

CHRISTINA WELSCH. *The Company's Sword: The East India Company and the Politics of Militarism, 1644–1858*. Critical Perspectives on Empire. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. 284. \$99.99 (cloth).  
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The history of the British East India Company has never provided much support for the oft-repeated claim that trade promotes peace. Still, for rather a long time this convenient bromide reinforced a tendency to see the East India Company's armed forces as mere accessories to trade and empire building rather than as a fundamental element of the Company's fabric. In recent decades this has begun to change, and Christina Welsch's book is a notable addition to that larger project.

One of Welsch's significant contributions is to revise the story of the rise of the Subcontinent's military labor market, as originally outlined in Dirk Kolff's influential study *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450–1850* (1990). She does this by emphasizing the Madras Army (Kolff's study focused on North India); by dealing quite substantially with the *decline* of the military labor market as the East India Company conquered hostile Indian states and forced its princely "allies" to disband their own armies; and by showing the effects of this decline both on sepoys (the sepāhī or Indian infantry) and on the white officers who commanded them.


The theme of soldiers as political actors is central to the book. Several chapters discuss sepoy attempts to negotiate the terms of their employment via protests, petitions, mutinies, and desertion to other armies. Particularly telling is the story of Muhammad Yusuf Khan, who rose to be a subedar and then "commandant" in the Madras Army before embarking, around 1762, on a series of quasi-independent military ventures. Many a European adventurer did the same, but such assertiveness was deemed insupportable in a sepoy, and in 1764 the Company had Yusuf Khan summarily executed, without even the courtesy of a court-martial (Welsch discusses Yusuf Khan's career in more detail in "Military Mobility, Authority and Negotiation in Early Colonial India" *Past & Present* 249, no. 1 [2020]: 53–84). *The Company's Sword* also deals with the most significant sepoy mutiny before 1857, the Vellore Mutiny of 1806, and the orgy of punitive blood-letting that followed. While Welsch's account adds little new information on the 1806 mutiny itself, it does usefully situate Vellore in relation to the declining room for maneuver of sepoy troops while showing how the memory of Vellore was mobilized by white officers to block army reform.

A substantial part of *The Company's Sword* focuses on the rise of white officer power in the Company between roughly the Carnatic Wars (1746–1763) and the middle of the nineteenth century. By means of a series of actual and threatened mutinies and coups against the civilian leadership, coupled with the canny cultivation of networks of support both in India and in Great Britain, including extensive use of the printing press, white officers not only forged a formidable political lobby, but managed to resist efforts both by the Company and the British state to merge the Company armies into the royal forces, to purge military commanders from governing councils, and to abolish the corrupt and costly system of officer perquisites. These same white officers or their friends also controlled the courts martial, by means of which, decade after decade, they managed to acquit their fellow officers of truly shocking derelictions of duty, refusal to follow orders, and outright revolt. Thus, in the officer's mutiny of 1809, over 90 percent of the white officers in the Madras Army refused to sign a loyalty oath to the civilian governor in Madras/Fort St. George who had tried to effect some new reforms. Some went on to arrest their superior officers and seize control of forts and their treasuries. At Srirangapatna mutinous white officers fired upon troops loyal to the Company, and by the time the mutineers caved, after months of turmoil, over 300 people, mostly sepoys, had died. However, in striking contrast to the blood-soaked aftermath of the Vellore mutiny of three years before, the instigators of the white officer's mutiny of 1809 faced almost no repercussions. Over one thousand officers had

supported the rebellion, but no one, apart from three officers from Srirangapatna, was even charged with wrongdoing, and of those three, one was cashiered, one got an honorable discharge, and the third was acquitted. At the heart of their defense was the old saw that only white officers experienced at commanding sepoys could stop the latter from mutinying and destroying everything the British had built in India—and that any and all reform threatened this delicate dynamic. So powerful had this argument become that it could be successfully deployed to redefine outright mutiny by whites as a heroic defense of empire.

The end was both sudden and decisive. The rebellions of 1857 thoroughly discredited European officers' claims to be the bulwark that stood between successful imperial order and chaos. The power and influence of what Welsch calls "stratocracy" (rule by officers) collapsed like a house of cards. Soon after, in 1858, the Government of India Act replaced the Company with direct rule and the Company's armed forces were forcibly incorporated into the regular army—precisely what the white officers had so long resisted. In the event, the majority of them resigned their commissions and returned to Britain in disgust.

This is an exhaustively researched study, notable for its use of sources from the relatively underutilized Tamil Nadu State Archives (Chennai) including unique material on the sepoy troops and on the Madras Army's relationships with Indian rulers. Particularly effective use is made of Persian-language sources including letters, chronicles, and even military poetry. One slight disappointment is the fact that Welsch has so little to say about the decades between roughly 1810 and 1857: we are left to assume that not much changed after the white officers got away, literally, with murder and mutiny in 1809. That may be so, but it would have been useful to hear more about the intersection of "stratocracy" and broader Company governance during those critical decades. This is, however, a minor caveat. This is an excellent and highly readable book that offers a significant new interpretation of the travails of the East India Company and its armies in the century or so leading up to the end of Company rule in South Asia.

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NEIL YOUNGER. *Religion and Politics in Elizabethan England: The Life of Sir Christopher Hatton*. Politics, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022. Pp. 288. \$130.00 (cloth).  
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This book is not a traditional biography—as Younger explains, three old biographies of Sir Christopher Hatton already exist—but rather a focused study of the man's political career and patronage networks. At its core is a reconsideration of Hatton's religious beliefs. Many of his contemporaries believed he was a crypto-Catholic, an idea that some historians have dismissed out of hand. Younger shows persuasively that Hatton was, at the very least, among the most conservative members of the Elizabethan regime, though his easy-going personality smoothed his relations with hot Protestant councilors. He exercised influence from around 1572 as the queen's favorite courtier, acting as principal gatekeeper for access to the royal person, and he was appointed to the Privy Council in 1577. His influence at court may help to explain why the regime remained relatively tolerant of Catholics prior to the 1580s—or perhaps it was the other way around. Perhaps, given the climate of anti-Catholic hysteria prevailing from 1569 to 1572, the queen set Hatton up as a deliberate counterweight to Cecil and Leicester, putting into practice her well-documented love of equipoise. This would suggest that the traditional story, that Elizabeth promoted Hatton after taking a fancy to his looks,