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► **To cite this version:**

Gilles Teulié. Orientalism and the British Picture Postcard Industry: Popularizing the Empire in Victorian and Edwardian Homes. Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens, Montpellier: Centre d'études et de recherches victoriennes et édouardiennes, 2019, 89, 10.4000/cve.5178 . hal-02567812

**HAL Id: hal-02567812**

**<https://hal-amu.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02567812>**

Submitted on 8 May 2020

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# **Orientalism and the British Picture Postcard Industry: Popularizing the Empire in Victorian and Edwardian Homes**

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**Titre :** L’Orientalisme et l’industrie britannique de la carte postale : la popularisation de l’Empire dans les foyers victoriens et édouardiens

**Abstract:** During the 19th century as and when Europeans developed a keen interest in what was described as the ‘Orient’—ranging from architecture in Moorish Spain to the faces and places in Northern Africa and the Middle East—images of an exotic fantasised Orient bounced back to Europe, in particular through the works of artists who painted what they had seen, or *thought* they had seen. The Orientalist movement was buttressed by Napoleonic expeditions in Egypt or the travel boom (Eugene Delacroix in Morocco). And yet suffice it to say that only the elite had access to these visual representations, either by becoming owners of paintings or by admiring them in art galleries, the prerogative of the educated and the wealthy. It is against this context that the article will consider how ‘high culture’ and ‘popular culture’ (and particularly postcards) permeated Victorian and Edwardian society, and through the transformative power of the Arts, contributed eminently to the consolidation of the imperial project.

**Résumé :** L’Orientalisme s’est diffusé au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle lorsque les Européens s’intéressèrent de près à l’architecture « orientale » (l’Espagne mauresque), aux populations et aux paysages d’Orient (Afrique du Nord, Moyen Orient). A l’aune des expéditions militaires (Napoléon en Egypte), du développement des voyages (Eugène Delacroix au Maroc) ou de celui du tourisme, des images idéalisées de l’Orient furent rapportées en Europe, en particulier par des artistes qui peignaient ce qu’ils avaient vu ou pensaient avoir vu. Mais, seule une élite avait accès à ces représentations. L’achat de ses œuvres et la possibilité de les admirer dans des galeries étaient la prérogative d’une classe éduquée et aisée. La question que cet article soulève est de comprendre comment la culture d’élite et la culture populaire (en particulier les cartes postales) ont pu être diffusées dans toute la société victorienne puis édouardienne, et, au travers du pouvoir de transformation des arts, ont pu faciliter le projet impérial.

**Biographical note :**

Gilles Teulié is Professor of British and South African Studies at Aix-Marseille University. He

has written extensively on South African history and the Victorian period. He has published a book on the Afrikaners and the Anglo-Boer War: *Les Afrikaners et la guerre anglo-Boer 1899-1902. Etude des cultures populaires et des mentalités en présence* (Montpellier UP, 2000) and another one on racial attitudes in Victorian South Africa: *La racialisation de l'Afrique du Sud dans l'imaginaire colonial* (L'Harmattan, 2015). He is the editor and co-editor of several collections of essays among which: *Religious Writings and War (Carnets du Cerpac 3, 2006)*, *Victorian Representations of War (Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens 66, 2007)*, *War Sermons*, with Laurence Sterritt (2009), and *Spaces of History, History of Spaces* with Matthew Graves (2017). He is currently working on war memories, as well as the mediatisation of European Empires through early picture postcards.

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**Key words:** Postcards, British Empire, imperialism, orientalism, Victorians, Edwardians, consumer society.

**Mots clés :** Cartes postales, empire britannique, impérialisme, orientalisme, Victoriens, Edwardiens, société de consommation.

During the 19th century, and in the wake of the Grand Tour, the development of tourism gave rise to a lively interest for foreign lands that permeated the Victorian and later the Edwardian societies through several art forms. The British elite had, for a long time, been art lovers displaying their acquisitions at home, which spoke for their taste, values, status, culture and wealth. Portraits and landscape paintings were common decorative items that adorned not only the walls of castles, manors and rich country houses but also of cosy urban flats.

At the same time, exotic landscapes were promoted by British expeditions across the world that were organized during a period that spanned the 18th and 19th centuries. Artists such as Sydney Parkinson (1745-1771), William Hodges (1744-1797), John Webber (1751-1793), William Alexander (1767-1816) or Thomas Baines (1820-1875) were hired to help naturalists and other scientists to provide a visual representation of what had been seen, found or discovered. These artists made sketches or full drawings of their findings, annotating the colours to be added once they were back home. They then took the time to complete their paintings of exotic landscapes with the view to selling them to rich people who were eager to have representations of the new geographical discoveries that were debated in erudite circles. Exoticism as well as the sublime and the picturesque were developed in that period and inspired artists devoted to what could be called 'expedition paintings', while the explorers, and the artists that accompanied them were the forerunners of what was then seen as a formidable adventure that led Europeans to discover the world. These enabled wealthy people to have a fashionable alternative to the traditional paintings of the English countryside, even though Constable and Turner were at the height of their fame by the end of the century.

When discoverers and explorers gave way to more common travellers, who partook in this international networking, Britain became even more imbued with exoticism, as (professional) painters turned travellers and travellers began to be (amateur) painters. Following Eugene Delacroix and other painters, Orientalism, became the new fashion in Europe, which led sometimes realistic, but often fantasized, representations of the 'Orient' to permeate European culture. Yet paintings were not accessible to all parts of the British population.

It took a further step to promote a vast broadcasting of the constructed image of the Orient and other exotic or 'imperial' topics into the Victorian and Edwardian homes. First engravings enabled newspaper and magazine editors to disseminate the Black and White representations of the colourful pictures displayed in galleries. Then, the invention of the postcard in Austria in 1869<sup>1</sup> and its developments towards the end of the Victorian era, resulted in art becoming industrialized. Anyone could buy a postcard representing a painting for half a penny without investing in a real and costly painting. This new access to art corresponded to the height of Empire. Thus, the first important production of foreign land paintings on postcards gave a stereotyped image of the colonies as a sort of 'Paradise Regained' and, (as Walter E. Houghton once put it) shaped the Victorian frame of mind durably.

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<sup>1</sup> Historians agree to give credit to Dr Emmanuel Hermann (1839-1902) an Austrian economist, professor at the Wiener Neustadt Military Academy, for the invention of the Postcard. Hermann would have been the first to suggest the creation of the postal card, adorned with an imprinted stamp. The Austrian postal services accepted the idea and the first postal card was published on 1 October 1869. By 1870 other countries, such as Great Britain, adopted this cheap means of communicating, with or without an imprinted stamp. A distinction was thus made between postal cards and postcards, the latter becoming a successful item fit for the new consumer society and the frenzy of the times. The 1890s witnessed the arrival of the picture postcard, whose success soon turned into a collectible.

In the light of the debate launched by British historians Bernard Porter and John MacKenzie, this essay aims to understand the correlation between the democratization of art through the new media of the picture postcard and the promotion of Empire. Was there a will to promote the Empire or was it just a ready means to make money? Were postcard publishers just following a fashion for collectibles or did they consciously, or unconsciously promote an ideology they were themselves subjected to? Were the postcards just indicators of the mood of the time (whether imperial or not) or were they themselves vectors of ideology? Questioning the interest displayed by Victorians for Empire, Porter suggests that it was imposed on them through propaganda and popular culture while MacKenzie contests this view. The question raised by Bernard Porter is an interesting one, as it sheds light on the reception of the Empire and its socio-cultural impact on Victorian and Edwardian societies. Porter is right, as stated by French historian Pierre Singaravelou, in showing that British society has never been homogeneous and that the attitude towards the Empire depended on their geographical (Wales, Ireland, Scotland, different parts of England), social, economic and religious background.

Yet, some academics have shown that Bernard Porter's interesting and convincing examples stating that Britons did not care for the Empire did not account for the full picture, such as Pierre Singaravelou who cites Richard Symonds's book giving evidence to the contrary. Antoinette Burton has argued that Porter's book lacked interpretive power although it was rich in evidence, while Andrew Thompson sided with Bernard Porter when he stated that in Victorian times there was 'no uniform imperial impact, no joined-up or monolithic ideology of imperialism, no single source of enthusiasm or propaganda for the empire, no cohesive imperial movement' (Thompson 241), even though this argument could be adopted by both debaters. In 2014, Richard Toye, from the University of Exeter pointed out that ten years after the debate was launched 'we can't assume that just because this [imperial] culture was out there, it was being consciously turned into a sort of imperial mindset by the people who present it with it and who were consuming it' (Toye). David Cannadine, relying on his own youth experience concluded in the same way that:

All this leads me to wonder whether I should describe myself as having been drenched in 'the imperial project', in the way that many post-colonial scholars argue was characteristic of the British throughout (and beyond?) the existence of empire itself. One answer is that I am not sure there was ever such a thing as 'the imperial project': even at its apogee, the British Empire was far more ramshackle a thing ever to display such unanimity of action and consistency of purpose. (Cannadine 197–98)

Richard Toye further states that he does not believe that imperialists had a conscious desire to dominate other people. They, therefore, could not impose their views through propaganda. He concludes that it is difficult to know what people had in mind and what the impact of imperially or colonially branded products was. What influence did they have on peoples' mindsets, did they normalize the Empire? Or did preconceptions predispose people to react in such ways in moments of celebration or crisis? The contribution of this article to this field of study is to be found in the analysis on how Orientalist paintings were turned into easily accessible mass-produced items such as postcards and have therefore enabled every British citizen to be able to see the pictures that had previously been the prerogative of privileged people.

### **Picture Postcards and the Pervasion of Images**

‘Empire follows art, and not vice versa as Englishmen suppose’ wrote William Blake at the turn of the 18th century (Mitchell 2005, 145). This statement, which is the starting point of Mitchell’s study on what comes first, art or empire, underlines the proximity of the two objects under scrutiny. In terms of popular cultural goods that were accessible to nearly all classes of Victorian society and to all geographical parts of the British Isles, the picture postcard became one of the foremost elements produced in the 19th century. It emerged in the wake of the invention and development of various techniques, such as photography, cinema and of the improvement of the printing devices. With its success and the massive production that followed in the last decades of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the picture postcard became a new medium. It was not just an image as it displayed a caption, a reference to the publisher, and when sent through the postal service, a postmark and a manuscript text written by the sender.

Picture postcards could not match modern media such as television or the internet in terms of broadcasting news to the public, yet, at the time, they could provide (partial) news, as they could be produced cheaply and very quickly (for example to profit from an important event that people wanted to share with their friends and relatives). As stated by Naomi Schor (1943-2001), a scholar in French literature, critical and feminist theories: ‘The turn-of-the-century pictorial postcard ... functioned like a cross between the modern print and communication media, something like *CNN*, *People*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *National Geographic*, all rolled into one, ...’ (Schor 193). Picture postcards were cheap to buy and to send; envelopes were not compulsory; postcards could only allow for a short manuscript text and therefore saved the sender from having to write a long letter; the picture could be part of a more global message (‘this is the place where I am staying’, ‘this is the accident I witnessed’ or ‘these are the troops I cheered before they left to the front’). The ‘postcard craze’ that took hold of Victorians and Edwardians alike, sheds light on their society and their attitude towards modernity. It was nothing compared to newspapers which had lengthy articles accompanied by pictures (or not) while the postcard was but a snapshot with a caption (and sometimes even devoid of text). The informative process was different, but postcards had an advantage the press did not have: the card could be kept as a souvenir and turned into a collectible, ‘a picture being worth a thousand words’ as the idiom goes. W. J. T. Mitchell reminds us that the link between text and image is to be carefully analysed as, instead of getting along harmoniously, they can be in tension:

The dialectic of word and image seems to be a constant in the fabric of signs that a culture weaves around itself. What varies is the precise nature of the weave, the relation of warp and woof. The history of culture is in part the story of a protracted struggle for dominance between pictorial and linguistic signs, each claiming for itself certain proprietary rights on a ‘nature’ to which only it has access. (Mitchell 1984, 529)

The success of the picture postcard was so swift among the European public that celebrated British historian Asa Briggs (1921-2016) stated in his acclaimed *Victorian Things*:

It is said, too, that half-a-million people passed through St Martin’s Le Grand on the first day of issue of the Post Office postcards, and that 70 million postcards were sold in the first year. By the end of the decade, over 150 million postcards had already been posted—with picture postcards yet to come. (Briggs 363)

During what became known as the ‘golden age’ of picture postcards (from the 1890s to the 1920s), statistics concerning picture postcards reached huge proportions: 2,360,000,000 postcards were sent each year, according to the French illustrated newspaper *Le Monde Illustré*, 13 July 1901 (de Noussanne 23). A whole industry emerged. Making profits out of fashionable items on such a scale was new for the emerging Victorian consumer society as shown by Judith Flanders:

Over the course of the nineteenth century, mass production of goods, improved distribution of those goods by new and faster forms of transports, promotion by advertising in newspapers and magazines, and new methods of retailing, all combined to produce a seemingly endless stream of things that could be acquired by the consumer. It was not expensive rarities that created the new middle-class world than all the world of plenty and ease: it was the small comforts of hot, sweet drinks, or cheap and cheerful clothes—perhaps more ultimately better symbols of the new world than all the machinery and technical ingenuity that made these items possible. (Flanders XVI)

Late Victorians and Edwardians therefore had a proclivity towards the spreading of stereotypes, images and representations of the world through the mass production of objects that extolled ideas and ideologies. Picture postcard industrialists encouraged their customers’ desire to consume manufactured goods by developing a taste for collecting that was a characteristic of Victorian society. This interplay between manufacturer and customer can probably be best exemplified in the British picture postcard industry, through the best-known picture postcard company of the time, Raphael Tuck & Sons (Ltd) which, in 1904, could boast a production of 15,000 different postcard designs.

The founder of the family business, Raphael Tuck (1821-1900) (whose real name was Tuch), lived in Prussia with his wife and seven children. He moved with his family to London in 1865 because of unrest in his country. He started a business in furniture and picture-framing. Then in the 1870s, he developed his trade to include Victorian scraps and photographs as well as Christmas cards promoting what the company was to be famous for: oleograph (or chromolithograph), a technology developed from the 1830s onward to produce beautiful colours. Tuck was joined by three of his four sons; the trademark was established in 1881 and the firm expanded and was granted a Royal Warrant by Queen Victoria in 1893. The quality of the firm’s products pleased all the British monarchs that succeeded, including Queen Elisabeth II, who also granted her warrant. The following year, in 1894, the first Tuck picture postcard representing a vignette of mount Snowdon was commercialized. The first postcards were chromolithographs published in Germany. The works of famous artists of the time were reproduced on postcards, as is still the case today particularly in museums’ gift shops. Raphael Tuck & Sons produced the ‘National Gallery Postcards’ for example, thus providing (black and white) copies of John Constable’s: ‘The Young Anglers’ or ‘Flatford Mill, Suffolk’ or a ‘Turner Postcard’ series copied ‘From the original painting in the National Gallery’ with such titles as ‘Portsmouth’ or ‘The Grand Canal in Venice’. These paintings had spread in other spheres of Victorian society through engravings which enabled publishers to reproduce famous works of art in newspapers, magazines and books, but with the picture postcards another level of pervasion was reached.

Such examples show that from the end of the Victorian era, nearly everybody could have access to famous paintings from the National Gallery and be subjected to pieces of art with a potential to influence their vision of the world. The company commissioned top-line artists to design postcards, such as Harry Payne (1858-1927), a military artist, or Helena Maguire (1860-1909) who specialised in painting cats. These artists contributed to the quality of the postcards and thus to the fame of the company. The company produced a great quantity of postcards, all

numbered and part of series, the most famous ones being the ‘Empire’ series of which Harry Payne was a prolific producer, and the ‘Oilette’ series, representing colour paintings of famous places or people from all over the world, and which was said by Adolph Tuck, who succeeded his father at the head of the company, to represent eighty percent of their profits. During the heyday of picture postcards, Raphael Tuck & Sons produced tens of thousands of original postcards, each of which being published in great numbers. A great variety of artists were commissioned to produce postcards. They were so numerous that, according to *The Times*, Raphael Tuck ‘opened up a new field of labour for artists, lithographers, engravers, printers, ink and paste board makers, and several other trade classes’.<sup>2</sup>

To understand the world-wide success of picture postcards, it is worth noting that customers were encouraged to see the picture postcard as a desirable object to be possessed. Indeed, beyond the obvious objective of the invention of postcards which was a means to correspond with relatives, friends or complete strangers, the aesthetic quality of many picture postcards, as well as their size which enabled anybody to treasure a great number of them, induced people to collect them. Did (Western) people need encouragements to become picture postcard enthusiasts, or were they spurred by operations of marketing into creating and participating into the ‘postcard craze’? Probably both assumptions are valid, as, on the one hand, a nice fashionable object generally creates envy and desire to possess it, and, on the other, people are egged on by the picture postcard industry to consume their products, as often as possible. Therefore, companies organized competitions, among which the most prominent was, once again, Raphael Tuck & Sons. They set up several contests which consisted in displaying the largest collection of Tuck cards for a single collector. Launched in July 1900, the first contest was granted a £1,000 prize. It was advertised in many newspapers including newly published picture postcard collectors’ magazines such as *The Picture Postcard* which had its first edition in July 1900 and advertised Tuck’s prize on its front cover. Interestingly, this cover stated that the objective of the contest was to gather the biggest collection of Tuck picture postcards to have passed through the post, to ensure that the great amount of circulating Tuck cards would not go unnoticed (so it was not just postcards that were bought for collecting purposes). The winner presented 20,364 Tuck picture postcards. It was a profitable event for the company: ‘The interest generated by this competition provided a massive boost to sales and certainly contributed to the growing popularity of the postcard collecting hobby’ (Smith 10). In 1903, the second contest was advertised through various means, one of them being the publication of ‘The latest List of Tuck’s Post-Cards’ which were ‘All eligible for the Two Thousand Pounds Prize Competition’. The winner presented a collection of 25,000 Tuck picture postcards. Another competition induced people to send Tuck postcards to friends and institutions; the more postcards you sent the more likely you were to win the competition, thus networking the whole society. It was called the ‘Tuck Post-Card Chain’ and was explained to the potential participants to the contest in this way:

50 prizes of the total value of £ 2,500 are offered to as many hospitals, nursing homes, scholastic and other Public and Semi-public institutions for whom the longest chains have been welded, that is, to whom the largest number of Tuck’s Post-cards have been sent by contributors.<sup>3</sup>

The idea was, for each of these contributors, to be an ‘originator’. It means they were encouraged to buy three Tuck packets of six postcards each. They were to send the first one (marked 01) to an institution such as a hospital which they proposed to benefit, the second to Tuck Company in Raphael House, London (marked 02) and the remaining 16 cards to 16 friends

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in the ‘History of Raphael Tuck & Sons LTD’ <https://tuckdb.org/history>

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in the ‘History of Raphael Tuck & Sons LTD’ <https://tuckdb.org/history>



(marked 03) who were all advised to become, in turn, ‘originators’ for the institution designated by the first ‘originator’. The institution that would receive the greatest number of Tuck postcards would win one of the 50 prizes. Winning ‘originators’ would be rewarded along with the ‘contributor’ friends who would share no fewer than 450 prizes (probably in Tuck goods).<sup>4</sup> Hence, the Tuck company understood the importance of postcards as a collectible and bolstered this Victorian inclination. One ad, in a 1908 French newspaper,<sup>5</sup> stated that the French branch of the Raphael Tuck & Sons company in Paris<sup>6</sup> (located 19 & 21 rue du Paradis) proposed to ‘facilitate, free of charge, the international exchange of artistic postcards between collectors in the world with its Exchange register for Postcard collectors’. To be part of that network, collectors just had to buy a Tuck postcard and send it to the above-mentioned address with his or her name and address. The advertisement was an opportunity to remind the reader that genuine Tuck cards could be found in any good ‘Librairie-Papeterie’ (stationary bookshops) in France and that their famous logo guaranteed the best quality artistic postcards and prevented customers from being led astray into buying poorer quality imitations.

If we take into account the enormous natural flow of correspondence of the time, as exemplified by the 14,000,000 letters and packages that were delivered in the London area during the Christmas period of 1882 (Gosling), we see that picture postcard editors at the turn of the 19th, the foremost figures being the Tuck brothers, were inventive to promote their products and therefore spread and exhibited their vision of the world and catered to the desire of the public. This enormous picture postcard market was a cross-class merger, reaching all strata of society because it was cheap, easy to handle, less time-consuming than long letters and could also be disseminated throughout the world as the world postal services were quite efficient. Pictorial genres had therefore a huge media support with picture postcards.

### **Orientalism & British Culture**

French postcard specialist Marie-Christine Massé, once wrote that in the 19th century photographers captured with their cameras some tiny parts of a territory which were then turned into postcards and which were going to forge a certain idea of the colony through their diffusion in mainland France, as orientalist paintings had done before (Massé 372). Orientalism is to be understood in its pre-Saïd meaning, as an artistic movement promoted by Western artists and writers who travelled to the East and described, drew or painted their vision of the Orient: ‘the polarising rhetoric of European Orientalism’ (Huggan 187). In this sense, it encapsulates a broader sense of exoticism as defined by Graham Huggan: ‘Exoticism describes, rather, a particular mode of aesthetic perception—one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to immanent mystery’ (Huggan 13). Exoticism is ‘a highly effective instrument of imperial power’ as it is the positive side of the coin: ‘the exotic splendour of newly colonised lands may disguise the brutal circumstances of their gain’ (Huggan 14). Exoticism, Orientalism, Empires and postcards are therefore key elements of our study that allow us into Victorian and Edwardian mindsets. To go further in our analysis, it seems interesting to see what orientalism meant for Victorians and Edwardians. One quotation, which can sum up the general mood, is from a young Scottish woman, Maria Margaret Brewster (1823-1907) who spent a few months on the French Riviera (from October 1856 to May 1857) with her father

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<sup>4</sup> The document is a salmon colour leaflet distributed by the company entitled ‘Tuck Post-Card Blotter’ and used as an advertising opportunity. The Royal Warrant and the company logo are clearly displayed as a guarantee of quality, and completed by the following statement: ‘Refuse Inferior post-cards often offered for the sake of extra profits’ (Private archives).

<sup>5</sup> Newspaper clipping sold on the internet without reference to its origin.

<sup>6</sup> The company had premises in London, Paris, Berlin, New-York and Montreal.

David Brewster (1781-1858), a Scottish philosopher and scientist, and wrote letters home which were subsequently published in Scotland. Margaret and her father stayed in Cannes and made day trips from there. On November 26, they went in the hinterland to Grasse, the city of perfumes:

The first thing that struck me on our journey—more perhaps than the object warranted, was a solitary palm-tree, which grows near this town on the Grasse road—there are several others in gardens, but not so erect and stately, and isolated. It looked wild and eastern out there under the sun, and brought all sorts of thoughts and memories,—some of oriental tales, other of old pictures of saints and martyrdoms, and yet others of solemn passages in Holy Writ, concerning days to come, when golden harps and branches of palms are to be tokens of joy and victory. (Brewster 51)

From this quotation we may infer that, if Maria Brewster is to be accepted as representative of the young educated middle class of the mid-Victorian era, orientalism evoked the culture of both the tales from the Arabian Nights and from the Old Testament. Thus, Orientalism, as promoted by Napoleon Bonaparte's campaign in Egypt (1798-1801) which triggered a keen interest in antiquities with the subsequent arrival of the Luxor Obelisk in Paris (1836) or Cleopatra's Needle in London (1877), was already imbedded in Victorian culture at least through the Bible. This strong interest in the land of the pharaohs in Europe turned into Egyptomania in the 19th century. But Orientalism was also developed by painters among whom Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863) is probably the most prominent, after his famous journey to Morocco in 1832. Along with French artists who embraced an idealized vision of the Orient, British 'Orientalists' contributed a great deal to the promotion of that pictorial genre such as John Frederick Lewis (1805-1876), Frederick Goodall (1822-1904), William Wiehe Collins (1862-1951), Edward A. Hornel (1864-1933), Arthur Melville (1855-1904), Mortimer Menpes (1855-1938). We may distinguish such artists as Frank Brangwyn (1867-1956), a very prolific Anglo-Welsh artist who illustrated an 1896 edition of *The Arabian Nights* in several volumes and painted the 'British Empire Panel' in 1926 or Walter Charles Horsley (1855-1934) who produced many Oriental paintings that included 'imperial' elements such as the presence of European troops, as we shall see further in this essay. Horsley travelled to India, Northern Africa, Turkey. He was considered one of the finest British late Victorian artists. Not only was he a prolific painter, but he also accepted, as many painters did, to devote some of his artistic skills to less prestigious activities as he illustrated newspapers. This is what happened for example in 1875, when he was noticed for his first presentation at the Royal Academy and hired by *The Graphic* (illustrated newspaper) to record the Prince of Wales's visit to India. Once there he was also employed by an Indian Prince to paint several hunting scenes. David Roberts (1796-1864) should also be mentioned as one of the most prominent British Orientalists. Originally a theatre scene-painter and part-time oil-painter in Edinburgh, Roberts was convinced by J. M. W. Turner to concentrate on the latter activity, which he did. He was already inspired by Oriental and biblical themes when he painted 'Departure of the Israelites' (1829) or 'Abduction from the Seraglio' (1827). He then travelled to Spain, Tangiers (1832), to Egypt and the Holy Land (1838) which enabled him to produce some of his masterpieces on Egyptian monuments for which he is best known. There were many other British Orientalists, this selection only meant to show how rich this genre was.

W. J. T. Mitchell makes an interesting distinction between images and pictures: he calls the former, 'immaterial symbolic forms' or 'mental things, residing in the psychological media of dreams, memory, and fantasy' (Mitchell 2005, 84); as for the latter, he explains that 'the picture is the image plus the support; it is the appearance of the immaterial image in a material medium' (Mitchell 2005, 85). Following this distinction, we can consider that the change of

media (picture) from an oil on canvas hung on a wall to a small size postcard displayed in an album does not change the image of the exotic scenery for the viewer. The remediation of the scene, although reduced in size, does not impede the process of mediation between the image and the viewer as stated by Bolter and Grusin:

Remediation did not begin with the introduction of digital media. We can identify the same process throughout the last several hundred years of Western visual representation. A painting by the seventeenth-century artist Pieter Saenredam, a photograph by Edward Weston, and a computer system for virtual reality are different in many important ways, but they are all attempts to achieve immediacy by ignoring or denying the presence of the medium and the act of mediation. All of them seek to put the viewer in the same space as the objects viewed. (Bolter & Grusin 11)

To further our understanding on how oils on canvas that were displayed in Galleries reached the whole of the British population and not just a few privileged people, we must remember that paintings were turned into engravings, typogravures or lithograph prints and therefore were reproduced in newspapers, magazines and books to reach a wider audience. But another way to reproduce oil paintings was through oleographs or chromolithographs (often called 'chromos'), technologies which enabled the reproduction of a colour lithograph. This was the best way to produce nice coloured prints at the time, therefore very useful in the picture postcard industry. Raphael Tuck & Sons was among the first to use it, which contributed to its success. Hence a Tuck ad published in 1910 for one of its competitions stated that the 'Oilette series' were 'the aristocrats of Picture Postcards' and that the cards themselves were 'veritable miniature oil paintings'. This is an example of how 'high' and 'low' or 'popular' cultures were related in Victorian times; it illustrates how art could impact every individual, in the same way as, today, famous paintings can enter any household as one purchases in an art museum a postcard or a magnet that one displays on a refrigerator door. Painter travellers or traveller painters produced oils of the Oriental scenes they discovered, probably influenced in turn by the famous Orientalists from European galleries.

At that time, a potential opposition between a painted exotic scene and a photographed one would definitely witness the defeat of the latter. Although photographic reproductions were of a high quality at the turn of the 19th century and had the flavour of 'reality', the absence of colour was a key issue. Even if some early 20th century postcards were hand painted, they did not match the bright colours a painter could use to depict a real or imagined landscape. As French specialist of the history of photography François Brunet puts it, reproductions are remedies to the wear of time: the more accurate they are, like photography, the more things can be preserved, unlike reproductions that come out of 'the imagination of the painter' (Brunet 42) which do not guarantee authenticity. The reason being is that Brunet distinguishes between photography as art and photography as visual memory (Brunet 27–28). With the former, the reproduction of colourful paintings is preferred by postcard customers while, with the latter, photographic postcards of places, events or people are favoured. The postcards reproducing exotic scenes were abundant and contributed to the massive production of 'fine art postcards' as they sometimes were referred to. To pursue our analysis on how common people had access to art through consumer goods such as postcards via the Tuck company, we are going to examine several types of picture postcards which display Orientalism.

Not all the names of the artists who contributed to Tuck's 'Wide Wide World series' have come down to us. This underlines the fact that the artists' names were not a marketing element when they were not well known. The generic title of this series encapsulates a large variety of smaller series such as 'Picturesque Egypt', with 11 series (series XI is identified as Tuck #7441), 'Egypt' with 15 series (series XV is #7750), or 'Cape Town' with 5 series (#7551 for series V) or postcards which do not belong to a series but have an identification number such as 'Aborigine of Australia' (#7592) or 'South Africa' (#7593). Interestingly, to grasp the enormous

production of Tuck cards, it should be clear that the 'Wide Wide World' is just one series among many other Tuck titles. What is more, this series, which evokes foreign countries, comprises many sub-series such as 'Cape Town' which are divided (or not) in sub-sub series each bearing its own Tuck number such as 'Cape Town series V' which is numbered 7551. This number may be printed on several different cards from the same sub-sub series such as 'Road to the Gorge, Cape Town' and 'Farm in Hout Bay, Cape Town', both cards by the same painter named H. Warner. The same pattern can be found with Oilette (#7295) Jamaica 'Port Mornt, Jamaica' and 'Arcadia, Jamaica'. Edgar H. Fischer painted several Oilette 'Tiger Hunting' series (#8780) from India; Hilda Dix Sandford, produced Oilette series 'Young Egypt' (#9791) from Egypt. John Fulleylove (1845-1908) is associated with several postcards from Tuck's 'The Holy Land', (series IV # 7311); L. M. Long contributed to several of Oilette's Morocco series II # 7428 such as 'A Moorish Sainthouse', 'A street in Mazagan', 'A street in Mogador' or 'Staffi Market'. When we keep in mind that Tuck card numbers ranged from 1 to 9999, that each number covered several, sometimes many picture postcards, we may infer that Tuck was one of the world's picture postcard leaders of his time.

Sometimes the name of the artist is well known, and therefore mentioned at the back of the 'Oilette', such as Robert Talbot-Kelly (1861-1934), who painted an Egyptian scene he entitled 'Evening at Fikus' and subsequently turned into a Tuck Oilette postcard (#7944) 'picturesque Egypt. Series XV', bearing the mention 'Egypt. Illustrated by R. Talbot Kelly (A. & C Black)'. Another Tuck series is captioned 'Oilfacsim Postcard' which displays one of James Greig's (1861-1941) paintings entitled 'A Street in Tunis' which belongs to the 'Charms of the East' series (#3)613 and was edited 'After the original painting by James Greig'.

### **Propaganda for a Conquered Space**

Another example of Tuck's exotic 'oilfacsim' painting reproduction by Bernard F. Gribble (1872-1962) is entitled 'The Sierra Leone Village in the Walled City of West Africa, British Empire Exhibition, Wembley, 1925'. Interestingly, the exoticism of an African village is linked to the Empire, through an exhibition as seen in Bernard F. Gribble's aforementioned postcard. So as to go deeper in the debate mentioned before in this essay, this association of an exotic place (a Sierra Leone village) with the Empire is at the heart of the debate launched by British Historian Bernard Porter who asserted that contrary to what most Empire historians had taken for granted, Victorians were not all Imperial-minded, and that in fact, very few were:

Some of those places and events had to do with the empire; but it does not follow from this that the middle classes' interest in them was imperialist. India as an object of curiosity is not the same as the Raj. Nor does it follow that these interests necessarily turned people *into* imperialists; that reading about the exploration of Africa, for example, or shopping in Calcutta, reminded people of the scope of their empire, or made them want to extend it. It may have done so in some instances; especially, perhaps, accounts of 'savage' societies which implied that they might become less savage if Britain took a hand. But we should not leap to that conclusion. The Victorian middle classes' interest in exotic places, peoples, and customs, even if they happened to feature the empire, could have been quite imperially innocent. (Porter 93-94)

John MacKenzie on the other hand developed the idea that all parts of Victorian society were subjected to the Empire, as many daily objects reminded people of the Empire such as memorabilia, games, decorative objects, advertisements, etc., and therefore shared a common 'popular' culture. MacKenzie plainly states that his seminal book *Propaganda and Empire*, published in 1984,

... seeks to explore the centripetal effects of Empire, in creating for the British a world view which was central to their perceptions of themselves. Even if they knew little and cared less about imperial philosophies or colonial territories, nonetheless imperial status set them apart, and united a set of national ideas which coalesced in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. (MacKenzie 1990, 2)

He also stated in another book that ‘at any rate the central role of imperialism must now be noted in all debates about culture, media, and society in the period between the 1870s and the 1940s’ (MacKenzie 1992, 14). The debate might be an everlasting one as definitive evidence is hard to come by. Yet, empirical demonstrations in favour of MacKenzie are to be found among British historians who accept the idea that Victorians and maybe Edwardians, even to a lesser degree, had a favourable attitude towards the Empire and were not just subjected to propaganda (such as those who contributed to his *Studies in Imperialism* series which boasts over a hundred titles),<sup>7</sup> or outside Europe as Birmingham University Empire historian Berny Sèbe has efficiently demonstrated in a forthcoming article (Sèbe). James R. Ryan, whose work focuses on imperial photographs, sums up his own position on the topic:

I support the contention of historians such as John Mackenzie who have described imperialism as a pervasive and persistent set of cultural attitudes towards the rest of the world informed to varying degrees by militarism, patriotism, a belief in racial superiority and loyalty to a ‘civilizing mission’. Conceived thus, imperialism played a central ideological role with British culture and society in the Victorian and Edwardian eras, finding expression and nourishment in a range of cultural forms, including music hall, theatre, cinema, education, juvenile literature, sport and exhibitions. (Ryan 12–13)

I would like to argue, following Ryan’s comment, that foreign exotic lands associated with Orientalist representations of faraway lands sometimes became linked to imperialism. It was the same ‘sphere’ in Victorian and Edwardian daily lives. One British artist who seems to best exemplify this proximity between the two terms is the previously mentioned Orientalist Walter Charles Horsley. Among his traditional Oriental productions feature paintings such as ‘The French in Cairo’ (1884), which depict Oriental people framed within an Oriental setting alongside French soldiers from Napoleon’s army during the Egyptian campaign; the latter are represented above the Orientals (one soldier is sitting on a wall, another is cheering, his military hat is therefore seen above the crowd, and a third one is standing on a ladder, carving graffiti on the wall of a monument with a mallet and chisel).<sup>8</sup> This was one of his specificities, as in another of his Oriental paintings entitled ‘Off Duty’ (1875)—and unlike most Orientalists—in which he depicts Europeans within a traditional Oriental setting. Two British soldiers, one colonial with red jacket and pith helmet is sitting in an open-air Egyptian café next to a Highlander; both are served a pipe by an Arab woman, scrutinized in the café by Egyptian men who are drinking tea or smoking hookahs. Further on his painting ‘A friendly power in Egypt’ (1895), we see marching colonial red coat British soldiers on the street of an Oriental city, presumably Cairo, watched by local Egyptian people and European tourists. It does not seem that Horsley’s paintings were reproduced on postcards, at least at the beginning of the 20th century. Yet, many other reproductions of oil paintings on picture postcards featuring the Empire have stood the test of time and are available today to historians. Orientalism is often understood as depicting peaceful urban scenes in an oriental street, oriental interiors or oriental

<sup>7</sup> ‘Studies in Imperialism’ Manchester University Press Series editor: Andrew Thompson (Univ. of Exeter) and Alan Lester (Unv. of Sussex), Founding editor Emeritus Professor John MacKenzie.

<sup>8</sup> See <https://artuk.org/discover/artists/horsley-walter-charles-18551934>.

landscapes as demonstrated by Christine Peltre (Peltre 49). Yet, the early orientalist paintings were devoted to battles such as during the French campaigns in Egypt or in Algeria, or the British ones in India. Here again, some British military artists emerged in the Victorian and Edwardian eras and best exemplify this passage from high to popular culture. Among them there was Richard Caton Woodville (1856-1927), who was one of the most prolific British battle painters whose work was often seen as an ‘artist’s victory over many a British defeat’. This is the case with his famous ‘Charge of the Light Brigade’ (1894) depicting a tragic British episode of the Crimean War. During his lifetime, he painted most of the wars Britain took part in, which included the Anglo-Boer War and the First World War.

He was one of these artists who also accepted to work for magazines such as *the Illustrated London News*, and for the picture postcard industry. Raphael Tuck & Sons, always choosing the best artists for their production, hired him for their numerous ‘Empire’ Series. He was very successful with ‘the Rise of Our Empire beyond the Seas’ series I (#9147) with such pieces as ‘Our first footing in Canada’, ‘Our first footing in the Bermudas’, ‘An Official of the Guinea (Royal African) Company’, ‘British seizure of Jamaica – 1655’ or ‘The birth of our Indian Empire’. Series II (#9148) comprises ‘Hosting the British flag at Cape Colony, 1796’, ‘Acquisition of Gibraltar, 1704’, ‘Sir George Simpson establishing his first council near Vancouver – 1835’ or ‘The first European to land in New Zealand. Captain Cook circumnavigating the Island’. He also participated in the ‘Deeds of British heroism’ series (#9132) and ‘British battles Series I’ (#9134) which he shared with the other famous British military artist Harry Paine, unlike series II (#9135) he covered alone. Harry Paine painted ‘Our fighting regiments – 1st Life Guards’ (#3163) among which ‘The First Life Guards, reconnoitring the enemy’s Position South Africa 1899-1902’ and a colourful, swift and heroically represented ‘Charge of the First Life Guards, Kassasin 1882’. It is important to bear in mind that these ‘Empire’ Oilette postcards were meant to glorify the British imperial project. The customers would not have sided with the editors had they not shared a common vision of the role Britain had to play in the ‘Wide Wide World’, as captioned by one of the Tuck series. We must add to these postcards other ‘Empire’ postcards out of the Oilette collection, which display drawings and engravings of British troops, but also photographs which were meant to show ‘real’ images at the beginning of the Anglo-Boer War. The picture postcard boom coincided with the end of the Victorian era; but the war in South Africa was a godsend for the Victorian commercial market, including picture postcards, which is why this conflict was called by some historians ‘the first media war’.

Along these war-time postcards, Tuck had several ‘Royalties’ series as the royal Family was (and still is) a secured business for the media. Interestingly, some of the royalties were part of Tuck’s ‘Empire’ postcards as shown by the following conclusive case in point. The picture postcard is a portrait of a crowned Queen Alexandra of Denmark then of Great Britain and Ireland (1863-1910). It is a Tuck ‘Empire’ number 1418. The caption reads ‘Her Majesty Queen Alexandra’. There is a printed text at the top right-hand corner of the picture next to the photograph of the Queen which states: ‘With the sunshine of her own good deeds and the radiance from that crown of virtue, which she had won for herself long before she was called upon to wear the imperial diadem’. Interestingly we have further details on the postcard as the copy under scrutiny was written by one M. Sellier, probably a French woman, on August 14, 1902 to a Miss Henriette Glasewski who lived in Provins, near Sainte Colombe not far from Paris. It was posted from England with a King Edward VII penny red stamp, on the same day it was written as testified by the English postmark and arriving in France on the following day. M. Sellier’s correspondence explains why she sent this postcard (mistakes have been kept):

My dear Jette,

I was waiting your new address for sending you this 'souvenir' of the Coronation all was very well passed the last Saturday as you have certainly read that in the newspapers. I saw neither king nor queen in reality, but many times in photography and I heard twice the 'God Save the King'. I hope you are enjoying very much during your holidays .... How is your mother? I send you my kindest regards to share with everybody and I kiss you many times. I thank your father for his postcard received this morning.  
Your affectionate friend, M. Sellier

This postcard is interesting for media historians in many ways. First, we see that the sender was aware that the coronation of King Edward VII and his wife Alexandra was a big event widely covered by the press. Many photographs were displayed and sold, the postcard she was sending being one among many others. We can notice that the dates are close, the postcard sent on the following Thursday, only six days after the event. We can see that the firm Raphael Tuck & Sons was ready for the event, as their postcards were probably fully prepared on coronation day (and maybe even before) to benefit from the people's enthusiasm for the event. People would buy the postcard for their own postcard albums as a 'souvenir', as M. Sellier states in her correspondence, or would send it to friends. We understand thus how the imperial project mentioned by the Tuck company in the text of the postcard ('she was called upon to wear the imperial diadem') permeated Victorian, but also, with this postcard, Edwardian society. It referred to the fact that Queen Alexandra was also Empress of India, and that the glory of the coronation spread to the entire British Empire (the card belongs to the Tuck's 'Empire' series). The Anglo-Boer War had finally come to an end in May 1902, less than three months before, and as the postcard circulated in France, so did the imperial message.

With these examples that are but samples of the huge production of the Tuck cards linked to the Empire, we get a hint that the British public was flooded with commercial proposals by the Tuck company. This leads us to the conclusion that these items were easy to come by, not forgetting that once bought (whether sent or not) they were displayed in albums regularly taken out for visitors.

## Conclusion

'But if vision itself is a product of experience and acculturation—including the experience of making pictures—then what we are matching against pictorial representations is not any sort of naked reality, but a world already clothed in our systems of representation' (Mitchell 1984, 525). These systems of representation, because they are embedded in people's frame of mind, can authorise mental manipulations as pointed out by Marie-Christine Massé, when she states that exotic and 'colonial' picture postcards can be seen as 'aesthetic manipulations' (Massé 372). They participated in the elaboration of an invented space: '... the East is symbolically constructed in order to be dominated, devised to be ruled' (MacKenzie 1995, 46). Hence, picture postcards staged the colonial space and its inhabitants which gave a sense of otherness to Europeans. This space was fragmented, idealized and fantasized, spurred by exoticism and orientalism. Picture postcards were vectors of ideology and biased representations as they perpetuated both an idealized and an atrophied image of an artificial reality. They were part of a project to promote the Empire. But to what extent can we say that British postcard publishers were pro-imperialists themselves? The answer is that they may or may not have been, as we can imagine that the driving force to publish 'Empire' postcards, such as that of Raphael Tuck & Sons, had commercial objectives rather than ideological motivations. Entrepreneurs have always been keen to gauge the mood of the time, trying to anticipate what would be the new fashion that would enable them to secure

a lucrative market. On the other hand, we may infer that, if these objects were fashionable, the public would seek them and thus would, willingly or not, participate in the propagation of a fashionable idea. Yet, we may add that if the ‘postcard craze’ united many Victorians and Edwardians, their choice of postcard theme is an important element to take into consideration. Some collectors were keen on Helena Maguire’s ‘Cat’ series while others bought Empire or Empire-related postcards. The latter were numerous considering the massive production of the postcards they favoured. It is possible to imagine that they were the same people who subscribed to Boys’ and Girls’ Empire magazines and bought juvenile literature grounded in imperial settings for their children. Picture postcards were a cheap and popular means to reproduce and spread Orientalist and exotic scenes which for most of them were views of the British Empire. They thus shaped the British mindset and were therefore tokens of a Victorian and Edwardian fashion for the Empire as proved by the popularity of the ‘relief of Mafeking’ picture postcard. It showed a drawing of Colonel Baden-Powell, depicted in a heroic attitude, an illustration in keeping with the ‘maffickings’ of the British population throughout the Empire when the relief of Mafeking, the besieged town, was announced during the Anglo-Boer War.

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