

# Editorial Foreword

*Imperial Visions.* The little lake of Nemi, known to modern Italians for its wild strawberries, remains evocative and mysterious to readers of English, thanks to James Frazer, who built a multivolumed vision (and an influential conception of ethnography) on what he imagined once happened there. Although pelted by the skepticism of classicists and the criticism of anthropologists, *The Golden Bough* has retained its place as a book one ought someday to read. In this issue, Mary Beard asks why so huge and diffuse a work has enjoyed such fame; and her nuanced answer goes beyond Victorian taste to consider the intellectual armor that makes alien cultures safe and the satisfactions to be found in facts (all part of early anthropology, as discussed by Bock in *CSSH*, 8:3, and by Hammel in 22:2). Mixing primal emotions and rational organization is a formula not just for bestsellers but for power, and Frazer's voyage of the imagination belongs to a rich genre (compare Breckenridge and Mitchell on exhibitions, both in 31:2), not so different for all its scientism from other tales of exploration and conquest. Robert Finlay compares two early examples—Portugal's most famous epic poem and a Chinese novel, sixteenth-century accounts of the naval expeditions led by Vasco da Gama and Zheng He (note Goldstone, 30:1, on this era). Inevitably, these accounts reveal more about the societies from which their heroes sailed than the ports at which they called, and Finlay uses the striking similarities in these two endeavors to expose suggestive differences between the cultures that sponsored them. The two writers shared something else, however, for the poet of the Portuguese adventurers and the novelist of the stately Ming flotilla both looked back at a glory not quite grasped. In their literature of imperial grandeur, they decried the degeneration of their times.

*The Social Ground of Modern Agriculture.* These two articles exemplify the gains to be won from systematic comparison. Both are about agriculture during nineteenth-century industrialization, and each treats a well-defined practice—gender roles in dairying, the mechanization of agriculture—which, considered in a single case, could be explained as economically inevitable or culturally determined, their development too obvious to require research. Instead, comparison shows that common theories about the effects of economic development on women's work or the reasons for investing in technology need to be modified (Cohen, 27:4, and Parr, 30:3, compared transatlantic organization of work with similar results). Sally McMurry contrasts cheesemaking in Britain, where women long retained a preeminent role, and in the United States, where factory production employed men. In each case the system in practice garnered cultural and ideological as well as institutional support for different ways of making cheese and different constructions of

women's wants. Jeremy Adelman makes his comparison of the wheatlands of Canada and Argentina in a point by point analysis of the factors that determined the pace and extent of mechanization to show that simple models of markets, costs, and profits do not explain technological change in agriculture (continuing discussions of the economy of choice in farming by Llambi, 31:4; Adams, 30:3; Lehmann, 28:4; Winson, 25:1; and Friedman, 20:4).

*Colonial Conversions.* A religion of the Word, Christianity has always cared greatly about language; and its importance for winning converts in other cultures has fed a thriving process of metahistorical mistranslation. With enormous erudition, Walter D. Mignolo places Renaissance ideas of language and printing at the core of the Castilian engagement with and colonization of Amerindian culture. Commitment to Latin, its alphabet, universal grammars, a philosophy of language, and to the book determined what Spaniards could perceive in the new world's civilizations. Their empowering discourse literally deconstructed cultures that used signs differently (compare the treatment of language and literacy in Akinnaso, 34:1; Niezen, 33:2; Ewald, 30:2; and Ryan, 23:4). Taking much from Foucault and Said, the authors in this section move beyond those now familiar formulations. The vectors of power, Mignolo argues, did not point in just one direction. While Castilians imposed the alphabet and the structure of the book to transform memory into history, Amerindians infiltrated these devices and made them a technology of resistance with which to codify something of their own threatened culture (see Clendinnen, 22:3; Farris, 29:3). Resistance is central, too, in David Scott's discussion of the British understanding of religion in Sri Lanka (a society also studied by McGilvray, 24:2, and Kemper, 26:3). That understanding developed, he shows, from early British Orientalism (with its earnest desire to place religions on a scale of enlightenment), expanded with the needs of colonial rule and the effects of actual encounters with Sinhala customs. Then Evangelical missionaries, who held stricter views and had some disappointing results to explain, identified the dangerous durability of local demonism, thereby establishing a category that would win its place in anthropology (see Beidelman, 23:1, and Wolfe, 33:2). Across the differences in their eras and purposes, Europeans remained bound by categories bequeathed to them in the invented histories of their ancestors. The reality of many different colonialisms is important for Nicholas Thomas, too, as he exposes the complexity of missionary representations (compare Burns, 30:2; Sider, 29:1; Schieffelin, 23:1). With fertile ambiguity, they expressed a need for control but also for faith in human equality, joyful confidence that change was possible along with static, infantilizing images. Analysis of these images exposes the contradictory meanings with which Methodist missionaries infused even the most standard stereotypes. Power was not enough to make colonial conversions a simple process.