



Yankee India

Susan S. Bean

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Built around mariners' journals of their pioneering voyages, "Yankee India" charts the early development of commercial and cultural relations between the United States and India in the Age of Sail. The end of colonial rule in 1783 had given American merchants and ship owners the freedom to trade in Asia. Voyages from ports along the eastern seaboard were the first American links to the distant and exotic culture of India. Mariners' journals and letters speak of encounters with vastly different ways of life that sometimes challenged and sometimes reinforced ideas about decorum, religion, and morality and that influenced attitudes toward imperialism, legitimate rule, and free trade. Material embodiments of India at the time - prints, paintings, and figurines depicting Indian scenes and people; "hubble-bubbles", "idols", fans and other souvenirs; as well as goods like bandannas, palampores (bed covers), and shawls - augment and illustrate the story. Previously untapped archives and collections of the Peabody Essex Museum, whose founders were captains and supercargoes in the Asia trade, provide the principal resources. These first encounters between the United States and India in the Age of Sail laid the foundation for American views of India and contributed to the development of American and Indian national and cultural sensibilities. "Yankee India" brings this important but little known episode to a wide range of readers interested in the histories of the United States and India, and in the impacts of intercultural encounters.

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