

“London in all its glory” or how to enjoy London: guidebook representations of imperial London.

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“London in all its glory” or how to enjoy London: guidebook representations of imperial London

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Abstract

Tourism has played a significant but often unacknowledged role in the construction of the modern city as a place to be seen and experienced. Guidebooks to modern European cities have usually interpreted them as sites of deep history, or as examples of a modern world in the making, or as centres of power and influence. This final trope was most common in representations of the capital cities of the imperial powers. This paper traces changing representations of London in its tourist literature from mid-Victorian triumphalism to the city's re-invention at the end of the twentieth century as a postimperial spectacle. It concentrates on mass-market guidebooks and others which were written explicitly for tourists from the British empire. This history points to long-running anxieties about London's cityscape as a fitting symbol of imperial power. It also

shows how readings of London which emphasized its global pre-eminence were replaced by alternative, more «domestic» understandings of imperialism and the imperial city in the interwar period. The paper stresses the significance of tourist guidebooks as a form of popular geographical knowledge. Rather than dismissing them as clichéd and one-dimensional, this account stresses both their diversity and their status as «transcultural» texts.



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