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Material Cultures 2010:  
Technology, Textuality, and Transmission  
The Centre for the History of the Book  
University of Edinburgh  
July 16–18, 2010

Trevelyan's Children

abstract

Charles Edward Trevelyan (1807–1886) was the most influential proponent of English studies in India until Thomas Babington Macaulay arrived in Calcutta as the legal advisor to the British government. By the time Macaulay penned his once famous, now infamous “Minute on Indian Education” (1835), he had become Trevelyan’s brother-in-law; and the two men worked closely in the cause of English education. Macaulay’s role has been amply rehearsed, if imperfectly understood, but Trevelyan has remained in the shadows. I will bring to the foreground the arguments that Trevelyan made in three obscure documents that Macaulay probably knew: *A Treatise on the Means of Communicating the Learning and Civilization of Europe to India* (Calcutta, 1830, 1834), which anticipates Macaulay’s “Minute” both in the reach of its argument and the severity of its rhetoric; the literally condescending propaganda that Trevelyan wrote as a preface to *The English Instructor* (Calcutta, 1834), addressed “To the Little Boys and Girls of Hindustán”; and *Report Upon the Inland Customs and Town Duties of the Bengal Presidency* (Calcutta, 1834), in which Trevelyan saluted the United States as a powerful ally in the propagation of English as a global language.

For Trevelyan, as for Macaulay, English was the best medium to transmit the civilized learning and morality of modern Europe to the antiquated cultures of the East. An imperial medium, it would reduce the geographies of the book to a singular expanse of Western intelligence. Trevelyan anticipated Macaulay in predicting that those Indians who were schooled in English would acquire “a sort of national character which may be denominated Anglo Indian, or, more strictly speaking, a direction of their thoughts and views towards what is English.” Such products of an English education have often been called “Macaulay’s children,” but Macaulay was their uncle, and Trevelyan was their father.