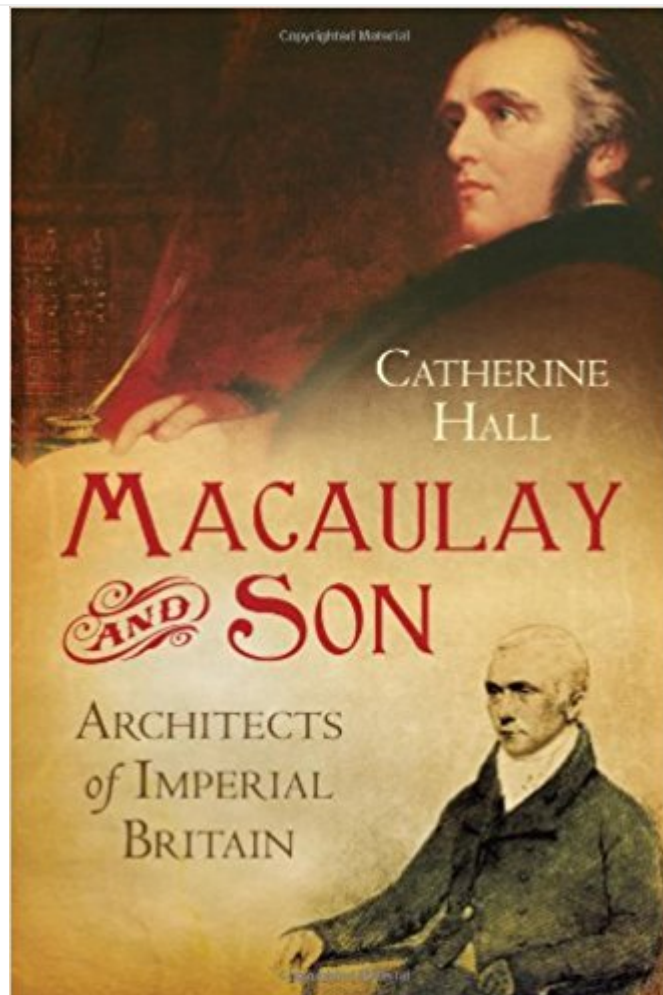


# {essays in history}

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## Macaulay and Son: Architects of Imperial Britain



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## Reviewed Work(s)

*Macaulay and Son: Architects of Imperial Britain*. By Catherine Hall (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). Hardcover. xxviii+389 pp. ISBN 978-0300160239. £35.00

More than a decade ago, new imperial historians focused their research on imperial subjects in motion and on the close relationships between imperial Britain and its overseas colonies. The path-breaking scholarship of historians such as Linda Colley, Kathleen Wilson, and Antoinette Burton demonstrated how the British Empire was staged both at home and in the colonies.<sup>[i]</sup> In *Macaulay and Son: Architects of Imperial Britain*, a follow-up to her excellent book *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867*, Catherine Hall further studies colonial encounters between imperial subjects and colonial people, attempting to shed new light on our understanding of British imperial history.<sup>[ii]</sup>

Following new imperial historians, Hall aims to deconstruct the conception of empire. “The imperial turn,” as Antoinette Burton argues, “is not a turn toward empire so much as a critical return to the connections between metropole and colony, race and nation,” signaling both the “inadequacy” and the “indispensability” of nation.<sup>[iii]</sup> “Empire as a unit,” according to Kathleen Wilson, “was a phantom of the metropole; all empire is local.”<sup>[iv]</sup> Outsiders such as the black settlers in Sierra Leone and the millions of Indian subjects, Hall asserts, were the shadowy constituting others who haunted both Zachary and Thomas Macaulay, shaping their search for self-identification as Englishmen. Writing this kind of new imperial history requires, Hall explains, “a reconfiguration of the topography of history—a return to the center, but now from the margins, a process not of affirmation but of deconstruction” (xvi). In so doing, Hall hopes to make new contributions to our understanding of the mutual constitution of the colonizers and the colonized peoples while also showing the symbiotic interconnections between the imperial capital and the colonies.

What, then, makes an imperial man? Opening with this question, which runs through the book, Hall explores the lives of two imperial subjects, the renowned Evangelist and abolitionist Zachary Macaulay (1768-1838) and his son the historian Thomas Macaulay (1800–1859). Focusing on their transatlantic encounters between 1768 and 1859, Hall not only analyzes Zachary’s ideas of civilization and race, but also considers Thomas’ hierarchical and orderly reformism. Although they were both imperial subjects, Hall thinks that their understandings of the British Empire were totally different from each other: while Zachary was an Evangelical, Thomas was “one of the most influential proponents of liberal imperial discourse” (xiii). Rather than writing a biography, Hall integrates the stories of abolitionist Zachary and his historian-statesman son Thomas into a single study.

In the first section, Hall discusses Zachary’s understanding of the British Empire from the perspective of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British evangelicalism. Born in Inveraray, Scotland, Zachary, the son of the Rev. John Macaulay (1720–1789), a minister in the Church of Scotland, went to Jamaica in 1784, where he worked as a plantation manager for about six years. As an Evangelical Christian, Zachary witnessed the cruelty of slavery in the colony. Believing “all men were God’s creatures,” Zachary became a leading abolitionist and an indefatigable crusader for evangelical Anglicanism when he returned to metropolitan Britain in 1789 (92). Partly because of his experiences in Jamaica, in 1790 Macaulay was invited to visit Sierra Leone, the British-sponsored settlement for free blacks on the West African coast. In 1794, Zachary was promoted to be governor of Sierra Leone, serving in this position for five years. After settling in England in 1799, Zachary’s own sinfulness and duty of atonement, as Hall points out, shaped his views on the imperatives of imperial reform at home: “To cleanse both the nation and the empire from the sinful paths of depravity,” especially the slavery (91).

In the second section, Hall pays particular attention to Thomas’ secular understanding of empire. As a Whig reformer, Thomas’ vision of nationhood embraced Irish Catholics and Jews, yet excluded women and colonial subjects (153). As Thomas moved between metropolitan Britain and India in the early 1830s, his view of empire concentrated on civilizing subjects. Looking at Thomas as an historian in chapter six, Hall

examines how Thomas' five-volume *History of England from the Reign of James II* promoted the Whig project of the British government for governing imperial subjects. Moreover, Hall not only explores Thomas' perception of progress from barbarism to civilization, but also considers his understanding of "the space of difference" between the insiders and the outsiders of the British Empire. Viewing Thomas as a secular historian and politician, Hall discusses his self-identification as an Englishman in detail.

Rather than separating the colony from metropolitan Britain, Hall reveals how metropolitan politics were closely related to colonial affairs in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century, British-Atlantic world. For example, analyzing Thomas' *Minute on Education* (1835), in which he promoted British educational policies in India, Hall illustrates the "space of difference" between the British rulers and their Indian subjects (229). Although the Indian subjects belonged to one family, Thomas believed that colonial government must be different to account for the higher level of civilization achieved by metropolitan subjects. Examining political debates in metropolitan Britain associated with these educational policies, Hall shows us that the colonial history was inseparable from the metropolitan history. Placing colonial history in a broader imperial context, Hall thus helps us to understand their relationship in a new way.

Certainly this book is not without its ironies and, perhaps, flaws. As Zachary was an Evangelical, Hall emphasizes his religious understanding of the British Empire. Although Thomas was born in an Evangelical family, Hall declares that he held a secular view of the British Empire and "religious beliefs were never central to him" (93). Both father and son were imperial subjects, but Hall overemphasizes the differences in their understandings of the British Empire. However, this should not take away from Hall's achievement. It highlights the imperial careers and the private and emotional lives of the Macaulays that are so often neglected by historians. Linking the imperial metropolis with the colonies, Hall insightfully explains how the British Empire shaped the cultures of both the colonized peoples and Britons themselves. Anyone interested in British self-constructions both in the colonies and at home will profit from a careful study of this book.

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[i] Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600–1850* (New York: Pantheon, 2002) and *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) and *Macaulay and Son: Architects of Imperial Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); Catherine Hall, Sonya Rose, eds. *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Antoinette M. Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) and *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and Through the Nation* (Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press, 2003).

[ii] Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[iii] Antoinette Burton, “Introduction: On the Inadequacy and Indispensability of the Nation,” in Antoinette Burton, ed., *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 2.

[iv] Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire, and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 213.



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