

money” that incentivized their capture. The court had the power to emancipate shiploads of captives, and ultimately resettled at least 14,500 people released from the Middle Passage between 1808 and 1823. Yet, Scanlan observes, it “wasn’t particularly interested in what happened to the people it released” (98). Liberated Africans were counted and registered, and then pushed into the military or indentured to locals, but afterward they essentially “disappear from the records” (113). The Court itself was “informal, even corrupt, by design” (101). A virtual monopoly held by the prize agent’s firm ensured the accumulation of a private fortune, and a “feedback loop” allowed a small number of officials to control both public monies and private enterprise (110).

Scanlan argues convincingly in chapter 4 that raids on slave forts led by Charles Maxwell mark a turning point in British imperial history, “when the campaign against the slave trade tipped from being a campaign of national self-purification conducted at sea, and became a justification for expansionist imperial war on land” (154). The raids drew the ire of West African rulers and inspired protests, written in Arabic, warning Maxwell “you are a stranger here, we are the proprietors” (161), but only the courts could halt this expansion, which Scanlan correctly notes was the expression of an abolitionism that “synthesized humanitarianism with capitalist accumulation, and drove it forward by military force” (165).

The climax of the book is its superb fifth chapter, in which Scanlan highlights the transformation in British antislavery that followed the Napoleonic Wars. Although prize money drove Sierra Leone’s economy during the wars, after 1815 “‘Civilization’ replaced prize money at the heart of the colonial economy.” Scanlan explains how the “abstract idea of ‘civilization’ became a program to teach former slaves European folkways: wage work, scheduled and times labour, dress, consumption, and church attendance” (168). Scanlan masterfully demonstrates how the “ideology of antislavery, in the hands of a few officials looking for a new way to make money from the practices of stopping the slave trade, was transformed into a colonialism that proposed to transform former slaves into Christians, wage workers, and consumers” (170).

Padraic Scanlan has not only written an excellent book on Sierra Leone, he has produced one of the most important books ever written on Liberated Africans. The sources necessarily skew the book—as the subtitle clarifies—toward a British rather than an African history. African actors are present, but secondary to the main characters, who are British. The book may thus be read alongside Paul Lovejoy’s *Jihad in West Africa during the Age of Revolutions* (published simultaneously) to provide additional context. And, because the book concludes after the Napoleonic Wars, readers may hope Scanlan will follow up with a sequel, as the majority of the estimated 100,000 African captives taken to Sierra Leone arrived after the period examined in this book.

*Freedom’s Debtors* is essential reading for any university course on abolition and for any scholar interested in British abolitionism’s effects in Africa. Scanlan powerfully re-centers our understanding of abolitionism and forces us to reexamine its immediate and long-term effects in Africa.

Matthew S. Hopper  
 California Polytechnic State University  
[mshopper@calpoly.edu](mailto:mshopper@calpoly.edu)

TIMOTHY J. SHANNON. *Indian Captive, Indian King: Peter Williamson in America and Britain*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018. Pp. 343. \$39.95 (cloth).  
 doi: 10.1017/jbr.2018.142

Timothy Shannon’s intriguing new book hinges, quite literally, on the question of what is and is not a lie. In the first half of *Indian Captive, Indian King*, Shannon tells the story of

eighteenth-century Scottish traveler Peter Williamson as he himself told it, presenting the various adventures (and misadventures) Williamson described in his published works and then subjecting them to historical scrutiny. (Spoiler: Williamson does not fare well.) The second half of the book presents Williamson as others, including Shannon, saw him, as an ingenious raconteur who turned his misfortunes to his own benefit, adapting his personal narrative and harnessing the expanding opportunities of the eighteenth-century British Empire to secure himself a living and improve his social position.

Peter Williamson began his life with little in the way of prospects. Born to poor parents in the rural countryside near Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1729, he was lured into indentured servitude and shipped to America at the age of thirteen. In the first part of the book, “Hard Fate,” Shannon follows the major episodes of Williamson’s early life, including his childhood in Scotland; his “kidnapping” by agents of Aberdeen merchants; his voyage to America, shipwreck, and sale as an indentured servant; his life as a successful farmer on the Pennsylvania frontier; his capture by Indians; his enlistment in the army and time as a prisoner of war; and his ransoming and eventual return to Aberdeen in 1758. The details of each episode are laid out in Williamson’s memoir, *French and Indian Cruelty*, first published in 1757 and reprinted multiple times during Williamson’s life and over the next century. Shannon examines these episodes for veracity based on meticulous research in archives in Edinburgh, London (Kew), and Pennsylvania, as well as published sources. But Shannon is not just interested in confirming or debunking Williamson’s story. He also wants to mine the story for what it can tell his readers about the larger historical context. As Shannon explains, “even in Williamson’s lies, we can glimpse important truths about the everyday lives and experiences of eighteenth-century Britons within their empire” (9). So, as we learn about Williamson, we also learn of many other children exploited by the Aberdeen servant trade, the increasingly limited prospects for indentured servants in the American colonies, the reality and sometimes harsher mythology of Indian captivity, and the impact of eighteenth-century American wars on its nonelite participants.

In part two, “The Interesting Tale,” Shannon follows Williamson as he performs his American adventures for a Scottish audience eager to hear tales from the exotic fringes of the British Empire. Williamson’s “restless and entrepreneurial pursuit of celebrity and social respectability” (123) led him to craft a largely imaginary narrative and persona that appealed to fellow Britons’ preconceptions about Native peoples. He dressed as an Indian, recounted his captivity, and described cultural practices of the “savage” Natives. Building on his growing fame, Williamson also published a series of written accounts of his adventures. These public accounts led to his prosecution by the magistrates and merchants of Aberdeen, who fiercely denied his claims that they had connived at selling children into foreign servitude. Much of Shannon’s evidence comes from these trials, and he examines them in detail, not only to support (or refute) Williamson’s story but also to demonstrate that Williamson used the trials to defend his hard-won status as a respectable businessman. There was enough truth to Williamson’s accounts to allow him to collect several hundred pounds in damages from his legal opponents. Having secured this vindication, Williamson settled permanently in Edinburgh and operated a succession of businesses. These included coffeehouses, a printing establishment, and a penny post, all of which allowed “Indian Peter” both to rub shoulders with the polite reading public of Edinburgh and to continue to profit from his performances and published accounts.

As he does in part one, Shannon uses Williamson’s ventures to explore some of the larger issues and themes of eighteenth-century Britain, including the development of the public sphere and influence of the Scottish Enlightenment. For instance, in one delightful section, Shannon describes the short-lived *Scots Spy*, published by Williamson and probably penned by him as well. A *Spy* article included a description of Williamson that captured both his common origins and his embrace of the Scottish Enlightenment’s ethos of moral equality and self-improvement: He was a “blunt plain man, who told his mind in such words as common sense dictated to him” (227). Shannon also demonstrates how Williamson’s Indian persona shifted over time, reflecting the evolution of British stereotypes about

Native peoples. While the first edition of *French and Indian Captivity* said Williamson had spent three months in Indian captivity, by 1792 Williamson claimed he had spent forty years as “King of all the *Mohawk, Oneidoe, Onondangoe, Cayaga, Seneca, Tuscarora, Natiouque, Conoy, Tuteloe, Chugnue, Delaware, Unanime, Minisink, Mehicon, Wappinger, and Cherokee Indians*” (263). Clearly, by the end of his life, Williamson’s persona had devolved into “self-deprecating burlesque” (262), and his audience, well acquainted with the familiar figure, was in on the joke.

Shannon’s book is very well written, frequently entertaining, and insightful in its analysis, thereby offering a valuable addition to the recent crop of microhistorical studies that examine the rapidly changing terrain of the expanding empire through the experiences of Eleazar Williams, John Ledyard, John Wompas, and other individuals. Not surprisingly, given the intricacies of Williamson’s deception, the book is also occasionally confusing and repetitive, particularly in the second part, when Shannon jumps back and forth between Williamson’s published accounts and actual events. A timeline would have helped the reader, particularly in the book’s second half, as would a chronological listing of Williamson’s known and suspected publications. Overall, however, the book is both a fascinating account of one extraordinary life and an informative examination of the lived experience, beneficial as well as costly, of the eighteenth-century British Empire.

Jenny Hale Pulsipher  
*Brigham Young University*  
[jenny\\_pulsipher@byu.edu](mailto:jenny_pulsipher@byu.edu)

JONATHAN WILLIS. *The Reformation of the Decalogue: Religious Identity and the Ten Commandments in England, c. 1485–1625*. Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. 388. \$120 (cloth). doi: 10.1017/jbr.2018.143

Jonathan Willis’s second monograph elucidates wonderfully the complex interrelations between ideas and culture in post-Reformation England. Taking his cue in part from John Bossy’s landmark 1988 essay on the emerging dominance by the sixteenth century of the Decalogue in the Christian West as the controlling system of practical ethics, Willis explores more fully the revolutionary role of Reformation theology in redefining the place of the commandments.

Willis has sensibly resisted the temptation to structure the book around the Ten Commandments (a strategy that would have been complicated by the different available numbering schemes), and has instead ordered his material in three parts, corresponding to three “offices” of the moral law: temporal or civil; “evangelical” or spiritual; and practical, or pastoral. This organizational scheme provides a natural framework for Willis’s consideration of the ways in which the Reformation wrought a profound change in the status of the Decalogue and allows for more focused discussion of particular commandments under the broader headings.

The use of distinctively Protestant categories for interpreting the function of the moral law does, however, raise a question about the extent to which the analysis is concerned with reformism across the confessions. For Bossy, the shift had its roots in Catholic thought, and the fact that the study has c. 1485 as its starting point might lead one to expect a more extensive discussion of late medieval doctrines and traditions than we are in fact given. At several points Counter-Reformation commentators such as Bonner and Bellarmine are drawn into conversation with Reformed writers, but these are sideways glances. Willis helpfully addresses this problem in his first chapter (48–56), explaining that although the Decalogue was not a