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BOOK REVIEW

Jessica Ratcliff, *Monopolizing Knowledge: The East India Company and Britain's Second Scientific Revolution*

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Monopolizing Knowledge by Jessica Ratcliff studies the interlinkages between the British East India Company and the production of scientific knowledge in Britain. It places the East India Company's India Museum (est. 1801) and its training institutions, such as Haileybury College, at the centre of this history. The book is part of a growing field at the intersection of science and technology studies and studies of empire, providing concrete evidence of the direct impact the Company had on the Scientific Revolution that was unfolding in Britain. As Ratcliff shows, although the links between the Company's political economy and the growth of scientific enterprise should seem obvious, it is precisely their ubiquity that has resulted in their neglect (p. 7). Her book aims to fill this gap by making explicit how the Company's trade and commerce fuelled the growth of scientific knowledge back at home.

Although a growing body of literature has focused on the links between science and empire – in the case of India, a good example is Kapil Raj's *Relocating Modern Science* (2007) – such works have largely focused on the latter period of colonial rule when the British Crown took control of India from the hands of the East India Company. Ratcliff focuses on the earlier exclusive domain of Company rule, from 1600 to 1858, and is thus able to draw attention to a neglected story. The nature of Company rule, in which a modern corporation of a small group of men effectively controlled vast swathes of Indian territory, paid for by Indian taxes, brought specific peculiarities to the production of scientific knowledge that the author can then showcase. Ratcliff's strong expertise in the history of science and technology, and particularly the impact of scientific knowledge produced in Britain based on materials gathered across various parts of the empire, makes her ideally suited to undertake this enterprise.

In chronological order, the book traces the various phases of these interconnections between science and political economy. It begins with the story of private individuals collecting materials for science haphazardly on their own initiative, moving to the eventual centralization of the acquisition of knowledge resources as the Company started to gain control of private collecting efforts in Asia around 1800. In earlier stages, scientific knowledge was produced by people contracted by the Company, so science grew '*under* the Company' (Chapter 1). In between were phases of wartime looting and collecting by British orientalists and 'nabob-scholars' who collected information with the support of their native interlocutors (Chapters 2, 3). This is when the Company started to gain more power and science began to be 'pulled' towards London, as, for example, when scientific surveys were launched specifically to collect information '*for* the Company' (Chapter 4).

The result was the consolidation of scientific material in the imperial metropole by roughly the 1830s. Thus, as museums, libraries and universities developed vast collections of material from the colonies, and as learned societies and clubs grew in Britain, British officers no longer had to be on the ground in Asia to become experts on the region. The material was laid out 'at home', in London, and a group of eager scholars met in various clubs and forums to discuss their knowledge of the colonies. The dissolution of the Company's commercial activities in 1833 brought another significant change, as it led to the transfer of the Company's property to the Crown, which raised questions about the stake the public had in its library and museum. In the end, as the Company's monopoly faded and its control over India was transferred to the Crown, this 'Company science' and its associated institutions then became absorbed in 'public science' in Britain (Chapters 6, 7).

Throughout the chapters is a strong focus on objects. Ratcliff brings to light the role of the material apparatus of scientific information, such as manuscripts, books, scientific instruments, specimens of natural history and so on, what she calls its 'knowledge resources' as consolidated in Britain's museums, libraries and colleges in helping fuel a political economy of knowledge.

This is also where the India Museum at Leadenhall Street comes in, as it became the central locus where many of the Company's employees sent their collections. A good comparison point for this aspect of the book is Arthur MacGregor's recent book on the India Museum, *The India Museum Revisited* (2023). Whereas MacGregor provides richly detailed empirical information on its collections, as well as on some collectors, Ratcliff's book provides a good theoretical grounding for the same. For example, she shows how collecting material in Asia helped Company servants build social networks that secured reputed positions for them on their return (p. 69). The maps and detailed plans of every floor in the India Museum, as well as occasional lists of objects being sent to the museum, are a welcome addition in this regard. They can help researchers trace how the material culture of empire, thus gathered, was then stored and displayed for the British public.

The book ends with the transfer of British Company rule to the Crown and the concurrent dissolution of the India Museum, with the dispersal of its collections to various museums and libraries in London. Ratcliff argues that by this time the Company had consolidated the process of scientific information gathering, but that picture is not completely true. Private collecting by interested individuals continued all the way up to the independence of the colonies, and many collectors, travellers and their families built personal collections that they kept for their own use, used for 'imperial self-fashioning', (Maya Jasanoff, 'Collectors of empire: objects, conquests and imperial self-fashioning', 2004) and chose to send to other repositories abroad, including beyond the United Kingdom, such as Europe.

Engagingly written and supplemented with interesting empirical information, the book would make for a good introduction for students and researchers of the history of science, museums and the production of scientific knowledge and its links with empire, especially with its accompanying visual material, and lists of objects acquired by the Company.

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