

Review

British Encounters with India, 1750-1830: A Sourcebook. Tim Keirn and Norbert Schürer (ed.). New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-230231-43-6 (hbk), 978-0-230231-44-3 (pbk). \$95/\$32.

Reviewed by: Dermot Killingley, Newcastle University (retired).
d.h.killingley@ncl.ac.uk

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This is a useful collection of extracts from the literature on India that was available in English to general readers in Britain and India during the time when British power in India was taking shape. Most of the texts are a page or two, but some are longer; there are histories, controversial pieces, letters, poems, schoolbooks, and a farce. Most are by British writers, some of whom spent much of their lives in India, while others were never there; some are by Indians, in translations available at the time; and three are by Indians writing in English. The topics covered are 'Politics and Governance', 'Colony and Metropole', 'Geographies', 'Religion', 'Gender and Domestic Life', and 'Culture'; there are also seventeen pictures, including two by Indian artists who had adopted European techniques. An introduction discusses the theme of 'encounter', and the inadequacy of the late twentieth-century construct of 'orientalism' in accounting for the range of responses. These include respect, amusement, incomprehension, and contempt; some cultural features such as nautch and suttee could command admiration and revulsion at once. Theorists seek the cause of 'despotism' or 'passivity' in the climate or the influence of ancient lawgivers, while politicians and moralists condemn or praise the empire-building activities of Clive, and the Rev. Claudius Buchanan and General 'Hindoo' Stuart debate the influence of missionaries.

Besides the breadth of the selection, another useful feature is that the introduction to an extract often describes the rest of the text, so that an enterprising reader can look for more. The numbering of the texts allows useful cross-references to be made from one to another. However, sometimes this is forgotten, so that Francis Gladwin is introduced twice (pp. 79, 124); the foundation of the Hindu College is summarized correctly on p. 167, but the old canard attributing it to Rammohun Roy appears on p. 61.

The supporting material falls short of the quality of the selection in other ways. Contrary to what is stated on p. xii, the texts are often disfigured by '[sic]', usually marking spellings that are no longer standard in the US. (even if they still are in the UK, e.g. *equalled*, p. 183). The footnotes are often helpful in providing orientation in Indian and British history, and sometimes explain unfamiliar words, but not often enough. *Hindustan* is explained, but not *India* or *East Indies*, each of which had a complex meaning which is no longer current; *Hindu* is hardly explained, and *Gentoo* not at all. Words that could be found in any non-specialist dictionary (*abstruse*, *encomium*,

guinea, waistcoat) are explained (sometimes wrongly: ‘gentle disposition’ for *lenitive*, p. 88); so are some Indian words, but not all. The meaning given is not always appropriate to the context: *imaum* (p. 53) is glossed as ‘the officiating cleric of a mosque’, where the context shows it means a Shīʿa ruler. Sometimes, like someone reluctant to appear unhelpful when asked for directions, the editors send the reader off in the wrong direction entirely. Thus the observation referred to by Joshua Marshman, that Rammohun Roy’s publication *The Precepts of Jesus* ‘may greatly injure the cause of truth’, is incongruously attributed to Rammohun himself (p. 138), instead of the missionary reviewer Deocar Schmidt. The same reluctance may have led Trivandrum to be misnamed Thiruvendipuram (p. xv). ‘*Trevandeparum*, four miles distant from *Fort St. David*’ (p. 93), is Tiruvendipuram or Tiruvayindrapuram—not Trivandrum, which is 300 miles away on the other coast.

There is no glossary. If a word has been explained in one place, it may not be explained again, and may not be in the index: very inconvenient in a book that can be dipped into rather than read from beginning to end. The book needs to be read with *Hobson-Jobson* and Schwartzberg’s atlas at hand—neither of which is in the bibliography. Some of the typesetting is (to borrow an inspired misprint from p. 34) ‘harum sacrum’. Unfortunately the incentive to publish books these days is greater than the incentive to make them really good. This one is not as good as it deserves to be.