

JOHN MCALEER and JOHN M. MACKENZIE, eds. *Exhibiting the Empire: Cultures of Display and the British Empire*. Studies in Imperialism. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015. Pp. 291. \$110.00 (cloth).
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If co-editors John M. MacKenzie and John McAleer overstate the breakthrough character of this collection—asserting that “Historians are apt to overlook the mechanics, practicalities and significance of putting empire-related subjects and material culture on display” and that this book “seeks to begin the process of correcting the imbalance” (2)—MacKenzie has only himself to blame. In his own pioneering book *Propaganda and Empire* (1984), and in the Studies in Imperialism series initiated with his edited volume *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (1986), MacKenzie has done much over the last three decades to lead scholars—including some in this collection—toward the exploration of the cultural manifestations of imperialism. The collection can thus be taken less as the “beginning” of a project than as a snapshot of continued progress in a burgeoning field of study. *Exhibiting the Empire* provides a broader canvas than do many of the volumes in the Studies in Imperialism series. Its ten essays treat cultural manifestations ranging from books and printed ephemera to visual art, exhibitions, and music, and they cover a temporal range from the late seventeenth century to the early decades of the twentieth, presented roughly chronologically.

Eighteenth-century manifestations of imperial aspiration provide the focus for the book’s first two pieces. Stephanie Barczewski’s essay treats the migration of a visual motif of allegorical figures representing the continents of Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas from royal residences in the late seventeenth century to elite country houses in the eighteenth. Barczewski argues the appropriation “was in keeping with a growing enthusiasm for imperial expansion among the British elite in the eighteenth century ... expressing an increasingly global vision of elite power” (37) in a period in which West Indian connections played a central part in British commerce. McAleer considers how the proliferation of print accounts and visual artifacts (from paintings and globes to museums) provided means for British subjects to interpret voyages of exploration in his essay. McAleer argues that “display and exhibition of material culture helped shape the public discourse about the purpose, value and results of these explorations” (44), and he tracks such discourse products ranging from maps and books to ethnographic collections.

The pivotal period between the Seven Years War and the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, so consequential both in terms of the power dynamics between Britain and its continental rival France and the consolidation of imperial holdings, is treated in the volume’s next two essays. David Fordham examines the shifting iconography and changing perspective toward empire in single-sheet satirical prints between 1762 and 1815. “The operative Freudian framework in graphic satire is that of the joke” (65), Fordham contends, but the significant terms and meaning of the joke in relation to growing British overseas power display no stability over the period, even if specific imagery is routinely recycled. In her essay, Eleanor Hughes evaluates the role of new visual forms of display (notably the panorama) and approaches to display (especially the solo exhibition) in artists’ representations of naval warfare with France. Fordham is particularly attuned to issues of time (that art tends toward commemoration, in the wake of more immediate forms of celebration in theatres and other public forums) and how different modes of representation stake claims to accuracy.

Imperial display from the time of the Great Exhibition in 1851 to the end of the Victorian era provide the focus for the book’s next three essays. Jeffrey Auerbach begins with that Great Exhibition (returning to the terrain of his *The Great Exhibition: A Nation on Display* [1999]) and traces forward to the Festival of Empire, held at the rebuilt Crystal Palace in Sydenham in 1911. “The Empire occupied only a relatively small place at the Great Exhibition” (112), he argues, although the exhibition did promote imperial holdings in a range of ways. Later

exhibitions, however, culminating with the Festival of Empire, “the grandest imperial celebration ever held in the Crystal Palace” (131), underlined the imperial far more explicitly, and accompanied that more imperial focus with forms of human display absent in the original Crystal Palace. Ashley Jackson and David Tomkins, drawing on the Bodleian Library’s John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera (also the key source for their *Illustrating Empire: A Visual History of British Imperialism* [2011]), catalog key imperial themes in print ephemera (ranging from leaflets and postcards to advertisements and matchbooks): “veneration of prominent figures” (151); bolt labels “attached to the ends of cotton bolts exported from British mills” (153); depictions of “indigenes as servants, labourers, and producers” (155); “consumer branding” on labels and advertisements (158); and ephemeral materials that “affirm the existence of a distinctly British world” (160). Berny Sèbe seeks to fill in the details of imperial literary production by looking at actual print runs of books, including “imperial geographies” (170), like atlases and descriptive accounts, and books embodying an “imperial ethos” (176), from imperial histories to Rudyard Kipling tales. In closing, Sèbe also attends to the ways in which imperial products were circulated in the empire itself, with publisher Macmillan’s supplying of texts for Indian schools.

The closing three chapters evaluate early twentieth-century forms of imperial display. MacKenzie examines the last major durbar in comparison to its predecessors in 1877 and 1903. He concludes: “that of 1911 was genuinely climactic since it most clearly expressed the fantasies of empire” (198), and significantly more spectacular (and expensive) than its predecessors. Nalini Ghuman, against a historiographical tradition of neglect for Elgar’s music for imperial occasions (and an undercurrent of scholarship that insists the music was never completed or performed), argues that Elgar’s music provided a critical unifying thread to the disparate musical and other displays at the British Empire Exhibition, highlighting “Elgar’s central role, in collaboration with Noyes, in generating that unity, in drawing the disparate narratives of imperial expansion together” (239). Ghuman concludes that Elgar’s “musical language and performing forces, participates triumphantly in the attempt of the whole British Empire Exhibition to return to a prewar sense of the spectacle of empire” (251). Finally, in another essay on that British Empire Exhibition, Sarah Longair examines the ways in which elites in Zanzibar constructed a historical narrative for the island in the Zanzibar Court and its accompanying handbook, then redeployed the materials for texts and a museum in Zanzibar itself after the exhibition closed.

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The experiences of those who were prisoners of war in the Far East during the Second World War are no longer “forgotten” in the way they once were. In 2013, Richard Flanagan’s prize-winning novel *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* and the film adaptation of Eric Lomax’s memoir *The Railway Man* highlighted the arduous physical demands of building of the Thailand-Burma railway, as well as the prisoners’ traumatic memories, camaraderie, and sheer ingenuity. In the emerging field of prisoner of war studies, too, innovative research by Meg Parkes on rudimentary medical treatment in prisoner of war camps in the Far East and by Clare Makepeace on veteran communities has uncovered even more about the physical and emotional