

A History of the Two Indies

A Translated Selection of Writings
from Raynal's Histoire
philosophique et politique des
établissements des Européens
dans les Deux Indes

Edited by
Peter Jimack



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*Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements des
Européens dans les Deux Indes*

Edited by

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First published 2006 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Raynal, Guillaume-Thomas-Francois, abbe, 1713-1796

A history of the two Indies : a translated selection of writings from Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique des etablissemens des Europeens dans les deux Indes* 1. World history - Early works to 1800 2. Colonies - Early works to 1800 3. Colonization - Early works to 1800

I. Title II. Jimack, Peter

909'.08

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Raynal, abbe (Guillaume-Thomas-Francois), 1713-1796.

[*Histoire philosophique et politique des etablissemens et du commerce des Europeens dans les deux Indes*. English. Selections]

A history of the two Indies : a translated selection of writings from Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique des etablissemens des Europeens dans les des deux Indes* / edited by Peter Jimack.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7546-4043-4 (alk. paper)

1. World history—Early works to 1800. 2. Colonies—Early works to 1800. 3. Colonization—Early works to 1800. I. Jimack, Peter. II. Title.

D22.R332 2006

909.08—dc22

2005024151

ISBN 9780754640431 (hbk)

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>		<i>vii</i>
<i>Introduction</i>		<i>ix</i>
Book 1	Discoveries, wars and conquests of the Portuguese in the East Indies	1
Book 2	Settlements, wars, policies and commerce of the Dutch in the East Indies	17
Book 3	Settlements, trade and conquests of the English in the East Indies	29
Book 4	Voyages, settlements, wars and commerce of the French in the East Indies	47
Book 5	Commerce of Denmark, Ostend, Sweden, Prussia, Spain and Russia in the East Indies. Important questions concerning links between Europe and the Indies	63
Book 6	The discovery of America. The conquest of Mexico. Spanish settlements in this part of the New World	77
Book 7	The Spanish conquest of Peru. Changes in this empire since it acquired new rulers	95
Book 8	The Spanish conquest of Chile and Paraguay. Events accompanying and following the invasion. Principles on which Spain organizes its colonies	111
Book 9	The Portuguese settle in Brazil. Wars they waged there. Products and wealth of this colony	123
Book 10	The European nations become established in the great American archipelago	135
Book 11	The Europeans go into Africa to buy men to cultivate the plantations of the West Indies. Conduct of this trade. What is produced by the labour of the slaves	147

Book 12	Settlements of the Spanish, the Dutch and the Danes in the American islands	163
Book 13	French settlements in the American islands	173
Book 14	British settlements in the American islands	191
Book 15	French settlements in North America. On what was their hope of prosperity based? What was the result of these projects?	209
Book 16	A new order is established in the French colonies of North America. What is the result of these new projects?	221
Book 17	The British colonies in the territories of Hudson Bay, Canada, Île Saint-Jean, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New England, New York and New Jersey	235
Book 18	The British colonies founded in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Carolina, Georgia and Florida. General reflections on all these settlements	251
Book 19	Conclusion	269
	<i>Bibliography</i>	279
	<i>Index</i>	281

Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to:

The resources and staff of Glasgow University Library, especially its splendid Department of Special Collections;

Dr Anthony Strugnell, principal editor of the forthcoming critical edition of the *Histoire des deux Indes*, for his help and encouragement;

Dr Mary Rigby, for her meticulous reading of my translation and her many helpful suggestions;

And my wife, Christine, for her numerous invaluable suggestions, her patience with my obsessive work habits, and most of all her general maintenance (of me).



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Introduction

Publication and background

The *Histoire philosophique et politique du commerce et des établissements des Européens dans les deux Indes* ('A Philosophical and Political History of the Commerce and Settlements of the Europeans in the Two Indies'), usually known as the *Histoire des deux Indes*, saw the light of day in 1771 (the first edition was actually dated 1770), and it was an immediate success. A substantially expanded version followed in 1774, and this was further considerably modified by the 1780 edition (which appeared in 1781). Not only did its success, and Raynal's reputation, increase with the successive editions, but so did the scandal it aroused: the work was placed on the Index in 1774, and in 1781 its author's arrest was ordered, forcing him into exile. With the Revolution, the status of the *Histoire des deux Indes* reached its peak. It was frequently reprinted during the remainder of the century, with subsequent editions up to at least 1826, and it was translated into several European languages; the English version, which had first appeared as early as 1776, continued to be re-edited up to 1821. But then the work sank into relative oblivion, and it was well into the twentieth century before serious scholarly interest in it was re-awakened: a milestone in its fortunes was the publication in 1922 of Anatole Feugère's remarkable pioneering study, *Un Précurseur de la Révolution: l'Abbé Raynal*, and since then historians and literary historians alike have increasingly recognized its importance.¹

To a great extent, the title of the *Histoire* is a fair guide to its content, provided we understand that of the two 'Indes' referred to, the East Indies in the eighteenth century usually comprised India and virtually the whole of East and South-East Asia, and the West Indies included both South and North America. The structure is more or less chronological in both cases. The first five books are devoted to the East, beginning with the Portuguese exploration of the West African coast leading to the discovery in 1498 of the route to India round the Cape of Good Hope; and then follow 13 books on the Americas, ending with the rebellion of the British North American colonies, exactly contemporaneous with the preparation of the 1780 edition. The work concludes with a book of résumé and reflection (absent from the first edition) discussing the various themes that have been evoked during its course, religion, government, commerce, agriculture, taxation, and so on.

The development of European contacts with Asia and America, and particularly the establishment of colonies, aroused immense interest and a great deal of

¹ A comprehensive critical edition, including variants of the different editions, is to be published by the Centre international d'étude du XVIIIe siècle, Ferney-Voltaire, in 2006.

controversy from the sixteenth century onwards in all the countries concerned, and nowhere more so than in France. There was much at issue, ranging from matters of, for example, geographical and botanical fact, to moral questions such as the treatment of native peoples and slavery and the related pros and cons of different economic and political systems; and as the eighteenth century progressed, the debate became ever more complex and more acute. Inevitably, ostensibly theoretical discussions were frequently informed by actual political situations and the national rivalries they both reflected and inflamed. It is easy, for instance, for British observers of the century to overlook or underestimate the immense impact on France and French opinion of what many saw as the humiliating conclusion of the Seven Years War in 1763, by which France's colonial empire was seriously depleted, above all by the loss of Canada and India. So by 1770 the moment was certainly ripe for a work on the whole subject of European ventures in Asia and the Americas, bringing together the various issues they raised.

The subject was admittedly a vast one, though there was no lack of a contemporary precedent for ambitious wide-ranging historical enterprises – illustrious examples are Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois* (1748) and Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs* (1756). And although Raynal was no Montesquieu or Voltaire, he was in more than one way well placed to be the author of such a work. Guillaume-Thomas Raynal was born in 1713 at Lapanouse de Séverac, a village in the Aveyron, spent his childhood at the nearby town of Saint-Geniez, and then studied at the local Jesuit college in Rodez. He became an abbé, but still in his thirties, left the clergy and embarked on a career as a journalist, first as the compiler of the *Nouvelles littéraires*, and then for several years also as editor of the *Mercure de France*. But at the same time, he began to publish a number of historical works, among them, in 1748, his *Histoire du Parlement d'Angleterre*.

Raynal could thus bring to the *Histoire des deux Indes* his talents and experience both as an industrious, if not particularly gifted, historian and as a resourceful, magpie-like collector of information. The work's basic historical content is sound, if predictable, taken from standard and at the time well-known sources: the two compilations Raynal probably drew on most frequently were the *Universal History* (1747–66) by John Campbell et al. (both the original and its French translation) and the abbé Prévost's *Histoire générale des voyages* (1746–59). But in addition to general works of this kind, he also profited from an immense number of more restricted histories and studies of particular areas and peoples. To take a few examples, he used Lafitau's history of the Portuguese discoveries for Book 1 (J.-F. Lafitau, *Histoire des découvertes et conquêtes des Portugais dans le Nouveau Monde*, 1733), David Hume's *History of England* for Books 3 and 14, Butel-Dumont's history of the British West Indies in Book 14 (G. Butel-Dumont, *Histoire et Commerce des Antilles Angloises*, 1758), and Charlevoix's well-known work on French Canada for Book 16 (P.-F.-X. de Charlevoix, *Histoire et description générale de la Nouvelle France*, 1744). It has, incidentally, been a matter of much comment, since his work was first published, that Raynal hardly ever acknowledges his sources, even when he quotes almost verbatim; but given usual practice at the time, and despite some

contemporary complaints of plagiarism, he seems much less reprehensible in this respect than he would be if judged by today's standards.

However, what makes the *Histoire des deux Indes* peculiarly interesting is the input from other sources. Raynal was, if not precisely a member of the establishment, at least a friend or acquaintance of many highly-placed government and administrative officials, and as an indefatigable collector of information, he utilized these contacts to maximum effect, to flesh out his work with the most recent facts and figures on a great variety of topics. Indeed, he became notorious for his often intrusive persistence in interrogating all and sundry, whatever the occasion. Horace Walpole told the story of a dinner in Paris when he feigned deafness to evade Raynal's cross-examination on the subject of the colonies.² He sent out questionnaires to anyone who might possess knowledge that could be useful to him, frequently, it seems, eliciting helpful and often detailed responses; and in any case, he appears frequently to have had ready access to official documents. So that on top of the banal historical framework culled from the standard published works, the *Histoire des deux Indes* contains a huge amount of new factual material, often very detailed, obtained from official sources – he seems, for example, to have made use of recent reports by governors of Jamaica and other British West Indian islands. And much of his information is remarkably up-to-date: he quotes statistics for population, farm animals and crops on Martinique (Book 13, ch. 24) and on Dominica (14, ch. 39) taken from censuses as recent as 1778.

But at the same time as Raynal made use of his connections with the political establishment for his own purposes, this process seems also to have operated in the reverse direction. Michèle Duchet has argued most convincingly that the *Histoire des deux Indes* was to an important extent an instrument of government policy,³ and if this thesis appears to conflict with the official condemnation of the work and its author, it is perhaps borne out by the fact that the substantial pension awarded to Raynal by the King in 1761 was renewed in 1779 and again in 1786. In some cases, he does indeed seem to have been encouraged to publicize official or semi-official proposals, as for example the résumés of Baron Bessner's memoranda on the abolition of slavery in Book 11 (p. 159),⁴ and on the project of civilizing the native inhabitants of Guiana in Book 13 (pp. 176–8).

The intervention of Diderot

Given that Raynal seems to have enjoyed so much official approval, how was it then that the *Histoire des deux Indes* was instantly condemned, and rapidly became an iconic work for opponents of the regime? The answer lies in the fact that, at the same time as he maintained close contacts with government circles, he was very much a

2 See G. Goggi, 'La collaboration de Diderot à la première édition de l'*Histoire des deux Indes*', in *Lectures de Raynal*, p. 19 note.

3 *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des lumières*, pp. 130, 170–71.

4 Page numbers refer to the present volume.

part of what one might term the intellectual, scientific and literary establishment. In many respects, of course, the effect of this was politically innocuous. With access to scholars in a great variety of fields, he did not hesitate to interrogate them in pursuit of the information he wanted. The celebrated naturalist Antoine-Laurent de Jussieu, for example, complied generously with Raynal's request and supplied him with many pages of botanical description, much of which was incorporated into the published work: on the coconut palm for instance (1, ch. 17), and the nutmeg and camphor trees (2, chs. 8 and 12). In other areas, however, Raynal's membership of the intellectual (as distinct from scientific) establishment, and more particularly of the circle of *philosophes* around d'Holbach and Diderot, was a very different matter. If closeness to the political establishment helped give him access to official papers and records, these philosophic contacts were rather more significant as far as the *Histoire des deux Indes* was concerned. Though Raynal certainly wrote a great deal of the work, he acted at the same time as a kind of commissioning editor (who mostly paid handsomely for the contributions) of what is now recognized as a collaborative enterprise, in many ways recalling the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert. Among the long list of collaborators, two of the most significant were Raynal's close friend, the utopian abolitionist Jean-Joseph Pechméja, and Alexandre Deleyre, energetic journalist and author of the notorious *Encyclopédie* article 'fanatisme', who is said to have been responsible for most of Book 19. But above all there was Diderot. It has indeed been estimated that the latter may have written up to a third of the finished work, and while I am inclined to see this as an over-estimate, it is certain that his contribution was very substantial. The extent of his work for Raynal is attested by a number of contemporary epistolary references, and in addition to many passages which echo his other works, there is a good deal of manuscript evidence to confirm his authorship of passages in the *Histoire des deux Indes*.⁵

Now there are two characteristics of Diderot's contributions. Firstly, and unsurprisingly, they consist mostly of political and philosophical reflections on the historical material. But secondly, the vast majority of them are absent from the first edition; most, indeed, appear only in the 1780/81 edition, and it is they that are responsible, in a very large measure, for the striking change of tone which, above all, characterizes the difference between this final version and the first edition.⁶ Many passages undergo merely minor modifications, which nevertheless introduce a new and more polemical note. The section of Book 1 on China in the first edition (in which there are no chapters), for instance, contains the sentence: 'It is the power to conserve which constitutes the right of kings'; in the 1774 edition, the word 'power' has already been revealingly replaced by 'duty' (1, ch. 20). But there are also a considerable number both of interpolations and deletions, many of which contribute to the same sharpening effect. To take but one example, into the brief paragraph in the first edition on the history of Ceylon, Diderot inserted in the second

5 See in particular G. Goggi, *D. Diderot: Contributions à l'Histoire des deux Indes*.

6 This change of tone was first effectively analyzed by Hans Wolpe, in his *Raynal et sa machine de guerre*, 1957.

the observation that formerly the monarch was as much bound by the law as the least of his subjects: 'If he violated it, he was condemned to death.' And in case the point should be lost on the reader, he further added in the third edition the following telling sentence: 'If peoples understood their prerogatives, this ancient practice in Ceylon would still be accepted in every country on the earth' (1, ch. 15). The final version contains many such passages which are politically aggressive, condemnations of tyranny, justifications more or less explicit of rebellion, and these are almost all by Diderot. No doubt he was profiting from the convenient veil of anonymity; after the chastening experience of imprisonment at Vincennes following the publication of his *Lettre sur les aveugles* in 1749, the majority of his own more politically 'subversive' works, especially of this period, remained unpublished during his lifetime.

It is indeed ironic that it was precisely such passages that were largely responsible for the immense prestige and popularity enjoyed by Raynal in the years immediately preceding the Revolution, when he was revered virtually as a secular saint; none other than Charlotte Corday saw him as her 'oracle'. The lionizing continued in the early days of the Revolution... until, in fact, Raynal read his address to the Assemblée nationale at the end of May 1791. The result was astonishment, even horror. The arguments of his address were seen as opposed not only to the policies of the Assemblée, but also to the principles of the *Histoire des deux Indes*. Far from supporting rebellion, and perhaps the execution of the King, as had been expected, he called, among other things, for the reinforcement of the place of the King in the Constitution, and for the criminalization of popular violence. Robespierre (perhaps predictably) dismissed the address as a counter-revolutionary plot by royalist aristocrats, who had made use of a Raynal who was too senile to realize what was happening.⁷

Raynal as historian

Now that we are no longer encumbered with the expectations that caused such disappointment, it is easier to make balanced judgments about Raynal and the *Histoire des deux Indes*. Even so, its reputation may still continue to be misleading. Throughout its fluctuating fortunes since the Revolution, and with the hindsight that has made it appear 'pre-revolutionary', it has, like the *Encyclopédie*, been seen largely as a polemical work. And even since its relative rediscovery in recent years, no doubt in part because modern scholars have tended to focus particularly on the intervention of Diderot, emphasis has continued to be placed on its philosophical and political content – which I too, I confess, find its most interesting aspect. However, as with the *Encyclopédie*, which it resembles precisely by its mix of 'straight' history and factual information on the one hand and fierce anti-establishment rhetoric on the other, there is much else besides.

7 On both the lionizing of Raynal and his address to the Assemblée, see the excellent article by Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, 'Le rôle de Raynal et la réception de l'*Histoire des deux Indes* pendant la Révolution française', in *Lectures de Raynal*.

Interesting though the variants of the later editions may be, the core text remains that of the first one, which was more or less unchanged – and in any case, many of the additions of 1774 and 1780 were not particularly tendentious. To some extent, the *Histoire des deux Indes* is a work of popularizing journalism, presenting in a digestible form summaries of the writings of a huge range of historians, travellers, scientists and specialists in a variety of fields. Following usual practice in the eighteenth century, the central theme of the work was used as a pretext for excursions into many other areas, which are often only loosely related to the arrival of the Europeans in the East and the West. There are many passages on indigenous plants and their uses: Book 1 contains a long development on the coconut palm, presenting it as a kind of natural cornucopia (ch. 17), Book 3 offers us the history of coffee (ch. 12), Book 5 has accounts of the cultivation of tea in China (ch. 26) and the manufacture of Chinese lacquer (ch. 29), and so on. There are various digressions, too, on other civilizations and religions: one is struck in particular by the extraordinarily long discussion of Hinduism in Book 1 (ch. 8). And many chapters are devoted to the description of primitive peoples, though these are often, admittedly, slanted to make a relevant polemical point – the Hottentots, for instance (pp. 19–22), or the Caribs (pp. 135–7).

The work has, of course, the usual merits and defects of such wide-ranging, popularizing works. While Raynal was a meticulous compiler of facts, he is somewhat prone to errors and inaccuracies of detail, in particular with names and dates – some of which have been picked up in the notes to this edition. Rather more importantly, while his selectivity as a historian is generally commendable, there is often significant distortion in his summaries. No doubt the distortion is frequently inadvertent. But as often as not, it is determined by the author's ideological bias. His recital of Portuguese atrocities in the East Indies, for example, is frequently exaggerated (pp. 12–13); and he similarly distorts his source (in this case Charlevoix) when he idealizes the qualities of the Canadian Indians, to whom he attributes, in particular, deep and altruistic feelings of friendship, in order to show their superiority over 'our' society, in which 'all kinds of conflicting interests [...] weaken every bond' (15, ch. 4).⁸ Equally, when he is confronted with conflicting accounts of the same incident, he will (understandably) opt for the one which most suits his purpose: recounting Pizarro's massacre of the Incas, he chooses the version of the story most unfavourable to the Spanish, putting the worst possible construction on the role of the Dominican Vicente de Valverde (pp. 97–8).

As for the material Raynal seems to have obtained from his interrogations of experts, in areas like medicine and agronomy, although his frequent excursions into such fields usually reflected what was then the most up-to-date thinking (for instance, an essay incorporated into Chapter 38 of Book 14 on the effect on crop growth of different types of soil and the use of manure), his views may often appear to the modern reader as no more than a historical curiosity. He was convinced, like most

⁸ See P. Berthiaume, 'Raynal: rhétorique sauvage, l'Amérindien dans l'*Histoire des deux Indes*', in *L'Histoire des deux Indes: réécriture et polygraphie*, p. 236.

contemporary observers, that hot climates made the native inhabitants physically, and particularly morally, feeble, and that the same thing happened to Europeans who lived too long in the tropics – though he seems little bothered by the apparent contradiction offered by the savagery of the Malays, who have ‘reverted to the natural violence of their character’ (p. 8). Some of the more scientific demonstrations are equally suspect: we are warned more than once, for example, of the poisonous exhalations from newly tilled soil, and of the terrible dangers of perspiring (for instance p. 200). And the author’s enthusiastic perception of the sea as an inexhaustible provider of fish (p. 239), and especially of cod, sounds particularly ironic to a world concerned with the grave problem of over-fishing. As in any other work of the period, there are inevitably, too, many other reflections of what most (though not all!) would today see as eighteenth-century prejudices. Women are often virtually absent in many accounts of native peoples, or else their subordination to men is seen as a ‘well-known, universal and constant law of nature’ – so that stories of their superiority in the Mariana Islands can be dismissed as an absurdity (pp. 89–90). Homosexuality, which, it is asserted, is a common practice among the American Indians, is described as ‘that shameful form of debauchery which is against nature and a perversion of animal instinct’ (p. 81).

No doubt the greatest merit of the *Histoire des deux Indes* as history lies in what Raynal obtained through his personal contacts, the wealth of up-to-date factual information, along with insights into government policy and attitudes to matters connected with the colonies. His résumés of Bessner’s proposals are a good example. Of course, using personal contacts in this way is bound to end up as a hit-and-miss method, yielding very uneven results, and this is indeed reflected in the finished work. The rather scant coverage of apparently major events in some cases contrasts strongly with other examples of minute detail about relatively trivial matters. Exact population and trading figures are frequently given, and we may even be told the precise numbers of cattle, sheep and pigs in a colony, on the French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe for instance (13, chs. 24 and 31), or the British island of Dominica (14, ch. 39). The precision of the figures sometimes verges on the comically implausible: we learn, for example, that there were at one time 471,154 Indians working on the Mexico City canal project (p. 87). In such cases, it seems fairly clear that Raynal was being opportunistic rather than positively selective (as I have sometimes been in the footnotes to this edition!), the determining factor being simply the availability of information. For the most part, however, a wealth of detail clearly corresponded to the author’s assessment of importance. This is surely true, for example, of the account of the botched French colonial enterprises in Guiana (pp. 173–6) and around the Mississippi (pp. 214–7), and of the history (largely the work of Diderot) of the very recent revolt of the British North American colonies (pp. 261–5).

A Political and philosophical history

It is, then, misleading to separate the question of selectivity from that of the criteria involved: in short, why did Raynal include some things and not others? The question appears particularly significant when the choice does not seem to be required by the historical narrative. If, for example, he includes a detailed account in Book 1 (ch. 8) of Hindu creation myths, it is mainly, presumably, as an allusive comment on Christianity and on the relativity of religious beliefs. And the debate in the same book about the government of the Chinese empire (chs. 20–21) is largely a discussion about despotism. But the inclusion of many passages which do have more obvious relevance to the subject of the work is often equally clearly determined by ideological considerations: the full account, for example, of the slave revolts in Jamaica against tyrannical masters (pp. 196–8), and the eulogy of the wise, just and tolerant administration established by William Penn in New England (pp. 251–6). Similarly, if we are from time to time given a very detailed portrayal of the mores of some of the indigenous peoples of America, their simple, innocent existence is always implicitly juxtaposed with the cruelty and savage extermination perpetrated by Europeans, particularly the Spaniards.

However, if it is easy enough to see the general ideological position adopted in the work – hatred of cruelty and avarice, admiration for benevolence and ‘humanity’ – it is somewhat more problematic to determine exactly where it stands on specific issues, because very often more than one view is expressed. In many cases, as we have seen, it was the intervention of Diderot which introduced a different, and sometimes contradictory, judgement into a discussion – though Raynal as officially the author, and in practice the general editor, certainly had the final say about what was included in the work, and thus, by implication, gave his assent, even to views which conflicted with those he expressed elsewhere. But on some important topics, as we shall see, Raynal himself – and Diderot too sometimes – tended to sit on the fence, as it were, expressing disapproval in principle along with reluctant approval in practice.

As far as the political views embodied in the work are concerned, the eloquence of Diderot’s interventions makes them appear very clear. There are frequent attacks on tyranny and despotism of all kinds. The right to rebel against oppression is affirmed as ‘the legitimate exercise of an inalienable and natural right’ (p. 267), and nations that are willing to tolerate tyranny are dismissed as ‘cowardly’: ‘do not bother us with your complaints, and learn to accept your unhappiness if you are unwilling to become free’ (12, ch. 29). For the oppressed must be prepared to resort to violence, even, implicitly, regicide, as in the passage on Ceylon quoted earlier: once a nation has become ‘corrupt’, the way of reform is impossible; it can be restored to health ‘only in a bath of blood’ (11, ch. 4) (an image used by Diderot in other works of this period). Even a passage apparently by Raynal justifies revolt, perhaps more timidly, as ‘a terrible expedient, no doubt, but the only one left for the people to defend themselves in countries oppressed by despotism’ (p. 42). And although these repeated calls to rebellion are usually couched in general terms, they

were clearly intended as comments on eighteenth-century Europe, and France in particular. For contemporary British readers, the long section devoted to the revolt of the North American colonies, most of it by Diderot, must have been particularly meaningful. The author's sympathy is on the whole without ambiguity: the taxes imposed on the colonies are seen, for example, as 'the mask of tyranny' (p. 262), and it is in this context that the 'inalienable right' to rebel against oppression is asserted. Virtually the only attempt to strike any kind of balance was a mild defence of legality in the recognition that the Bostonians' destruction of cargoes of tea was indeed 'blameworthy' and that the city deserved a fine as 'appropriate compensation for the damage caused' (p. 262).

In the work as a whole, however, the political stance is far less clear-cut. If, in Book 14, for example, governments are declared to be 'almost all corrupt in their origin' (p. 205), this remains a very theoretical notion, and respect for actual existing governments is manifest throughout, even though it is rarely unalloyed. Book 1 offers a particularly interesting example of this ambivalence. There was at the time something of a fashionable cult of China, and in the first edition a long chapter, probably by Raynal, was devoted to a mostly eulogistic account of this great empire. But in the third edition, the minor reservations have been removed and incorporated in an equally long new chapter, *État de la Chine, selon ses détracteurs* ('The Present State of China according to its Detractors'), demonstrating in detail that China was far from admirable and that its allegedly benevolent paternalist regime was nothing if not despotic.

It is indeed despotism that is the principal reproach levelled against rulers, and the English command particular respect for having actually had the courage to adopt the 'bath of blood' remedy, by killing one of their kings – as well as driving out another – in the pursuit of their liberty (p. 268). Book 14, devoted to the British West Indies, opens with a remarkable paean of praise for the political evolution of the English: not only have they disposed of two despotic kings, but they have gradually created an admirable constitution, 'the only one, perhaps, in which, since man has lived in society, the laws have preserved his dignity, his personal freedom and his freedom of thought'. On the other hand, in an earlier book, there is praise for the wisdom of Queen Elizabeth – which is then undermined by a warning, in an interpolation by Diderot, about the dangers of the benevolent despot, who inadvertently prepares the people for unprotesting submission to a less benevolent successor, a theme to be found in several of Diderot's own works, and in particular in his observations on and to Catherine the Great. As for contemporary eighteenth-century Britain, despite siding with the North American insurgents, the work elsewhere regularly expresses approval for its relatively democratic constitutional regime and even, in some cases, for its benign administration of its colonies, though the nation is also of course condemned for its rapaciousness, especially during the Seven Years War. In any case, it must be borne in mind that praise for the British system of government is almost always, at least by implication, intended as an indirect criticism of the autocratic French monarchy. The contrast with France is made explicit in the grudging admiration expressed for Pitt's ruthless efficiency

in the conduct of the recent war, when blame for the inefficiency of the French government is mingled with a patriotic sympathy for the French as victims of Pitt's 'ardent and savage fanaticism, which he called patriotism, perhaps believing it to be so, but which was at bottom nothing more than a violent hatred of the nation he wanted to persecute' (p. 146).

It is in fact a recurrent theme of the work that the French people are endowed with enormous natural advantages, both in their land and their character, but that they have been repeatedly handicapped and betrayed by incompetent, despotic government. So that, despite its natural superiority, the nation has regularly been beaten in wars and outmanoeuvred in the race for colonies by the British and the Dutch. The bravura piece by Diderot in Book 5 (pp. 65–6) on the character of the French is no doubt not to be taken entirely seriously, but there are many other instances in the work which reveal an unambiguous admiration for the authors' countrymen, or at least for their so often unrealized potential. A good deal of Books 4, 13 and 15, for example, is concerned with reproaches for what the French did wrong, explanations of what they ought to have done, or advice on what they ought to be doing now. There is clearly an underlying sense of frustration and irritation that the naturally superior French have been upstaged by the Portuguese, the Dutch and above all the British. A superiority which is confirmed, for instance, by the Canadian Indians' 'positive liking for the French', in response to the sensitive way in which the latter have dealt with them, contrasted with their 'most invincible aversion for the English' (p. 232). And yet possession of Canada has somehow passed from the French to the British! Somewhat paradoxically, perhaps, given the denunciations of despotism, there is a distinct sense of nostalgia for the glorious past of France, and the author clearly sees as both admirable and significant the determination of the French inhabitants of Nova Scotia to remain French even after the colony had become British, motivated as they were by the patriotism 'which the honour and glory of France once inspired in all her sons' (p. 240).

Nostalgia for ideal societies of the past was of course a standard characteristic of eighteenth-century political thinkers, and with a commendable attempt at relativism, Raynal attempts to show that it was not only Greece and Rome that offered such models. The early civilization of India, for example, anticipated the glories of European Antiquity: 'Most of our sciences originated there. The Greeks went to India to learn [...]. The most ancient trading peoples brought back cloth from India, which shows how much progress manufacturing had made there' (1, ch. 8). However, this civilization has degenerated sadly, and additions to the same chapter by Diderot emphasize the awfulness of modern India, its superstitions, such as the dreadful practice of suttee, and the horrors of the caste system (pp. 2–4). The ambivalence is maintained in Book 3 with a glowing eulogy of the state of Bisanpore, which, it is claimed, has miraculously retained 'the purity and equity of the ancient political system of the Indians'; and then doubt is cast on the actual existence of this modern survival (pp. 34–6). There is similar ambivalence about the empire of the Incas. The first edition provides in Book 7 an admiring account of their practical achievements; this is subsequently replaced by a revised version, relegating

most of these achievements (often unfairly) ‘to the realm of myth’ (pp. 98–101). In the following book, however, there is virtually unstinting praise for the principles followed by the Incas in their system of government, which were adopted, with great success, it is claimed, by the Jesuits in their settlements (pp. 116–18).

But the ideal society need not necessarily be only a thing of the past. In the context of the development of Mexico City, we are offered a by no means unrealistic vision of the ways in which the modern state may be improved:

A hygienic, thoughtfully constructed and well-administered hospital; the abolition of mendicancy or the provision of employment for the indigent; the paying off of the national debt; a moderate and equitably distributed system of taxation; the reform of the law through the creation of a clear and simple code [...]. (6, ch. 20)

Almost at the very end of the work, Raynal finally describes to us an existing society which he sees as ‘the realization and reappearance of the heroic times of the ancient world, which the life and laws of Europe had seemed to declare a fiction’ (p. 253–4). It is the state of Pennsylvania, the creation of the Quaker, William Penn. Its government embodied all the elements needed to create a virtual utopia, benevolence, freedom, religious toleration, equality before the law, security of private property... so that the author can conclude: ‘Never perhaps had virtue inspired a set of laws more likely to produce happiness.’ (p. 253). One notices, though, that the exclusion of atheists from citizenship and of non-Christians from public office (p. 252) is not seen as a restriction of religious toleration (a sure sign that this passage was not written by the atheistic Diderot), and needless to say, various other aspects of the ideal society may seem less than ideal to the modern reader. The head of a Pennsylvanian family who finds himself in financial difficulties ‘is entitled to pledge his children to his creditors’ (p. 255), while, less surprisingly, in the North American colonies in general, we are told, ‘women have remained what they should be, gentle, modest, compassionate and helpful’ (p. 260). In another idyllic North American community, the French inhabitants of Nova Scotia, women are treated, it seems, virtually as chattels: when a young man reaches marriageable age, he is provided with all the necessities to set up his own farm, a house, land already sown, a year’s provisions, and ‘the young woman he had chosen as a companion, and who would bring him a dowry of flocks’ (p. 241).

In reality, however, rather than a serious political model, the lyrical picture of the Nova Scotia French presents an example of the standard (and spurious) eighteenth-century hankering after the simple life of the poor, which had been given such eloquent expression by Rousseau. There are several similar idealized communities in the work: the early Cape Colony Dutch for instance (p. 23), and the poor but happy inhabitants of the Dutch island of Saba (pp. 165–6). A lyrical account of the idyllic life of the inhabitants of Bermuda concludes with this ecstatic apostrophe: ‘May you keep these advantages, oh! industrious people, without riches, but happy in the work and the poverty which preserve your virtue!’ (14, ch. 29). And so on, completely ignoring, incidentally, the fact that half of the population of Bermuda consisted of slaves.

The associated primitivist cult of the ‘noble savage’ was, of course, similarly at bottom a critique of contemporary European society, and like many others, Raynal was often apt to let his preoccupation with the ills of the latter influence, sometimes distort, his account of the life and customs of indigenous peoples. In Book 10, for instance, ‘[s]ince their hearts were not depraved by the bad institutions which corrupt us, the deceptions, the betrayals, the perfidy, the murders so common among civilized peoples were unknown to the Caribs’ (p. 136). The author conveniently ignores here what he does indeed go on to tell us a few paragraphs later, namely that these people ‘who only followed nature’ occasionally indulged in drunken feasts in which they were moved by hatred and vengeance to slaughter one another. Nor is such behaviour among primitive tribes particularly exceptional; Raynal does not shy away from recognizing that savages were inclined to be savage, as well, often, as rather unattractive in other ways. In a most telling fragment, he reports that explorers in French Guiana have recently discovered the existence of numerous tribes, ‘each one more barbarous than the next’:

Everywhere they found the oppression of women, superstitions which prevent the increase of population, hatreds which can only be extinguished by the destruction of families and communities, the deplorable neglect of the old and the sick, the habitual use of the most varied and subtle poisons, and a multitude of other hideous practices only too often characteristic of peoples living in the primitive state of nature. (pp. 176–7)

In the Far East, the alleged dominance of the women in the Mariana Islands is reputedly due to the extreme ugliness of their men (p. 89); and although the ‘Californians’ in the following chapter of Book 6 are physically ‘well-made’, they are ‘inconstant, lazy, stupid, [...] and extremely cowardly’ (p. 91).

In general, though, it is the tranquillity of native peoples that is stressed, their contentment with their lot, even their inactivity, contrasted with the continual agitation of Europeans, both as individuals and as societies. Despite their murderous parties, the Caribs spent most of their lives peacefully ‘sleeping or smoking in their hammocks’; hardly ever moving, they scarcely even needed to eat, and what little food they required ‘they found beneath the trees’ (p. 136–7). The pastoral Hottentots of the Cape of Good Hope are even more obviously idealized. Being without vices and without possessions, they are ‘united by bonds of indestructible friendship’, and like the Carib, the Hottentot is mostly completely idle: ‘He lies forever outside his door. As little concerned with the future as with the past, it is there that he sleeps, smokes and gets drunk’ (p. 19). The nomadic Indian hunters of Canada were admittedly not inactive, but they were certainly content with their simple lives, their independence, their physical prowess and their ability to survive in the wild. The contrast with Europeans is made explicit:

That restlessness which leads us to cross so many oceans, in search of an ever-disappearing fortune, they take to be rather the effect of our poverty than of our enterprise. They laugh at our arts and our manners, at all those practices which fill us the more with vanity the further they are from nature. (p. 211)

And although the population of these primitive tribes is small, they have no reason to seek to increase it, unlike civilized nations, which never have enough land ‘for their life of continual initiatives and expense’ (p. 210).

As much as its subversive political sentiments, however, it was the blatant anti-clericalism and hostility to the Church in the *Histoire des deux Indes* which angered both civil and religious authorities (and delighted their opponents). The work is strewn with denunciations of superstition, fanaticism and the abuse of power by priests which do not refer explicitly to Christianity, but whose real target is never in doubt. A typical example is to be found early in Book 1, in the account (by Diderot) of the Hindu religion:

The Brahmins, who are the only ones to understand the sacred book, make use of its text in the way that religious books have ever been used. They find in it all the maxims that their imagination, their self-interest, their passions and their hypocritical zeal suggest to them. Their function as sole interpreters of religion has given them limitless power over the people, a power such as impostors and fanatics will always have over men who have not the strength to listen to their reason and their hearts. (1, ch. 8)

The insidious equation of superstition and religious belief is another approach frequently employed, again principally by Diderot. He uses the alleged submission of men to women in the Mariana Islands as an opportunity for a near-explicit attack on the Bible:

[...] there is nothing that superstition cannot pervert, no custom however monstrous it cannot establish, no crime it cannot lead men to commit, no sacrifice it cannot obtain. If superstition tells a man that God wishes him to mutilate himself, he will mutilate himself. If it tells him that God wishes him to kill his son, he will kill him. (p. 89)

And one might add as an example of another frequently used device the horrified denunciation of any religion which (however implausible this may seem, it is implied) ‘authorized [...], if only by its silence’ the atrocities involved in the use of slaves (p. 159).

But from the very first book also, there are numerous direct attacks on the Church and its clergy. The many atrocities perpetrated by the Portuguese, for example, are attributed to their ‘religious fanaticism’, and the Inquisition established in Goa is denounced as an ‘infamous tribunal’ (p. 12). Among numerous other instances, the case of the Dominican Vicente de Valverde inciting Pizarro’s men to massacre the Incas is particularly noteworthy, since Raynal here deliberately rejects a version of the story presenting the priest in a much more favourable light (pp. 97–8). Earlier, in Book 6, he had devoted many pages to recounting the conflicts in Mexico and New Mexico between the Church and the civil authorities, emphatically taking the side of the latter, and denouncing in particular the Church’s abusive use of the right of asylum. Diderot then adds a paragraph attacking the corruption and misuse of their enormous secular power by the Franciscans:

Can anything be more absurd than this authority of the friars in America? They are a set of men without learning and without morals; their licence rides roughshod over their constitution and their vows; their behaviour is scandalous; their houses are dens of iniquity [...]. (p. 85)

There is much more in the same vein. Diderot even goes as far as to blame them for spreading ‘the spirit of revolt among native peoples’ – a rather hypocritical accusation in the light of his incitement to revolt elsewhere in the work. Nor was it only the Catholic Church that was targeted. One of the most horrifying pictures of religious fanaticism in the work is that of the Puritans of New England. They are presented as ridiculous – banning the use of the title ‘Saint’ in their determination ‘not to have any common ground with the Church of Rome’ (p. 244) – but above all as appallingly cruel: Raynal gives a graphic account of their regime of ferocious persecution, culminating in the fanatical hysteria of the notorious Salem witch trials. And lest these atrocities be dismissed as an exceptional aberration, he explicitly universalizes their significance by pointing out that ‘the spirit of persecution [...] has stained with blood every religious sect’ (p. 245).

On the subject of the Jesuits, however, there is considerable ambiguity, due mainly, it would seem, to the Raynal–Diderot dichotomy. The present lamentable state of the French colony in Guiana, for instance, is attributed in part to the departure of the Jesuits, who had been so successful in obtaining the trust of the black slaves, whereas ‘their successors have displayed neither the same industry nor an equal knowledge of the human heart’ (p. 178). Several chapters in Book 8 are devoted to the very controversial Jesuit missions in Paraguay, and given the work’s general anticlericalism, they are perhaps surprisingly favourable – though one remembers Raynal’s own Jesuit background. He does give an account of the criticisms levelled at the missions, but it is on balance an exculpatory one, scarcely outweighing the judgement he has already formulated, that ‘never perhaps was so much good done to men along with so little harm’ (p. 117). However, there is a final chapter on the subject, almost certainly by Diderot, in which it is argued that, whatever the apparent benefits brought to the Guarani Indians by the Jesuit missions, they can never have been truly happy, since they were forced to live a dreary life in what was to all intents and purposes a religious community, being without vices or virtues, and since (an unexpected argument) ‘[t]he equality to which they were reduced [...] prevented the least degree of competition among them’ (p. 121). The ambivalence about the Jesuits is even more pronounced in the following book. Raynal gives a glowing eulogy of the wonderful achievements of their missionaries in Brazil, where the natives came to trust and love them. But an equally rhetorical paragraph is added by Diderot, in which, referring to the expulsion of the Jesuits from South America and the banning of the order in 1773, he laments that these ‘energetic and courageous men’ might have been able to continue their good works, if only, among other sins, ‘they had not appalled all moderate people by their intolerance, and all shades of opinion by their love of despotism’, and if only ‘excessive religious zeal had not made them secret enemies of the progress of knowledge and persecutors of enlightenment’ (p. 128).

Colonialism and slavery

The activity of the Jesuits is, however, a rather marginal issue in the *Histoire des deux Indes*, confined to a relatively small number of chapters; there is a much greater degree of ambivalence in the treatment of its two intertwined principal themes, colonization and slavery. The work is usually represented as anti-colonialist: even Simon Schama, in his excellent *Citizens* describes it as an ‘incendiary attack on European colonization’ (p. 173). Certainly, it does contain such an attack, and the cruelty and barbarity of the Europeans in establishing their colonies is repeatedly and unequivocally condemned. There is, moreover, at the beginning of Book 8, a theoretical examination of the ethical principles underlying the foundation of colonies, which concludes with the axiom that the only land that may legitimately be settled is one not already inhabited (pp. 111–12). Now if this passage, added by Diderot in 1780, seems to destroy the legitimacy of the vast majority of the colonies described in the work, it is surely because it is so intended, as the very next sentence makes clear: ‘It is according to these principles, which seem to me to be eternally true, that European nations should judge themselves, and then give themselves the name they deserve.’ Far from being an objective philosophical enquiry, the examination of principles appears as little more than a dialectical strategy designed to show that colonization is nearly always robbery.

To some extent, this view is implicit in the work from the beginning; however, at the same time, the reader is struck, also from the very beginning, by a strong element of admiration for the intrepidity of some of the early conquerors, and even sometimes for their good administration. Many pages of Book 1 are devoted to the exploits and wisdom of the so-called ‘Great’ Affonso de Albuquerque, second viceroy of Portuguese India, who, we are told, showed himself to be an excellent ruler, ‘wise, just, humane and altruistic’, so much so that after his death, Indians would come to his tomb to pray for his intercession with the oppressors who had succeeded him (1, ch. 17). And Raynal’s praise was extended to those who served under Albuquerque: ‘If one has to be astonished at the number of his victories and the swiftness of his conquests, do not those intrepid men whom he had the honour to command also deserve our admiration?’ (1, ch. 18). It is not clear whether Raynal was aware that in reality Albuquerque was no less brutal than other Portuguese leaders, but a few chapters later, a passage is inserted into subsequent editions, almost certainly by Diderot, in which the author emphatically denies condoning in any way the atrocities committed by the Portuguese:

Oh! barbaric Europeans! I have not been dazzled by the splendour of your deeds. Their success has not obscured their injustice. [...] If I cease for one moment to see you as so many flocks of cruel and ravenous vultures, with as little morality and conscience as those birds of prey, may this work and my memory [...] become objects of the utmost contempt and execration! (1, ch. 24)

This declaration is echoed by a similar disclaimer at the beginning of Book 7, this time certainly by Diderot, who confronts the dilemma of the historian and explicitly

dissociates himself from the injustices he is narrating: 'I am writing history, and I do so with my eyes almost always full of tears' (7, ch. 1).

No doubt Raynal largely shared this view; nevertheless, the theoretical principles enunciated at the beginning of Book 8 are mostly forgotten, or rather ignored as irrelevant in practice. Even Diderot, in the first chapter of the following book, is concerned with the practical matter of the 'art of founding colonies', and proposes an approach, much in favour at the time, which completely ignores the rule that only uninhabited lands may be settled. Instead of the barbarous methods that have been used hitherto in the New World, Diderot argues that it would have been 'more humane, more useful and less costly' to have introduced hundreds of young men and women who would have intermarried with the indigenous population. Not only would they all soon have become 'one single family', but the native would quickly have appreciated that 'the arts and the knowledge that were being offered him were most conducive to the betterment of his lot' (p. 123). Earlier in the work, intermarriage between French settlers and local women formed an important part of Raynal's prescription for the ideal way to establish a colony on Madagascar, though here he does attempt to legitimize it by proposing the purchase from the islanders of uninhabited land. But what is perhaps most striking about this passage is the humanitarian confidence it expresses in the benefits that European (or at least French) civilization could bring to the native population:

What glory it would be for France to deliver a numerous people from the horrors of barbarousness; to give them a decent way of life, an ordered administration, wise laws, a beneficent religion and both the useful and the agreeable arts; in short to elevate them to the ranks of enlightened and civilized nations! (p. 50)

If this is only aspiration, there are actual examples of existing colonies in which it is claimed that the native population has greatly benefited from being colonized, however illegally it may have been done in the first place. As well as the case of the Guarani Indians of the Jesuit missions in Paraguay, we learn that on the island of Guam, the 'children of primitive nature', surviving remnant of the people who were slaughtered by the original Spanish conquerors, have finally become happy as the result of the wise and humane government which has taught them agriculture and the rights of land-ownership (p. 91).

These are, however, isolated cases, and while there are rather more examples of colonies which are presented as admirable without any claims being made for benefit to the natives – we have already referred to some of them, the Dutch on Saba and on the Cape, the French in Nova Scotia, the British in Pennsylvania – it remains true none the less that the overall picture conveyed by the work is predominantly that of the cruelty and unscrupulous rapacity of the colonizers, regardless of any question of legitimacy. There are continual denunciations of the massacres and other atrocities perpetrated by the early settlers, and although the barbarously ill-treated savages are often far from 'noble', sympathy is unquestionably on their side. But when it comes to slaves, and more particularly black slaves, there is decided ambivalence.

Raynal's work was certainly hailed in its day as an attack on slavery. To quote one significant item of iconographic evidence, a portrait painted in 1797 by Anne-Louise Girodet of the black Haitian J.-B. Belley, who had actually helped to persuade the Assemblée in 1794 to abolish slavery (temporarily), represents him leaning against a prominent bust of Raynal.⁹ The whole question of slavery and the slave trade is addressed at some length in Book 11, and the discussion is for the most part entirely without ambiguity. After a graphic evocation of the appalling conditions in which plantation slaves are forced to live (pp. 152–4), Diderot contributes a theoretical demonstration that slavery cannot under any circumstances be morally justifiable, exactly as he had done concerning colonization, and follows this with a horrified denunciation of slavers, slave-owners, and a church which fails to condemn them (p. 159). We may, however, be surprised, a few chapters later, to discover that a discussion of sugar-cultivation, including detailed proposals for making it more profitable, appears to have taken entirely for granted the need for slave-labour (p. 162). Is the position of the work on slavery then analogous to its position on colonization, rejection in principle, acceptance, however reluctant, in practice?

In fact, the view throughout is clearly that plantation colonies, and especially sugar colonies, cannot prosper without black slaves. One of the fundamental flaws in Choiseul's ill-fated attempt to establish a French settlement in Guiana, we are told, was 'to think that Europeans could sustain in the tropics the exhausting hardships involved in the clearing of the land' (p. 174). And the point is made on more than one occasion that the native Indians were too feeble to perform such work: 'The only way to obtain really valuable harvests will be to have recourse to the muscular arms of Negroes' (p. 178. For in the New World, 'experience had proved that they [Negroes] were infinitely better suited to all kinds of work than the native inhabitants' (8, ch. 22). It is worthy of note, as Diderot here points out, that Las Casas, celebrated defender of the Indians, had actively supported the purchase of African slaves to work the plantations in their place. Diderot does later outline a scheme, based on a programme of gradual emancipation, which would enable plantations to be worked without slave labour, adding this revealing comment: 'The crops could be gathered by free hands, and consequently consumed with a clear conscience' (p. 159). But this does not seem to be anything more than a pipe-dream, and the inevitability of the need for slave labour is hardly ever contested. Indeed, it is even claimed, in a bitter reflection on the savage repression of slave rebellions in Jamaica, that the slave system must inevitably be a cruel one:

It was to such barbarous excesses that trade and the enslavement of Negroes inevitably led these usurpers. [...] For the New World to be conquered, its inhabitants had doubtless to be slaughtered. For them to be replaced, Negroes had to be purchased, as the only people able to withstand the toil and the climate of America. For these Africans to be transported to a land which they were destined to cultivate without owning any of it, they had to be

⁹ The portrait is shown on the cover of C.A. Bayly's masterly recent book, *The Birth of the Modern World*.

seized by force and turned into slaves. For them to be kept in a state of slavery, they had to be treated harshly. (p. 198)

However, the irony of this rather curious passage makes it somewhat ambiguous, and it must be set against a chapter of Book 11 devoted to ways of reforming the treatment of black slaves (pp. 155–8). More significantly, many of the colonies described with admiration in the work were dependent on slave labour, as is often recognized. This is particularly true of the British possessions. Nevis, for example, is presented as a successful and happy colony in which the huge number of slaves on so small an island is actually a sure indication of ‘the prosperity which is the result of virtue in well-ordered societies’ (14, ch. 13). And in the ‘delightful spectacle’ of the virtue and prosperity of Pennsylvania, where there are no beggars and ‘not a single pauper’, the presence of slaves is glossed over in an extraordinary manner (while that of indentured servants is virtually ignored):

We shall not disguise the fact that 30,000 Negroes formed part of this numerous population; but it must also be stated that slavery in this province has not been a source of corruption, as it has always been, and as it will always be, in less well ordered societies. (p. 254)

The overall attitude conveyed by the *Histoire des deux Indes* is predominantly one of approval of the slave-dependent plantation system, provided that it is run on more humane lines. It is significant that the work was very popular precisely with plantation owners, and it is not difficult to see why. Amid the historical summaries, philosophical reflections and economic debates, there are from time to time very detailed practical explanations and recommendations. Book 14, for instance, provides a plan for land-clearance and the establishment of settlements in the West Indies (pp. 200–201), and in Book 11, there is a very full explanation of the cultivation and production of sugar, together, as we have seen, with a proposal for improvements to make it more profitable (pp. 160–62). Many pages are devoted to the discussion of ways of making colonies prosperous, and in particular, the reasons for the relative failure of some – such as the fragmentation of estates by the division of inheritances (pp. 187–8) – are examined frequently and at length. It is clearly the viewpoint of the planters that is embraced. The author revealingly includes in a list of the factors affecting the wealth of a colony ‘the number of slaves, cattle and implements necessary for a plantation’ (p. 187), and he laments the fact that France has kept Martinique poor by sending it far too few slaves (p. 182) – just as earlier, while deploring the cruelty with which the ‘oppressive’ Spaniards treated their native labourers in Mexico, he had seen the reduction in the workforce as a contributory cause of the country’s lack of prosperity (p. 86). He has the greatest respect for the bold settlers who have endured many hardships to establish the colonies, and among them, it is, he declares on one occasion, particularly the rich ones, the ‘large landowners’, whom he admires: ‘They are not men debased by rough work, humble occupations or penury. The absolute authority they exercise in their plantations will have given them loftiness and nobility of spirit’ (p. 206).

Despite the eulogies of the poor which we noted earlier, and despite frequent denunciations of the ‘lust for gold’, it is clear that underlying much of the *Histoire des deux Indes* is an ideal of material prosperity, together with the emphatic conviction that the key to the increase and the sharing of this prosperity was trade – a widely held belief in the eighteenth century. The Introduction to Book 1 consists of a potted history of Europe in which the whole emphasis is on the development of trade, and the importance of trade and commerce is the predominant theme of the concluding book. As we have seen, the objections to slavery were set aside in favour of mercantile considerations, and the importance attached to the latter is reflected in the many chapters throughout the work devoted to the minutiae of trade, details of products, exports, and prices,¹⁰ and to the discussion of major commercial and economic questions. In particular, there are a number of attacks on the monopolies of chartered companies and national restrictive practices, and calls for the freedom of trade as the only sound way of promoting universal prosperity (see especially Book 5, Extract V). It is interesting to observe the similarity of many of Raynal’s arguments to those of Adam Smith, whose *Wealth of Nations* was published in 1776; but whereas Smith concluded that Britain’s colonies constituted a drain on its economy, Raynal appears quite certain that the reverse is true, expressing great, even envious, admiration for the prosperity of the British West Indian possessions and holding them up as a model to be emulated by France.

But enthusiasm in the work for commerce went beyond seeing it merely as a means of achieving prosperity. In the very first paragraph of Book 1, the opening of the sea-route to India and the discovery of America are hailed as marking ‘the beginning of a revolution in the commerce and the power of nations, and in the way of life, the industry and the government of all peoples’; there is an unmistakable tone of enthusiastic optimism in the evocation of the new relationships that have been created between far-flung nations, which now exchange their products and their needs. The theme of this paragraph, which indeed pervades the whole work, is echoed and developed in the final book by a chapter which is a veritable hymn of praise to trade and commerce. The pursuit of riches is certainly emphatically defended, as encouraging the people to be fruitful and industrious, to sail the seas and to engage in manufacturing; for ‘gold and silver corrupt only idle folk’ (19, ch. 6). But the acquisition of wealth is only a part of the picture, and perhaps merely the means to an end. By breaking down the barriers between peoples, ‘by extending the sphere of needs and the desire for pleasures,’ trade ‘becomes, one might say, the driving force of the world’ (p. 271). Waxing ever more lyrical, the author proceeds to imagine the Deity at last contemplating with satisfaction the picture of a ‘Europe full of industrious nations, circulating unceasingly around the globe, to bring it under cultivation and make it useful to man, [...] linking continents together by flying bridges of communication’ (19, ch. 6). And it is the architect of this transformation of the world, the merchant, the trader, who finally emerges as the hero of the work:

10 For example, Book 13, Chapters 12, 24, 41; Book 14, Chapters 24, 32, 46. I have omitted most of such passages in my selection as being of little interest to the modern reader.

he must have the genius of Newton, the intellectual icon of the Enlightenment, in order 'to trace the movement of the trading peoples who make the earth prosper', allied to the skills of Cromwell and Richelieu, as he 'encompasses the two worlds in his glance, and directs his operations over a host of relationships that it is given only rarely to the statesman or even the philosopher to envisage and appreciate' (p. 273).

Just as the modern reader's perception of 'pre-revolutionary' works in France is inevitably coloured by the revolution that actually occurred, so, even more perhaps, it is difficult now to judge Enlightenment enthusiasm for the emergence of capitalism without one's view being profoundly affected by the knowledge of what followed. One can scarcely blame Raynal and the other authors of the *Histoire des deux Indes* for their confidence in the benefits that would accrue from the freedom of trade and the dominance of the market-place, and for not foreseeing some of the horrors produced in the nineteenth century by unbridled capitalism. On the contrary, we should perhaps admire them for their awareness and even understanding of the great changes that were transforming the world, the process which modern historians have called 'proto-capitalist globalization'.¹¹

But another problem with reading the work today is that the evolution of ideas in the general field of colonialism and slavery has sensitized us enormously – and unfairly – to the existence of unacknowledged 'racist' prejudices in even the most benign of reformers. Raynal's very reputation as a pioneer anti-colonialist and opponent of slavery may well prompt the modern reader to look suspiciously at the evidence which appears to support this view of him. His reluctant acceptance of the then widely held view that slavery was a regrettable commercial necessity may be understandable, but despite the contempt he shows for the House of Commons for taking seriously Montesquieu's ironic demonstration that Negroes were an inferior species (p. 188), it is difficult not to suspect that Raynal's view was unconsciously not far different from the one he mocks. How, one wonders, at the risk of being anachronistic, would he have reacted to the virtual slave labour of white women and children in the mines and mills of the nineteenth century? However, to keep Raynal's position on the matter in perspective, it is useful to recall that, as recently as 1931, a reputable American historian could list among several 'advantages' of slavery that 'it was in some ways a blessing to the Negro himself', since it 'taught him the rudiments of civilization and Christianity', and that it 'trained the Negro in habits of industry', and 'helped to curb his savage instincts and discipline him into the self-restraint demanded by civilization'.¹²

A Note on this edition

Given both the length of the *Histoire des deux Indes* and the fact that neither the French original nor the English translation is readily available other than in specialist

11 See Bayly, p. 44.

12 O.P. Chitwood, *A History of Colonial America*, Harper, New York, 1931, p. 355. The book was reprinted in 1948 and 1961.

libraries, an edition of extracts seemed a worthwhile enterprise. Justamond's translation was in many respects admirable; but it does contain errors, and even, occasionally, omits passages, apparently on the grounds of propriety (I draw attention to some of these omissions in my footnotes). It is largely for these reasons that I have chosen to give a new translation.

In my selection of passages, I have tried to observe two principal criteria: they should be representative of the work as a whole, and they should be likely to interest the modern anglophone reader. Obviously, these criteria are sometimes in conflict. For instance, there are many botanical chapters devoted to local flora, which I have largely ignored; whereas economic, philosophical and political discussions are probably over-represented. I recognize that there will certainly be readers who do not share my priorities.

For obvious reasons, I have followed the 1780 text. Titles of books are those of the original, titles of extracts my own. Proper names presented many difficulties, and I have not succeeded here in being consistent. In general, I have tried to use recognized English versions, though preferring those used in the eighteenth or nineteenth century to modern ones (for example, Batavia and Pernambuco rather than Jakarta and Recife), and I have given explanations in the notes where this seemed desirable. And where Raynal has misspelled names, I have corrected them. I have tried to be faithful to the French text as far as possible, and so have used terms such as 'Negro' and 'savage', with no regard for modern political correctness!

Given the problems of authorship discussed earlier, I have mostly avoided referring to Raynal as the author of any particular passage. However, since there is never any positive evidence of his authorship, I have, for convenience, assumed that he is the author where there is no evidence to the contrary.

I have assumed that 'leagues' and weight in 'pounds' are comprehensible enough, without the need for exact modern equivalents. Money, however, posed problems. The most common value used in the work is the 'livre', and to avoid confusion, I have retained the French word: however, the reader may find it helpful to know that 1 *livre* equalled 20 *sols* (or *sous*), and 1 *sol* 12 *deniers*, while the pound sterling was equivalent to roughly 24 *livres*.



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Book 1

Discoveries, wars and conquests of the Portuguese in the East Indies

Extract I (Introduction)

Nothing in the history of mankind in general, and of the peoples of Europe in particular, has been so significant as the discovery of the New World and the route to India by the Cape of Good Hope. These events marked the beginning of a revolution in the commerce and the power of nations, and in the way of life, the industry and the government of all peoples. It was from this moment on that the inhabitants of the most far-flung lands were brought closer together by new relationships and new needs. The productions of equatorial climes began to be consumed in polar regions; the manufactures of the North were transported to the South; the fabrics of the Orient became prized luxuries in the West; and everywhere, men exchanged their opinions, their laws, their customs, their sicknesses, their remedies, their virtues and their vices. [...]

Extract II (Chapter 8): *The society of India: castes and suttee*¹

[...] There are several orders of Brahmins. Those who live in society are usually very corrupt. Convinced as they are that the waters of the Ganges cleanse them of all their crimes, and not being subject to any civil jurisdiction, they are without curb and without virtue. They do, however, still have the compassion and the charity which are so common in the gentle climate of India.

The others live away from society; they are feeble-minded men or enthusiasts, given up to idleness, to superstition, and to the delirium of metaphysics. [...]

The warrior caste is to be found everywhere, with various names. They are called Nayars in the Malabar: they are well-made and brave, but proud, effeminate and superstitious.² [...]

The third caste is that of all those who till the soil. There are few countries where they are more deserving of the gratitude of their fellow citizens. They are industrious and enterprising; they understand well the secrets of irrigation, and know how to

1 The whole of this extract is by Diderot.

2 The armies of this warrior caste of the state of Kerala were to be disbanded under British rule. In the eighteenth century, the Nayars were unusual in having a matrilinear society, in which marriage was often merely nominal.