

Reviews

R. LAWRENCE STONE (ed.), *An Imperial State at War. Britain from 1689 to 1815*. London and New York: Routledge 1994. IX, 372 pp., £ 40. ISBN 0-415-06142-3

Closer examination of this book makes the title seem rather misleading. Only Christopher A. Bayly's article on Indian resistance movements against British rule between 1750 and 1820 deals with the topic of the imperial British state at war, illustrating the workings of the Indian state in its formative phase. Uncertain of victory in the eighteenth century, it was later cross-bred with the British fiscal-military state. Early indigenous Indian resistance against the British can be characterised as a continuation of traditional resistance movements. But the more the British insisted on their understanding of the East India Company's constitutional position as sovereign and not as a privileged trading corporation within a symbiotic hierarchy of man and land, valid even after the grant of the *diwani* in Bengal in 1765, the more these movements became fierce fights for local rights or the independence of Indian states. In 1820, the British succeeded in their struggle for primacy after they had introduced a reasonably efficient and smooth running revenue system, based on local or regional patterns. The success of 1820 is unthinkable without the "Permanent Settlement" of 1793 as a starting point for an elaborate military-fiscal state in India.

John Brewer's *Sinews of power: War, money and the English state, 1688-1783*, published in 1989, is a bold and successful attempt to deconstruct the then still accepted notion of the 18th century English state as a fairly weak political entity. But nobody seriously challenges Brewer's thesis of an efficient tax and excise gathering system, which was to a large degree centralised by the London authorities. In his contribution to this volume Brewer summarises his thesis and opens new discussions: compared with the continental European states the question is, how could the English state operate on that high level of efficiency without direct state intervention?

Thomas Ertman generally agrees with Brewer's thesis but emphasises the fleet as an important constituent of the military-fiscal state because its logistics, organisation and financial requirements equalled those of the large standing armies of continental Europe. Ertman stresses the diverging

development of the military-fiscal states in Europe. For him "timing" becomes the main feature of this historical process.

Latecomers had a definite advantage compared with the pioneers. Joanna Innes takes a closer look at the internal development of the military-fiscal state in England. Whilst the fiscal and military apparatus was strengthened and continually centralised during the "long 18th century", political institutions were decentralised and local authorities became more important. No continental power witnessed a similar development, leading Innes to the conclusion that England's singularity lies in the features of British government and society.

Daniel Bangh contributes an interesting article on the supply of the military-fiscal state through maritime trade. The British state was embedded in a maritime-imperial system which derived its value from maritime commerce rather than from territory and dominion. Baugh's thesis of Britain's "blue water strategy" is exemplified by transatlantic trade. The combination of trading ports and naval bases connected by shipments of various goods over different distances was the backbone of transoceanic trade. Similarly, the flexibility of this system was the source of its success. It was only the "mercantilist" policy in the third quarter of the 18th century which almost destroyed the maritime-imperial system. After the independence of the American Colonies the "Old Colonial System" persisted in a modified form, based on the notion that this trading system had to be considered as a whole and not just as individual colonial commodities. The attempt to establish territorial rule or "direct rule" in North America by the British government finally destroyed the political ties between Great Britain and its North American colonies. India can be seen as the exception to the rule.

Though all the contributions to this volume refer to John Brewer's thesis, hardly any deal with the imperial state at war. Many articles are descriptive rather than analytical. The most innovative is without doubt C.A. Bayly's contribution. The connecting issue seems to be the military-fiscal state, but the general subjects of the volume are the internal situation and the external relations of the British state in the 18th century.

Michael Mann

K.K. BHARGAVA, H. BONGARTZ, F. SOBHAN (eds.), *Shaping South Asia's Future. Role of Regional Cooperation*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1995. ISBN 0-7069-9994-0