



**Alan Tritton.** *Scotland and the Indian Empire: Politics, Scholarship and the Military in Making British India.* London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. Illustrations. 232 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-78831-809-9.

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*Scotland and the Indian Empire* is a surprisingly difficult book to review; it is not what is expected from a history text. Alan Tritton follows two Scots and their careers in the East India Company in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The first is John Ballie, an indirect ancestor of the author, as the book jacket notes; the book covers his progress through the military ranks of the company in India. The other, Neil Edmonstone, rose through the company's covenanted service ranks to a high career as a company servant closely involved in the high politics of company rule in India. Through these careers, Tritton sets out to provide insight on the Scottish affinity for the British Raj and a fresh perspective on the history of the early company rule in India from 1780 to 1820.

What makes *Scotland and the Indian Empire* different (and thus difficult to engage with) is the almost complete absence of *any* citations or referencing, for either the primary or the secondary material the author has used to formulate his arguments. In some ways this can be useful. The text is surprisingly readable, with a relatively seamless flow. The short, pithy chapters make their points succinctly and it is easy to pick up from where one leaves off. Tritton does an excellent job leading his readers along the lives of his protagonists, tracing their rise through their respective hierarchies,

and giving some interesting insights into the sociopolitical world of the British in India. Historians have often tended to paint Britons as something of a monolith, setting them against the “native.” Conceptual categories that other historians frequently engage with—Orientalists, Anglicists, imperialists—are almost absent from Tritton's narrative, which focuses more narrowly on the stories of people, their engagements, and the environments they inhabited. For a novice to the area this could be good, though their ability to build off the book is somewhat constrained, as I explore below. More experienced readers might be left somewhat cold by the lack of engagement with the wider body of scholarship.

Lack of citations causes several problems for the reader. When the author incorporates his characters into the narrative and endeavors to explain broader contexts, following along can become surprisingly difficult. Tritton does not delve into the complexities of the environments that he explores. The first chapter, “Setting the Scene,” for example, covers, in a page and a half, the history of the creeping parliamentary regulation of the company from the 1760s through the 1780s through such legislation as the Regulating Act of 1773 and later Pitt's India Act of 1784. The extremely brusque coverage does little justice to the complex underlying histories that drove these

events, involving financial interests, clashing imperial ideologies, parliamentary lobbying, and factional battles. Any attempt to explore the subject beyond Tritton's book will be stymied by the absence of specific citations in the text. These rushed explorations, absent any explanation via footnote or endnote, will leave the veteran reader uncertain about where Tritton is drawing his information from.

This is similarly a problem when Tritton explores subjects for which he has clearly drawn on outside material. In chapter 16, "Bundelkhand Affairs," Tritton, for instance, engages extensively with the Gosains, a mercenary clan of warrior ascetics and their leaders, Himmat Bahadur and Anupgiri. Someone already familiar with William Pinch's *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (2006) will spot the book in the extremely brief two-page "further readings" section of *Scotland and the Indian Empire* and understand that it was the source of Tritton's information. Yet unless they already knew this, they would be totally lost. This problem repeats itself across the book, with the reader simply unable to delve further.

Another area where the lack of citations becomes a problem is in evaluating Tritton's own assessment of characters as they clash with his protagonists. In chapter 26, "Lord Moira," for instance, Tritton opens his description of Governor-General Francis Rawdon-Hastings in starkly negative terms: "He was tall, good-looking and rather vain. He was apparently open to flattery, not particularly good with money and he left for India, really considerable debts behind him" (p. 148). He provides no sources for these claims. And this characterization becomes relevant later when the governor-general seemingly pressures Ballie into extortion, resulting in Ballie trying to bring a case against Hastings before the company directors and Parliament. We learn that Lord Hastings would be later "demoted from Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of India to being Governor of a small island in the Mediterranean,

called Malta, and died shortly thereafter" (p. 150). Tritton's own assessment of fault and whom it lies with is obvious. His ancestor was clearly the wronged party. And yet the complete lack of referencing for any of these claims, both in secondary literature and the primary source material Tritton himself deploys, leaves it impossible to do any follow up on Tritton's claims and arguments. The reader must either accept or reject Tritton's words without any ability to interrogate the text for its claims.

These issues make it hard to offer a proper assessment of Tritton's scholarship and hard to recommend it to interested readers. Though there is a clear need for more material on how Scots played a role in the British imperial project, *Scotland and the Indian Empire* does little to advance that. With no way to understand where the book fits in with existing literature, no historiography, and not even the ability to follow up on claims, using the book for its intended purpose of exploring the varied contexts of Scots in British India becomes impossible.

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