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There is no doubt that in the present state of the historiography of imperialism there is a crying need for parallel and comparative studies. In the anglophone world there has been excessive concentration on the British empire, as has been reflected not only in the older and newer Cambridge and Oxford histories, but also in publishers' lists. Although there are of course major works on the French, Dutch, German and Italian empires in their native European languages, the sources available to the English-speaking student are much less rich. If this is true in general terms for these European empires, how much more is it true of the inter-war period, which has until recently tended to be a 'cinderella' era in imperial scholarship. So far as the French empire is concerned, there has been a notable quickening of interest, not least in the fields of popular culture, propaganda and administrative concerns.

This book constitutes a very welcome addition to the literature in English on French imperialism, especially valuable because it deals with the period between the two world wars of the twentieth century. It is also striking that the work picks up on so many valuable themes in the period. It has sometimes been argued that this period constitutes, against all the odds, something of a classic era in imperial rule. It was the time when the most strenuous efforts were made to integrate metropolitan and colonial economies. It was a period when administrative practice was most highly developed. And these were the years when empires, buffeted by world economic depression, apprehension at political and military developments in Europe and the Far East, as well as assaulted by revolt and intellectual disillusion at home and in the colonies, became most active in issuing propaganda and asserting the centrality of the imperial relationship through popular culture. In the French case, this was reflected in the extraordinary colonial exhibitions that took place in Marseilles in 1922 and in Paris in 1931 and 1937, among the grandest and most eclectic of their type.

Martin Thomas deals here with the multiple aspects of what he calls the period of 'consolidation and expansion', the emergence of colonial planning policies, the attempted integration of economies, the roles of urban growth and development, education and women's activities, as well as the quickening of both nationalist resistance and fears of international crisis. All these themes are illustrated by examples from North and West Africa, the Middle East and Indochina, and all contribute to the sense of the major paradox of the inter-war years. On the one hand, here was a sort of Golden Age, if regularly tarnished. On the other, here was the prelude to

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the major disruptions of the Second World War, with an empire divided in allegiance to Vichy or the Free French, and consequently to the acts of decolonisation forced upon the French state after the Second World War.

Obviously, the experience of the French empire stands alone, but the parallels with developments in the British, and perhaps other, empires (not least the American and the Japanese, as well as the European) are striking. The need for major studies of comparative imperialism can be fully realised only when histories of individual empires, particularly of the quality of this one, have been researched and published.

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