

important British Middle East administrators charged with maintaining British authority and control during the interwar period. Their integrated biographies form a critical aspect of Fletcher's overall narrative. When these sources are combined with an equally broad range of printed primary and secondary materials (evident is his extensive bibliography plus numerous and frequently detailed explanatory footnotes), it is obvious that Fletcher has presented scholars and researchers with an important repository of future research possibilities.

In many ways, Fletcher's work represents a long overdue re-examination of the nature of Western imperialism in the Middle East generally and British imperialism in particular. By rejecting the "state-centric" paradigm of most interwar Middle East studies for a transnational one, Fletcher allows the reader to part the curtains of anonymity and examine British imperialism not as ideology, but as part of a larger global process. At the same time, he is able to demonstrate the complex and gritty nature of imperialism as well as its impact on the local populations. Specifically, this involved the British requirements for maintaining control over a vast and largely un-defined desert frontier territory and its intersection with the needs of the various Bedouin desert tribes as they struggled with the demands of a modernity that disrupted their traditional transnational lifestyles. To this end, Fletcher's contributions greatly enhance not only our understanding of the Middle East during the interwar era of the twentieth century, but he also provides an essential framework for analysing the contemporary twenty-first century conflicts now unfolding in Syria and Iraq. Clearly this book is an important and substantive work that belongs on the shelves of every academic library. At the same time, it should be included in the class syllabi of courses on recent Middle East history and politics and read by every individual interested in contemporary Middle East policy development.

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David K. McQuillkin, *Bridgewater College*

NORTH AMERICA

Matt Cohen and Jeffrey Glover, eds. *Colonial Mediascapes: Sensory Worlds of the Early Americas*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014. 438 pp. ISBN: 9780803249998. \$35.00.

In one of the more evocative examples from this book of admirable essays, a wisp of tobacco smoke from an inscribed pipe conveyed complex and multi-layered meanings. It calmed minds, cemented agreements, and conveyed messages between humans and other-than-human persons. Pipe smoke is only one illustration of how native peoples in North and South America imparted information to each other and European colonizers alike. *Colonial Mediascapes* illustrates that widely varying forms of communication—written and unwritten, verbal and non-verbal, material and sensory—played a hugely important role in early America, helping alternately to facilitate, confuse, obscure and misdirect interactions between Natives and Europeans.

The editors set out to examine text and "other than text" sources. As they argue, scholars need to look more carefully at "multiple, sometimes simultaneous modes of communication" (2). The book is structured around Arjun Appadurai's concept of "mediascapes". Mediascapes include written, visual, material, performative and oral communication, which highlight a host of

interesting encounters that shaped the early Americas. Offering this conceptual framework presents the opportunity for novel approaches to communication, challenging entrenched concepts like “writing” and “literacy”. The goal is to “try out *media* as an organizing frame” (4).

This effort largely succeeds. To that end, *Colonial Mediascapes* stretches—occasionally, some might feel, overstretches—the boundaries of what communication means and how it is accomplished. The twelve essays provide provocative accounts of Spanish, French and Anglo encounters with indigenous peoples. The authors make a determined effort to put paid to the debate about the “Great Divide” between oral and literate cultures by demonstrating the multifaceted ways that communication worked for both Natives and Europeans. They question the definition of “writing”, what it means to be “literate” and suggest that too much emphasis has been placed on the book to the exclusion of (or largely ignoring) a host of other media deployed for communication, not only by Natives but Europeans as well. Germaine Warkentin wants to reconceptualise books as “objects of knowledge transfer”, looking especially at their materiality rather than the texts inscribed in them. Moving beyond the narrow strictures of “writing”, as Andrew Newman urges us to do, each of the essays grapples with different forms of communication. This shift from an emphasis on writing to “media”, the editors suggest, “disrupts progressive linear thinking about communications history” (4). Galen Brokaw, for example, explores the meaning of the Quechua concept of *quilca*, which may have had initial associations with colour, but came to represent an organic conceptualization of a wide range of Andean media.

Although all the essays reimagine communication between cultures in the early modern period, the coverage is weighted toward North America and these pieces plough new ground more effectively. Given that North Americanists have remained more closely tied to histories of the written word, Heidi Bohaker’s essay on sources created by indigenous peoples of the Great Lakes stands out for its coverage of material culture, and its call for redefining what constitutes an archive. Part III, focused on the interaction between media and the senses in the North American context, also has much new to say. Peter Charles Hoffer argues that communication swiftly went awry between Natives and the English in Virginia as a result of differing sensory perceptions, a process that he terms “sensory imperialism”. By comparison with the straightforward snarls, growls and yelps of animals, Jon Coleman argues that, human efforts to understand one another more often generated confusion than clarity. Going even further, Richard Cullen Rath tells us that objects could be “heard” through their association with negotiations and orality, as was the case with the woven beads of wampum exchanged as critical features of Native-European diplomacy. Although these sensory media were not always intelligible to the other side, they constituted sophisticated ways of recording, conveying and archiving information.

The combination of textual, material, bodily and visual analysis is a strength of most of the essays, and here several efforts focused on South America shine. Birgit Brander Rasmussen highlights Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala’s *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* from 1615 as a written effort that draws upon the *quipu* tradition, the knotted and coloured cords that served as Andean memory devices to convey his “philosophical arguments for coexistence and balance in the region” (142). Similarly, Ralph Bauer, in arguing that European writing could function as a sort of “khipu”, offers a fascinating “word picture” from Guaman Poma’s *Nueva corónica* that illustrates a manuscript page organized in the form of a khipu, visually bringing two dramatically different forms of communication together into a “colonial hybrid that ultimately leaves its intercultural contradictions unresolved” (349).

Communication and knowledge are closely associated with power, and for Europeans books and writing were a form of imperial power. Encounters with indigenous forms of communication could be confusing, even unintelligible, and several essays show how Natives deployed their preferred forms of knowledge transfer to stake out their position in altered political arrangements. Alternately, Europeans used the written word to convey positive impressions of Native communication practices for political and religious ends, as Jeffrey Glover notes in his account of North American borderland diplomacy. Some Europeans also absorbed Native languages not as acts of erasure or domination but as forms of preservation intended, as Sarah Rivett recounts, to find the keys to a universal language that might bring them closer to God.

These essays have a bit of everything, all falling into the definition of media: Mayan codices being burned, wafts of tobacco smoke, animal-sound communication between Natives and Europeans, wigs employed in faux instances of scalping, urinating and defecating wolves, spear-carrying Mastiff dogs, praying Indians, tattoos, universal language, not to mention the wampum of North America, the *quipu* of South America and traditional written volumes reinterpreted with multiple layers of meaning. As a result, the volume poses the question of how malleable the boundaries of media categories are before they “dissolve into meaninglessness”, to use a phrase deployed by Richard Cullen Rath (297). Although the authors make a strong case for moving well beyond writing to a wider range of media, one is occasionally left wondering what did *not* constitute a form of communication. Nevertheless, the breadth of the “mediascapes” encountered in these essays will undoubtedly serve to prompt reassessment and redefinition of the ways we think about intercultural interactions. This is the achievement of the volume, and a laudable one it is.

This fine collection illuminates the multi-faceted efforts at communication in the early Americas, which sometimes worked but often did not. The book, overall, is well-crafted and the ideas clearly conveyed. By mapping the terrain of communication practices from New England to the Andes, *Colonial Mediascapes* should be of great interest to historians, literary historians and material culture scholars across the geographic sweep of the early modern Atlantic world.

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Stephen G. Hague, *Rowan University*