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Muriel E. Chamberlain. *The Longman Companion to Formation of the European Empires, 1488-1920.* Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000. viii + 267 pp. $25.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-582-36979-5.

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Some Dates and Facts Relating to European Empire-Building

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With no introduction to speak of provided by the author, the reader of Muriel E. Chamberlain's *Longman Companion to Formation of the European Empires* will have to refer to the back cover for any information as to the purpose of this volume. Here, the book is acclaimed as bringing "together in one comprehensive volume all the essential facts and figures relating to the process of empire-building by the European powers."

Roughly half the book (pp. 3-134) is devoted to the chronological facts of European imperialism from the late fifteenth century to the 1920s. In these pages, chronological tables alternate with short paragraphs discussing causes of expansion and structures of particular empires or colonies. This section displays a heavy bias in favor of the British empire, which is covered in sometimes excessive detail, while the information on other empires is often scanty (for example, late-nineteenth century Nigeria is given more space than all of German imperialism in Africa during the same period). Many territories or events are simply mentioned as having existed or occurred, without any further elaboration. Furthermore, as the chronological tables are not really chronological but constructed "per empire," processes which involve interaction between several colonial powers become hard to follow. The text between the tables is rather brief; irritatingly, from time to time it collapses into truncated sentences and mere catchwords. On the other hand, the chronological entries at times expand into narrative. For example the entry for the "West Indies" in the chapter on "Society and Religion in Colonies of Settlement" reads: "After the Restoration, the plantation system developed, producing cash crops of tobacco, cotton and, especially sugar. Required labour. Government began to send out convicts.... But came to be believed Europeans could not labour in the tropics. Increasingly imported negro slaves" (p. 25). Statistical data, where given, do not go beyond territorial and population size. They are taken from period publications (*Whitaker's Almanach*) and no effort has been made to include the results of recent quantitative research in economic or demographic history.

In sum, these sections sit uneasily between the forms of reference work and narrative, displaying the weaknesses of both but the strengths of neither. Airing specific grievances as to which events, names and territories have been covered extensively and which have not would be a cheap way to criticize a book that attempts to deal with a large part of human history in a few pages and this consequently will not be attempted here. On the other hand, the volume's claim to provide "all the essential facts and figures" too obviously clashes with the necessarily sketchy and selective presentation, inviting criticism of the absence of any explicit reflection on relevance and choice.

The second section of the book (pp. 137-189) is made up of biographical entries concerning persons involved in the formation and expansion of European empires, again with a particular emphasis on Britain. With this limitation in mind, the biographical section is the most useful of the book and comes closest to fulfilling a "companion function."

Section 3 consists of a glossary of events, locations, terms, etc., which might have been made more useful by indicating in the chronological section the terms explained in the glossary. Section 4 consists of miscellaneous appendices including chronologies of events related to slavery and to anti-colonial resistance, a table of the territories of the British empire and their constitutional status, and lists of India's Governors-General, British colonial secretaries and secretaries of state for India, and French colonial ministers. Section 5 provides a guide to further reading, listing chiefly general works with a heavy emphasis on British imperialism, while section 6 offers some very basic maps.

In sum, this book leaves the reviewer wondering to whom it may be useful. It is too sketchy and limited to serve as a companion on your desk giving background information and allowing you to quickly check dates and facts. Neither can it be considered a useful first introduction and quick reference for undergraduates, because it cannot point the reader towards further information on specific aspects of European empire-building or help him develop ideas of his own–the lack of an argument and of explicit choices, of an introduction, of an up-to-date and specific bibliography prevent this. The work under review is designed as a complement to the *Longman Companion to European Decolonisation in the Twentieth Century* by the same author, which has been unfavorably reviewed.[1] Unfortunately, very many of the same criticisms are true of *Formation of the European Empires*.

Note

[1]. Reviewed for H-Net by L. C. Barrows under the title "The Companion as False Friend," <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?-path=14124918244961>.

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