

G. A. BREMER, ed. *Architecture and Urbanism in the British Empire*. Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. 465. \$65.00 (cloth).

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New forms of architecture and built environment emerged across the British Empire, but our knowledge of these places and spaces is surprisingly limited. There has been little engagement between historians of empire interested in urbanism, on one hand, and architectural historians interested in empire, on the other. The “New Imperial History” of the 1990s and 2000s took relationships between empire and culture seriously, creating opportunities to bring together the fields of urbanism and imperial history. These opportunities have rarely been taken; but there is great potential in such an engagement for the study of intersections between place, politics, economics, culture, and technology. As G. A. Bremer notes in the introduction to this edited volume, there has long been a need for a “scholarly overview” of urbanism in the British Empire (2).

This fascinating, generously illustrated volume affords this long-awaited overview. The first part of the book is thematic, considering early colonial architecture, urban planning, government buildings, the metropole, religious and educational buildings, and modernist architecture; and the second part is arranged geographically, covering North America and the West Indies, South and South East Asia, Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East. When we think of architecture and the British Empire, we might think first of the intimidating mass of the Viceroy’s House at New Delhi, designed by Herbert Baker and Edwin Lutyens (1912–30). It appears here, but Bremer’s book excels in drawing our attention to the sheer variety of buildings associated with British imperialism. Castles in medieval Ireland; Martin Frobisher’s house in the Arctic (1576–78), apparently the first structure in North America constructed by a Briton; the barracks inhabited by enslaved people in early eighteenth-century North America; Maori *whare whakairo*, or meeting houses, of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and Norman Foster’s HSBC tower (1983–85) in Hong Kong: all appear in these pages. This architectural diversity reflects the longevity and geographical reach of British imperialism, but also variations between regional architectures in Britain itself, and complex encounters with indigenous knowledge, methods, and materials.

Buildings helped to create environments legible to British people, from Toronto to Cape Town to Calcutta. They “were both produced and consumed locally, yet conceived within an intercontinental cultural sphere,” as Daniel Maudlin observes in his chapter on early colonial architecture (22). Built environments helped to make a British world in which indigenous people were subject to dispossession and exclusion. The book also draws our attention to the multipolar networks of information and expertise that bound the empire together. Boston in the eighteenth century was a center of craft skills, with connections to other parts of British North America. India in the nineteenth century was an imperial hub from which strategies of government, associated built environments including hill stations and cantonments, and “Indo-Saracenic” architecture were exported to other British-controlled territories in Asia and Africa, to be put to work in new contexts. By the twentieth century, Australia was a nodal point from which architects worked across Asia and Australasia. The book is compelling on the ways these networks dissipated unevenly in the era of decolonization. Some proved surprisingly resilient, and facilitated the work of British architects in decolonizing territories well after formal transfers of power. The volume shows that the study of urbanism has much to offer to our understanding of the patterns of interconnection that made up the British Empire.

Despite this richness, the survey Bremer offers is of a relatively young field of research, and the engagement of many chapters with the historiography of empire is limited. Bremer urges scholars of colonial urbanism to engage with the New Imperial History (10) and leads the way

with his chapter on architecture and empire in Britain, which addresses the recent interest in empire “at home.” The debates and concepts of imperial history are, however, strikingly absent from much of the book. The contribution that the study of built environments might make to the historiography of empire, and vice versa, is not the main concern of most contributors.

This is reflected, for example, in the marginal place of colonized people in many chapters. The role of “collaboration,” crucial to the making and unmaking of British power, is a staple of historians of empire. Here, it is well addressed by Preeti Chopra in her chapter on South and South East Asia, which is fully alive to the role of colonized people “as users, designers, engineers, builders, and sometimes patrons” (278). Ian Lochhead and Peter Walker’s chapter on New Zealand offers some interesting coverage of the effects of British settlement on Maori architectures; and twentieth-century non-British architects, including the Sri Lankan Minnette de Siva and the Nigerians Adedokun Adeyemi and Olumide Olumuyiwa, feature briefly in other chapters. But the book engages only sporadically with how the everyday lives of colonized people invariably remade urban space and invested it with new meanings.

This issue might be addressed through a more sustained study of buildings’ use and representation. Not traditionally a question that has attracted architectural historians’ interest, the consideration of how colonized people used and appropriated built environments would allow us to develop a more multifaceted understanding of colonial-era urban space. It is striking that buildings intended to express and uphold British power, like those at New Delhi, ultimately failed to do so. This failure is best explained by locating them within wider histories of empire.

That said, Bremner offers an invaluable and unprecedented survey of a new and exciting field of imperial history that should mark its coming of age. The volume’s importance for many will be as an entry point to this almost endlessly rich arena of study: it surely contains the seeds of hundreds of dissertation topics. Bremer and his contributors have given us a dazzling and abundant survey. The full importance of the field they have delineated will only become clear in the years to come.

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ANDRÉ BRETT *Acknowledge No Frontier: The Creation and Demise of New Zealand’s Provinces, 1853–76*. Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2016. Pp. 343. \$35.99 (paper).  
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In 1853, New Zealand, by the imperial parliament’s New Zealand Constitution Act, established a quasi-federal system by which authority was shared between provincial governments (six originally) and the colonial government based in Auckland. The provinces were not like British municipalities, though they had elective councils modelled on the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act. Their wide powers included immigration and public works, especially railway construction. In 1858, they were given a substantial share of the revenue accruing from the disposal of crown lands.

André Brett’s *Acknowledge No Frontier: The Creation and Demise of New Zealand’s Provinces, 1853–76* is a timely book, not least because it might serve to revive interest in the politics of the New Zealand colonial society, much neglected over the last half-century apart from the occasional biography of high-strutting premiers and the like. More important, this is the first comprehensive treatment of the subject since W. P. Morrell’s *The Provincial System in New Zealand*