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William Beinart, Lotte Hughes. *Environment and Empire.* The Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. 395 pp. $85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-926031-7.

Jacob A. Tropp. *Natures of Colonial Change: Environmental Relations in the Making of the Transkei.* New African History Series. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006. 304 pp. $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8214-1699-0.

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Consolidating Environmental Dimensions of the Colonial Experience

These two recently published books provide abundant evidence of both the maturity and wealth in the field of environmental colonial and imperial history. *Environment and Empire* and *Natures of Colonial Change* are very different in study area, focus, and research methodology, but taken together they enrich and expand our understanding of a fascinating and increasingly important dimension of the past.

In 2003, Jacob A. Tropp was awarded the Rachel Carson Prize for Best Dissertation by the American Society for Environmental History for "Roots and Rights in the Transkei: Colonialism, Natural Resources, and Social Change, 1880-1940." Tropp works in the Department of African Studies at Middlebury College. His interest in South Africa was inspired by the enthusiasm and expertise of Jean Allman and Allen Isaacman, and he completed his PhD at the University of Minnesota. South African historians, as well as scholars in other disciplines (including botany and forestry), need to thank Allman and Isaacman for pointing Tropp in the direction of southern Africa and for encouraging and supporting the studies that resulted in this excellent book. Tropp's detailed case study of the KwaMatiwane area of the Transkei (the patches of Afromontane forests straddling the Tsolo, Umtata, and Engcobo districts, today part of the Eastern Cape Province) over the long period of colonialism and apartheid is a major contribution to the historiography of the region. What makes this book of particular significance is that it is one of the few that extends the analysis into the present post-apartheid era to emphasize how many long-established attitudes and institutions continue, little changed, into the present.

Tropp's aim is to reveal "the ways in which issues of environmental use and control originally became entangled in deeper colonial transformations and experiences" (p. 3). To demonstrate this, Tropp uses the example of access to forests and control over woodland products in his study area. sHis sources are the archival collections in South Africa, a wide variety of secondary material, and a large number of personal interviews he conducted in the late 1990s. Tropp acknowledges his debt to previous scholars of rural Transkei, in particular William Beinart and Colin Bundy, and builds on their endeavors by taking the environmental dimension of social control further back into the past than they did. Tropp is at pains to present an ever-changing historical scenario to avoid a static perspective, to uncover colonial attitudes in a complex manner, and, in so doing, also to avoid a simplistic notion of traditional resource use and indigenous knowledge.

After a long explanatory theoretical and historiographical introduction (useful in itself), the book is divided into two sections. The first is a general historical account arranged into three chapters, with a timeframe from the 1880s to the 1930s. The second consists of two chapters that consider a cultural and gender perspective from the point of view of the local Xhosa today. Although this book runs to 268 pages, the text itself is relatively short–the conclusion ends on page 166, the remainder being taken up by footnotes (many of them long and explicatory), the bibliography, and index.

This publication explores a number of topics that extend our knowledge of this part of the Transkei. Among them are the politics that both overlie and underpin long-standing environmental tensions relating to rebellion and drought. Tropp illuminates relationships between colonial authorities (at the level of local adminis-

trators) and headmen. Many of these were predicated on individual bonds in specific circumstances and places, but also owed much to the local authorities' dealings with superiors in Cape Town. Tropp also takes into account the differing objectives of foresters, magistrates, and Department of Native Affairs officials. He explains extremely well the difficult lines of authority and the different and competing objectives of various colonial structures as well as those of local people.

The manner in which traditional usage and regulation of woodland extraction meshed–or did not mesh–with colonial ideas of appropriate and sustainable use is also well drawn. Patronage, tractability, and the twists in the complex role of forest guards all played a part. Tropp deals with the colonial legislation effectively, showing its effects rather than detailing the minutiae of the law. The colonial endeavor to protect indigenous woodland by growing commercial exotic species (such as Australian wattle) is given statistical form, and the identification of how structures were set in place to force local communities to utilize these plantations follows logically. Tropp outlines the different objectives, viz. economic extraction for the market versus cultural importance for domestic use. In his narrative, Tropp gives thought-provoking ideas about what "conservation" during these decades might have meant, certainly worth consideration by all historians, especially in terms of environmental justice. Essentially, we learn that this mantra could be anything that restricted Africans from using woodland resources that the colonial power wished to retain for itself.

In the second part of the book, Tropp investigates the African dimensions of forest use, based largely, but not exclusively, on oral history. Here, in contrast to the colonial and Western approach to woodland management, Tropp concentrates, in a more anecdotal vein, on the cultural and social meaning of forests to local people. With the aid of interviews, he explains the particular tree species used for stick fights and initiation rites, the importance of certain plants for traditional healing rituals and remedies, the species that were of significance to women, and trees that protected from evil or brought good fortune.

While the introduction is generous, the conclusion is very brief, and this reviewer yearned for a longer summary analysis that would tie all the threads together in more detail, particularly with implications for the present. It would also have been useful to have had more photographs that specifically applied to the KwaMatiwane area. Tropp does not provide many images in this book, and their captions are generally vague as to locality. The map of KwaMatiwane is of limited use because it does not indicate where the forested areas were (or are), nor where plantations replaced indigenous bush. The map of the whole of the Transkei is strangely orientated with north (KwaZulu-Natal) on the right of map, thus placing the Indian Ocean at the lower edge–one cannot imagine that the publishers were obliged to save the few centimeters of space by doing so. An appendix that listed scientific, common English, and Xhosa names would also have been useful.

Whereas Tropp's is a detailed study, *Environment and Empire* is a magisterial overview. William Beinart, whose contribution to South African environmental history has been, and continues to be, enormous and who is based at St. Antony's College, Oxford, and Lotte Hughes, a lecturer at the Open University, whose expertise lies in East African history, have collaborated on a book that is very different from Tropp's. But it owes its success to such talented scholars as Tropp, who have accomplished remarkably proficient micro-histories of specific places, resources, or products and ideas on which they can draw. Beinart and Hughes have adeptly worked their way through a huge amount of secondary literature (their select bibliography runs to almost thirty pages) to produce a global account of how imperialism affected natural environments throughout the British Empire. As the authors express it: "*Environment and Empire* is a synthesis, exploring commodity frontiers, environmental change, diseases, conservationist ideas, urban environments, visual images of nature, and political ecology over the long term" (p. vii). This is a tall order, but one accomplished with flair and insight. This book fills a gap in the historiography of the British Empire and will be extremely useful both to experts in the field of environmental history as well as to those new to the discipline.

The contents of this book range across the empire in terms of topic, resource, and place. Each chapter, therefore, is a stand-alone mini-history, but together, the nineteen chapters provide a combination that surveys the immense effects of imperialism–in all aspects and guises–on the natural world. With an engagement with the rich historiography at its core, the authors' focus is a loose one; therefore, they do not exhaust the subject nor compel it into a single narrative. Instead, their study conveys the complexities of a British imperial mindset and the nature of the times. While imperialism was indeed a dominant philosophy, one forced on subject peoples all over the globe, it was, in turn, influenced by the communities, ecologies, and geographies with which it came into

contact. In this regard, *Environment and Empire* is frequently biographical, the tale told through the life or career of a single bureaucrat or expert. In this regard, people as different as Joy and George Adamson (wildlife), Sir Herbert Baker (architecture), Alfred Russel Wallace (evolution), Sir William Wilcocks (hydraulic engineer), Marianne North (botanical artist and traveler), Henry Ridley (enthusiast for rubber planting), and many others find a place here. The account is also, however, just as frequently based on a specific commodity, the production of which changed the empire and certainly altered the colony involved. Of necessity, this book is selective (indeed, at times a little disjointed), and some readers may be disappointed at not finding details about some particular theme or topic that interests them personally. It must also be said that the authors interpret "imperialism" loosely, often bringing the narrative into the present, their argument correctly being that the legacy of imperialism is still very much with us.

A list of all the subjects covered in the many chapters of this book is a long one, but worth providing so that readers of this review are made aware of the richness that can be expected. Generally speaking, the book is arranged chronologically. In terms of commodities, the authors focus on Canada's fur trade, rubber in Malaysia, and oil in the Middle East. They explain the effect of domestic stock and crops on the natural environment through the introduction of sheep and a pastoral economy in Australia and sugar (and slaves) in the Caribbean. Exploitation and extraction are the themes of chapters relating to wildlife hunting in Africa (and its obverse–national parks and eco-tourism), the augmentation of a regular and controlled water supply in India and Egypt, and the utilization of the rich forests of India. Historians of empire will be pleased to see three chapters devoted to the construction of an imperially driven urban environment, including one on the postimperial city. Chapters on imperial travelers, visual depictions, disease, ecology, and conservation cover the history of ideas and science. Technological as well as scientific innovation is shown to have been a strong driver, and this strand runs through many chapters. Resistance is another strong theme and the book ends with a chapter that analyzes the reassertion of indigenous environmental rights and knowledge. While leaning on their particular scholarly strengths, the authors do not overload this book with their own research material and definitive conclusions.

Foregrounding the less well-known aspects of the imperial experience and writing about a variety of less well-trodden academic pathways is a bold move on the part of Beinart and Hughes. It also makes the reviewer's task a difficult one, because it would not be appropriate to single out or emphasize one chapter rather than another. Despite the range of chapter subjects, many of them at first seeming out of tune with what follows, there is a strong thread to this book that dissection dilutes. *Environment and Empire* makes a contribution not only to environmental and imperial history but also to transnational history, for the flows of ideas and products are expertly delineated and provide the overarching theme. There is no doubt that this is an extremely important contribution to the literature, one that can be appreciated by novice and expert alike and that will certainly find its way onto textbook shelves.

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