

Peter Limb (ed), *Orb and Sceptre: Studies on British Imperialism and its Legacies, in Honour of Norman Etherington,*

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Orb and Sceptre, the latest volume in the ever-expanding repertoire of Monash University's home-grown press, celebrates the career of Norman Etherington, distinguished scholar of British Imperialism and Professor of History at the University of Western Australia.

Etherington's contribution to so many facets of British imperial history, and his continuing impact upon the work of so many scholars, is here recognised appropriately, through a collection of 12 articles dealing with a myriad of different themes. The final product is therefore not only a tribute to one historian's work, but a showcase of the impressive talent of so many Australian and international scholars working in interconnected fields of imperial history.

Peter Limb's introduction does well in tying together the variety of themes and subjects covered by the volume's contributors. In fluid and attractive prose (just the thing for an introduction of this kind), he not only charts the course of Etherington's career, but also the course of British Empire and Commonwealth studies as it has evolved since the 1950s. The links between this broader context and the minutiae of each contribution is made clear, moreover, with summaries of each chapter impressive even in their brevity. Limb also highlights the place of each chapter within the respective thematic sections into which the volume is divided – dealing with the larger themes of periphery and metropole; networks of power and knowledge; and transnational and global entanglements. These are useful divisions and help give the volume structure and focus, allowing some readers to be more selective in their use of the collection.

It has long been my view that histories of British Imperialism should begin with India (given that it was the riches of the Orient which first drove the English to expand their kingdom's power). It is therefore satisfying that in the first chapter of Part One, Fiona Groenhout explores the failures of indirect rule in the Raj through the case-study of Govind Singh, Maharajah of Datia. Groenhout wisely avoids exploring whether British perceptions of Govind Singh corresponded with the reality of his character and activities, and deals instead with the more important question of how certain discourses of empire and the realities of power-politics impacted upon relations between the British and their Indian vassals. Etherington's own contribution, in association with Jennifer Weir, then takes us to Natal to explore the life of imperial administrator Theophilus Shepstone (1817-1893). The authors take aim at the sphinx-like portraits of Shepstone which have dominated accounts of his career, and instead reveal the 'impetuous, voluble and passionate' side of his private character.

The Shepstone chapter is the first of several to deal with issues relating to South Africa, and the southern African chapters are perhaps the volume's real strength. Of course this is an appropriate emphasis, given Etherington's own longstanding interest in and contribution to this field. The reader is treated to Jennifer Weir's fascinating exploration of the (apparently apocryphal) story of the Zulu king Shaka's great 'smelling out' of evil. Also shedding fresh light on well-known episodes from imperial history are Keith Smith's on the murky personal and private background to General Lord Chelmsford's conduct of the Zulu War; Peter Limb's on-the-way interaction with the wider British world shaped the views of early ANC (African National Congress) leaders; and Ryôta Nishino's on the 'dead hand' of George McCall Theal in South African history textbooks. In the last named, the enduring effect of direct and indirect imperialism on the very historiography of the empire produces perhaps the most interesting article of the volume. The way Theal's original version of the settler's 1818-1819 frontier war against the Xhosa has been recycled or reinterpreted through the different epochs of South African history is of continuing relevance. Nishino shows that Theal's version of Settler triumphalism certainly remained pervasive until the end of apartheid, but unpacks the subtle ways in which 1948-1994 versions of the

story were not uniform, but responded to different pressures in the society and government of South Africa over that time.

As an Australian publication, and given Etherington's position in the Australian academy, key domestic impacts of the imperial experience are also dealt with in some detail. Tim Dymond takes up the important historiographical trend of exploring American-Australian contacts as indivisible in many ways from the imperial relationship with Britain. The 'seamless shift' of identity by Australian conservatives, from feelings of closeness with Britain to the special relationship with the United States, is dealt with in admirable style, arguing that Australians felt themselves part of both the great modern-world hegemonies, and not merely their subjects.

Important contributions to the volume also deal with other recent trends in British imperial historiography, with the spatial turn featuring prominently. Felicity Morel-EdnieBrown for instance, discusses the 'imperial impress' of architecture and the importance of spatial factors in Perth, Western Australia. Just as the architecture and orientation of that city persist today, Natalie Lloyd also offers an intriguing critique of another enduring, quintessential imperial space, in her analysis of zoological gardens in Australia. Just as Nishino explores the impact of shifting perceptions of empire in the 'space' of the textbook and classroom over time, both these chapters deal with the changes wrought by a dynamic imperial ideology (or ideologies) on the space chosen for analysis. Lloyd for instance sees in the evolving architecture of Australian zoos (mainly Melbourne and Sydney's Taronga Park) the pervasive ideology of acclimatisation, and the creation of an orderly paradise evocative of the potential of the colonies. As time passed, this view was supplanted by a romantic reaction, seeking to emphasise the wildness and uncontrollable nature of much of the world, as well as a more nationalistic appreciation for Australia's native fauna.

It seems hardly possible to write any history of British imperialism without touching upon tea, a commodity which powered territorial and commercial expansion over many centuries. Jason Lim's examination of the Sino-British trade, focusing on the Fujian tea industry, is perhaps the epitome of that new thread of transnationalism

which is coming to dominate histories of empire. In following the course of a key business enterprise, Lim picks up on one of the most important methods by which national and cultural borders were constantly breached and traversed, shedding new light on the production and export of that most imperial, but also most transnational, of drinks.

The final paper – Jennifer McGuire’s – on Elizabeth II’s media role as head of the Commonwealth ‘family’ in the 1950s (at a time before her own family was under pressure) brings the collection to a suitable close. That the Queen had, even before the famous 1969 *Royal Family* documentary, been keen to allow members of the British and Commonwealth public a peek inside the private world of the Windsors, is itself a fascinating notion. More broadly, by emphasising again the continuities of much of the imperial story (Elizabeth II specifically referred to her father’s and grandfather’s ‘reaching out’ via the mass media), the reader is invited to reflect on the ongoing significance of the British Empire, and therefore of the work of Norman Etherington and its other historians.

Readers and researchers will also find at the back of the volume a comprehensive bibliography of Norman Etherington’s own work, including books, contributions to edited collections and other works, occasional addresses, and journal articles. Thus *Orb and Sceptre* is both an appropriate tribute to an important scholar, as well as an invaluable research tool for the next generation of Norman Etheringtons.

As with all Monash University ePress publications, the book is available online (in complete and individual chapter form) at: <http://www.epress.monash.edu/os>.

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