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Lakshmi Subramaniam. *The Sovereign and the Pirate: Ordering Maritime Subjects in India's Western Littoral.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press (India), 2016. 296 pp. $50.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-946704-4.

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Piracy never goes out of fashion. Yet it is striking to observe the flourishing historiography of piracy, especially around Asian coastlines in recent years. A raft of articles, special issues of journals, edited collections, and monographs have been produced in the past decade that explore and interrogate the phenomena called piracy along the Indian Ocean littoral. I suppose we have the brief and dramatic resurgence of piracy off the coasts of Somalia to thank for eliciting this scholarly industry. Moreover, this is not merely a sexy and shallow topic, but in fact piracy has proved to be incredibly fecund ground for cultivating new perspectives on law, labor, political economy, colonialism, sovereignty, and more.

Lakshmi Subramanian was producing important studies of piracy long before it was quite so sexy, but has now returned to the topic with a tour de force. Her new monograph, ***The Sovereign and the Pirate: Ordering Maritime Subjects in India's Western Littoral***, displays the easy command of historiography and the mastery of archival materials that are the fruit of long and hard-won experience in the field. Relying largely on the rich colonial archives of the Bombay Presidency, the book examines the interplay of the expanding dominion of the English East India Company and the varied and mobile denizens of present-day India's northwestern coastline. The main focus is the regions of Kathiawad and Cutch around the turn of the nineteenth century, but Subramaniam's analysis occasionally follows the pirates and their adversaries down to the Malabar Coast in the early modern era and across to the Persian/Arabian Gulf coasts in the 1820s.

This is not the kind of work that puts forward an overly simplistic historical argument but rather rewards the patient reader with a textured analysis of the enormous complexity of this history. ***The Sovereign and the Pirate*** may frustrate the graduate student looking to quickly extract a talking point to recall in comprehensive examinations, but serves the reader willing to absorb the nuanced narrative and discover the rich insights that emerge, especially in the last two substantive chapters. Consequently, it is impossible to do justice to the incredibly subtle, contingent, and complex portrait that Subramanian provides in this book, so I will not attempt to do so here. After a very brief outline of the chapters, I will discuss some of the main themes and problems that are threaded through this work and summarize some of its contributions to the study of piracy and the littoral of western India. I'll conclude with some brief questions and reflections prompted by this important and thought-provoking book.

This work is divided into an introduction and five substantive chapters, along with an epilogue,

which functions much like a conclusion. The introduction carefully outlines the questions that animate the monograph, the historiographical context, and the geography that centers the study. The first chapter provides additional background on piracy in the centuries that precede this study, as well as the political geography of the region north of Bombay which is the focus of the book. The second substantive chapter looks at the petitions of merchants appealing to the East India Company for restitution of goods, and of local potentates complaining of the Company's increasing encroachment on their privileges and revenues. Next, this history shifts as the Company's approach to piracy takes an ethnographic turn, and we see how pirates and their sponsors were constructed as objects of ethnographic inquiry. Chapter 4 returns attention to the pirate-mariners: the substantial demand for their skilled labor, and their own extraordinary statements of why and how they engaged in maritime raiding. The last substantive chapter steps back to interrogate the colonial archive itself. Subramanian give the reader powerful insights into the forms of colonial knowledge that enframe mercantile, political, and piratical practice, and that also elide the operation of colonial power in producing these practices.

One of the most impressive aspects of this monograph is its easy transcending of the division between land and sea. Indeed, this is perhaps the best study of a "littoral society" that I have ever encountered. Michael Pearson set out a conceptual framework for littoral societies some years ago, but in this work Subramaniam gives real empirical depth to the term. She depicts with rich detail the flexible but necessary links between pirate-mariners at sea and various merchants, potentates, religious authorities, and colonial officials on land. In this space and time, the pirate is not sailing the high seas but rather is "a creature of the creek whose operations blurred the boundaries between sea and land, between law and custom" (p. 238). The phenomenon of piracy as examined in this study is not purely maritime but rather amphibious. For Subramaniam, pirates are not outlaws or exiles from society but are deeply imbricated in if not always determined by power struggles on shore.

The Sovereign and the Pirate ably and admirable resists the temptation to generalize and reduce the complexity and contingency of this history into a simple argument about the true nature of piracy. Instead, we have a nuanced and evolving history of who participates in "piracy," who gets called a pirate, who funds and supports their endeavors, and what are the larger structures that produce this violence off the coastline. So in distinction to the portrayals of piracy by Marcus Rediker and Clare Anderson, we are given a history of pirates not as radicals but as operating through existing hierarchies.[1] Indeed, while Subramaniam sees resonances with James C. Scott's "barbarians by design" in the Zomia region of upland Southeast Asia, her Okhamandal pirates are not refugee anarchists but floating, semi-autonomous groups that operated within layered relationships of authority on shore.[2] Moreover, these pirates are not portrayed as arbitraging plural legal systems à la Lauren Benton, but rather claim custom, tradition, and penury as counter-discourses to the law.[3] Furthermore, Subramaniam demonstrates how the practice, self-representation, and governmental discourse of piracy evolved from the privateering of Kanhoji Angria to the corsairs of Okhamandal to subaltern resistance in Cutch and finally to the villainous Joasmee (Qawasim) of the Persian/Arabian Gulf.

While this work might not immediately strike the reader as in the tradition of the subaltern studies collective, in my reading it seems to combine some of the best qualities of this occasionally controversial school of historical study. Pirates would appear to be exemplars of subaltern resistance to colonial power. And to a certain extent Subramaniam does unearth aspects of subaltern resistance that would dovetail with Ranajit Guha's

classic work on peasant insurgency.[4] But she pushes this further in a very subtle analysis of agency which is counter-posed to "spontaneous choice" (p. 183), referring to the ability of pirates to act and innovate within changing circumstances. On the one hand this phrasing feels a little like Marx's famous formulation that people make their own history, just not in circumstances of their own choosing. However, for these pirates, their spontaneous choice occurs from within a position of vulnerability that cannot overthrow the political system, but only open up fleeting and unpredictable spaces for political action. This notion of spontaneous choice was a very provocative and potentially powerful concept that I wish would have been developed even further.

Just as deftly Subramaniam analyzes and critiques colonial discourse and the colonial archive. In particular she both appreciates and critiques governance in the ethnographic mode. On the one had we see that it does provide for a more sympathetic portrait of colonized peoples and political experiences. However, this ethnographic framing also tended to overplay the importance of religious sanction and the warrior ethos of the Rajput populations of Gujarat. But most impressive is Subramaniam's powerful intertwining of this postcolonial discursive analysis with social history. We are given a rare glimpse into how pirate-mariners responded to and navigated the policies and practices produced by colonial discourses. In many ways, I felt that this beautifully married the early subaltern studies focus on history from below, with the later subalternist concern with post-colonial critique.

Consequently, I have little in the way of direct criticisms of this deeply researched and analytically rich scholarship. I do, however, have a few questions and caveats that might aid the reader of this work. If one of the book's strengths is its nuance and empirical detail, this also has the side effect of making the prose at times quite dense. There is little in the way of theoretical jargon, but the sheer complexity and nuance of the material may make it challenging for the more general reader.

In the final chapter there is an interesting discussion of the ethnographic emphasis on the legends of Krishna and the temple at Dwarka as a timeless impetus toward piratical raids. And yet we also are shown a large number of Muslim seafarers and rulers engaged in this piracy as well as a Sufi shrine that sanctifies it. There appear to be easy cooperation, alliances, and even fluid boundaries between Hindu and Muslim in this littoral society. Perhaps the archives make little distinction between devotees of different religious traditions, or religion was not much of an identity marker at this moment. Yet it seemed to this reader that this fluidity and collaboration could bear more examination and analysis, particularly given the political tensions and violence today and the often religiously segmented character of histories of this region.

The Sovereign and the Pirate ends with an appendix that includes images and a translation of a (Gujarati?) letter from Sundarjee Shivjee concerning piracy and politics along the Kathiawad coast. In reading the third chapter on colonial ethnography, I was struck by the centrality of Shivjee to the colonial official Alexander Walker's ethnography. Indeed, I almost wondered the extent to which Walker becomes a sympathetic figure because he relies so heavily on Shivjee. Regardless of who is in fact responsible for this sensitive political approach, the figure of the native intermediary and interpreter has taken on increasing prominence in colonial historiography. As I was reading, it raised the question of how colonial was colonial knowledge and I expect that this path of inquiry might have further extended Subramanian's important insights about the blurred boundaries between pirate and state.

Nevertheless, these are just some of the many questions and ideas that emerged from reading this important and insightful book, and they are a

testament to how much it will stimulate discussion and new research. ***The Sovereign and the Pirate*** deserves a wide readership and should appeal to scholars of South Asia, the Indian Ocean world, piracy, littoral societies, and colonial governmentality. I am confident that almost all members of H-Asia will find this as stimulating and rewarding to read as I have.

Notes

[1]. Marcus Rediker, ***Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden A***ge (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005); and Clare Anderson et al., eds., ***Mutiny and Maritime Radicalism in the Age of Revolution: A Global Survey*** (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[2]. James C. Scott, ***The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*** (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 8.

[3]. Lauren Benton, "Legal Spaces of Empire: Piracy and the Origins of Ocean Regionalism," ***Comparative Studies in Society and History***, 47 (2005): 700-724.

[4]. Ranajit Guha, ***Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*** (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).