



*Crowns and Colonies: European
Monarchies and Overseas Empires*

Robert Aldrich and Cindy
McCreery (eds.)

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The British Empire dominates the popular perception of imperialism in the nineteenth century. Queen Victoria is famous as the monarch who reigned over a global empire so vast that it encompassed one third of the earth's land surface, reviving the description applied to Spain's overseas territories in the sixteenth century, "the empire on which the sun never sets." The Queen's image as mother of the British Empire, combined with the title of Empress of India, which she received in 1876 at the suggestion of her Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, demonstrates how the monarch came to personify her empire. The relationship between monarch and empire, however, was not confined to Britain, but was instead a Europe-wide phenomenon, as sovereigns across the continent developed overseas empires, or were frustrated in their territorial ambitions. *Crown and Colonies*, which developed from papers presented at a 2014 University of Sydney Conference, "Crowns and Colonies: Monarchies and Colonial Empires", examines the vast array of connections between monarchs and their empires, exploring the key links between overseas empire and monarchical institutions.

The contributors to *Crown and Colonies* demonstrate that the actual relationship between individual monarchs and empire did not always match their public images. Queen Elizabeth II's commitment to her role as a constitutional monarch above partisan politics informs a popular perception of her great-great grandmother Queen Victoria as a ceremonial figure. Miles Taylor in his chapter, however, emphasizes that Victoria exercised the royal prerogative in a variety of ways, including: her role as head of the Church of England during a time of overseas expansion, military patronage, and appointments of members of her family to colonial positions. In contrast, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany's bombastic speeches seemed to demonstrate a commitment to colonial expansion, but in his chapter, Matthew FitzPatrick concludes "Wilhelm II's notable lack of involvement in the management of the [1904] war in South-West Africa was indicative of his marginal role in German imperialism" (77). In addition, royals who are not known today for their contributions to imperialism in fact pursued empire building. As Alessandro Pes observes, "The place of the royal house in the history of Italy has been mostly studied in terms of aspects of domestic policy" (245) and yet, King Vittorio Emanuele III, his wife, and daughters toured Libya in 1938, and a member of the extended Italian royal family, Duke Amedeo d'Aosta,

became viceroy of Ethiopia and Governor General of East Africa on 21 December 1937.

Queen Victoria is of course a key figure in many of the chapters in *Crowns and Colonies*, and a number of the contributors reveal her wider influence on women from all social backgrounds across the British Empire. Taylor discusses how female political figures—such as Princess Lili'uokalani and Queen Kapi'olani of Hawaii, and the Begums of Bhopal in India—gained legitimacy by being acknowledged by Victoria. Women met with members of Victoria's family during imperial tours, though Cindy McCreery describes “the awkward position of colonial women, who were viewed more as adornments”(72) in her chapter about Prince Alfred's visit to Melbourne in 1867-68. Victoria, however, was not the only female sovereign to shape women's responses to empire. Susie Protschky discusses how Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands inspired women across the Dutch empire, and within the Afrikaner communities of South Africa, who identified with her position as a wife and mother, as well as a sovereign. For the Maharani of Kutch, the subject of a chapter by Jim Masselos, Indian independence transformed courtly life. When she emerged from purdah later in life, she acquired an independent public persona, and she was approached for advice by women from a variety of social backgrounds.

The legacy of monarchy and empire continues to shape the modern world, and the contributors draw direct parallels between the zenith of European imperialism, and attitudes toward monarchical government around the world today. Taylor notes that seven successive generations of the British Royal Family have been present in Australia: from Prince Alfred, to the present Duke and Duchess of Cambridge's son, Prince George. Vincent O'Malley's chapter traces the relationship between British and Maori monarchs in New Zealand, from Queen Victoria's reign to the 2014 royal tour. During the 2014 tour, Maori King Tuheitia Pahi rejected a meeting with the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge because of the brevity of allotted time, and an unresolved controversy that the site where the Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840 was left off the itinerary. The last two chapters are particularly topical. Harshan Kumarasingham discusses how India's independence had a lasting impact on the role of the British sovereign, as the non-hereditary role of Head of the Commonwealth replaced previous imperial titles. In his chapter, McKenna examines how the British monarchy continues to reinvent itself and defy predictions of obsolescence in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.

The contributors to *Crown and Colonies* draw on a diverse range of sources, and one of the strengths of the book is its analysis of the material culture of empire. Bruce Baskerville explains in his chapter on the Crown in

early colonial New South Wales, 1808-1810, “Examples of material culture such as great seals deputed, and their reflections in popular culture, suggest that the historiography, and its reliance upon the paper archive, is not sufficient for considering the relationships between crowns and colonists, especially in settler societies” (274-275). Royal regalia, from both Europe, and the overseas empires, played a key role in projecting royal authority, as discussed in Robert Aldrich’s chapter. In her chapter, Protschky analyses examples of formal oorkonde, formal salutations adorned with calligraphy and symbols of the House of Orange. Black and white illustrations in the text allow readers to view these examples of material culture and empire. *Crown and Colonies* is a valuable addition to the literature concerning monarchy and empire. The contributors draw upon a wealth of written sources and material culture to provide a global portrait of the relationship between European monarchs and their overseas empires, bringing new perspectives to key themes in the history of imperialism.

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