht which brought artists and others close to the emperor who would not have had this chance in the classic court setting, with all its regulations.¹⁶ On occasion of the Kiel week, another of these alternative or substitute courts when Wilhelm II took part in the regattas, the emperor praised himself in 1903 for having thrown industrialists and aristocrats “like shot-gun pellets into a drum” as he wanted to achieve “genuine relations” between the two groups.¹⁷

These new kinds of places are also significant in that they show how important the dynasties remained as the most potent actor to acknowledge the relevance and credibility of new forms of leisure – in this case sailing regattas – and to acknowledge the relevance of the groups participating in these activities. The dynasty remained the best-placed actor to bring together old and new elites. The Biennale in

¹⁵ Schneider, *The ‘Sailor Prince’ in the Age of Empire*.

¹⁶ Marschall, *Reisen und Regieren*.

¹⁷ Röhl, *The Kaiser’s court*, 105.

Venice, the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth and many other events had been founded with and under royal patronage or in response to a dynastic logic: the silver anniversary of Umberto I in 1893 in the case of the Biennale, Bayreuth in 1876, in the context of an – albeit strained – relationship between the Bavarian king Ludwig II and Richard Wagner.¹⁸ The monarchy as the personified center of society and nation had to transform in order to incorporate the dynamics of social change and to offer a vision for the future.¹⁹ The role the British royal house played in Cowes, or Leopold II in the horse races in Ostend, both highlights that pressure to adapt was on the dynasty and demonstrates the chances the dynasties could grasp.

The power position of smaller and larger princely families changed from having a socio-political basis towards a more culturally defined one. The smaller dynasties so characteristic of Imperial Germany had to innovate, if they wanted to preserve their relevance, and connecting to the world of leisure was an almost ideal means to do so.²⁰ In Darmstadt, the capital of Southern Hesse, the established social order was reflected and questioned through the means of art in the artists' colony under the sponsorship of Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig. Often departing from the mercurial term aristocracy, the arts were not only a means and form of discussing a new elite. Art ennobled a new elite, which was to lead the way to overcome a society which within a few years would destroy itself in the First World War.²¹ These dynamics go beyond the mere replacement of old elites by new ones, or the question of which societies succeeded in producing a composite elite, often associated with the success model of Great Britain.

While it appears almost logical that the described arenas emerged against this background, it was only the 19th century which provided the preconditions for them to spread and flourish. The arenas could only emerge thanks to the infrastructural revolution of the 19th century, in particular the new opportunities offered by a quickly expanding railway system.²² Only against this background could the Central European spas or the French Riviera turn into truly European places, attracting elites from Scotland to the Urals.²³ This infrastructural revolution included the emergence of the modern hotel and particularly the specific form of the grand hotel, which merged exclusiveness with the latest achievements in indoor plumbing. As semi-public spaces, as Habbo Knoch has shown, grand hotels also became an important place to mark one's belonging to the new urban elites.²⁴ These hotels, as the arenas of en-

¹⁸ Spotts, *Bayreuth*.

¹⁹ Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe*, 137–146. For Germany: Kohlrausch, *Die Monarchie und der neue Adel*.

²⁰ See Anderson, 'Mein Hessenland blühe und in ihm die Kunst'.

²¹ Gerstner, *Neuer Adel*; Conze et al., *Aristokratismus und Moderne*.

²² Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe*, 151–152.

²³ See on the link between new infrastructures and the new mobility of the British aristocracy: Canadine, *Aristocracy*, 370–372.

²⁴ Knoch, *Grandhotels*.

counter in general, also relied on modern mass media, which turned them into places reaching out far beyond those who actually participated in their social scenes. Visibility became a resource and a means to assign status to the arenas and those who entered them. And the media played an active role in the process. The first transatlantic yacht race of 1866, for example, was organized by Gordon Bennett, owner of the *New York Herald*, whose victory was not only rewarded with a dinner invitation from Queen Victoria, but also with climbing sales of his newspaper.²⁵ Other events like the Kiel week and the car races that began around 1900 were always big media events as well, with immense attention lavished on the elites who attended them. These events attracted elites through the media, and the media played a role in defining who belonged to the new elite.²⁶ The media also turned the respective arenas into an expression of shifting geographies on national level. The rapidly growing urban conglomerations of Europe brought about new symbolically connoted spaces, in particular in the capitals. Belgravia in London, “Berlin-W”, and Paris’s 6th and 7th arrondissements came to signify not only geographic locations but certain lifestyles and evoked pictures of ascending and descending elites and new configurations of those who belonged to the inner circle.²⁷

Modern infrastructures also formed preconditions for the numerous new cultural events, festivals in particular, which assembled European elites in Glastonbury, Salzburg and Bayreuth, the latter certainly with a decisively anti-modern agenda. The Proms in London spring to mind as does the Bloomsbury group or the previously mentioned Darmstadt artists’ colony. All these groups and festivals consciously and unconsciously employed art as a currency to define how modern the new elite should look.²⁸

The example of the Bayreuth festival also poses the question of which role such festivals played for defining national cultures, in particular in the late nation-states Germany and Italy, deeply impacted by tensions between liberals and Catholics as well as between different regions, and those between a dynamic bourgeoisie and traditional aristocracies.²⁹ Belgium, as the first of the new states of the 19th century, had set an example in this respect. The dynasty had to shape its own national elite in a region which had an exclusive nobility and bourgeois elites highly aware of their status, as well as a quickly rising corps of professionally qualified technicians. The new state of Belgium developed numerous arenas which often had an allure far beyond

25 Jefferson, *Gordon Bennett and the First Yacht Race Across the Atlantic*.

26 *Die Erfindung der Pressefotografie*, 78–80.

27 Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe*, 148; Reif, *Das Tiergartenviertel*.

28 On the role of museums: Montens, *Le Palais des Beaux-Arts*; Nys, *De intriede van het publiek*; Van Kalck, *Les Musées royaux*.

29 For Germany: Augustine, *Patricians and Parvenus*; Reif, *Adel und Bürgertum in Deutschland*. For Italy: Aliberti and Rossi, *Formazione e ruolo delle élites*; Banti, *Storia della borghesia italiana*; Cardoza, *Aristocrats in Bourgeois Italy*; Jocteau, *Nobili e nobiltà nell’Italia unita*.

its borders, like the horse races in the Hippodromes of Groenendael and Wellington in Ostend.³⁰

The focus of the prevailing literature on the United Kingdom, logically often taken when analyzing the emergence of sailing, horse races, automobilism and leisure as a broader phenomenon, diverts attention from the tensions in the new nation states with their competition for shaping the new national space culturally, which could be seen in Italy and Germany as well as the “Russifying” Romanov Empire.

International and European arenas?

How international and European were these new arenas of encounter? Britain took the lead and set the tone not only because of the success story of “English sports” but also because in many respects, its elite formation seemed exemplary and highly attractive to continental Europeans, in that it merged the aura of the established families with the advantages – from new technologies to fortunes accumulated in business – of the new times. Britain also seemed to succeed in forming a new elite and integrating new groups while not estranging the old ones.³¹

While Britain in many ways pioneered and defined the new arenas coming up in the 19th century, they quickly turned into a pan-European phenomenon, with being European themselves becoming one of their hallmarks.³² Regattas assembled yachts – another one of the new technical features of the 19th century – from different countries, and car races became the more attractive the more borders they crossed.³³

The arenas of encounter attracted a European, international elite, and in most cases, they even made a point of their very internationalism – whether factual, pretended or both. In so doing the arenas were also part of the “mechanics of internationalism” described by Martin Geyer and Johannes Paulmann.³⁴ The very rationale of places like Ostend, Biarritz, San Remo or Heiligendamm was their allure beyond national confines.³⁵ Spas and seaside resorts catered to new groups and provided both old and new groups with new opportunities to fill their leisure time.³⁶

This does in no way imply that the national framework of these places was irrelevant though nationalist critics of the new forms of sociability practiced in these places condemned exactly this. The Biennale in Venice played an important role for the elites of the new Italian state, but could do so only because of its well-es-

30 Lombaerde, *Leopold II*; Ranieri, *Léopold II urbaniste*; Meuwissen, *Richesse oblige*

31 Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe*, 152–155.

32 Easton, *The Red Count*; Reif, Harry Graf Kesslers Berliner Welten.

33 On the rise of the yacht as status symbol and enabler of a new mobility and yacht races: Cannadine, *Aristocracy*, 373–374.

34 Geyer and Paulmann, *The Mechanics of Internationalism*.

35 Walton, *The English Seaside Resort*.

36 Large, *The Grand Spas of Central Europe*.

lished international status. In the Kiel sailing event the Wilhelmine Empire strove to acknowledge its newly acquired qualities as a seafaring nation against international competition – and only against this background could the event function as a national(ist) projection screen.

To be sure, we should not forget that pre-First-World-War Europe was in many ways a less nationalized space than 20th-century Europe. Within the borders of the still-dominant empires elites could move freely. Crossing borders was also much more simple, at least for members of the elites, than it became in the aftermath of the First World War. Dina Gusneynova's study on "European Elites and Ideas of Empire" in the five decades after 1917 provides ample evidence of how members of the elites formed before 1917 now hovered like free radicals through a newly created space, trying to use the techniques of encounter they had acquired before 1917 in new settings.³⁷

We thus need to be alert to the geography of the arenas of encounter, which reflected more than just a selection of Europe's most attractive places. Before 1900, these places echoed a European space still mostly defined in imperial terms. The arenas of encounter also starred the imperial elites. This imperial geography was informed by strong asymmetries, with large parts of the continent, particularly its Eastern part, less prominently represented. And of course not all elite groups within the empires – for example, the Polish nobility in the Russian and German empires – had equal access to the arenas or even wanted to enter them. On the other hand, the imperial geography opened up opportunities for the smaller states, Belgium and Switzerland in particular, as Madeleine Herren has demonstrated, to acquire a central place on the mental map of relevant places of encounter.³⁸ The amenities of places like Brussels or Zurich could be combined with financial and business opportunities and the attractiveness of a neutral position in the intensifying struggle of the big imperial powers.

An event like the James Gordon Bennett car race, sponsored by American billionaire Gordon Bennett mentioned above, and rotating yearly between different European places, shows the geographic dynamics of these new arenas of encounter. In 1904 the Bennett cup started at the newly restored Saalburg, a former castle of the Roman Limes and as much a prominent site of Wilhelmine imperial aspirations as it was of Wilhelm II's favorite pastime, archeology, thus connecting the new world of technology and races to the old benchmark of Roman achievements. Not by chance, the cars also crossed the spa town of Bad Homburg, the region where Queen Victoria's daughter "Vicky" had spent her last years and a favorite arena of encounter for British, German and other European elites.

³⁷ Guseynova, *European Elites and Ideas of Empire*; Buchen and Rolf, *Elites and their Imperial Biographies*, 32–35.

³⁸ Herren, *Hintertüren zur Macht*.

First steps towards a history of European arenas of encounter

This volume does not aspire to provide an all-encompassing picture of the tendencies listed above. Given the temporal and geographic scope but also the often still premature research on the phenomena we are discussing, we have to confine ourselves to “test drillings” in order to explore the potential of the concept arenas of encounter.

Our volume begins with three articles analyzing the highly dynamic phenomenon of spa tourism in the 19th century and its implications for merging old and new elites. Seaside resorts and the respective grand hotels will be the focus of the first two articles. Jan-Hinnerk Antons analyses the mundane seaside resort of Heiligendamm on the German Baltic coast as an expression of the specific tensions of German elites in the 19th century, but also as a hotspot for the elites of northern, Baltic Europe. Botakoz Kassymbekova looks at the examples of Nice and the Crimea – only at first glance unconnected – both of which served as poles for the elites of the Tsarist empire and their attempts to gather outside the boundaries of the strict St Petersburg court protocol. In doing so Kassymbekova also treats the question of how growing nationalism and empires could go together and to what extent nationalism could be contained in imperial, European and international structures of gathering elites. Tomasz Pudlocki, finally, addresses an example so far hardly known or studied, tourism of the Polish subnoble intelligentsia during a period in which their fatherland was divided between the great landed empires of Central and Eastern Europe. By combining summer holidays with scholarships or school trips, their leisure time was more or less consciously connected to a pluriform patriotic mission, involving both popular education and the promotion of rural tourism. They gladly shared their experiences within these arenas in lectures and articles, thus creating an intellectual middle-class network devoted to the national cause.

The second group of articles focuses on associations, only at first glance diverse, of elites in women’s clubs, the Paris art market and the transforming function of religion. Christa Spreizer discusses the examples of the London and Berlin Lyceum Clubs, branches of the International Association of Lyceum Clubs. These clubs organized privilege and leisure in a way which posed at least two problems: the question of how much access women would have to the newly forming elites and to what extent this was predominantly a national or international question. The aspect of gender brings to the fore more far-reaching questions as to the inclusiveness and openness of elites and also highlights the different path-dependencies of the transformation of elites along national lines. Gabriele Clemens shows how Paris, among the many other functions it fulfilled for the French and European elites, also turned into a hub of the transforming art market. This market, of course, followed an economic rationale but also served as an important leisure activity for old and new elites and their positioning vis-à-vis history and modernity. As in

other examples which we discuss, national and international agendas interacted in complex ways in this market. Matthieu Brejon de Lavergnée offers a new perspective on the matter at hand, by demonstrating how the Parisian networks of charitable works, in particular the parochial chapters or conferences of the Society of Saint-Vincent de Paul, acted as arenas where old (idle) and new (active) elites intermingled, offering the latter a lever towards social promotion. This case study not only demonstrates how the Catholic Church made great efforts to moralize leisure activities in the 19th-century “age of religious revival”, but also highlights the interesting processes of cross-fertilization between old and new elites on the practices, maybe even the nature of charity. Traditionally seen by the nobility as a respected but leisure-like activity, charity gradually became a planned, repeated, seriously conducted, one might even say semi-professional commitment connected to religious militancy which contributed to the expectations towards elites.

The third group of articles turns to the phenomenon whose relevance has been mentioned in several instances above. Heinz Reif studies the horse racing course of Hoppegarten near Berlin, an example of the manifold new race courses emerging all over Europe. As in other cases Hoppegarten did not only, and perhaps not even in the first place, serve to establish the sportive qualities of horses and jockeys but rather as a potent pretext for establishing and reflecting new hierarchies of the German Empire. The Second Reich was only founded in 1871 and its young capital Berlin consequently became a place in which old and new elites had to go to greater lengths to negotiate their place in society than in the well-established capitals London and Paris. Like other similar places, Hoppegarten also radiated beyond the confines of the German empire. Tito Forcellese looks at the way in which sport institutions and the connected political and other networks in Italy functioned as arenas of encounter, in particular for the aristocracy. He highlights the often-subtle differences between the disciplines (gymnastics, alpinism, cycling, yachting, etc.) and demonstrates the complexity of the interactions by looking at the establishment of the Italian National Olympic Committee. The contribution of Cosmin-Ștefan Dogaru offers an interesting, exploratory analysis of Romanian club life in the last quarter of the 19th century, until the outbreak of the First World War. Dogaru demonstrates how the gradual modernization of the country and the rise of new economic and intellectual elites went hand in hand with the emergence of a new elitist life-style, inspired by the British model and clearly supported by the young monarchy.³⁹ The two main Romanian gentlemen’s associations Dogaru studies, the Jockey Club and the Conservative Club, differed in nature, membership and style of activities. However, they can both be labeled modern spaces of masculine sociability and leisure.

³⁹ For the British model of horsemanship and the Jockey club as “the social center of gravity of the nobility” see Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe*, 157.

Conclusion

We believe that the aforementioned examples – out of many potential others – very clearly demonstrate the dynamics of European elites through the world of leisure. We need to be careful, however, to imagine and describe these encounters of elites not solely in terms of inspired gatherings of open minds, free of tensions, and free of those tendencies that ushered in the First World War and the catastrophic developments to follow. These arenas of encounter were far less neutral places than they at first appear to be. They turned into dynamic sites for acquiring influence and could be used for representative – in the widest sense – purposes. These tendencies could be generally linked with all political ideologies.

We have stressed above that the arenas of encounter from the world of leisure provided elites with a greater degree of freedom to socialize and get together. It is obvious, but still important to stress, that this freedom was confined to a very small group of those who commanded the right family background, education and economic means. The lyceum clubs, for example, allowed women more freedom than they would enjoy in many other social fields, but this was only so for the upper classes and only within the established hierarchies. Though the discourse of many of the arenas was one of inclusiveness, they often perpetuated or even strengthened ideological prejudices and exclusions. Anti-Semitism, just to mention one example, was present at the racecourses as much as in the exclusive spa towns.⁴⁰

What is more, the new exclusiveness displayed at these arenas of encounter also provoked opposition or even outright hatred directed both at the arenas and at those groups who gathered in them. Anti-modernism, as much as a radicalized and increasingly xenophobic nationalism, found ample evidence for its belief systems in the practices of at least seemingly cosmopolitan arenas of encounter. Moreover, the mingling of elites, which necessarily implied the inclusion of hitherto excluded groups, in activities not necessarily regarded as aristocratic could and was denounced as a symptom of decline and crisis by the old elites. As David Cannadine has observed, “It was the new rich of England and the multi-millionaires of America who set the pace, the style and the tone. It was they, rather than the landowners, who went down on the Titanic, who shot most of the tigers, and who owned most of the yachts.”⁴¹ To an extent embracing contemporary criticism, Cannadine diagnoses a transformation from “leisure class” to “pleasure class” by the late 19th century, as leisure ceased to be bound to certain ends but became an end in itself.⁴²

Structurally, however, the new arenas of encounter were also less innocent than might appear at first glance. Above we discussed the specific fusion of national aspirations and internationalism which characterized arenas like the Kiel week and the

⁴⁰ See Bajohr, “*Unser Hotel ist judenfrei*”; Drewes, *Jüdischer Adel*.

⁴¹ Cannadine, *Aristocracy*, 384–385.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 386.

Cowes sailing race. These events could only claim relevance and status if they attracted an international field. At the same time it was of high, and increasing relevance to which nation the different participants belonged and how successful the nations they represented were. The old aristocratic ideal and partially also the practice of not being fully attached to one specific nation were superseded by much clearer delineations. The ideas of performance and achievement were central in Hoppegarten but also in the hierarchies of the Paris art market. Of course, the respective mechanisms and institutions were meant to contain the potentially destructive dynamics of competition. But they also reflected a principle of competition with quickly growing relevance and potentially destructive potential.

The world of the arenas of encounter outlined here perished in the First World War. Of course, most of these arenas as such survived. But they no longer functioned as arenas in the same way they had before the war. The imperial framework was gone, borders had become much more difficult to pass, the aristocracy had lost its status in Central Europe and the financial strains of the war heavily affected the economic standing which was a precondition for participating in car races, flight shows, etc. Of course it would be a more than worthwhile theme to ask how the story we are looking at for the period before the First World War continued in the newly founded nation-states, developing their own arenas of encounter like Zakopane in the Polish Second Republic.

The developments after 1918 are, however, beyond the confines of this volume. Even for the period from 1815 to 1914 we are only able to take preliminary steps towards establishing the concept of arenas of encounter as a historical approach. Most of the arenas of encounter and exchange were connected to prestigious and sometimes even transnational structures. These clubs and associations often ensured the durability of these events and fostered their supra-regional relevance. The correspondence and diaries of key figures, membership lists and records, press coverage and contemporary pamphlets also enable us to reconstruct the arenas of encounter. However, the dynamics of the often-ephemeral events are hard to grasp. As historians, we are only able – at best – to reconstruct the ranks and backgrounds of attendants and the membership of the clubs which stood behind the events in question. Media coverage allows us to say something about the broader social receptions, and the occasional diary or memoir entry adds further substance. But the inclusive or exclusive character of conversations is as hard to establish as the elite-building intentions of the organizers. Although this volume takes a first step in this direction, it is in no way all-encompassing, not even in the different categories of arenas which could be created. On the contrary, the articles in this volume point to a number of open research questions.

We have confined ourselves to Europe, which poses the question of to what extent the interaction of old and new elites, at times conflict-prone, at other moments smooth and successful, was a particularly European struggle, with the nobility being in many respects a typically European phenomenon. One could also ask to what extent “our” arenas could be seen as predecessors of what later would be referred to as

the jet set, or, more specifically, preceding the rise of the transnational elites, which one would associate with transnational structures that arose later on in the 20th century, for example the League of Nations, the United Nations and the European Community and European Union.

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