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Penelope Carson. *The East India Company and Religion, 1698–1858: Worlds of the East India Company.* Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012. 288 S. $115.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84383-732-9.

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The gates to the temple of Somnath may just serve as the best possible heuristic to summarize the central narrative of Penelope Carson's *The East India Company and Religion, 1698-1858.* In 1842, the governor-general of British India, Edward Law, Lord Ellenborough, ordered that British forces in Afghanistan should remove the gates from the tomb of Mahmud of Ghazni and return them to India. It had been Mahmud who pried the gates from their original hinges on the Somnath temple in 1024. By the time Lord Ellenborough implicated himself in the struggle over these doors, they had become iconic (if not outright holy) symbols for the Hindu community at Somnath, the Muslim community at Ghazni, and, in their own way, to the British community of Christians who had emerged as the rulers of India by the middle years of the nineteenth century. How best to juggle the relative claims to possession and the concomitant religious sensibilities of these three faith communities was very much at the core of the controversy over Ellenborough's instructions regarding the Somnath gates, orders that would, at least in part, push the East India Company's Court of Directors to recall the governor-general in 1844.

In *The East India Company and Religion*, Carson offers a retelling of the East India Company's corporate history from 1698 until the company's eventual dissolution in 1858, but, unlike other company narratives, Carson's takes seriously the question of religious policy as a central factor of the story, arguing that the history of Britain's corporate rule in India in this period can, and perhaps indeed needs to, be written as what we might call a history of strategic religious diplomacy. Carson has divided her book into eleven chapters, joined by an introduction and conclusion. These chapters move in a steady chronological progression, as the book unfolds its narrative history. Indeed, many of the chapters end with logical historical questions about what is to come next that serve as transitions to carry the current of the story along.

On one hand, Carson is able to offer more historical narrative in this book–from 1698 to 1858–than she might in another because her argument hangs on the story itself. The company's history can and should be told as a history of religious policy. On the other hand, though, there is reason to wonder if there might have been some advantage to be had had this book delved more deeply into theoretical issues than it does. Very little is said here about the racial component to this story that runs through other works on religion and empire, notably Catherine Hall's *Civilising Subjects* (2002). Noticeably absent, too, is any mention of Homi Bhabha's work, particularly his essay "Signs Taken for Wonders" (1990), with its evocative opening images of the transmission of translated books of scripture and the transformative work done to those books inside the colonial exchange.

There are, though, strong arguments for the narrative style of *The East India Company and Religion.* Historical currents that are often lost in other histories of the East India Company–and which might have been lost had Carson structured this book in some other way–come through very clearly here. Let me offer three examples.

The old theater adage notes that there are no small parts, only small actors. In Carson's telling, some of the actors in the East India Company's history who might have previously grumbled that they had been given small parts become central players. Charles Grant, both the father and the son, emerge in this book as significant actors in ways that they do not elsewhere. The elder Grant, in particular, takes center stage as a critical link between Britain's more aggressively Evangelical communities and

the company, a person well placed to argue for missionary goals at the very heart of company policymaking. His son, too, was positioned to raise the hopes of the Evangelical community in Britain when he assumed the presidency of the Board of Control in 1830. Like the Grants, William Willberforce, who does not make a single appearance in the index of John Keay's historical survey of the East India Company, *The Honourable Company* (1991), emerges in this book as a central player in the history of company policymaking vis-à-vis India.

Perhaps more interesting than the altered roles that various actors play in the company's drama in Carson's history is the nuanced way in which her focus on faith forces us to appreciate the religious balancing act that was always at the heart of company rule in South Asia. Axiomatic though it may be that the company struggled to balance missionary work against its trading functions, *The East India Company and Religion* is richest in its insistence that historians have overly homogenized what we mean when we refer to missionary activity. Take, for instance, the competing interests of the Church of England and other dissenting religious communities. Ought the company's missionary involvement in South Asia focus on the established church? Or, ought it be more inclusive? Would Anglican missionaries threaten indigenous religious sensibilities as being aggressively statist? Hence, as Carson suggests, the question of how the company functioned in India vis-à-vis religion was always also a question of the constitution of church and state in Britain more broadly and of the religious composition of the state and the company's growing empires around the globe.

One final revelation that comes of Carson's focus on religion in this book is the rather surprising dislocation of the 1857/58 uprisings from their pride of place in the company's Indian history. Every school child who has studied those events knows of the tainted munitions cartridges distributed to sepoy soldiers to use in their new Enfield rifles. As the culmination of a story about the East India Company and religion, the uprisings of 1857/58 only receive six pages here–in a book of nearly three hundred pages. Furthermore, Carson leaves the question of just how significant religious sensibilities were as motives for those sepoys who rose against company rule as an almost unknowable issue. What seems to matter more than the precise cause of the uprisings here is the role that the events of 1857/58 played in the end of the East India Company as an institution.

The mutiny that matters in Carson's telling is the uprising at Vellore in 1806. Where the ideological origins of the 1857 uprisings played themselves out in fairly short order and in rather clear ways, the motivations behind the events at Vellore on July 10, 1806, seem to have shaped the rest of the East India Company's nineteenth-century efforts to balance out control, trade, profits, and evangelical fervor in India. After Vellore, the company was always shy about promoting religious communities, and Evangelicals found themselves reliant upon governmental intervention to advance their causes in South Asia, as evidenced by the well-known 1813 East India Company charter with its so-called pious clause. The result was the tangled set of alliances–company, Crown, Parliament, Church of England, dissenting communities, Hindus, and Muslims–that define the fifty years of Carson's narrative between 1806 and 1858, fifty years which, it should be noted, fill far more of this book (almost a full two hundred pages) than do the one hundred or so years from 1698 to 1806 (which fill just seventy pages).

The East India Company and Religion is a well-written narrative, both readable and informative. By taking seriously the place of religion in the history of the East India Company, it opens up new ways of thinking about a relatively well-traveled history. As was the case with Ellenborogh's decision to relocate the gates to the temple of Somnath, the East India Company's relationship with religions and religious diversity proves much more complex than anybody might at first have imagined it would be. In this respect, Carson's is a useful book not only for students of the East India Company and the British Raj but also for those interested in missionary activity more broadly.

In the book's final pages, Carson notes how little changed with respect to religious policy after the crown replaced the company as the sovereign power in South Asia. Queen Victoria's clear unwillingness to impose upon the religious convictions of her South Asian subjects–in clear defiance of the will of Britain's Evangelical community–was a reaffirmation of the company's religious compact with the people of India. From the point of view of religious policy, then, the shift from company to state Raj made little difference; continuity hid beneath the surface appearance of radical change. But, as Carson notes, the focus on religion tells us more still. For, what we find in the final pages of this book is that, though faith mattered a great deal more in the nineteenth century than it might in our own secular age, British power in nineteenth-century India was always a multicultural engagement, one in which the Christianizing impulses from Britain had to be tempered against the faith of the colonized people of South Asia in order to secure and, ultimately, sustain British power on the subcontinent.

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