

R.J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas 1640-1700* (Leiden: Research School CNWS, Leiden University, 1998). vi + 465 pp. 60 Dutch guilders

Reviewed by Katherine Moseley

"To the merchants and mariners of the seventeenth century the wide waters of the Indian Ocean appeared of vast, superhuman dimensions. An interminable time was spent crossing it...." So opens Barendse's *Arabian Seas* a splendid account, resembling, in its complexity, color, and scale, the region it describes. Indeed, it takes us, like fellow-travelers, to the ports, ships, and mercantile communities of that great maritime arc, bounded by the East African shoreline, the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, and India's western coast.

Based on over a decade of archival research in the Netherlands, India, and Portugal, Barendse's book blends social and economic history, economic geography, and institutional analysis. While synthesizing perhaps thousands of primary documents, it retains the feel of an account -- descriptive, discursive, with little in the way of generalization, aggregate data, or quantitative trends. The underlying strategy, however, seems like Braudel's: to take the reader to the scene, letting him sort through the evidence himself for clues to interests and motives, underlying structures, and long-term shifts. There are shortcomings: countless typographic errors, quaint wordings, rudimentary tables, the lack of an overall bibliography, and vagueness on certain points. All these pale, however, in face of the utterly convincing realism of this work's seductive combination of historical sweep, sharp insights, and rich detail.

Barendse's focus is on the last half of the seventeenth century a period of Dutch hegemony, English ascent, and Portuguese decline and the problematic of "European expansion" in many ways frames the book. This is far from a conventional imperial or economic history, however: it is resolutely centered on the regional economy, with minimal attention to wars, states, boundaries, or even to trade with the metropolises. A chapter is devoted to each of the three great chartered companies of the Indies, but the emphasis throughout is on contradictions and ambiguities the impossibility of effective monopolies or central control; the ubiquity of corruption, smuggling, and "private trade"; the immense and inescapable role of indigenous traders, shippers, and financiers.

The Moghul, Safavid, and Ottoman empires, along with other local principalities, also remain in the background, leaving the political demarcations of the region somewhat unclear. As in Europe, Barendse notes, "the cornucopia of American bullion was emptied by the state on payments for a salaried bureaucracy and army" (111), while the sale of offices and tax farming were milked for further revenues. Despite their actual dependence on trade, however, the Asian states with the exception of the Omanis tended to treat commerce with some disdain (preferring, as Barendse puts it, "the stirrup to the ship")(p. 434).

Europeans -- barred entirely from most of the Ottoman Red Sea -- were generally confined to coastal enclaves; Barendse provides fascinating detail on these, especially the

stratified, more or less creolized Portuguese settlements of the western Indian ports, and their subaltern strata of mestizos, converts, and lascarin troops. Other diasporas of Portuguese settlers, lancados, and mercenaries stretched up the Zambezi and Euphrates, and into the political centers of the interior. More generally, the ports and sea lanes teemed with a multicultural assortment of renegades, freebooters, "sea proletarians" (a term from Frederick Lane), and African (ex-)slaves.

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Barendse's focus then, is not only regional but maritime, and especially on the coastwise, inter-Asian, or "country trade." The major flow was between India (producer of pepper, cloth, and diamonds, inter alia), and the Middle East (still the major conduit for bullion, along with cotton, silk, and coffee). To both regions came smaller flows of African slaves, ivory, and gold. Barendse provides especially rich material on not only the operations of the Companies, but on local-level structures and transactions—ports and bazaars, Indian and Muscati merchant and banking networks, European privateers, ships' crews, the seasonality of trade—in such places as Basra, Mocha, Goa, and Surat.

It is the character and dynamic of this commercial system that is Barendse's overarching concern. In the long run, he seems to argue, the more humdrum, localized trade in bulk goods was as important as, and intertwined with, the long distance trade. Though the latter was crucial for capital accumulation and state revenues, "[t]he entire trade of the Indian Ocean would barely have filled one modern freighter" (p. 173). Even the old silk route, he argues, was less "a highway from Europe to the celestial kingdom" than "a succession of small local circuits of trade" (p. 134). Markets for high-value exports were limited and fragmented, beset by inadequate information and erratic fluctuations, high insecurity and protection rents (or by customs duties, which might be even worse). To minimize risks, small-scale "peddling" and dispersed "portfolio investments" tended to prevail.

Barendse is accordingly quite cautious on the question of a seventeenth-century "world-economy." The Arabian seas, he says, did make up a regional maritime system (p. 60), but less an (integrated, hierarchical) "world-economy" than a simple "network of trade" (p. 435). And thus the transformative impact of the European chartered companies—their mercantilist character, their superior centralization, capitalization, and power; their ability to achieve economies of scale and lower costs; and their role in forging wider linkages on a truly global scale. One might add a Wallersteinian point that Barendse does not quite make explicitly—the fact that there was not one chartered company but several, always competing, never able to regulate, stabilize, and thus limit global commerce as they might have wished.

By the end of the century, Barendse suggests, "the integration of the Arabian Seas within the modern world system" was well underway (p. 439). Spatially, eastern and western Asia became more closely connected, as did both not only to Europe, but to

the wider Atlantic world. A marvelous chapter, entitled "Private Deals," tells of the smugglers and buccaneers who, in defiance of mercantilist restrictions, pioneered the American routes, carrying East African slaves and other booty to the Bermudas and New York. "By 1700 global connections tied both \u2018Indies\u2019 together," Barendse notes (p. 407). Similarly, tea and other Chinese goods began to appear in significant quantities, in exchange for opium, textiles, and bullion earned in the Indian trade.

Larger and more unified markets, in turn, narrowed the gap between staples and hitherto luxury goods. By the end of the century, bulk-manufactured cloth, and primary products like indigo, coffee, and rice entered massively into world-wide trade; so did labour, "not only slaves but indentured labour and mercenaries as well" (p. 5). Market integration also spelled greater cost/price competition and a "global process of product substitution" (p. 216). Indigo from the Caribbean and Guatemala displaced the Indian product, first in Italy, then in the Levant; pepper from the East Indies, shipped round the Cape, struck a blow to Western Indian exports and the traditional Levant trade. Competing supplies of New World sugar, cotton, then coffee were to follow close behind.

This ongoing reorganization of world trade was led by Europeans, Barendse argues, above all by the English, whose multiple advantages are explored in some detail. These included their early entry into the tea and coffee trades, the close connections they engineered between Bombay, China, and Madras, and their experience in producing textiles for the Middle East. But "paramount to the rise of the British Empire in Asia," Barendse argues (pp. 378-9), was their thriving "country trade," soon surpassing the Portuguese, then the Indians themselves. In the process, Bengal and Arabia prospered, but to the detriment of the Malabar Coast and the Levant.

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Bullion had long drained eastward to India\u2019s "bottomless sink" (reflecting Portugal\u2019s early deficits with the region, for example). With the decline of the transit trade in pepper, the Persian and Ottoman balance of payments turned negative as well. By the turn of the century, silver began to drain eastward from India itself: "One could obtain bullion for the China-trade," Barendse notes, "with the sale of European commodities at Surat and Bombay..." (p. 405). These shifts seem to have been part of a more general decline affecting the Arabian Seas, ca. 1660-1690, to which Barendse alludes at several points. There were other possible culprits, however\u2014inflation and heavy taxes, plague and climate change; the possible connection to a wider "seventeenth-century crisis" is mentioned as well.

Here, as on other major points, Barendse sticks to the evidential clutter, the uncertainties, of the middle ground. His book stands somewhere between Steensgaard and Pearson, emphasizing both the revolutionary role of European commerce and the immense importance of the preexisting inter-Asian trade. Similarly, it treads a path between Wallerstein and Frank, seeing the area as not "external" but still only partly integrated to a still-emerging world-economy\u2014a world-economy in which India, as well as

Europe or China, had a major place. This world system, however, was also assuming distinctive capitalist, systemic features, and under increasing European control.

A revised edition, to be brought out in the United States by M.E. Sharpe, promises to tell us more of the African side of the Arabian Seas. For now, useful (but uncited) companion volumes might be Risso's *Merchants and Faith: Muslim Commerce and Culture in the Indian Ocean* (Westview 1995), and Joseph Harris, *The African Presence in Asia* (Northwestern 1971). Photos and other art work would also be precious complements to a new edition, but are perhaps too much to hope for. Such basic amenities as an index and bibliography, however, not to speak of proofreading, should be de rigueur, along with better maps, perhaps some even showing political boundaries, trade routes, or commodity flows. This volume is a great achievement, and surely deserves the best.

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Snooks, Graeme Donald. *The Ephemeral Civilization: Exploding the Myth of Social Evolution*. London: Routledge, 1997. ISBN 0-415-16995-X, \$125.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Stephen K. Sanderson  
Department of Sociology, Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

This book builds on Graeme Donald Snooks's earlier volume, *The Dynamic Society: Exploring the Sources of Global Change* (Routledge, 1996). Both books lay out a general theory of human society and history known as materialist man, but the more recent book develops the argument in much greater detail. Snooks argues that there are no adequate models of human social behavior, but that the two most popular ones are neoclassical economics and sociobiology (more on this shocking statement later). Neoclassical economics goes wrong, he says, in assuming that humans are primarily cognitive beings who intellectualize about the world, whereas sociobiology goes wrong in being too genetically deterministic and in giving pride of place to the struggle for reproduction rather than to the struggle for survival. Human social life is governed by passions, not intellect, and the most important passion is the struggle for material advantage, i.e., for wealth and power. To realize material advantage humans adopt one or more of four dynamic strategies, which Snooks calls the family multiplication strategy, the conquest strategy, the commerce strategy, and the technological strategy. In the process of developing this argument Snooks reveals himself to be an old-fashioned economic determinist. At the base of every society is its dynamic economic strategy, and political and social institutions rest on this strategy and function to promote it. Social change occurs by virtue of the unfolding and eventual exhaustion of a dynamic strategy, at which point the leaders of the society shift to the next-best strategy. As the dynamic strategy changes, new social and political institutions emerge.

The dynamic strategy most likely to be found in small-scale preindustrial societies is the family multiplication strategy. Here families hive off from other families and occupy new land. This strategy has also been used by more complex societies in the settling of frontier regions, such as in colonial America. The most common dynamic strategy in the world of large-scale agrarian civilizations has been the conquest strategy. Here the political leaders of a society, usually in close collaboration with its economic leaders, engage in a pattern of constant war against other societies. War becomes a large-scale business, and wealth is created in the form of the spoils of war: land, slaves, tribute, etc. The usual reason that agrarian civilizations adopt the conquest strategy is that there is no real alternative. By far the greatest example of the conquest strategy is the Roman Republic and Empire. The dynamic strategists were the senators, who had launched this strategy by about the middle of the fifth century BC. Later the senators were replaced by the emperor as the primary strategist, a change necessitated by the need for greater centralization of the whole process of conquest. According to Snooks, by AD 138 the Romans had essentially exhausted their conquest strategy, but since there were no real alternatives to it the empire started on a process of long and slow decline. As another example of the conquest strategy, Snooks discusses the Aztecs, whose budding empire in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was centered around the capital city of Tenochtitlan. Unlike Rome, the Aztecs did not make use of a large slave labor force, and there was no

permanent army. As in Rome, war became a serious business. Merchants -- the dynamic strategists of the commerce strategy -- were greatly distrusted, but since their wealth was useful to the state they were tolerated. One of the more prominent features of Aztec society was its religion based upon extensive human sacrifice. For Snooks this religion symbolized the "dark spirit of conquest" that was the essence of Aztec society. The Aztec conquest strategy was cut short by the Spanish conquerors early in the sixteenth century before it had a chance to spread and ultimately to exhaust itself. Snooks speculates that had this not happened the Aztecs would soon have embarked on the conquest of much of North and South America.

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A few agrarian societies have been fortunate enough to use the commerce strategy rather than the conquest strategy. This strategy involves the creation of wealth by producing and trading goods over as large an area as possible. It depends on favorable geographical and other circumstances that give a society the necessary access to markets and trade routes. Since commerce societies could not coexist peaceably with conquest societies, the former had to be beyond the reach of the latter. The greatest commerce society in all of human history was, of course, ancient Greece. The Greeks were not only geographically suited for the commerce strategy, but since they were divided into a number of small and independent states that were equally matched militarily the conquest strategy could not be successfully employed. The Greeks employed their commerce strategy between approximately 800 and 550 BC. An integral part of this process was the founding of many Greek colonies in both near and distant regions. These colonies were important to the Greeks because "they were the means by which Greek city-states attempted to gain a monopoly over trade in a particular part of the Mediterranean" (p. 213). According to Snooks, commerce societies emphasize the "beauty of reason" rather than the "darkness of chaos" of conquest societies, and this was certainly true of Greece. Because its dynamic strategy was fundamentally different from that of Rome, the political structure of Greek society was also different. In Greece we find the city-state or polis, a political form based on rule by assemblies of male citizens rather than a king or emperor. As commerce expanded democracy expanded, because democracy facilitated commerce. By around 550-500 BC this strategy had exhausted itself and Greece was forced to turn to the conquest strategy. But since it had no particular advantage in the use of this strategy it subsided into insignificance on the world stage. Venice in the time between approximately AD 1000 and 1500 was also a major commerce society. It followed a similar path to that of Greece. It was ideally geographically situated for commerce, and it followed this strategy for several centuries. Soon, however, the strategy had run its course and, like Greece two millennia earlier, it turned to conquest. But since it had, also like Greece, no particular advantage in the use of this strategy the conquest strategy failed, and early in the sixteenth century Venice opted for a policy of neutrality and diplomacy.

The history of Europe, England in particular, over the past millennium reveals a sequence of dynamic strategies. Between about AD 1000 and 1450 England used a conquest strategy. Once this strategy had been played out England adopted a commerce strategy.

This latter strategy had itself been played out by the middle of the eighteenth century, and as a result England embarked upon what Snooks calls the technological strategy, or what I think might be more appropriately called the capitalist strategy. This involved the substitution of inanimate for animate energy and was marked by, of course the Industrial Revolution.

As far as Britain's dynamic strategists were concerned, the essence of the Industrial Revolution was that it devised cheaper ways (both technically and institutionally) of producing old products, such as cotton textiles, and new products such as consumer durables, and cheaper ways of transporting those products to markets at home (by canals and railways) and abroad (by steam-driven steel ships). . . . By providing ways of achieving favoured access to resources and markets other than the exhausted traditional ways of force, diplomacy, and physical proximity, the British Industrial Revolution imparted a new impetus to commercial expansion. But this time commercial expansion was the outcome of the technological rather than the commerce strategy (pp. 293-94).

Despite its short history, the United States has also undergone a sequence of dynamic strategies. In colonial America the strategy followed was that of dependent commerce, a version of the commerce strategy in which the colonies were a junior partner to England. This strategy came to an end late in the eighteenth century, and the United States then embarked on a strategy of family multiplication by expanding into the Western frontier. Once this strategy had been exhausted by around 1890, the US took up the technological strategy. Snooks argues that the key to understanding US society is that it was the world's first megastate and the first society to create a megamarket. Prior to the Civil War the US was really made up of two subsocieties that were committed to different dynamic strategies. The North wanted to expand industrial capitalism into the Western frontier in order to create a megamarket, but the "longrun material success of Southern strategists depended more on their economic relationship with Britain than with the rest of America" (p. 379). The Civil War was really fought over this clash of strategies, and Snooks contends that had the South won the war the US would have been divided into a number of nation-states rather than one megastate. Thus, the outcome of the Civil War was essential to the preservation of the North's technological strategy, for this strategy could not have been sustained without a megastate and a megamarket.

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In the final two chapters Snooks takes out a small crystal ball. The future, he says, will be dominated by the clash of four megastates because small nations, though they may fare reasonably well, can never be economic or political hegemony. European countries have increasingly recognized this, and thus have created the European Union. Snooks is optimistic that Russia, now that it has shed communism and embarked on the technological strategy, will, within a generation or so, emerge as a megastate. He also foresees China as one of the megastates; along with the EU and Russia, it will join the United States as one of the four megastates of the twenty-first century. What is the possibility that a global state will eventually succeed the megastates? This is neither possible nor desirable, Snooks contends. A global state would be an unmitigated disaster

because it would kill off the competition that is an essential part of the technological strategy and thus kill off that strategy itself.

There is a great deal of value in this book and I urge all those scholars with a serious interest in world history on such a grand spatial and temporal scale to read it. I am in strong agreement with his materialism (even economic determinism), and much of what he says about dynamic strategies and their importance is quite plausible. However, there is also much that is problematic, some of it seriously so. For one thing, Snooks concentrates wholly on what might be called "external" dynamic strategies and totally ignores "internal" strategies. That is, he concentrates entirely on intersocietal relations as if this is the only source of wealth and power and completely ignores the forms of wealth creation that go on within societies. In large-scale agrarian societies a great deal of wealth is created simply through the surplus extraction process engaged in by landlords against peasants. Snooks claims that "for a conquest society the domestic economy is a side issue" (p. 188). Certainly conquest can bring in a great deal of additional wealth, but the domestic economy should not be relegated to such an insubstantial status. After all, what do societies do when their conquest strategy fails, or what do societies incorporated into another society through conquest do to create wealth? Most commonly, they (i.e., their economic and political elites) engage in surplus extraction.

Snooks also turns his back entirely on the world-system perspective. There is no world-system, he argues, and the global economy is merely the outcome of dynamic strategists operating within the institutions of individual societies. In a sense this is true, but in another sense it is highly misleading. Once a world-system has been created, to some extent it acquires a life of its own and constrains the actions of its constituent members. Or so most of the readers of this journal would argue.

Snooks also does an inadequate job of explaining how dynamic strategies are exhausted. I have no difficulty accepting his thesis that strategies eventually exhaust themselves and have to be replaced by new strategies. However, Snooks doesn't really do enough to show us, within the framework of his concrete case studies, how strategies peter out; he merely asserts that a strategy petered out rather than developing the evidence to show us how and why this happened. I also have a problem understanding just what Snooks means by the family multiplication strategy. His discussion of this strategy in *The Dynamic Society* seemed to make it clear that this was a strategy suitable to very small-scale societies, and yet in *The Ephemeral Civilization* we read that this was the major strategy of American society in the century between 1790 and 1890, and we also learn of the enormous amount of wealth that the use of this strategy created. But surely family multiplication cannot be much of a wealth creating strategy on its own, let alone the level of wealth that Snooks is referring to. Perhaps I misunderstand the family multiplication strategy, but it would appear to me that it could not create much wealth unless it were combined with one of the other strategies. For example, the expansion of the railroads was a major aspect of the expansion into the Western frontier of the United States, but this was driven by Snooks's technological strategy (or what I prefer to call the capitalist strategy) rather than by simple family multiplication.

I also take exception to Snooks's broadside attack on social evolutionism. He asserts that social evolution is a myth, and he is out to destroy it. In using the term social evolution he seems to mean some sort of unilinear process that never reverses itself or heads off in any other direction, for he says that "sharp directional changes and reversals in institutional change observed throughout the historical record cannot be explained by an evolutionary model" (p. 8). Snooks is woefully out of touch with the literature on social evolution and theories of it. There are many social scientists today who are evolutionists, but few would claim that social evolution is some sort of unilinear process that never changes course. Indeed, I have developed an evolutionary interpretation of world history (Sanderson, 1995) that takes full cognizance of the rise and fall of civilizations, societal collapse, etc. Snooks is not reading some of the literature that he should be reading. He also seems to think that social evolutionism is some sort of unitary approach, but some years ago I tried to dispel that notion (Sanderson, 1990).

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One of the more startling statements in *The Ephemeral Civilization* is Snooks's contention that the two most influential models of human behavior have been neoclassical economics and sociobiology. I am not sure how influential neoclassical economics is outside of the field of economics itself, but I do know that sociobiology has made headway only in two social science disciplines, psychology and anthropology, and sociobiology is still highly contentious there. Within sociology sociobiology is still fiercely resisted by all but a small minority. Again, Snooks needs to acquaint himself with a wider body of literature than what he has been reading. However, more important is Snooks's own treatment of sociobiology. There have been many serious distortions of the claims of sociobiology, but Snooks's treatment is one of the worst I have seen. He claims that sociobiology is a rigid form of genetic determinism that makes humans slaves (his word is robots) to preordained forces, but this charge has been successfully repudiated countless times. Only a little familiarity with the literature of sociobiology will disabuse the careful and objective reader of such a claim. Perhaps Snooks's most serious charge against sociobiology is that, even though it claims to be Darwinian, it is in fact a distortion of Darwin. Sociobiologists distort Darwin, he says, by emphasizing the struggle for reproductive success, when in fact what Darwin was talking about was a struggle for survival, for material resources, not for producing offspring. In fact, though, Snooks seriously misunderstands Darwin and has created a false dichotomy. Not only did Darwin emphasize reproductive success, but his theory depended intimately upon it. Life is a struggle for both survival and reproductive success, and evolution cannot occur if organisms do not mate and leave copies of their genes in future generations. This is the only way an adaptive trait can spread throughout a population. What Snooks is really trying to do, it would seem, is to gain for economics a privileged position by making most important that which economists focus on, competition for material resources.

This is not the only serious interpretive error committed by Snooks, for in fact his entire treatment of sociobiology is just one massive exercise in intellectual distortion. In my

copy of the book I have marked long passages on pp. 110-11, 112, 113, 117-18, 121-22, 123, 124, and 125 that are just disasters of confusion and misunderstanding. He makes such startling assertions as the claim that animals have institutions, norms, and values; that animal behavior is not under genetic control; and, incredibly, that "children are, except in human families, an unavoidable by-product of the satisfaction of sexual desires" (p. 125). Ironically, what Snooks fails to see is that his general theory, materialist man, is not only compatible with sociobiology but makes sense only in terms of it. Why do people strive for wealth, status, and power? Because these are the resources they need in the struggle, not only to survive and prosper, but to attract mates and perpetuate their genes.

Fortunately, Snooks's discussion of sociobiology has little effect on the main argument of his book, which could have been written in much the same way without much theoretical grounding at all. I recommend Snooks's book for economic historians and their fellow travelers, but an important lesson of this book is that economists and economic historians should either stay away from theories in fields significantly removed from their own or take the time and effort required to make sure they understand these theories correctly.

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