

West meets East: At the Borders of the *Oikoumenē* and Beyond

Lecture 13 – Rome and India in Scholarly Thought

CLAH6007

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New Discoveries

- Development of scholarly paradigms (nevertheless striking persistence of certain notions).
- Translation of *PME* available by sixteenth century.
- Discovery (and losses) and reports of Roman coins in India from eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
- Exploration and antiquarian interests in Eastern Desert of Egypt from the time of Napoleon's campaign in Egypt (1798-1801).



Francois Louis Joseph Watteau 1978-79,
Battle of the Pyramids

Development of Scholarship

- Charlesworth's *Trade-Routes and Commerce of the Roman Empire* (1924) and Warmington's *The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India* (1928) - literary, numismatic, and epigraphic evidence.
- Correlation of numismatic evidence and the *PME* – Warmington.
- “Modernising” approach of early scholarship - quantitative rather than qualitative differences?
 - ‘typical, too was the complete lack of capitalistic methods in the case of jewellery and gem trades, which remained small industries working to individual order. On the whole, then, a traffic... did not create large industries... and the same holds good among the Indians...” – Warmington (1928), 315.

Indian Ocean Commerce and Government Policy

“It will be obvious that it was the policy of the Empire to encourage trading by the sea, so as to control the rich revenues arising from it, and prevent them falling into the hands of the Parthians...” – Charlesworth (1924), 73 – cf. Sidebotham (2011), 13.

“We may conclude further that either the merchants on their own initiative, or else the economical Vespasian, who had to meet a huge state deficit, discouraged and checked the exportation of gold and silver...” – Warmington (1928), 293 – cf. De Romanis (1997), 119-28.

“[Pliny] recognised the wisdom of Nero’s devaluation of the currency as a means of checking the export of treasure needed to finance the eastern trade.” – Miller (1969), 20 – cf. McLaughlin (2010), 169.

Nationalistic and Ethnic Generalisations

- Ethnocentric, even racist notions present in earlier scholarship.
 - Edward Said (1978) – legacy of “orientalist” ideas.
 - Still later implicit tendency to see westerns as proactive and dominant – Miller (1969); Meyer (1992); McLaughlin (2010); Gurukkal (2013).
- “...nor, indeed, is there any greater certainty or knowledge about the character of the early Indian vessels, for like the Egyptians, the Indians were not, and are not, as a nation seafaring people. Those Indians who following seafaring pursuits were then, as now, of the lowest caste; hence the inference is natural that their shipping would exhibit a corresponding inferiority in construction.” - Lindsay (1874), 129-30.

A New Critique

- Excavations at Arikamedu in 1940s.
- Miller's *The Spice Trade of the Roman Empire 29 B.C. to A.D. 641* (1969) – etymological study of plant references.
 - *PME* as semi-official or restricted document, concerned with foreign affairs and public revenues.
 - imbalance of trade was created because of the lower purchasing power of the Indians.
- Raschke, 'New Studies in Roman Commerce with the East' (1978) - argued against the synthesis of 'fantasy and statistics, romance and economic theory.'
 - Context – development of “primitivist” ideas on the economy.

Scepticism Continued

- Casson (1989) - Roman army were primarily to serve the major quarries.
- Sidebotham, *Roman Economic Policy in the Erythra Thalassa 30 B.C.-A.D. 217* (1986) – government interests in Indian Ocean trade – contra Young (2001).
- Sidebotham (1986) – luxury trade debate, and imbalance of trade debate.

Archaeology: Recent Excavations

- Begley leads new excavations and resurvey of material from Arikamedu (1980-90s).
- Work at Quseir al Qadim (Myos Hormos) - 1978-84 – University of Chicago and 1999-2003 – University of Southampton.
- Work at Berenike - 1994 and 2001.
- Work of Institut français d'archéologie orientale (IFAO) on Myos Hormos route 1994-1997, and the route to Berenike 1998-2011.
- Excavations at Qana' 1985-1991.
- Excavations at Pattanam (Muziris) – 2007 and ongoing.



Studies on Social Impact

- **Impact on Roman Society:**
 - Parker's *The Making of Roman India* (2008).
 - Olson's *Dress and the Roman Woman* (2008).
- **Impact on Indian Society:**
 - Seland's *Ports and Political Power in the Periplus* (2010).
- **The Roman Empire and the British in India:**
 - Vasunia's *The Classics and Colonial India* (2013).

The British in India: Classical Antiquity and Modern Imperialism

Alexander as a Model?

- The journey to India, the establishment of colonial foundations, the attempt at fusion of cultures and peoples, and the flamboyant character of the conqueror.
- William Robertson (1721-93) *Historical Disquisition* – Seapoys and Alexander's Persian phalanx. Contra George Grote.
- Problems of Alexander – transience and “going native”, aspirations to divinity – uncomfortable parallels with Louis XIV and Napoleon.
- Alexander and the Indo-Greeks was largely absent from Sanskrit and Prakrit texts prior to arrival of Turks and Afghans.

In the Footsteps of Alexander

- Fears over potential invasions of India by the French and the Russians.
- Charles Masson discovery of Harappa and thousands of Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek coins.
- *Geographical Memoir to accompany Papers respecting Afghanistan and Persia* – prepared by House of Commons in 1839.



The Roman and British Empires

- A number of scholarly comparisons made between British Empire and the Roman, notably:
 - Bryce, J. 1914. *The Ancient Roman Empire and the British Empire in India*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Coherence of India as a territorial entity and administrative system.
- Differences in terms of distance and communication, travel times.
- Both Romans and British are presented as unintentional conquerors.

Warnings for the “Future”

- Dangers of recruiting more vigorous foreign peoples from outside the Empire (late Antique period).
- Roman roads and British railways as strategic.
- Natural barriers, but Rome threatened by north and east – Britain (in India), only really vulnerable from northwest.



British railway lines in India at 1872

Dissolution of the Roman Empire

- Bryce – Western Roman Empire crumbling due to manpower, maladministration?, lack of revenue – “internal maladies”.

“...the warning Rome has bequeathed is a warning not be neglected.” – Bryce (1914), 76.

- Bryce cites the dangers of impoverished cultivators - more danger from internal dissent than foreign enemies, threat of large body of educated Indians.

“To India severance from England would mean confusion, bloodshed, and pillage.” Bryce (1914), 78.

Classics and 20th Century India

- Gandhi and Socrates, the latter could be classed as *satyagrahi* (a practiser of *satyagrapha*).
- Nehru – Gandhi as Socrates.
- Nehru – India as closer to “old Greece” than the claim made by modern Europeans.
- Decline in post-Colonial World.

“The complete collection of Greek plays is a treasure. Personally I like the so-called tragedies far better than the comedies. It is a pity that Gilbert Murray’s translations are not always given... Then there is Plato’s *Republic*, a book for all time, if one can get into the spirit.’ – letter of Jawaharal Nehru from Prison in 1943.

Neo-Classical Architecture in India

Tropical Classical

- Questions of what style of architecture to utilise in India – Classical, Gothic, Mughal or some other style?
- High prevalence of Classical buildings in Calcutta, then in building of New Delhi.
- Parallels to neo-classical style in Britain in eighteenth century.
- Structures designed to represent Empire.



Victoria and Albert Museum (now the Bhau Daji Lad Museum), Mumbai (Bombay)



Lord Cornwallis

- Denunciation by some of this style as vulgar and inappropriate (cf. James Fergusson 1866).
- Idea of creating a new architecture that was not Indian, English or Roman, but “Imperial” – (Edwin Lutyens).



Town Hall, Mumbai, built in 1833 by Colonel Thomas Cowper



Viceroy's House (Rashtrapati Bhavan, and Jaipur Column, New Delhi

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