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Canada and the North Pacific. Maritime Enterprise and Dominion, 1778?1914

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With over seven hundred volumes published, the Variorum Collected Studies Series has branched out considerably from its origins in late antique and medieval history. Recent forays into imperial history, for example, have generated collections of articles by some of the biggest names in the field. Authors submit a selection of previously published articles and book chapters, especially those which might be difficult to find otherwise, and present them in collected form with an introduction or preface (formats vary). These volumes have a retrospective air, offering opportunities for autobiographical and historiographical reflection.

Professor Gough?s collection of nineteen articles fulfils many of these goals admirably. A prolific scholar, Gough has a very wide range of articles and book chapters to choose from in order to create a coherent selection and structure. The first section presents pieces on the theme of ?James Cook and British Enterprise in the North Pacific? and the second features ?*Pax Britannica*: South America, Canada, and the Pacific?. Earlier pieces tend to be about exploration, trade and high strategy in the Second Age of Discovery. Later articles discuss the reinforcement and expansion of Britain?s nineteenth-century Pacific empire with particular reference to the activities of the Royal Navy. This is where Gough?s career began and the earliest article included here, from 1969, outlines one of his most conspicuous achievements: an investigation of the virtually unknown records of the Royal Navy?s Pacific Station.

Less sure-footed ventures, such as discussions of British ?gunboat diplomacy? against northwest coast aboriginal peoples, have wisely been omitted from this collection. What we have instead are pieces on international relations, naval biography, exploration history and high imperial policy in the north Pacific. These fields are the cornerstones of several of Gough?s many books, but especially of *The Royal Navy and the Northwest Coast of North America, 1810?1914: a Study of British Maritime Ascendancy and Distant Dominion: Britain and the Northwest Coast of North America, 1579?1809*.(1)

Several things become clear. This is a scholar devoted to meticulous empirical research and argument; there are surely very few relevant archival documents which Gough has not seen, few sites of maritime importance which he has not visited in person. This is also a scholar of remarkable epistemological certainty. He tells us that in north Pacific history we will find ?the essence of British imperial purposes? which consisted of ?commercial influence and political power? (p. ix). The only question worth asking is which came first, trade or the flag? And Gough confidently points readers toward ?the truth of the maxim that commerce came first and empire second? (p. ix). Gough is extremely well read in the work of the elder statesmen of British imperial history, and their preoccupation by commercial and strategic issues informs his research questions.

The strikingly limited introduction to this volume is unlike many others in the series. There are no accounts of epiphanies prompted by the work of friend or foe, no students thanked for their inspiration, and none of the challenges or surprises that scholars often note over the course of a long career. Gough tells us of Vincent Harlow, whose two volume study *The Founding of the Second British Empire, 1763?1793* (published in 1952 and 1964 respectively) was and remains his most formative intellectual influence. Citations in the introduction, however, refer overwhelmingly to Gough?s own work. This suggests a rather self-contained scholarly programme which, once launched, stayed the course with stolid determination. One of the articles in the volume tells us that the distinguished imperial and maritime historian Gerald Graham, then Gough?s doctoral supervisor, warned him that the Pacific defied historical narrative and analysis (chapter III, p. 99). Gough?s career can be seen as a sustained refutation of Graham?s doubts.

There is nothing here to surprise those familiar with Gough?s widely reviewed books. Profits drove British activities in the North Pacific in the wake of Cook. Fur traders and British politicians faced down Spanish claims to the northwest coast, but continued to face rivalry from Russian commercial activity. Hydrography and overland exploration combined by the end of the eighteenth century to create, for the first time, a transcontinental British presence. Formal colonisation on Vancouver Island and the mainland began and, after 1871, the new Canadian province of British Columbia continued to engage with a Pacific world first opened up by the British. Above all, ?British naval power as exercised on the Northwest Coast in the late nineteenth century represented the *Pax Britannica* in all its features? (p. xiv).

Gough makes his scholarly politics clear. In ?*Pax Britannica*: peace, force and world power? (1990), he argues that ?with world leadership comes the need and even the propensity to intervene physically, where diplomacy fails, to meet the pronounced need of the state? (chapter XIX, p. 167). Various political historians of decolonisation are cited for and against the argument that the collapse of the British Empire left a void which should have been filled by American power, but usually was not. The main question seems to be whether or not the Americans will be willing to take up the necessary burden. This approach to imperial

history raises many questions about the place of Gough?s work in a wider context of historiographical debate.

Throughout this volume, the challenges of thirty years of postmodern and postcolonial scholarship are largely silenced by omission, leaving Gough?s knowledge of recent historiography in question. He hints at the existence of those who might question his conclusions and terms of debate, but these forces lurk outside the margins of the text like ghosts. We need to think ?less in terms of the absolutes of ?good? or ?evil??, he declares (chapter XIX, p. 182), yet it is unclear who has been thinking in these terms. In fact, postmodernists would agree with Gough that these categories are epistemologically suspect. We should ?stop seeing the imperial process as unequivocably exploitative? (chapter XIX, p. 183), Gough continues, but we do not learn who has been doing so. It is unclear whether Gough is aware of the recent postcolonial scholarship which affirms the importance of historical complexity and nuance. The book?s introduction offered an opportunity to address these debates about the history and legacy of the British Empire, but the opportunity was not taken. We do not know, for example, how Gough would situate his work with reference to wide ranging critiques such as Frank Füredi?s *The New Ideology of Imperialism: Renewing the Moral Imperative* (1994), or to friendlier perspectives such as Niall Ferguson?s *Empire: the Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (2002).(2)

The *pax Britannica*, Gough believes, introduced well intentioned systems of trade, law and governance that are worthy of admiration. ?Nowadays that would all go under the heading of ?imperialistic? or even ?colonial? and would be much disparaged in many, though not all, quarters? (xv), he tells us. Which quarters? The essay from 1989 on ?Pacific Exploration in the 1780s and 1790s? includes some ambiguous comments about the efforts of ethnohistorians: a possible clue. The great explorers were Eurocentric, naturally, ?But how weightily we hang on their every word two centuries later while the likes of the more cautious Howe, Dening and Fisher desperately try to see the other side of the frontier? (III, p. 104).(3) Perhaps it was the area studies and ethnohistory movements of the 1960s and 1970s, therefore, whose critical ghosts haunt Gough?s texts. Perhaps it was an earlier generation of Marxist scholarship. Much remains unclear, and Gough's broadsides are therefore deployed in uncertain directions.

The impact of Gough?s work is equally difficult to assess. He remains the leading authority (indeed, the only authority) on north Pacific maritime and imperial history, and there is no question about the scope of his achievements. He can be found in every major collection relating to his subject, including the *Oxford History of the British Empire*.(4) High standards of empirical argument and documentation, combined with a willingness to tackle big questions, have helped him to maintain a tradition of imperial history scholarship founded by Vincent Harlow and others in the early twentieth century.

Nevertheless, it seems that the north Pacific is a rather lonely place. If Gough has ignored much recent historiography, it has returned the favour. There has been a striking lack of interest in Gough?s work by potential revisionists. Postcolonial scholars of British Columbian history with an interest in ?law and order? issues have barely acknowledged the maritime dimension, allowing Gough?s claims about the central role of naval power to go unexamined.(5) Those few who engage with maritime frontiers also seem strangely reluctant to tackle Gough?s work. Daniel Clayton?s acclaimed *Islands of Truth* (2000), for example, draws widely on Pacific maritime historiography while arguing that postcolonial historical geography is the key to taking these debates in new directions.(6) He engages with virtually every other imperial historian of the Pacific except Gough, however, even though he covers classic Gough territory: northwest coast exploration, commerce, and imperial policy. He quotes Gough only once (and not by name) in order to make a point about the limitations of early twentieth-century historiography. I have written elsewhere that ?We are still without significant debate about the vast archives and important issues unearthed by Gough?s pioneering work?.(7) This remains the case.

Such a situation would be unimaginable in other branches of Pacific maritime history. A ?Captain Cook Industry? is subjecting every word written about the great man?s death to relentless critical scrutiny. The explorers, traders and policy makers discussed in Gough?s work might have been expected to generate a similar reaction, but they have not. Perhaps scholars of British Columbian and Canadian history have been

less willing to venture offshore than their Australian and New Zealand counterparts. Perhaps imperial historians based in Britain find the warm south Pacific a more inviting subject than the chillier waters of the north. Whatever the reason, Gough and the historiographical debates of recent decades continue to pass like ships in the night.

Barry Gough got the first word about many dimensions of north Pacific imperial history, and he made the field his own. Revisionists seem content to let him have the last word, too. Very well, here it is: like the *pax Britannica*, today?s *pax Americana* features ?the marine landing party, the airborne brigade, and the diplomatic agent and native collaborator?, and in future ?much will depend on the toughness of heads of state, secretaries of state, agents and consuls, and on the character of the domestic political will that they represent, to maintain a world ?pax?? (chapter XIX, p. 183). Condoleezza Rice take note.

Notes

1. *The Royal Navy and the Northwest Coast of North America, 1810?1914: a Study of British Maritime Ascendancy* (Vancouver, 1971) and *Distant Dominion: Britain and the Northwest Coast of North America, 1579?1809* (Vancouver, 1980), revised as *The Northwest Coast: British Navigation, Trade, and Discoveries to 1812* (Vancouver, 1992).Back to (1)
2. Frank Füredi, *The New Ideology of Imperialism: Renewing the Moral Imperative* (1994); Niall Ferguson, *Empire: the Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (2002).Back to (2)
3. See K. R. Howe, *Where the Waves Fall: A New South Sea Island History from First Settlement to Colonial Rule* (Honolulu, 1984); Greg Dening, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas, 1774?1880* (Honolulu, 1980); and Robin A. Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774?1890* (Vancouver, 1977).Back to (3)
4. See Barry M. Gough, 'The Royal Navy and the British Empire' in *Historiography*, vol. v of *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Robin W. Winks (Oxford, 1999), 327?341.Back to (4)
5. For example, see Tina Loo, *Making Law, Order, and Authority in British Columbia, 1821?1871* (Toronto, 1994).Back to (5)
6. Daniel W. Clayton, *Islands of Truth: the Imperial Fashioning of Vancouver Island* (Vancouver, 2000). Back to (6)
7. Jane Samson, ?British Authority or ?Mere Theory?? Colonial Law and Native People on Vancouver Island?, *Western Legal History*, 11:1 (1998), pp. 39?63, at p. 41.Back to (7)

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