

Comptes rendus / Book Reviews

BOWEN, H. V. — *The Business of Empire: The East India Company and Imperial Britain, 1756–1833*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. 304.

The English East India Company's striking expansion from a largely commercial body into an organization that also ruled vast colonial territories in Asia necessarily had profound effects on its inner workings and structures and also on its larger roles in British society. H. V. Bowen brilliantly recounts these transformations in the East India Company's "domestic history" (p. 2). His sophisticated analysis of the interactions between the East India Company and the British domestic economy and state provides us with a far deeper understanding of these complex processes than has hitherto been available.

Bowen builds his persuasive argument using his unprecedented analysis of the East India Company's own extensive financial and administrative records over eight decades, from its earliest territorial conquests in 1757 to the end of its commercial privileges in Asia in 1833. Throughout, the East India Company remained a joint-stock corporation, displaying many characteristics of a "modern" multinational. Simultaneously, however, its institutional boundaries were blurred by the overlapping and often cross-cutting agendas of its employees personally, of the various competing shipping and other private interest groups that overlay it, and also of the British politicians who regulated its administrative functions and incorporated them into the British machinery of empire in Asia.

In two particularly strong chapters, Bowen studies the social history respectively of the shareholders and the employees of the East India Company. Over time there were shifts in "the geographical, social, and structural profiles" (p. 84) of the approximately 3,000 men and women who owned East India Company stock. Using specific examples and larger analytic patterns drawn from East India Company records of stock ownership, Bowen shows how and why investors and speculators purchased and sold its shares — variously seeking financial gain, social prestige, patronage in the appointment of East India Company employees, and political influence. Overall, he shows that a steady core of two-thirds of the stock was held by male merchants, bankers, and tradesmen in the City of London. Significantly, however, the proportion of female shareholders declined after the 1760s when price fluctuations apparently induced many women to sell out. Further, the substantial volume of stock held by Dutch and other foreign

investors declined markedly after the 1780s, replaced by British gentlemen shareholders in specific regions of southern and eastern provincial England. These patterns in the composition of the shareholder community reflected broader social and economic developments on the continent and in Britain.

These shareholders elected 24 of their number onto the Court of Directors that managed the East India Company and its employees. After the 1780s, the East India Company's growing colonial possessions and ever more complex functions shifted the composition of the directorate toward more men with specialized knowledge and experience of India; over half of the 110 men who served as directors between 1784 and 1834 had resided in India, for example. Many came from different geographic origins and careers than the bulk of the other shareholders. While Bowen does not extensively discuss the types of men whom the directors appointed to the East India Company's civil, commercial, military, and other cadres in India, he does analyse the composition and duties of the hundreds of British managers, clerks, and other officials who comprised its home office. Gradually, the London staff of the East India Company became more bureaucratized, in parallel with developments in the civil service of the British state during this period.

The East India Company's growing bureaucracy created its vast archive which sustained not only its mercantile operations but also its expanding colonial administration. The "insatiable metropolitan demands for information helped to cultivate an attitude of mind ... which placed a very high premium upon full and accurate record keeping" throughout the British establishment in India (p. 158). These demands emerged partly from the profit-driven commercial methods of the Company, but they were reinforced by the expanding European drive to know, classify, and rule other cultures. This colonial archive enabled the British to establish an empire of information that empowered them over the Asian rulers and peoples who had no unified counterpart. Indeed, Bowen has used this same colonial archive effectively to analyse the East India Company's own operations and social and economic history.

Nevertheless, the directors increasingly struggled to adjust the formal and informal administrative and decision-making structure of their home office to the dramatically changing demands of colonial rule over India. In London, Parliament periodically asserted its power to regulate the East India Company and its employees. In India, British officials and officers often acted independently of — and even in direct opposition to — policies set by the directors. Further, in the context of dramatically shifting global economic and political forces, the directors found their management of British-Indian trade was hobbled by the East India Company's relatively static business-like organization. Hence, by the early nineteenth century, the East India Company's own commerce, which had been its original purpose, had declined substantially even as the larger British economic and political exploitation of Asia expanded.

Bowen concludes with an assessment of the social and economic effects of the East India Company on Britain itself during this period. He conservatively estimates that a sizeable 93,500 Britons were dependent on it for their livelihood in 1800. Further,

over the period covered in this book, the East India Company made cash payments in Britain of £667 million, a figure equivalent to more than 20 per cent of the entire expenditure of the British government over this period. Thus, the East India Company did exert considerable effect on Britain. However, Bowen rightly dismisses the simplistic and out-dated argument that specie and other capital drained from India by the British funded England's own industrial revolution.

Overall, Bowen's thorough research in the East India Company's massive archive has enabled him to make definitive arguments about aspects of its functions, structure, composition, and effects that have been long inconclusively debated. Combining social and economic history, he provides a highly accessible and yet rigorously scholarly study of this crucial period in the history of the East India Company and of British colonialism as well. Deliberately limited to the "domestic history" of the East India Company in Britain, this book achieves its goals.

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COOK, Tim — *Clio's Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006. Pp. 326.

This very good book should be read by those interested in Canadian military history. Cook's stated purpose is to provide a military intellectual history, to study the history of ideas, events, individuals, and actions that underpin the Canadian documentation and writing of the world wars. The men tasked with writing Canadian official military history confronted budgetary shortcomings, a lack of historically skilled personnel, military indifference (especially in an anti-intellectual navy and an operationally obsessed air force), overt military and political interference, and sometimes near complete governmental indifference. It is a wonder that anything was written at all. Cook, however, is a good writer — his exceptional first book explored the impact of gas warfare upon the Canadian Corps in the Great War. He presents material clearly, the narrative flows easily, the analysis is sound. Cook does not bore.

The production of the official history of the Canadian effort in the First World War was particularly cursed. There were multiple efforts to document the Canadian role, led by the mercurial and hyperactive Max Aitken and Arthur Doughty, the more staid head of the Public Archives of Canada. At war's end, the job of putting pen to official paper was handed to Arthur Duguid. It proved a poor choice. A man unable to see the forest for the trees, Duguid did good research but had failed to produce even one book of a projected multi-volume series when the Second World War had begun. That task fell to G. W. L. Nicholson, whose fine history emerged finally in 1964! Cook rightly damns Duguid's proprietary behaviour for injuring subsequent attempts to explain the Great War to Canadians.