Review by Stephen L. Harp, University of Akron.

This book begins with a simple question posed by Pascal Griset in the preface: "comment les réseaux de télécommunications ont-ils contribué à l'émergence d'un espace européen?"(p. 19). Laborie's answer, as it turns out, is complex. Laborie's book surveys the formation and evolution of the various international unions that coordinated postal, telegraph, telephone, and radio services. Organized and run mostly by high-ranking technocrats, the unions provide a series of glimpses at European economic and technical coordination long before European economic integration after World War II.

Laborie's first section considers the establishment of the unions and their scope from the 1850s to the turn of the century. Perhaps not surprisingly, formal efforts to set up permanent international unions to govern transnational communications began in the era of relative free trade of the 1860s. The first, the Union Télégraphique Internationale, emerged in 1865 (it would become the Union Internationale de Télécommunications in 1932). Its postal equivalent, the Union Générale des Postes, was created in 1874 and would be renamed the Union Postale Universelle in 1878. Laborie traces the founding of both organizations with particular attention to the obvious irony; the telegraph, an innovation of the nineteenth century, was subject to international coordination before the post, which had existed for centuries. Although the reasons were manifold, the most important was that French officials resisted, and then hesitated, to take part in an international organization for the postal service, especially in the 1860s as increased tensions characterized French relations with Prussia, the primary advocate of greater cooperation (as a sort of European communications equivalent of the Zollverein). For the post, there were longstanding differences in rates and in other practices to overcome. In the case of the telegraph, France had only adopted the Morse code in 1854 and had then undertaken a series of agreements with bordering countries. An international agreement was but a small additional step. In short, Laborie, without neglecting the *conjonctures* of the 1860s, makes the argument that the existence of a well-established technology could delay international cooperation in its regulation, while a new technology did not face such existing assumptions, interest groups, or inertia.

The second section examines changes from the turn of the century through the 1930s. It begins in 1903 when the first international conference met to consider the emergent technologies typically associated with the Second Industrial Revolution, notably the telephone, the radio, and the airplane. The first two would eventually undergo coordination much like that of the telegraph and the post, while the airplane had important implications for the postal union as airmail was slowly incorporated into national, and eventually international, mail systems. The primary novelty in all of the unions in the early twentieth century was the increased presence of the Americans, particularly after the First World War. While the United States had been party to earlier international agreements, the business interests of the Radio Corporation of America

and of American Telephone and Telegraph posed important new challenges. While RCA merely rivaled European radio systems, AT&T and its electrical manufacturer, Western Electric, were a definite threat. The Bell system, already comparatively well-developed within the United States, had obvious technological and organizational advantages as it attempted to transfer technology and practices to the European continent. In this case, European cooperation served to protect national telephone networks. In the end, the largely "liberal" and privatized American systems for radio and telephone were not adopted in Europe, where state-run systems remained the norm.

Laborie's third section focuses on the interface of the technical and the political from the 1930s to the late 1950s. Here he makes a strong case that European technocrats were initially successful in keeping the international unions governing communications out of the political sphere. In particular, representatives of the unions successfully resisted having their organizations folded into the League of Nations. Moreover, they managed to ignore the Briand pact, championed by political leaders, as it seemed a threat to their positions within the nation-states. Postal, radio, and telecommunications experts saw themselves as independent professionals and largely were. These were, after all, the men who remained in positions of power, often for decades, as governments and their ministers underwent comparatively rapid turnover.

International politics did, however, begin to intrude in the 1940s, when the Germans created a new European union in 1942 for the post and telecommunications, one that incorporated much of Europe, but specifically excluded the French. After the war, the international unions, somewhat weakened, were integrated into the United Nations. The Cold War brought other challenges, and the resulting (western) European organization that formed in 1959, the Conférence Européenne des Administrations des Postes et Télécommunications (CEPT), emerged only after the Soviet Union and its satellite states formed their own organization. Again, in Laborie's account, *conjonctures* mattered in the formation of structures that governed European communications.

Although this book has implications for a host of historiographical issues, its primary contribution is to the history of European integration. Laborie rightly insists that much historical scholarship, traditionally defined by political conflict among European states, has ignored international economic structures that, especially in peacetime, tended to bring Europeans together. By focusing on technology and especially the actions on the part of European bureaucrats to manage it internationally, Laborie shows, by example, considerable European cooperation. This book thus complements very recent work on electrical grids and roadways to reveal that there were European economic and technological structures in place before the creation of the European Economic Community.[1] Also, Laborie cautions that historians should not assume that Europeanization was inevitable or that it came only in the form of the European community. In fact, in one of the many ironies of this book, Laborie notes that the Treaty of Rome did not even mention the postal and telecommunication organizations. And the European telecommunications union founded in 1959 brought together all of western Europe (that is, west of the Iron Curtain and including Turkey), not just members of the Six, and not just the European members of NATO. European integration thus came in many shapes and sizes and was in no way one-dimensional.

At first glance, it might appear that Laborie focuses on the French role in the international groups because he is a French scholar. Yet the book reveals the usefulness of his approach. The French were at the center of each of the organizations (save the Nazi one in 1942), and French resistance tended to doom agreements. Moreover, as in the conflict between advocates of the British "Marconi ship to shore" and the German "Telefunken" radio systems, the French

delegates sometimes served as arbiters. To some extent, the critical French role was a function of geography, given France's position between Britain and Germany. At the same time, the focus on France makes clear that European postal and telecommunication cooperation in the nineteenth century depended on the same two continental players as did European integration after World War II: France and Prussia/Germany.

This book is comprehensively, thoroughly, even exhaustively researched. Secondary sources in French, German and English are appropriately deployed. Primary sources are largely the archival documents from the unions themselves, from the relevant postal and communications ministries in Britain and France, from the French and British foreign offices, and from the AT&T corporate archives. It is a revised and shortened version of a *thèse* defended at the Université de Paris-Sorbonne in 2006 under the direction of Pascal Griset. In large part, it still reads much like a *thèse* of old. Laborie is very careful not to over-generalize and the book is exceedingly well organized as a series of outlines (with the requisite Roman and Arabic numerals in subheadings). As a result, the most likely readers will be those doing research on the history of the postal service, telegraph, telephone, or radio. For such scholars, Laborie has done invaluable background work. Who went to which convention which year, who represented the major and smaller powers at various conferences, and what they said are all covered in minute detail. On one level, it is gratifying to see that Peter Lang is willing to publish an assiduously researched, hefty monograph in this series edited by Eric Bussière (also a member of the thesis committee). On another, in its current form, the book will probably not be assigned to many graduate students of European history. That is a shame, as there is much of interest buried within these pages.

For example, in the early chapters, Laborie describes early modern and early nineteenth-century postal service and pricing, including the evolution of rates. The postal service was a cash cow for many regimes, until the British in particular began using it, in the 1840s, for nation-building. Here Laborie is very clear; the "penny post," a flat rate for sending a letter, cost the British government some revenue but was deemed nevertheless worthwhile. It is one example of a political concern, rather than technology or economics, which changed policy. Soon thereafter, other European states, including France, would adopt the reform, despite the cost. When historians of Europe consider nation-building or European integration we rarely think of the postal service, telegraph, or telephone; Laborie makes it clear that we should.

A second and fascinating example is the obvious preoccupation of French bureaucrats with maintaining the French language within the international unions. The French language had to be *a*, if not *the*, language of the international unions. This symbol of French influence was very important to French technocrats at international conferences and its maintenance was one of the ongoing objectives of French delegates. In fact, according to Laborie, it may have been in part their insistence that French be a language for meetings that contributed to the German exclusion of France from the union established in 1942. Clearly, the prestige and role of French was maintained in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries not only by the Académie Française but also by French technocrats working in the seemingly banal setting of postal and telecommunications organizations.

This is, in many respects, an interesting book in the history of technology and what Laborie calls "technological diplomacy." It is not about the culture of technology, but even cultural historians, not to mention political, diplomatic, and economic specialists, will find much useful detail.

NOTES

[1] Vincent Lagendijk, *Electrifying Europe: The Power of Europe in the Construction of Electricity Networks* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2008); Frank Schipper, *Driving Europe: Building Europe on Roads in the Twentieth Century* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2008).

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