

some admixture of more modern ideas for the instruction of his own and following generations". Barnett was, of course, entirely right. It is gratifying to see from Bronkhorst's summary that Indological scholars are at last agreeing with the old master. Now begins the exciting work of thinking about the people who compiled the *Arthaśāstra* and their historical and political reasons for doing so.

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TIRTHANKAR ROY:

India in the World Economy: From Antiquity to the Present.

xliii, 276 pp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. ISBN 978 1 107 40147 1. £18.99.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X13000396

This slim volume attempts a difficult task – that of surveying over two-thousand years of Indian economic history without either succumbing to impressionism or imposing some Procrustean model upon the long and complex history of an extraordinarily diverse sub-continent. Such an enterprise encounters at the outset the problem of defining the boundary and content of an “economy” in the pre-modern era when neither fiat currencies nor central banks nor centralized governments existed to give some shape to the endless flux of transactions that we might retrospectively classify as “economic”. Such questions are not addressed. Roy (perhaps wisely) sidesteps a major debate about the meaning of “economy” famously initiated by Karl Polanyi *et al.* (*Trade and Market in the Early Empires*. Glencoe IL, 1957). Addressing that debate could, for example, have led into the complexities of separating the economic and non-economic within the family or household unit where reproduction and production have coincided through most of Asian history. Was marriage, for example, an investment in workforce recruitment?

Roy defines his theme as “cross-border economic exchange” (p. 3), the study of India in its transactions with the world. This avoids the knotty question of what the “borders” crossed were. We may think of oceans as borders but given the vastly greater efficiency of water transport, a small stretch of rugged, waterless terrain within “India” would be a much greater obstacle to economic transaction than the Bay of Bengal might be. Roy’s working definition seems to be that India was broadly equivalent to the British Empire in India until 1947, and then to the territories of the Republic of India. The former is implicitly projected back a few millennia as the setting for the discussion of these interactions. The foundational questions avoided, Roy’s strengths come to the fore. That includes his important effort to introduce the “knowledge economy” into the explanatory frame. The effort ignores, however, the many works on the exact sciences published by David Pingree and described in Kim Plofker’s *A History of Indian Mathematics* (Princeton, 2009).

A lucidly written series of chapters leads the reader through from the chalcolithic civilization of the Harappans (mature phase *c.* 2600–1900 BCE) only known from archaeological sources to the better-documented era of Iron Age empires (600 BCE onward). A range of printed sources are elegantly integrated into a coherent narrative that also deploys basic economic analysis to understand this period. A distinction between ports of trade and royal capitals and their respective hinterlands is employed to classify the period up to about 1200 CE (p. 49). That date marks the beginning of Islamic empires in the Indian subcontinent and also according to

Roy, the gradual integration of the semi-autonomous port of trade with the economy of inland peasant empire. The period 1200–1800 is allotted two chapters, one looking at land-borne trade, especially in horses, and the other sea trade after the arrival of Europeans in Asian waters. Roy offers a persuasive discussion of the technological and organizational advantages that Europeans possessed for several centuries.

These culminated in the creation of the British imperial state by 1850. Roy takes a benign view of empires as agents of market integration, with the British being the most effective in this regard. Four chapters are devoted to it. Roy points to the revolutionary effects of the introduction of railways on the economic gradients that had hitherto dominated economic activity in India (pp. 161–5). He also rebuts the idea current among “left nationalists” that the effects of the transport revolution were largely negative pointing, for example, to the transfer of embodied technology and human skills from Britain and the USA that gave India its precocious lead in modern industry, with the first railway and cotton mill being built simultaneously with the “opening” of Japan in 1854. In general the thrust of his narrative is to undermine the “development of underdevelopment” model that remains current among many Indian historians long after East and South-East Asian economies decisively exploded it. Roy points to the conceptual and factual weaknesses of the model even for the nineteenth-century Indian setting (earlier established in S. Guha, “Commodity and credit in upland Maharashtra 1800–1950”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26 December 1987). Roy notes that it is extremely difficult to demonstrate that free and integrated markets have uniformly negative economic effects unless one adopts it as an article of faith.

This was, however, as he astutely notes, an article of faith among the leadership that took office in 1947. It was their vision of economic management that took centre-stage from the 1950s to the early 1980s (with generally negative effects on the Indian economy). But there was a pragmatic constraint to the policies that is ignored here. As B. R. Tomlinson (“Historical roots of economic policy” in Subroto Roy and William E. James (eds), *Foundations of India’s Political Economy*, New Delhi, 1992) noted, the Nehruvian planned economy was institutionally a direct descendant of the British imperial war economy of 1941–46. Finally, two chapters look at the Republic post-1950 and a concluding one offers a retrospect and prospect at the threshold of the twenty-first century. These are written with the elegant force that characterizes much of Roy’s work, scrupulously avoiding the shallow binaries that have so dominated much discourse on globalization and its effects. In conclusion therefore, this book despite certain shortcomings represents an unprecedented effort that must be the foundation for further advances in our understanding of the long history of India as a global entity.

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CENTRAL ASIA

CHRISTOPHER I. BECKWITH:

Warriors of the Cloisters: The Central Asian Origins of Science in the Medieval World.

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012. \$29.95. ISBN 978 0 691 15531 9.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X13000426