

Simon Davies, Daniel Sanjiv Roberts and Gabriel Sánchez Espinosa, eds., *India and Europe in the Global Eighteenth Century*. Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2014. Pp. xii+341, 13 ills. £65 / €85 / \$115 (pb). ISBN 9780729410809.

Editors of this collection of fourteen essays explain that, by placing the relationship between the two terms from the title in the ‘global’ context, they seek to avoid the commonplaces of historiography and imagination. As a result, ‘some significant individual figures receive but little or passing mention’ by the contributors (11). This may be the volume’s most significant contribution: it shows how a shift in perspective populates the historical imagination with new cohorts of historical characters and requires new accounts of historical relationships.

The new characters emerge from essays that seldom suggest what ‘global’ third terms may disrupt the static images of ‘India’ and ‘Europe’ in the history of colonialism. More often the essays suggest that the primary terms stand in need of rethinking, and the historical imagination in need of reaching beyond the ‘significant individual figures’ and familiar narratives about hierarchies and distributions of power. The broader context brings about a range of perspectives around which editors remain ‘conscious that other narratives might be constructed’ (12). The volume discusses ‘aspects of Enlightenment theory; European and Persian historical representations of India; economic history; war and piracy; material culture and display; book history and translation; travel writing; critical theory and fiction; European missions and British evangelicalism; Hellenism and orientalism and Mughal history and culture, among other topics’ (12). The collection makes clear how a ‘global perspective’ on the seemingly bilateral relationship may be indispensable, but also disorienting. This is a broad landscape of narrative and methodological possibilities. Keeping up with all the novelty requires an array of competences few can marshal.

The central question guiding this collection may be about the materials with which to probe the nature of ‘India’ and ‘Europe’ and their interactions. To put it more politically: has this been, above all, a relationship of representation, always framed by the asymmetrical connections of colonization, and then by the political commitments of historiography? Stories about relationships between texts of India and England can seem familiar, tracing the paths of dissemination and appropriation of ‘Oriental’ thought and iconography in European canonical literature. Some in this collection are not so easily subsumed under the ‘Orientalist’ dynamic, and offer new ways of imagining relationships between ‘indigenous’ texts and their ‘European’ uses. Indian and English texts could be triangulated, for instance, by authoritative texts from traditions seldom mentioned in histories of contact between Britain and India, as in Claire Gallien’s account of the role of Indo-Persian historiography in Britain’s colonial historiography. Or they could present themselves as European ‘translations’ for which there is no equivalent in any Indian language, as in Javeed Majeed’s examination of John Richardson’s ‘A Dissertation of the languages, literature, and manners of Eastern nations’. They would even suggest that Britishness was shaped by loans from the global textual traffic, especially by romance and the gothic, cultural influences long disowned. The essay by Gabriel Sánchez Espinosa concerns the adventures of a Spanish translation of a French text about ‘India’ as a focus of questions about Enlightenment’s viability as a political program and blueprint for reform. The eighteenth-century Spanish publication market becomes a vibrant scene of tension between reformists and the Inquisition, a rare sight in a publication in English.

Since most readers of scholarship in the dominant languages of European colonialism in India will know next to nothing of these new historical characters and conditions, the essays are experiments in what to say against the backdrop of available theories and narratives. Sometimes a scholarly argument can amount to little more than a presentation of names and shapes of eighteenth-century people and institutions: Mogens R. Nissen shows that there was a Danish East India Company (or, rather, several), along with droves of eighteenth-century Danish politicians, patricians, and merchants, all of them named and somehow motivated. Lakshmi Subramaniam explains that there was a tenuous difference between ‘piracy’ and ‘privateering’ on a site she defines as ‘India’s western littoral’, amidst the East India Company’s ambivalence towards local political and market forces long since irrelevant. Subramaniam, much like Florence D’Souza and Seema Alavi in their essays, suggests that the most formidable limitation to a richer historical understanding of relationships between India and Europe may lie in the prevailing protocols of documentation and narrative habits. D’Souza reminds us of textual evidence that Surat was a site of encounter on the west coast long before Mumbai, important to remember because ‘constant adaptation to evolving circumstances ... prevailed over any legalized stability or any long-term arrangements’ (307). Alavi suggests that insistence on ‘the myth of Mughal decline’ hides from view the continued existence of important intellectual communities in South Asia. To surpass such melancholy narratives about colonialism, historians should attend to ‘the creation of wider conceptual spaces’ in the period, and see how they ‘served as critical arenas’ in which historical agents could ‘connect in fresh ways to global influences’ (285). The broad range of scholarship here will guide many experienced researchers to the volume, in search of particular essays, or clusters of essays on specific research questions or focal areas. The same breadth may recommend the entire volume to teachers keen to show their students that transnational history of colonialism is a thriving interdisciplinary field in which much exciting work remains to be done.

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