

1 Introduction: 'the master link of connection'

On 4 May 1797, after a voyage of seventy-one days, Lord Macartney finally arrived at the Cape of Good Hope, one of Britain's newest colonial possessions.¹ The following day, after a brief ceremony in Cape Town, he assumed the latest in a long series of diplomatic and administrative appointments stretching back over thirty years.² In taking the oaths of office, this stalwart servant of the Crown was now entrusted with the custodianship of this recently acquired colony at the southern tip of Africa, a place at a crucial crossroads in Britain's maritime channels of communication and commerce. After several months at sea, journeying southwards in HMS *Trusty*, Macartney must have been relieved finally to disembark his gouty frame and survey the place that British troops had captured only two years previously. They had done so in the name of the Dutch House of Orange. Ostensibly, Britain claimed to be protecting the colony, its settlers and its institutions from the nefarious depredations of the republican Dutch government, with its revolutionary principles and French sympathies, rather than aggrandising its own position in this part of the world. Others, however, saw less altruistic motivations behind the British capture.³ Whatever the reality, this did not alter the fact that, as Diogo de Souza, the Portuguese governor of Mozambique, put it, the British were now 'masters of the Cape of Good Hope'.⁴

As the first British civilian governor of the Cape, Macartney recognised that this recent turn of events meant that the future required careful consideration. Writing to Henry Dundas in London, he made a shrewd

¹ J. L. McCracken, 'The Cape of Good Hope, 1796–98', in Peter Roebuck (ed.), *Macartney of Lisanoure, 1737–1806* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1983), pp. 266–77, p. 267.

² Maurice Boucher and Nigel Penn (eds.), *Britain at the Cape, 1795 to 1803* (Johannesburg: Brenthurst Press, 1992), p. 69.

³ See, for example, 'Extract from a Proclamation of General Dumoriez to the Batavians', February 1793, *RCC*, vol. I, p. 3.

⁴ AHU, Conselho Ultramarino (CU), Moçambique (Moç.), CX75/62, Diogo Rodrigo de Souza Coutinho to Luis Pinto de Souza, 28 September 1796. The phrase in the original document is 'Senhords do Cabo di Boa Esperanza'.

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assessment of his new bailiwick. Its 'geographical situation' was vital, he observed. In fact, it 'formed the master link of connection between the western and eastern world'. It was 'the great outwork of our Asian commerce and Indian Empire'.⁵ Macartney was not the first person to consider the geopolitical consequences of the British presence in (or, indeed, absence from) the region. Nor was he alone in regarding the capture of the Cape as crucial to Britain's commercial and political empire in Asia. Nevertheless, his statement raises a number of interesting questions. First, what were the geographical boundaries of Macartney's 'western' and 'eastern' worlds? Second, what sort of 'master link' did Macartney have in mind when he suggested the Cape could unite them? Third, what motivations might individuals, trading companies or countries have for connecting these seemingly disparate maritime and political spaces? And, finally, was the Cape the only place that could connect these worlds? In other words, was the 'master link' centred on one place, or was its strength, like a chain, in the binding together of many links to make a stronger whole?

This book explores these issues, arguing for the need to see beyond the boundaries of oceanic basins and suggesting the flexible, overlapping and interdependent nature of the various maritime worlds comprising Britain's late eighteenth-century empire.⁶ Key components of that empire – such as the East India Company in Asia, which encompassed complex, interconnected networks of people, places and resources – stretch beyond the confines of traditional historiographical and geographical frameworks.⁷ Although many might have agreed with Macartney that the Cape formed part of the 'Indian World', the precise definition as well as the extent and boundaries of that world were much less clear.⁸ The discussion that follows, then, offers a differently imagined geography of empire. It is one viewed from the southern hemisphere. It comprises places as diverse and geographically distant from each other as Río de la Plata and Mauritius, St Helena and the Cape of Good Hope, Tristan da Cunha and the Indian Ocean coastline of Southern Africa, and links them in the same frame of historical analysis. In adopting this perspective and approach, the book demonstrates how the British Empire evolved in

⁵ TNA, WO 1/329, p. 17, Lord Macartney to Henry Dundas, 10 July 1797.

⁶ This point mirrors ideas outlined in Philip J. Stern, 'Politics and Ideology in the Early East India Company-State: The Case of St. Helena, 1673–1696', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 35 (2007), pp. 1–23, and Gerald Groenewald, 'Southern Africa and the Atlantic World', in D'Maris Coffman, Adrian Leonard and William O'Reilly (eds.), *The Atlantic World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 100–16.

⁷ Richard B. Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2014), p. 61.

⁸ NAS, GD51/1/530/5, Macartney to Dundas, 9 March 1798.

the second half of the eighteenth century and into the early nineteenth, through the challenges of global wars and political revolutions.

Macartney's correspondent, Henry Dundas, needed little explanation of Britain's place in the wider world. As Secretary of State for War, and President of the Board of Control (the governmental body which oversaw the British East India Company), Dundas was a central figure in much of the political rhetoric and logistical realities that connected distant parts of the British Empire to Britain and to each other in the period.⁹ As a confidant of William Pitt, the Prime Minister, he was one of the most significant architects of Britain's wartime strategy and imperial policy during the long years of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.¹⁰ As Dundas recognised in a memorandum circulated among his cabinet colleagues in 1800, the regions beyond Europe, acquired in the crucible of war, were 'objects essential to the permanent interests of Great Britain'.¹¹ And, like many politicians in London, Dundas had shown himself to be keenly interested in the Cape as the gateway to India.¹²

Indeed, there is evidence that Dundas also tried to work out where the Cape sat in this reoriented British Empire. His evolving thoughts are laid out in a series of 'Suggestions respecting the Cape of Good Hope', which were appended to a larger document on the region and which Dundas presumably presented to his cabinet colleagues. Should the Cape under the British follow the Dutch model, he wondered, and be considered 'in no other light but as subservient to their Indian trade'? Dundas felt this would simply result in government 'upon those principles of grievous and oppressive monopoly which has always marked the policy of the Dutch in India'.¹³ Instead he advocated a different approach: 'I lay it down as a fundamental principle that Great Britain must never attempt to hold possession of the Cape on the principles of strict colonial connexion.'

⁹ By the end of the eighteenth century, the Secretaryship of State for War had also come to embrace the colonies, although the official change of name only occurred in 1801.

¹⁰ There is a copious literature on Dundas. The most helpful sources include: Michael Fry, *The Dundas Despotism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992); Holden Furber, *Henry Dundas, First Viscount Melville, 1742–1811* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931); Cyril Matheson, *The Life of Henry Dundas, First Viscount Melville, 1742–1811* (London: Constable, 1933).

¹¹ TNA, PRO 30/8/243, p. 91, Henry Dundas, 'Memorandum for the consideration of HM's Ministers', 31 March 1800.

¹² Dundas received many letters and suggestions with regard to the Cape and its strategic position. One George Forster of the Madras Civil Service, for example, discussed the strength of the garrison at the Cape and the oppressive nature of the government there. UWits, A154, George Forster to Dundas, 22 January 1786.

¹³ KCL, DT2042 [Henry Dundas], 'Suggestions respecting the Cape of Good Hope' [c.1796], unpaginated. For details on the authorship of the 'Suggestions' and further thoughts on the attached 'Sketches', see accompanying correspondence in the DT2042 file.

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More pointedly, he continued: 'The important benefit we must look to from this possession is the immense security it gives to our Indian Empire, which would not exist if it was in the hands of any other powerful European nation.'¹⁴ His musings reflect the wider backdrop against which the events and opinions discussed in this book were played out. Should the Cape, and the ports and islands in the surrounding region, form part of the commercial empire of the East India Company? Or, alternatively, should they be subsumed into the Westminster-controlled colonial framework of the British Atlantic?¹⁵

Few disagreed with either Macartney or Dundas about the importance of this fulcrum between Britain's Atlantic and Asian empires. The Cape lay along the principal oceanic arterial route that sustained the long-distance maritime trade plied by the ships of the East India Company. Within three years of its capture, it was being touted as politically and strategically vital for Britain's global interests, particularly those centred on the Indian subcontinent. Richard Wellesley, governor general in India, alerted Sir George Yonge, Macartney's successor at the Cape, to the importance of this foothold in Southern Africa. Harking back to Yonge's more conscientious predecessor, Wellesley extolled the wider imperial benefits of an efficient exchange of information between Calcutta and Cape Town:

My correspondence with the Earl of Macartney furnishes abundant proof of the advantages to be derived to the Public Service in India by the speedy communication from the Cape of Good Hope of intelligence affecting the interests of this empire.¹⁶

Wellesley's grand views of Britain's empire in India, and his place in it, are well known.¹⁷ And he had a troubled relationship with Yonge, whom he considered to be a martinet of the most dissolute kind. This impression was not improved, it should be said, by Yonge's performance at the Cape: he was described by Sylvester Douglas as 'having bedeviled himself there so as to make it necessary to recall him'.¹⁸ However, it appears that, on

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ For more on this, see UWits, A88/20, Notes from Meeting of the Privy Council, 23 December 1795; A88/31a, 'Queries submitted by Mr David Scott to the Court of Directors [of the East India Company] relative to the Cape of Good Hope, with proposed answers thereto, July 1796'.

¹⁶ BL, Add. MS 13784, f. 82, Richard Wellesley to Sir George Yonge, 15 September 1800.

¹⁷ The most comprehensive account is still P. E. Roberts, *India under Wellesley* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1929).

¹⁸ ESRO, AMS5440/354, Sylvester Douglas to Lord Sheffield [October 1800]. For alternative, more sympathetic, interpretations of Yonge's governorship, see *Diaries*, vol. I, p. xxiii; Hermann Giliomee, *Die Kaap Tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind, 1795–1803* (Cape Town: HAUM, 1975), pp. 117, 344.

this point at least, Yonge needed little guidance. In November of the same year, he wrote to Henry Dundas along the same lines as Wellesley had adopted when writing to him:

The situation of the Cape makes it the Gibraltar of this part of the world, and it is so acknowledged by France, Holland, America, & by the East India Company, by the unanimous concurrent voice of all these it is admitted & confessed, that an active power possessed of the Cape will command all communication between the Eastern & Western World.¹⁹

The importance of the Cape to British imperial interests continued to be acknowledged into the first decade of the nineteenth century. Robert Percival, an army officer who served both at the Cape and in India, was adamant about its importance:

The situation of the Cape of Good Hope, however, placed as it is directly in the middle between the two great divisions of the British empire, forces itself upon the attention of Great Britain, as a possession which would not only contribute to her prosperity, but which seems almost essential to her safety.²⁰

And an anonymously authored document in the Lowther family papers, carrying the suggestive title 'The Importance of the Cape of Good Hope Considered', reminded its readers that:

When the Cape of Good Hope was first captured by Sir Alured Clarke, it was considered of the utmost importance to the British Empire, and its advantages as a military as well as a naval station were so impressively described in the discussion upon the Peace of Amiens that it was almost unanimously designated the physical guarantee or the Key of India.²¹

Quite apart from its importance and significance for the subsequent history of South Africa, the capture of the Cape cemented the British position in the maritime region comprising the southern Atlantic and Indian oceans. By 1815, and along with St Helena and Mauritius, the Cape formed a chain of British way stations on the route to India, acting as a 'sub-network' within the wider British Indian Ocean world that was (and, in many ways, still is) being defined.²² The area was lauded, by a variety of people with diverse interests and concerns, as a critical part of Britain's Asian empire. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the

¹⁹ Yonge to Dundas, 15 November 1800, *RCC*, vol. III, p. 358.

²⁰ Robert Percival, *An Account of the Cape of Good Hope* (London: C. & R. Baldwin, 1804), p. 329.

²¹ CRO, D LONS/L13/1/91, 'The Importance of the Cape of Good Hope Considered' (c. 1815–16), p. 2.

²² Megan Vaughan, 'Foreword', in Shawkat Toorawa (ed.), *The Western Indian Ocean: Essays on Islands and Islanders* (Port Louis: Hassam Toorawa Trust, 2007), pp. xv–xix, p. xv.

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Indian Ocean had come to be regarded as a 'British lake' in the anglo-phone world, and a fundamental part of this dominance was control over the maritime gateway connecting the Atlantic and Indian oceans.²³ When Britain captured the Cape, it was already part of a sophisticated maritime system of strategic and commercial interests sustained by the Dutch. But the first decades of British rule in Southern Africa facilitated the development of another set of connections and exchanges, as political, military and scientific links were forged. As such, the region, with its commercial maritime links and strategic military requirements, was woven into the fabric of the British Empire as it developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

It would be misleading, however, to suggest that the Cape was the only place on the route to India to be described in such fulsome and complimentary terms. In fact, the encomia bestowed on the Cape should alert us to the importance attached by contemporaries to securing the entire maritime route to the East, rather than any specific part of it. The Cape was only one stepping stone among many potential way stations in the southern reaches of both the Atlantic and Indian oceans, as well as along the southern coastline of Africa. Invariably, these places were seen in terms of their utility to broader British strategic and commercial interests. For example, Lady Anne Barnard, the wife of the resident colonial secretary at the Cape, recorded some thoughts about Algoa Bay in her diary entry for 27 October 1799. This inlet, some 425 miles east of Cape Town, had neither settlers nor infrastructure. But this did not prevent some people from imagining a great future for it. Lady Anne recalled that Major-General Francis Dundas, the military commander at the Cape and a nephew of Henry Dundas, resolved 'to make Algoa Bay a second Gibraltar', guarding the entrance to the Indian Ocean in the same way as Gibraltar stood sentinel to protect the Mediterranean.²⁴ Thomas Brooke, author of one of the first histories of St Helena, suggested that this South Atlantic island had similar potential: 'This little spot, with congenial prosperity, may continue to protect and facilitate our

²³ Kavalam Madhava Panikkar, *India and the Indian Ocean* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1945), p. 9. For more on British hegemony in the region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Milo Kearney, *The Indian Ocean in World History* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 118–35. See also Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Thomas R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860–1920* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

²⁴ *Diaries*, vol. I, p. 314. For an introduction to Lady Anne's life and career, see Madeleine Masson, *Lady Anne Barnard: The Court and Colonial Service under George III and the Regency* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1948). For more on Lady Anne's writings, see Margaret Lenta (ed.), *Paradise, the Castle and the Vineyard: Lady Anne Barnard's Cape Diaries* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2006).

commerce with the East, and, by participating in its success, be always regarded as an important and essential part of the British Empire.'²⁵ And from the middle of the eighteenth century, the Ile de France (present-day Mauritius) was referred to as the 'star and the key of the Indian Ocean'.²⁶ In 1807, Félix Renouard de Sainte-Croix described the island as occupying 'a central geographical point between every other place in the world'.²⁷ This book integrates the various histories and historiographies of these places, arguing for their individual and collective importance in the development of Britain's maritime empire and providing a new way of conceptualising the region that straddled the worlds of the Atlantic and Indian oceans.

When Macartney took office in 1797, Britain's command of this important maritime gateway was relatively negligible. The Cape was only supposed to be in British hands temporarily; the adjacent coastlines of Africa were either uncharted or in the hands of the Portuguese; and the Ile de France and a clutch of other islands in the south-western Indian Ocean were French, and harboured the pirates and privateers who wreaked such havoc on British shipping coming from Asia. And while the East India Company controlled St Helena, and despite Brooke's opinions to the contrary, this was hardly a major boon, either for company or country. The island was geographically remote and isolated, '1200 miles distant from the nearest land', and far removed from other British settlements.²⁸ By virtue of prevailing sailing patterns, it was only useful for homeward-bound ships coming from the East, and it relied almost entirely on imported foodstuffs and other supplies to sustain it. Just over a decade later, by the start of 1811, the position had changed dramatically and British power in the region had expanded considerably. All of the major southern ports in the Atlantic and Indian oceans – Cape Town, St Helena, Mauritius and Rio de Janeiro – were in British hands or guarded by British ships.²⁹ By the end of the war in 1815, and together with other British-controlled locations like

²⁵ Thomas H. Brooke, *A History of the Island of St Helena: From its Discovery by the Portuguese to the Year 1806* (London: Black, Parry and Kingsbury, 1808), p. 428.

²⁶ Auguste Toussaint, *La Route des Iles, contribution à l'histoire maritime des Mascareignes* (Paris: SEVPEN, 1967), p. 95. Contemporary British writers tend to refer to this island by a number of different names, often in the same document: 'Ile de France', 'Isle de France', 'Isle of France', 'Mauritius'. The collective name for the group of islands east of Madagascar – consisting of Mauritius, Réunion and Rodrigues – is derived from the Portuguese navigator Pedro Mascarenhas, who first visited them in the early sixteenth century.

²⁷ Quoted in Lissa Roberts, "'Le centre de toutes choses': Constructing and Managing Centralization on the Isle de France", *History of Science* 52 (2014), pp. 319–42, pp. 319–20.

²⁸ BL, Add. MS 30097, f. 108, 'Memorandum on the Island of St Helena, by Robert Wilson' (1806).

²⁹ James Fichter, 'The British Empire and the American Atlantic on Tristan da Cunha, 1811–16', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36 (2008), pp. 567–89, p. 568.

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Tristan da Cunha, Ascension and the Falkland Islands, the British maritime sphere of influence at the gateway to the Indian Ocean was considerable. Studying this maritime region as a whole, and considering the rhetoric surrounding its acquisition and the practical connections that subsisted within it, provides a powerful illustration of the symbiotic nature of maritime and imperial activities and enterprises in this period.

In considering the nature of Britain's presence in the South Atlantic and southern Indian Ocean, the maritime context in which all eighteenth-century European empires operated is essential. As N. A. M. Rodger reminds us, 'the use of the sea was an indispensable precondition for the existence of these empires'.³⁰ Access to sea routes and commercial opportunities mattered more than territorial control. This was an age in which islands played crucial roles in commerce, navigation and defence.³¹ Britain's imperial power rested on its maritime strength. It was, in the words of Simon Bolívar, the 'mistress of the seas'.³² In reflecting on the route to the East, the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the East India Company stated the glaringly obvious in a letter to the Secretary of State for the Southern Department, the Earl of Hillsborough, in 1781. 'No fleet can possibly sail to, or return from, India', they declared, 'without touching at some proper place for refreshment, and, in time of war, it must be equally necessary for protection'.³³ Consequently, the ability to establish a network of island bases and mainland trading stations, tied together commercially and strategically by communication routes connected to Europe, was vital for any country with significant overseas trade interests. The ability to maintain such a network, especially those southern-hemisphere stations on the route to India, was fundamental to British global power. In fact, the British became so good at this that, as the Victorian author and wit Sydney Smith observed in the late nineteenth century, they maintained garrisons 'on every rock in the ocean where a cormorant could perch'.³⁴ Henry Dundas was fully aware of the

³⁰ N. A. M. Rodger, 'Seapower and Empire: Cause and Effect?', in Bob Moore and Henk Van Nierop (eds.), *Colonial Empires Compared: Britain and the Netherlands, 1750–1850* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 97–111, p. 97.

³¹ John R. Gillis, 'Islands in the Making of an Atlantic Oceania, 1500–1800', in Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal, and Kären Wigen (eds.), *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), pp. 21–37.

³² Quoted in Barry M. Gough, 'Sea Power and South America: The "Brazils" or South American Station of the Royal Navy, 1808–1837', *American Neptune* 50 (1990), pp. 26–34, p. 27.

³³ BL, IOR, H/154, p. 281, Laurence Sullivan and Sir William James to the Earl of Hillsborough, 25 October 1781.

³⁴ Quoted in James Morris, *Pax Britannica: The Climax of an Empire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 429.

connection, explaining to Lord Spencer, First Lord of the Admiralty, with admirable confidence in 1796: 'Home will take care of itself . . . In the present war . . . there can be no real injury done to this country but in its distant possessions . . . the Eastern World is their [the enemy's] only rational object'.³⁵ Others concurred. Sir Hugh Christian, on station at the Cape, agreed that 'India must be their highest object'.³⁶ In 1799, Dundas explained to Richard Wellesley that 'Great Britain can at no time propose to maintain an extensive and complicated war but by destroying the colonial resources of our enemies and adding proportionately to our own commercial resources, which are, and must ever be, the sole basis of our maritime strength'.³⁷ In 1800, Dundas told his cabinet colleagues in no uncertain terms:

I need not remark, because it is obvious, that the present strength and pre-eminence of this country is owing to the extent of its resources arising from its commerce and its naval power which are inseparably connected. They must stand and fall together.³⁸

The connection may have been self-evident but it was never inevitable. The acquisition and maintenance of maritime nodes of empire was fraught with logistical, military and political problems. It attracted considerable jealousy from, and outright conflict with, European rivals, while the connections forged by and between these places created new networks of economic, cultural and scientific exchange that required careful management, scrutiny and control.

In re-examining and reappraising Britain's oceanic empire, this book focuses on the maritime arc stretching from the islands of the South Atlantic, around the coastline of Southern Africa, and into the south-western corner of the Indian Ocean.³⁹ It explores the rhetoric and the reality of this oceanic space, and the various maritime 'keys' that defined it and guarded the route to the East. The discussion considers how this region, its islands and its contiguous land masses were represented, and the vital role they played both in cementing Britain's Asian empire and in frustrating its European rivals. Taken together, they enabled the

³⁵ Dundas to Lord Spencer, 24 March 1796, *Spencer*, vol. I, p. 240.

³⁶ UWits, A88/292, Hugh Christian to Macartney, 29 April 1798.

³⁷ Dundas to Wellesley, 31 October 1799, *Two Views*, p. 206.

³⁸ TNA, PRO 30/8/243, p. 94, Dundas, 'Memorandum'.

³⁹ Some scholars have described the south-western Indian Ocean (or, more precisely, its islands) as 'a regional cultural corridor'. See Pamila Gupta, 'Island-ness in the Indian Ocean', in Pamila Gupta, Isabel Hofmeyr and Michael Pearson (eds.), *Eyes Across the Water: Navigating the Indian Ocean* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2010), pp. 275–85, p. 282, n. 16. The phrase is Sarah Nuttall's. The image of a maritime 'arc' better describes the trajectory and movement inherent in the maritime connections that characterised the wider region in the period under discussion here.

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movement of people, goods and ideas, as well as facilitating information and intelligence exchanges. Individual, often insular, bases formed part of a dense network of administration, security and control that helped to buttress the burgeoning British Empire in the early nineteenth century. Contemporaries frequently dubbed these 'Gibraltars of India'. The book explores places that laid claim to the title of, or were proposed as, crucial 'gateways' to or 'outposts' of India.⁴⁰ The chapters that follow explore the deployment of these monikers in different contexts, the rhetorical baggage that accreted around them, and the practical and logistical connections that enfolded the region into Britain's wider maritime empire.⁴¹ The book posits the region as a crucial hub in understanding the character and workings of the late eighteenth-century British Empire as it struggled to redefine itself following the loss of thirteen colonies on mainland North America. And it also examines the connections that were said to exist both within the region and between constituent parts of the region and India, investigating how these worked in practice.

Throughout the period, speculation, debate and disagreement abounded, as a whole host of soldiers, sailors, businessmen, governors, administrators and others offered their views on the place of the southern Atlantic and Indian oceans in Britain's overlapping commercial, political and imperial interests. The first reference to the word 'strategy' in the *Oxford English Dictionary* dates from 1810; before then, ministers, politicians and commentators considered 'policy towards the outside world'. This was a subject, therefore, which took on 'diplomatic, political, commercial, ideological, financial, military and naval expression according to the circumstances'.⁴² Discussion and deliberation about the place of the Cape, and the surrounding islands and seas in the wider British Empire extended far beyond the upper echelons of government in London. As a result, the cast of characters that informs this history ranges widely. We will encounter the opinions of monarchs, merchants and politicians. But those of prospectors, prophets, profit-mongers, and even the proprietor of a remote island also have a role to play in the story that follows. It includes the views of hoary old governors, men of science and ladies of

⁴⁰ The discussion that follows does not deal with the Comoros, the Seychelles, or any of the myriad 'stepping stones' to India north of the Equator. However, the ways in which the British state and the East India Company approached these places, with their indigenous, Arabic and other Asian connections, deserves serious scholarly attention.

⁴¹ For other uses of these terms in similar or analogous contexts, see Frank Broeze, *Gateways of Asia: Port Cities of Asia in the 13th–20th Centuries* (London: Routledge, 1997), and Philip Henshaw, 'The "Key to South Africa" in the 1890s: Delagoa Bay and the Origins of the South African War', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24 (1998), pp. 527–44.

⁴² Rodger, 'Seapower and Empire', pp. 98, 99.