

Report on RSVP Curran Fellowship

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Project Title: Britannia's Monthlies: The Rise of Slow-Paced Journals of Empire in the Age of Newspapers

Fellowship Year: 2017

Brief Outline of the Project:

This study will offer the first in-depth account of the rise of specialized missionary, military and emigration monthlies with an imperial remit and reach. In doing so, it will fill a gap in the burgeoning scholarship on Victorian imperial presswork, which has so far remained focussed on how newspapers developed elaborate communication networks in order to publish the latest news from the colonies. I argue that the slower-paced imperial monthlies, in having more time and space than the daily and weekly papers, enabled more extensive analysis of colonial events. Through close readings of the form and function of the imperial monthlies, I will show that they enabled debate and discussion between Englishmen at home and in the colonies, and generated support and funding for further overseas efforts. I will also demonstrate that these journals offered an arena where cultural anxieties about colonial encounters were expressed and explored regularly.

Work Undertaken:

Most of my work was undertaken in London. I visited various libraries to conduct archival research and access print and/or digital copies of periodicals that were not accessible to me in India. At the British Library, I studied the correspondence between the nineteenth-century British Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel and Robert Montgomery Martin, editor of *Fisher's Colonial Magazine and Commercial-Maritime Journal*. These letters date from 1834 to 1846,

the very year of Peel's famous repeal of the Corn Laws. Martin repeatedly petitions Peel for a post in his government, particularly in the line of colonial administration. He presents his large volume of publications on imperial affairs, including his editorship of the *Colonial Magazine*, as indicating his expert knowledge of imperial affairs, untiring industry and patriotism and as proof of his fitness for public office. He also draws attention to the fact that he helped build public support for the policies of Peel's Conservative Party. In an 1834 letter, Martin attaches an article on 'Principles and Prospects of a Conservative Government', published in a recent volume of the *Colonial Magazine*, as proof of his support for Peel's government. These letters put strain on the editorial claim, made in the inaugural issue of the *Colonial Magazine*, that the journal was free of 'party feeling'. These letters also elucidate interesting aspects of the *Fisher's Colonial Magazine's* reportage of international trade between the colonies, imperial warfare and emigration. In 1843 and 1846, for example, Martin provides commentary on some of the critical issues that had driven the First Opium War (1839-42) between England and China. He not only reports on the importance of tea and opium, but also condemns as an egregious error, the British government's expenditure on developing Hong Kong, while giving up Chusan [modern day Zhoushan], as an imperial trading port. All these issues were also extensively covered in the *Colonial Magazine*. By commenting on a recently concluded colonial war and showing his expertise on what remained a tense site of imperial trade, Martin was displaying his acumen for serving in the British government. The *Colonial Magazine's* reflective reportage on the recently concluded First Opium War, and its long-term perspective on imperial trade with China, enabled it to present itself as providing valuable guidance on how to continue managing this deeply fraught site of imperial trade. In his letters to Peel, Martin also comments on various aspects of colonial taxation, banking and agricultural production, all topics on which he had also written book-length works. The *Colonial Magazine* carries considerable material on these

issues and presents similar views on the commercial affairs of the empire. This alerts one to the possibility that Martin might have written a bulk of the magazine himself. To follow up on this, I am currently trying to trace the sources of the articles published in the magazine and to see if they are excerpts from Martin's own vast corpus on the British empire. From the India Office Collections, I also gathered letters written by Martin to several important colonial officials such as Mountstuart Elphinstone (the governor of Bombay between 1819 and 1827) and Lord Wellesley (son of Arthur Wellesley, First Duke of Wellington, former British Prime Minister and celebrated military officer). Martin had edited Arthur Wellesley's *Despatches* and most of this correspondence is regarding Wellesley. Martin writes to Elphinstone to seek information on Wellesley's term in India. Wellesley's career is alluded to in celebratory terms in the *Colonial Magazine*. However, although Martin initially establishes contact with Elphinstone for his editorial work on *Despatches*, he also attempts to build an independent relation with the Elphinstone on the basis of his own writings on British India. In a February 1854 letter, for example, Martin contents that his view of 'Mohammedan period' of Indian history differs from Elphinstone's and also asserts that each individual must arrive at his own understanding of this period of history. In the above letter, Martin seems to be underlining the critical difference between contemporary history, consisting largely of eye-witness accounts and first-person narratives, and history of events long past, composed from a wider range of print material. Martin's statement is particularly interesting since the *Colonial Magazine* consists predominantly of these two different kinds of historical narratives: reflective accounts on recent events, which are predominantly first-person accounts, and historical accounts of events long past, which are composed from a wide range of secondary sources.

At the National Maritime Museum's Caird Library and Archive, I studied letters from Sir Edward Belcher, a naval officer who was a contributor to the *United Service Magazine*, a

pioneering military monthly, to Sir John Philippart, editor of the *United Service Magazine*. Belcher's *Narrative of a Voyage Round the World* (1843) was reviewed positively in *Colburn's United Service Magazine*. In his letters to Philippart, Belcher provides details about his famous 1852 Arctic expedition, his experiences during the First Opium War, and also provides critical commentary on the state of the military and naval forces and suggests reforms. The *United Service Magazine's* reports on naval valour and adventurousness and its campaign for military reform draw on Belcher's experiences. In a letter, written in August 1861, Belcher thanks Philippart for having sent him a copy of the *United Service Magazine* and also states that he trusts Philippart will place his recent article in a manner that will 'make it seem as from a looker on'. This detail is particularly interesting to my study of slow-journalism as it shows that articles written at second-hand and long after the event had taken place were made to seem like 'on-the-spot' eye-witness accounts through clever placement. There are also several letters about *The Naval and Military Gazette*, the weekly that Philippart edited, and I will, going forward, track the overlap of material between that weekly and the monthly *United Service Magazine*.

My visit to the Hammersmith and Fulham Archives and Local History Centre, which holds some correspondence and papers of Sir John Philippart, proved to be disappointing as most of the letters in this collection were related to Philippart's management and contribution to the local charities in Hammersmith. However, these letters alerted me to look out for possible reports on local charities in the *United Service Magazine*.

At the Bodleian Library in Oxford, I perused early print editions of some of the imperial monthlies in order to gauge certain features of these periodicals, such as weight and paper quality, that are not easily perceptible in their digital format. In the Bodleian and the British

Library, I also looked through a range of other kinds of imperial journals, such as shipboard periodicals and steamship journals. At the time, I wanted to get a sense of how these differed from the imperial monthlies. But as I move forward with the project, I envision these journals, especially the steamship periodicals, as becoming an integral part of the project (outlined below).

My paper, entitled ‘Embodying Empire: The Trans-Colonial Perspective of the *Colonial Magazine and Commercial-Maritime Journal* (1840–44)’ was accepted to the 2017 annual RSVP conference, The Body and the Page in Victorian Culture. Despite being awarded a conference travel grant, I could not travel due to lack of funds to cover airfare from India and other miscellaneous expenditure. I plan to write up this paper and submit it for publication in the coming year.

Recent scholarship in the area of periodicals research, in particular the Routledge Handbook and Research Methodology volumes, edited by Alexis Easley, Andrew King and John Morton, has noted the importance of rethinking the relation between fast and slower-paced journals. Laurel Brake’s essay, ‘Markets, Genres and Iterations’ underlines the need to rethink the traditional bifurcation of the nineteenth-century press into newspapers and periodicals and notes the critical ways in which a journal’s geographical location determines its periodical identity. In view of this, and other recent work on imperial print culture, particularly *Commodities and Culture in the Colonial World*, edited by Supriya Chaudhuri, Josephine McDonagh, Brian H. Murray and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (London: Routledge, 2018), I have been rethinking the shape of the project. I feel that broadening the scope of the project and studying imperial newspapers and journals in a comparative framework would help me examine the critical ways in which imperial monthlies and newspapers influenced

the imperial project. I was thinking of dividing the project into two different halves: the first dealing with imperial monthlies that are predominantly reflective and historical in character, and the second, with imperial newspapers, such as the steamship journals, that continued to function as carriers of up-to-date news till they were superseded by the undersea telegraph in the 1880s. The steamship press would, I think, work very well as a point of comparison with the imperial monthlies, as it too was, like the imperial monthlies, entirely sustained by pre-telegraphic imperial print networks. Such a comparative framework would also enable me to study how date-stamped newspapers and periodicals were also durable print commodities.

The pace of my work on the project was affected by some difficult personal affairs that transpired in the past year. My father was detected with advanced cancer very soon after I returned to India and as his only child and primary caregiver, I was constantly travelling to various cities for his treatment and returning to Delhi to fulfil my teaching commitments. I lost him earlier this year. Returning to work on this project has been a source of solace. I thank the RSVP committee for supporting my project and look forward to producing more writing on it in the coming months.