



Figure 1. *General Patrick Duff*. 1790. George Romney. Source: A. Tayler and H. Tayler, *The Book of the Duffs* (Edinburgh, 1914).

General Patrick Duff of Carnousie, Banffshire

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Please note that this case study was first published on blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah in November 2013. For citation advice, visit: <http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah/usingthewebsite>.

General Patrick Duff (1742-1803), commander of the East India Company's Artillery in the 1790s, left behind no great mansion. However, he did however leave an impressive set of farm buildings on his home farm and extensive letters which enable us to examine the domestic concerns

of a returned East India Company official in two key ways. First, Duff's correspondence shows how he sought to create domestic comfort during his lengthy stay in India and provide details of the country estate he aspired to when he returned home to Britain. Second, these letters also highlight the importance of Madeira as a key link in the chain connecting Britain to India, enabling the development of a trade in desirable artefacts from Asia and generating wealth for those involved. Significantly, it was this wealth which aided Duff in his aspiration to a country estate.

Patrick Duff was born in 1742, son of a tenant farmer on unpromising land on the banks of the river Spey in Banffshire.¹ His maternal uncles, James (1712?-1790) and Alexander Gordon (1715-1797), were successful Madeira wine merchants. James, who was unmarried and childless, provided for the education of his nephews. Two were to enter the service of his Madeira wine business; the remaining three were destined for military service in India. The eldest was Patrick, who, after initial service in the British Army, transferred to the artillery of the East India Company in 1763. Despite participation in the mutiny of European officers in 1766, Patrick was evidently a competent officer, for he rose through the ranks. His fortune appears to have been made by his command of the Nawab of Oudh's artillery.² From the 1780s he was looking to repatriate some of his fortune and invest in a country estate in his native

¹ Alistair Mutch, 'Agriculture and Empire: General Patrick "Tiger" Duff and the Shaping of North-East Scotland', *Review of Scottish Culture*, 22 (2010), p. 91.

² Eric Grant and Alistair Mutch, 'Indian Wealth and Agricultural Improvement in Northern Scotland', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, (forthcoming, 2014).

north-east Scotland. He eventually bought the 3,000 acre Carnousie estate near Turriff in 1788. Duff proceeded to invest in works of agricultural improvement, having a magnificent square courtyard steading constructed in 1797. He was involved in local politics, standing unsuccessfully for Parliament in 1795.³ He had town houses in Banff and Edinburgh and repaired the existing house at Carnousie. Whether Duff would have commissioned a new house (as subsequent owners of the estate did) to be filled with artefacts from India will never be known, as he died in Edinburgh in 1803.

Rather than concentrating on his military and political exploits, which are recounted elsewhere, this case study draws on his own letters and other estate papers to focus on Duff's home life in both India and Scotland. His letters were mainly to his brother James and his uncle, also James, and contained a mixture of topics. Material is often duplicated to cover the uncertainty of ships reaching their destinations and was often composed with dates of sailing in mind.⁴ Some letters extend to sixteen pages, being added to as dates of sailing were put back. 'You are not to expect method or regularity in this letter,' he noted in a letter of 1785, 'I write just what comes uppermost without minding what went before.'⁵ While much of their contents are concerned with Duff's prospects of military preferment, they often slip into a more 'domestic' mode, from which we can glean some hints about his memories of home and the material artefacts that he collected.⁶ Over time they also give more insight into his important connections with his uncles in Madeira. Although the trade of the island has been explored in considerable detail, especially in the context of colonial America, by David Hancock, its key role as a node in the trade and military networks that constituted the relationship between Britain and India has been relatively understated.⁷ Duff's letters help bring these networks to life and reveal his links to the wealth generated by trade through the island.

³ , Alistair Mutch, 'A Contested Eighteenth Century Election: Banffshire 1795', *Northern Scotland*, 2 (2011), pp. 22-35.

⁴ Kate Teltscher, 'The Sentimental Ambassador: The Letters of George Bogle from Bengal, Bhutan and Tibet, 1770-1781', in Rebecca Earle (ed.), *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945* (Aldershot, 1999), p. 80

⁵ University of Aberdeen Special Libraries and Collections, Gordon of Letterfourie papers, Letters of Patrick 'Tiger' Duff, Bundle 2, Patrick Duff to James Duff, from Fort William, Bengal, 15 July 1785.

⁶ Elizabeth Vibert, 'Writing "Home": Sibling Intimacy and Mobility in a Scottish Colonial Memoir', in Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton (eds), *Moving Subjects: Gender, Mobility and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire* (Urbana and Chicago, 2009), p. 69

⁷ David Hancock, 'Commerce and Conversation in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic: The Invention of Madeira Wine', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 29:2 (1998), pp. 197-219; David Hancock, *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste* (New Haven, 2009).



Figure 2. Map of Southern India.

At home in India

Although Patrick made the arduous voyage between India and Britain five times, most of his adult life was spent in India. While on one return visit to Britain in 1774, he married his cousin, Ann Duff (1748-1776). She soon died at Madras, however, as he wrote to his uncle James Gordon in 1776:

My last from Madras was giving you the Melancholy account of the death of my wife, I still greatly feel her loss, and I believe no man

had ever more reason to regret the death of a wife; for she was possessed of the greatest sweetness of disposition without one single fault which I was able to discover in near two years we liv'd together, most of which time she enjoy'd but an indifferent state of health; as my loss is now irretrievable I shall for the future drop the subject.⁸

He was to marry again, in 1794, when as a landed gentleman he married Dorothea, the sister of Andrew Hay from whom he had purchased his estate. But in between these marriages he lived the life of a bachelor. In July 1785 he wrote concerning rumours of an attachment between himself and a Miss Donaldson that he 'had no more intention of marrying than I have of blowing my brains out'.⁹ But he was not without female company, for he had at least three children with Indian women during his stay. Such relationships were common, yet, as Durba Ghosh points out, we often know little about these women.¹⁰ However, the letters do indicate some concern for these 'bibis' and Duff's bonds of both affection and duty with his children. His children were sent back to Britain to acquire an education under the care of his brother John in London.¹¹ Sending John Kenneth on a Danish ship to join his brother Davie in London, Duff in 1785 wrote:

I told you before, & I repeat it again that it is my intention should I live, to give them the best education England can afford and to set them out in a proper manner into the world, for tho' they have the misfortune to be illegitimate and of a half cast they are not to blame; the fault is all my own and for that reason I think myself doubly bound to provide for them, and I am as fond of them as

⁸ Gordon of Letterfourie papers, Bundle 4, Patrick Duff to James Gordon, from Calcutta, 24 November 1776

⁹ Gordon of Letterfourie papers, Bundle 2, Patrick Duff to James Duff, from Fort William, Bengal, 15 July 1785.

¹⁰ Durba Ghosh, *Sex and Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 17.

¹¹ Christopher J Hawes, *Poor Relations: The Making of a Eurasian Community in British India, 1773-1833* (London, 1996), p.79.

if they were of a good cast & had been born according to the rules of Law and Gospel.¹²

Two years later, the eldest boy had been sent to Scotland to visit relatives, much to the initial concern of his father:

I am not sorry you have sent Davy to see his Relations in Scotland it was what I did not intend, as I did not know how he might be treated; I know such as he did not meet with much encouragement there sometime ago; the people in that part are certainly more enlarged in their ideas than they were in my younger day.¹³

In the same letter he confessed that:

I believe I have got another of the same sort, tho' not so fair as either of the others, I have given him the name of William, you won't see him until I come myself; he is a fine stout good humoured fellow of only eleven months old. I did not intend to have any more of these, but what is to be done, a man more than a woman is not at all times master of his passions don't you show this part of the Letter to Mrs Duff.¹⁴

While in India, his children did not live with him, but rather at the house of his friend Colonel Deare, where they were cared for by an Indian housekeeper. Patrick got his brother's wife to commission paintings of his two eldest boys, which were given to this woman 'who took care of them after their Mother's death, and who used them in the kindest manner, and who tho' black possesses a heart that would do no discredit to a white lady'.¹⁵ Duff's letters point to the complexities and contradictions of British racial attitudes in the later eighteenth century, and to the significance of the East India Company's role in bringing these issues 'home' to Scotland and to Britain more broadly.

Patrick himself had a country house four miles south of Calcutta and 'a Bungolo or Straw and Matt house at the Practice ground near Dum Dum'.¹⁶ Here he had a piece of ground and he solicited his brother to send him out seed. He was particularly in search of tomato seed which he had 'from the Sev't at Batchlors Hall Madeira, they throve here remarkably well but I think are now degenerating, they were the first of the sort ever seen in this Country, and I wish to have some more'.¹⁷ He was also in search of hop seed 'or indeed any thing else in that way which could be procured

¹² Gordon of Letterfourie papers, Bundle 2, Patrick Duff to James Duff, 15 September 1785.

¹³ Gordon of Letterfourie papers, Bundle 3, Patrick Duff to James Duff, from Cawnpore, 2 March 1787.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Gordon of Letterfourie papers, Bundle 3, Patrick Duff to James Duff, from Cawnpore, 22 June 1787.

¹⁶ Gordon of Letterfourie papers, Bundle 2, Patrick Duff to James Duff, from Fort William, Bengal, 15 July 1785.

¹⁷ Ibid.

without much trouble; I have now given over hunting, I cant take so much exercise in any way as I was once accustomed to, for that reason I divert myself with my Garden; I succeed very well with vegetables &c for the table'.¹⁸

Family members provided other British provisions to make his life in India more comfortable. Boots were sent out by his brother from London, although the maker had forgotten that, thanks to his leg being broken by a shot at the siege of Allahbad in 1763, Duff had one leg over an inch shorter than the other.¹⁹ In 1785 he 'wish[ed] to have the best military books sent me, also books of fortification & Artillery which may be most in repute; enquire of some of the Booksellers and send me all as are in estimation'.²⁰ In return, Patrick sent items from India that he thought would be of interest to his relatives. His brother received, variously, a table service and



Figure 3. Embroidered muslin. 1855. Dhaka, Bangladesh. 0214(IS). Victoria and Albert Museum.

a tea set directed to the Jamaica Coffee House in London, an Indian matchlock and sword with a basket handle, and a parcel of muslins (perhaps similar to those seen in figure 3). In 1776 he sent his uncle James in Scotland a small cask of pickled mangos which 'may be a rarity in the North'.²¹ In sending these gifts, Patrick played a small part in creating awareness of artefacts from Asia in Britain. At the same time, Patrick used his gifting practices to affirm familial bonds with valued members of his network. In the case of his uncle James, such bonds also connected Patrick with Madeira and the wealth that would allow him to aspire to purchase a Scottish country estate.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Gordon of Letterfourie papers, Bundle 2, Patrick Duff to James Duff, 15 September 1785.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Gordon of Letterfourie papers, Bundle 4, Patrick Duff to James Gordon, from Calcutta, 24 November 1776

Madeira



Figure 4.
Image of
Madeira wine.

Lying off the coast of Africa and under Portuguese rule (a longstanding ally of Britain), Madeira was in an ideal position for ships heading either to the Americas or Asia. It offered opportunities for taking on fresh water and produce. It also lay at the centre of networks of commodity trading. - Madeira, exported wine to British possessions in both North America and the Caribbean.²² By the same token, local merchants, many of Scottish origin, drew in timber, cereals and dried fish from the Baltic. One of these merchants was James Gordon, Patrick's uncle. Beginning with a partnership in 1730, James built up a thriving trade in Madeira wine, trading principally with Scottish contacts in the Caribbean. His success may have owed something to his commitment to Roman Catholicism, a handicap in Scotland but a possible source of advantage on the island. His brother, Alexander, fought at Culloden and was forced into exile after defeat there. Over time, James returned to Britain to run the London office while first Alexander and then their nephew, James (Patrick's younger brother) looked after the house's interests in Madeira.

A key part of such operations was providing hospitality to European visitors. In return, they hoped for business for their wine. In 1776 James Duff wrote from Madeira to the factor for the Duke of Gordon, reporting on the recent visit of John Duncan from Findlater to the island. He had been intending to continue on to India where he would source porcelain for the Duke, but he had decided to alter his course and head for Jamaica. James was keen to offer the services of Patrick, relatively recently departed for India, to order porcelain into Bengal and forward it to the Duke from there. The correspondence does not indicate whether this offer was taken up, although the Duke became a customer for wine.²³

This expansion of the customer base came at a good time, for existing business was badly disrupted by the American War of Independence. Not only did this close American markets, but it laid the rest of the house's Atlantic trade open to the depredations of American privateers. This is where Patrick's presence in Bengal was

²² Hancock, *Oceans of Wine* pp. 107-132.

²³ National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh, Duke of Gordon muniments, GD44/43/160/5, James Duff, Madeira to James Ross, Gordon Castle 18 April 1776

of immense value, for he was able to use his contacts to open up a new trade in Madeira to Bengal. Together with the spoils of war and profits made from contracting to the East India Company army, this enhanced Patrick's fortune and led him to think of investing in a Scottish estate for his eventual return.²⁴



Figure 5. Entrance to the Mains of Carnousie, built 1797. Image courtesy of Alistair Mutch.

Scotland

By March 1784 Patrick had 'been thinking ever since about buying Land, and if a Man can get a snug spot, with about four per cent for his money, I think it is by much the safest & best way he can lay out his money.'²⁵ With the help of his brother and uncles, plus other family connections in north-east Scotland, he considered several estates before settling on Carnousie. Patrick's letters generally adopt a down to earth tone; there is none of the playing with genre that marks the letters of George Bogle, another Scot in Company service in Calcutta in the 1770s.²⁶ However, he relaxes a little when writing to his brother and in one of his letters he enters into something of a reverie about his potential return:

I would like above all things to have a place of my own where I could retire to and amuse myself in the fields; I know little of farming tho' fond of that amusement, but above all things I would like to have a good Garden with fruit trees &c and if possible not far from a stream where I could divert myself in fine weather with fishing; to have a hill near where one might go a shooting would make it still more agreeable to my taste and I would like it near the sea if possible. You'll say I want too much and that all these things cannot be had; indeed I don't expect it, but as I was on the topick I mentioned them. I abhor a place entirely without wood and water, and would not like to live where I could not see both. To be in the fields in fine weather, to fish, shoot & hunt;

²⁴ Grant and Mutch, 'Indian Wealth'.

²⁵ Gordon of Letterfourie papers, Bundle 2, Patrick Duff to James Gordon, from Fort William, Bengal, 17 March, 1784.

²⁶ Teltscher, 'Sentimental Ambassador', p.83.

with some Books, and now and then the Company of any friends, are the only pleasures which I can hope to enjoy. ²⁷

These thoughts prompted him to map out what he hoped to do when he got home, and they are far from the ambitions of a ‘nabob’. There were considerable debates at the time about the corrupting influence of Indian wealth on British politics and society.²⁸ Showy and ostentatious, those who returned with a fortune from India used their wealth, it was alleged, together with the corrupting influences of the ‘Orient’, to subvert British life. This was far from Patrick’s ambitions at that time, as his letter continues:

I never mean to have any hand in Politicks, nor to gain anything by farming, for after all the Bustle I have lived in all my life, if I get only home, I mean to enjoy myself as much as possible; so I have no idea of being so happy as when in the Country, in the way I mention, with, at same time, having it in my power to go into town in the Winter, or even as far as Edinburgh or London for four months in the Year, without finding it incommode me in the money way, I must also (if I mean to be as I would wish) have a Carriage with four good horses and a couple of saddle horses for myself, & two others for my Servants; all the horses but those I ride shall work in the Cart, plow & harrow. My farm shall be no larger than will produce Grain and Hay for the horses & a few Cows, with Corn & C sufficient for my Family, which shall not be very large; with this Farm I shall find (at least I think so) full Amusement for my leisure hours, and at the same time not be obliged to attend to it but when I am inclined to do so for pleasure. I must have a neat warm house with a few rooms to lodge my friends when they come to see me.²⁹

²⁷ Gordon of Letterfourie papers, Bundle 2, Patrick Duff to James Gordon, from Fort William, Bengal, 16 March, 1784.

²⁸ Tillman Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth-century Britain*, (Cambridge, 2010), p. 133.

²⁹ Gordon of Letterfourie papers, Bundle 2, Patrick Duff to James Gordon, from Fort William, Bengal, 16 March, 1784



Figure 6. Locations map. Courtesy of Alistair Mutch.

These criteria were eventually to be met by the estate of Carnousie in Banffshire (see locations map above). It was not close to the sea but in the words of the Earl of Fife (whose brother-in-law, George Hay, was seeking to sell the land) ‘there is a great deal of good ground and great deal to improve’.³⁰ However, Fife confessed that he had little influence over George Hay, leading Patrick to express his concerns:

altho' I want an estate and particularly in this country, I would not give more for one than my friends thought prudent and reasonable. I know there is an idea that people from India will give more than any person else, but I assure your Lordship this is not the case with me, as I am determined to be guided by the advice of my friends in cases of this kind where I am no judge myself³¹

However, these scruples were overcome and Patrick purchased the 3,000 acre estate. It came with a tower house of 1577, with a William Adam addition of 1740 (see figure 7 below). While Patrick had repairs done to this building, his main work was the building of the impressive courtyard of farm buildings of 1797 (see figure 5 above).³² Entered by a two storey gatehouse with finely worked masonry, Venetian window and belfry, this building contained a row of finely worked cart arches in the east wing. There are seven of these, all round arched with well worked masonry dressings and keystones. The most northerly of the arches is significantly taller, suggesting an entry for a laird's coach (see figure 9 below). Probably the finest example of its type in an area known for landlord-led agricultural improvement in the late eighteenth century, this was the lasting legacy of Patrick's application of his Indian fortune.

³⁰ A. Tayler and H. Tayler, *The Book of the Duffs*, (2 volumes) (Edinburgh, 1914), p.479.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 478-9.

³² H. G. Slade, ‘Carnousie- Banffshire’, *Archaeological Journal*, 136 (1979), p. 238.

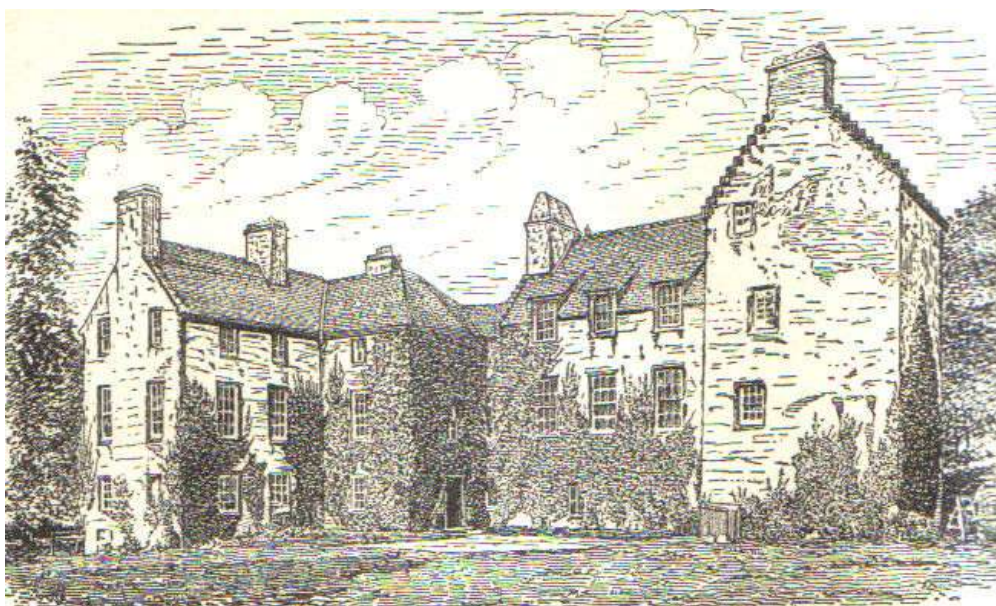


Figure 7. Old House at Carnousie, showing William Adam addition of 1740.
Source: A. Tayler and H. Tayler, *The Book of the Duffs* (Edinburgh, 1914).



Figure 8. Mains of Carnousie steading. Note gate house in left corner, leading to arches mentioned above. Image courtesy of Alistair Mutch.



Figure 9. Cart arches and laird's carriage arch, Mains of Carnousie. Image courtesy of Alistari Mutch.

Conclusion

Patrick Duff's letters reveal something of the concerns of those of more middling rank who made fortunes in India and were fortunate enough to return with them. They present an alternative to the more common narratives of return associated with East India Company 'nabobs'.³³ Although Patrick's wealth undoubtedly had an impact on his locality, and although, despite his earlier resolution, he did dabble in local politics, his horizons were rather more domestic ones than those of the 'nabob' elite. His letters give hints as to the material culture which accompanied the life of a successful British military officer, although unfortunately none of the artefacts he might have brought back survived the eventual dispersal of his estate on his son's death in 1828. What is of particular interest is the gift of paintings of his sons to the Indian woman who cared for them, indicative of a flow of artefacts back from Britain. They are also indicative of bonds of responsibility and affection, tempered of course by assumptions of patriarchal authority, for the children he had with Indian women and, albeit fleetingly, for those women themselves.

³³ Andrew Mackillop, 'Locality, Nation, and Empire: Scots in Asia, c. 1695 - c. 1813' in John MacKenzie and T. M. Devine (Eds), *Scotland and the British Empire*, (Oxford, 2011), p. 70.



Figure 10. Restored house of Carnousie. Image courtesy of Alistair Mutch.

Patrick went to India in some measure, as did Thomas Munro, another Scot in the service of the East India Company whose career has been explored by Margot Finn, to restore the family fortunes.³⁴ As he noted somewhat ruefully in a letter to his uncle about his father's affairs, 'the Old Gentleman is not by any means a good Manager'.³⁵ Although John Duff appears to have been a competent farmer, his work on behalf of the Grant of Monymusk estate collecting rents for their lands on Speyside had landed him in considerable debt. Between them, Patrick and his brother worked to clear those debts.³⁶ In this, they were fortunate in their connections with their uncles, the Gordon

wine merchants of Madeira. This both gave them the ability to settle their father's debts and

then to contribute to the expansion of the Madeira wine business. In this way private concerns meshed with the broader economic development of their home country, for their father moved to one of the new farms created by the rage for agricultural improvement in Scotland. George McGilvary has shown how this movement could not have been fuelled by investment from internal sources; the career of Patrick Duff gives an illustration of the process at work for one estate.³⁷ The magnificence of the surviving farm buildings and the high quality of the farmland that surrounds it testify to the lasting impact of Indian wealth on the Scottish countryside.

Duff's history is also an indication of the important place of Madeira as a key node in the network over which capital and commodities flowed back to Britain from India. It

³⁴ Margot Finn, 'Anglo-Indian Lives in the Later Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33:1 (March 2010), p. 55.

³⁵ Gordon of Letterfourie papers, Bundle 4, Patrick Duff to James Gordon, 14 September 1780

³⁶ NRS, Grant of Monymusk, GD345/943, Mr Jas Duff of Madeira & his father Mr Duff of Pitchaish, James Duff to Archibald Grant, 8 November 1775.

³⁷ George McGilvary, *East India Patronage and the British State: The Scottish Elite and Politics in the Eighteenth Century*, (London, 2008), p. 185.

was not just a convenient watering place, but an important centre of trade, one dominated in the late eighteenth century by British, and especially Scottish, merchants. They developed a global trade with British possessions in both the West and East Indies, and so were an important link between those areas and their wealthy customers in Britain. As well as supplying their noble patrons with wines, they also opened up awareness of other goods whose purchase they could facilitate. A gift of preserved lemons for the Duchess of Gordon to accompany an order for wine might build on distant family connections, connections which might also be mobilised to assist in the search for military preferment.³⁸ In this way, business, family and patronage networks were intimately intertwined.³⁹ Their lasting memorial might be the artefacts which found their way back into the noble houses of Scotland.

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³⁸ Duke of Gordon muniments, GD44/43/185/20 James Gordon to James Ross, 22 July 1777.

³⁹ Margot Finn, 'Colonial Gifts: Family Politics and the Exchange of Goods in British India, c.1780-1820', *Modern Asian Studies*, 40:1 (2006), pp. 203-231.

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