

## Querying the Origins of Orientalism: Recent Approaches to the History of Representations

*Em busca das origens do Orientalismo: novas perspectivas na história das representações*

*En quête des origines de l'orientalisme: nouvelles approches en histoire des représentations*

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## QUERYING THE ORIGINS OF ORIENTALISM: RECENT APPROACHES TO THE HISTORY OF REPRESENTATIONS

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This review article draws attention to two recent publications with a potential to revive the debate around the origins of Orientalism, Ângela Xavier and Ines Zupanov's *Catholic Orientalism* (2015) and Sanjay Subrahmanyam's *Europe's India* (2017). Both books set out to respond to Said from a distance, by exploring stories of pre-British imperial knowledge making in Asia. Whilst the focus in *Catholic Orientalism* is on Portuguese (and some Italian, Spanish and French) materials, *Europe's India* casts its net more widely also to include British writings. Both books attempt to create some clarity in a field particularly fraught with confusion, especially when it comes to representations of India's religions. The most promising aspects to take note of are the appearance of new primary materials especially in Portugal, and the increasing intertwinement of European biographies with Asian societal and cultural processes.

**Keywords:** cultural history, early modernity, travel literature, orientalism, India.

*Resumo (PT) no final do artigo. Résumé (FR) en fin d'article.*

Four decades into the publication of *Orientalism*, discussions about the pertinence of Edward Said's arguments have become somewhat predictable: against those who point, sometimes disingenuously, to the shortcomings of the theory, its apologists often hold up the more abstract principles that allowed Orientalism to flourish historically in the first place. All knowledge, we are reminded quite rightly, is inherently political. But then again, once a theory becomes dogmatic, it easily loses its power to drive epistemic renewal. Some may be tempted, in such a context, to turn to non-representational approaches, studying artefacts from the past by asking questions about embodiment, performativity, print culture, and other aspects related to social and economic praxis. Is the Orientalism debate, then, doomed to expire as new subfields gain traction and move towards ignoring the politics of representation altogether?

The answer is no, it would be premature to declare the death of the debate on European constructions of Asia in the context of imperial expansion. There is still much to be said about how Europeans depicted

and imagined distant cultures in the early modern period, especially if new materials are studied and theories allowed to evolve. Two recent books carry the potential to enliven the debate about early Orientalist representations in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Both aim to throw new light on the early modern depths of a phenomenon seen by Said and most of his followers as largely bound up with modern British and French imperialism. Both promise redemption from simplifications and a corrective to the persistent blind spot in Anglophone academia when it comes to the cultural and scientific agency of the Catholic South. And whilst both suggest – to varying extents – that it may be time for syntheses, their main assets are fine analytical explorations of underappreciated materials, with a strong potential to inspire further incursions into the field.

## 1. Exploring Catholic Orientalism

*Catholic Orientalism*, a pathbreaking monograph co-authored by the Croatian-French Indianist and historian of religion Ines Zupanov and the Portuguese historian Ângela Barreto Xavier, was published by Oxford University Press in New Delhi, in 2015. It has attracted some attention but, perhaps precisely because of the disciplinary instincts it seeks to deconstruct, not quite generated the flurry of scholarly responses that one might have expected. A majority of readers seem to have come at the book from the Iberian angle, rather than the British or the Indian, where there is the greatest potential for debate. One can only hope that the reception of the book in years to come will widen, and that the more recent publication of Sanjay Subrahmanyam's *Europe's India* (2017) will further invigorate the debate.

The aim of *Catholic Orientalism* is “to follow the path of knowledge production about and in India in the context of [the] decidedly Catholic empire [of the Portuguese] and to (re)draw the map of Catholic knowledge – its production sites and the way it operated in South Asia and on a global scale in the early modern period” (p. xxi). Catholic Orientalism is here defined as a “set of knowledge practices geared to perpetuate political and cultural fantasies of the early modern Catholic protagonists and their communities” (*idem*). In significant measure, Xavier's and Zupanov's is an enterprise of mapping, and indeed of putting on the international academic map, the vast body of Orientalist knowledge produced in the ambit of Catholic expansion in Asia.

*Catholic Orientalism's* most immediately visible merit is to offer a gateway into a vast and often poorly explored world where scholars coming

from Iberian and non-Iberian backgrounds will find plenty of materials and topics to work on. In the first chapter, the authors present an important idea that, whilst not being new, deserves all the attention it can get: it is the notion that “an effort at classicizing Portugal opened the way for the subsequent move to ‘orientalize’ India” (p. xxxv). Barreto Xavier and Zupanov rightly place emphasis on two sixteenth-century authors who saw the Orient through a classicist lens: João de Castro (viceroi, mathematician, cartographer, and a connoisseur of Indian art and architecture) and João de Barros (court humanist, chronicler and armchair geographer).<sup>1</sup> Barros in particular is a figure still awaiting an in-depth study that does full justice to the complexity and global ambition of his oeuvre.<sup>2</sup>

The second chapter of *Catholic Orientalism* is clearly closer to the authors’ core interests, exploring the “collection and production of useful knowledge by the Portuguese for the governance of local societies at the micro level – the level of the Indian village” (p. 46). An interesting point brought up by Barreto Xavier and Zupanov in this regard is that some administrative-epistemic practices may have evolved in India around the same time as in the metropolis. In fact, it would make sense to assume that some sort of *innovation* must have occurred when, for example, Hindu villages and temples were inventorized (with the help of local informants) to help build a new Christian territory around the city of Goa: quite simply, because no Hindu villages, temples and informants existed in Portugal itself. We are witnesses here to fascinating processes of translation and formalization at a distance from the empire’s presumable centre (pp. 63-67). The most troubling questions remain unanswered so far, but have the potential to generate important debates: to what extent did comparable practices occur in earlier periods? What did imperial administrators from Vijayanagar, the Bahmani polities, or Bijapur do with the Goan village lands before the Portuguese arrived? Where should we draw the border between pre-colonial, early colonial, and high colonial “information orders” (p. 72), and on what grounds precisely?

Barreto Xavier and Zupanov speak of “bioprospecting” in their third chapter. Some hyperbole apart (p. 82), the pioneering role of botanist Garcia da Orta is rightly emphasized. A less widely known case is that of the Discalced Carmelite Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomaeo, who collected information on plants in eighteenth-century Malabar. In his surviving

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1 See Moreira (1995) and Biedermann (2017).

2 The most relevant bibliography is listed in Biedermann (2003).

archive, today in Rome, scraps of paper filled with notes written in Italian, Portuguese, French, German, Tamil, Malayalam, Sanskrit, and Syriac abound. Jesuits, too, realized the value of medicinal knowledge for their missionary work, as we know especially from Zupanov's earlier work. The knowledge thus accumulated was immense, and the reader will inevitably experience a sense of indignation when reminded of how the extraordinary achievements of men like Orta ended up in the hands of northern Europeans such as Carolus Clusius, who appropriated them and built their own fame through something we, today, would describe as plagiarism. A similar story is that of the Discalced friar Matteo di San Giuseppe, who is known to have inspired Hendrik Adriaan van Rheede's famous *Hortus Indicus Malabaricus*. And the erasure of the Catholic heritage continues, as Xavier and Zupanov rightly note (p. 109): in his not very distant effort to restore the memory of Malayali physicians and Ezhava herbalists who helped Van Rheede, Richard Grove (1998) still ignored the Catholic contribution.

The story subsequently explored, of how the Jesuits "separate[d] religion from civility" (p. 119), introducing a "fissure" between "religious beliefs" and "social ethics" (p. 122) and relying, in this endeavour, on Brahmanical knowledge acquired in South India, is of the greatest relevance to intellectual historians in general. It can be argued that the Jesuits "conceptualized religion in plural" (p. 119), going against the structures imposed by traditional Western taxonomies of religion, and applying the notion of "sect" to diversify experiences (p. 117). This is not, of course, to distract us from the fact that descriptions of temples, for example, were often produced as a prelude to their destruction – a topic duly acknowledged by Xavier and Zupanov. It simply reminds us of how complicated things in science history can become with regard to the problem of religion.

The challenge, here, relates to a complicated spectrum of religions and perceptions. In India, we are reminded, "a Brahman was perceived both as an appalling obstacle when inspired by demonic forces, and potentially an attractive agent of conversion to Christianity" (p. 130). The horror experienced by observers of idolatrous rituals in dismal, dark spaces "smelling of rancid butter" (p. 131) was often counterbalanced by a certain admiration, especially for ascetic Brahmans – one is here reminded of Alan Strathern's work (2004) on the communications between Franciscans of the *Piedosos* branch and Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka. Xavier and Zupanov delve deep into the world of books circulating between Brahmans and Catholic missionaries. The focus of Catholic animosity, they argue, fell increasingly on the practice of "idolatry". We know from the work of Sabine MacCormack (2006) and Carina L. Johnson (2006) on the New World that, whilst early

observers saw idolatry simply as a sign of a very old substratum, a *prisca theologia*, the resilience of such practices generated increasing frustration among missionaries by the seventeenth century. Out of this frustration, further fed by Protestant challenges over the survival of idolatry in allegedly Catholic lands, came some of the most interesting textual engagements with religion in India. Perhaps most importantly in this context, Xavier and Zupanov underscore again the distinction, born out of the *accommodatio* championed in India by Roberto de Nobili, between religion and “civility”:

religion in its modern version of the term also came from the Orient. When Nobili and other Jesuits who practiced accommodation strategically separated “civility” from all other “superstitious” and “sectarian” customs, rites, and opinions, on the basis of what they defined as Brahmanical normative texts rather than ethnographic observation, “religion” had to be reinvented in universal terms in order to be reattached to Indian civility... religion became the matter of the heart (p. 157).

Only in a footnote do the authors refer to the way some scholars have built careers on deconstructing British “inventions” of Hinduism whilst ignoring consistently almost everything that came before. As Zupanov points out in the main text, “the scholarly methodology of the Catholic missionaries resembled that of the pioneering British Orientalists in Calcutta in [almost] everything” – and yet, Sir William Jones rejected anything written on religion and literature in India “prior to the first translations by his Orientalist clique in Calcutta” (p. 156). Again, the parallels are profound between the effacement of pre-British achievements in a now distant past, and the amnesia of Anglophone academics in recent decades.

Barreto Xavier and Zupanov throw light on entire bodies of material rarely used by historians: Franciscan texts begging for comparative and connective approaches drawing the Asian production closer to that of the Americas;<sup>3</sup> linguistic works on at least a dozen Asian languages; and the activities of “Orientalists from Within”, namely Brahmans and *Charodos* in Goa. These were, as Barreto Xavier and Zupanov put it, “argumentative” Indians, “colonized but well versed in the language of the colonizer, [...] imaginative writers who desired to intervene and to shape the empire according to their own interests” (p. 246). Their historical narratives were “as much part of Indian history as they are of the world or global history” (p. 247) and resonate well with the strategies described by historians including

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<sup>3</sup> Note the recent special issue on Franciscan textual production coordinated by Federico Palomo (2016).

Sumit Guha (2004), Prachi Deshpande (2007) and Kumkum Chatterjee (2009) for other parts of India.

Why, then, did “Catholic Orientalism” decline and disappear from the European intellectual stage? Money was certainly an issue, as the British started moving into the Indian manuscript market prepared to spend much more than other Europeans before them (p. 314). Increasingly, Portuguese and French efforts looked as disjointed on the cultural front as on the political and commercial fronts. Perhaps most decisively, “with the establishment of the printing presses in Calcutta and the mission press in Serampore, books about Indian languages and those translated from Indian languages to English grew exponentially” (p. 316). Serampore alone churned out over 200,000 books in 40 languages from 1801 to 1832. As Barreto Xavier and Zupanov hint in the conclusion of their book, the story of the final demise of Catholic Orientalism deserves a study in its own right.

But so does the story of its rise, one feels an urge to add. For all its magnificent archival and interpretive work, *Catholic Orientalism* leaves the reader somewhat uncertain about how this vast machinery of knowledge production got rolling in the first place. Repeatedly, Barreto Xavier and Zupanov hint that they are critical of the Saidian terms of analysis, and do not recognize the mechanisms described in *Orientalism* as characteristic of the Portuguese universe. Yet, just because “there was rather a diversity of perspectives among the Portuguese Orientalist writers”, do the authors wish to advocate that “a Saidian type of Orientalist attitude” (p. 201) did not exist at all? At times, this does indeed seem to be the suggestion. According to the authors, the Saidian (and Foucaultian) template “is not sufficient to account for layers of practices, projects, imagination, and the dynamics of knowing that we see as an integral part of Catholic Orientalism” (p. xxv). This dismissal is, as far as I can discern, grounded here in a distinction between situations of “interdependence of knowledge and political demands”, on the one hand, and situations revealing “the agency of the actors pursuing their own interests and personal and collective desires”, on the other (*ibid.*). In another passage a contrast is drawn between a reality where “the producers of knowledge about Asia in the early modern Catholic world were socially, culturally, and institutionally heterogeneous”, and a more forcefully Saidian “regime of truth” (p. 18). The point being, one may assume, that knowledge produced by individuals with fluctuating personal interests and no obvious imperialist agenda is inherently too subtle to carry its own Orientalist politics in the Saidian sense. One perceives a discrete move away from a focus on Said-inspired representational history to a more complex exploration of the social praxis of textual production

– but without much of an explanation of the theoretical and practical implications, the shift remains somewhat unclear.

Virtually everything humans do is representational *and* political in one way or another – and indeed both Xavier and Zupanov have always shown awareness of this problem in their scholarship. Perhaps, then, something has been lost in translation, as the authors’ attempts to voice a subtle, informed critique of the Saidian template give rise to assertions that could be misread as somehow depoliticizing the matter through a social and institutional contextualization that simply emphasizes the disjointed nature of Portuguese imperialism: “as opposed to later varieties, Catholic Orientalism is conditioned by the fragmentary nature of institutions, itineraries, and archives within which it was shaped and made operational” (p. xxix); or “to political fragmentation referred to earlier, we have to add the diversity of the producers of Catholic Orientalism and the fluidity of their geographical and cultural itineraries and identities” (p. xxxi).

One struggles not to see a rather solid and fearsome institutional architecture when it comes to the global Catholic Church, regardless of its many complexities, internal tensions, and local appropriations. As for the “fluidity of identities”, or indeed the multiplicity of agents pulling in different directions, it certainly provides much-needed nuance and constitutes a key insight for which Barreto Xavier and Zupanov deserve the highest praise. But how, *exactly*, can it drain textual production of its political charge in the Saidian or indeed Foucaultian sense? The “circulation” (p. xxvi) of knowledge across “state, language, religious, and institutional borders” (p. xxxi) does little to defuse the impression that knowledge still moved up and down some rather steep hierarchical ladders along the way. Again, the lack of clarity may well be down to a lack of editorial intervention on the part of the press, rather than a lack of awareness on the part of the authors. And such criticisms, it should be underlined, do little to diminish the immense value of *Catholic Orientalism*. In fact, they show rather clearly how large parts of the debate are still in their infancy, very much in spite of some apparent saturation when it comes to questions of “Othering” for later periods.

## 2. The discreet charm of *Europe’s India*

The same can be said of Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s recent book, *Europe’s India: Worlds, People, Empires 1500-1800*. This erudite and wide-ranging account of how Europeans came to grips with the cultural complexity of “India” may have been packaged as a work of synthesis, but it is in fact a

remarkably personal and, in many ways, exploratory work. To be sure, it can be read as an attempt to follow up on earlier efforts, by Bernard Cohn about *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (1996) and Ronald Inden on *Imagining India* (1990), to apply or test Said's ideas to European writings on India. It also embraces, whilst taking some critical distance from Foucault, the overarching Saidian principle that it remains reasonable to "ask how the concrete and institutional conditions within which certain forms of knowledge were produced affected both the form and the content of the knowledge itself" (p. xiii). Yet it is, at the same time, a book that could hardly have been imagined by the cultural champions of the 1970s (and even 1990s) in this form. We are now well into the third decade following on the publication of Subrahmanyam's widely quoted article (1997) on the "Connected Histories" of early modern Eurasia, and the field has, effectively, changed in a way that makes the dichotomies cultivated in the days of Said feel rather awkwardly old-fashioned. Global biographies, cross-cultural connections, and *regards croisés* are now the norm, not the exception.

Subrahmanyam is adamant to distance himself, as he has over the years, from the more straightforward narratives of the European-Indian encounter: on the one hand, the classic tale of ever-increasing improvement in understanding (either by accumulation, or by a shift from religiously informed to more secular forms of knowing – an idea thoroughly undermined already by Xavier and Zupanov's *Catholic Orientalism*); on the other, the notion of inherent, immutable incommensurability (against which Subrahmanyam has written repeatedly since the early 2000s, most recently in *Courtly Encounters*, 2012). If anything characterizes the period here covered, it is the great variety and dynamism of power relations under the general umbrella of "contained conflict" – the complications of an age that saw commerce, diplomacy, warfare, religious mission and extensive travels combined in ever-changing proportions. Because of the relative fragility of Europeans in most parts of Asia (one exception being of course the village world of Goa studied by Xavier and Zupanov), the problem of alterity was always closely bound up with the fleeting challenges of self-representation (p. 7).

As usual in Subrahmanyam's writings, *Europe's India* is full of characters crossing borders, styling themselves (and indeed their companies and nations) as respectable figures in ways that make the modern reader smile. It is thus not always easy not to be distracted as one enjoys chapter after chapter of often lengthy and highly detailed engagements with particular travellers or authors. One of the more compact and synthetic chapters is the first, dedicated to the "Indo-Portuguese Moment" (albeit here, as in Xavier and Zupanov, the attempt to tell the story against its chronological

grain may prove counter-productive with uninitiated readers). An overview on the representation of “caste” (*casta*) is particularly useful. A number of important sixteenth-century Portuguese authors, without whom the stories of subsequent centuries are difficult to grasp in their full complexity, are here presented in a very readable way, offering an introduction altogether more accessible than in *Catholic Orientalism*. The bulk of *Europe’s India*, though, deals with actors other than the Portuguese – most notably with French, Dutch and British authors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

As Xavier and Zupanov, Subrahmanyam is particularly interested in the question of religion. This is a difficult matter not just on grounds of the complexities one can expect from three centuries of interactions and misunderstandings. It is also a matter fraught by the purportedly critical, yet profoundly disingenuous kind of deconstructionism championed since the 1990s by Talal Asad: the notion that, before we can even try to talk about religion and the secular, we need constantly to acknowledge that somehow the very concepts are inoperative because they are tied up with the (fundamentally unbearable, for some) Enlightenment project. Subrahmanyam suggests, like Xavier and Zupanov, that the discussion would benefit from serious historicization. He then explores with considerable detention the construction of Indian religion in the works of Bernard Picart and two of his more obscure predecessors, Abraham Rogerius and the Seigneur de La Créquinière. The challenge in dealing with such materials is that they are immensely complex. To readers today, as to readers in the past, their observations easily induce a “vertiginous confusion” (p. 123) – and we are still far from getting things straight, perhaps because it simply cannot be done.

One move attempted here by Subrahmanyam takes its inspiration from the work of Partha Mitter (1977) and, more recently, Paola von Wyss-Giacosa (2006): it is to look into the ways Indian religion was represented (and/or constructed, of course), sometimes with “emic” ambitions, through images. This is most welcome, and makes for very stimulating reading and viewing, although the original problem remains: “too much [...] material on India and its ‘Gentiles’ had accumulated in the years between 1500 and 1700” (p. 138). Whilst Subrahmanyam’s proposal to throw some Islamic and Zoroastrian representations of India into the mix certainly produces excitement, one also begins to wonder whether any single historian can produce a synthesis of all this by now. Readers of *Europe’s India* may feel relief as the author moves on to less bewildering grounds in chapter 3, “Of Coproduction”, which provides the most enjoyable passages of the book. It centres on James Fraser, a quarrelsome Scot with a “reputation of being uncommonly skilful in the languages and learning of the East”

– or, as Subrahmanyam puts it, an “unruly orientalist” (p. 145). There is something for everyone in this chapter: thoughts about the chronology of English and Scottish involvement in India; matters of marriage, networks, and career building; details of the functioning of the factory at Surat; stories of British adaptations to life in that city in the 1720s-50s, a time of considerable political turbulence in North India and across the Indian Ocean; and, above all, a colourful demonstration of the social and epistemic intertwinements between London, the local milieu of Surat, and the wider Indian political field. It is in this context that Subrahmanyam’s take on the British collecting of Indian manuscripts proves particularly relevant, including the highlighting of the voluminous nature of Fraser’s own catalogue from 1742, now an important part of the Bodleian Library’s Asian funds. The narrative culminates in the assertion that Fraser, commenting at one point on the shortcomings of Jagannathdas Laldas Parekh, a *baniyā* employed as a broker by the EIC, took on “the posture and attitudes of a well-born Surati Muslim himself” (p. 184) – a crowning moment in one of those extraordinary life stories that the historiography of the past three decades has made fully retrievable at last.

To get a grasp of what followed (evitably or inevitably in India, the question will always remain), that is, how the late eighteenth century saw a “transition to colonial knowledge” (p. 211), Subrahmanyam resorts once more to biography. Four main characters are brought to life in the final chapter: firstly, Dom António José de Noronha, a Goan-born military and ecclesiastic leader and possible graphomaniac, who transitioned into service to the French crown in the 1740s and then again to the Portuguese crown as the conflict with the Marathas unfolded north of Goa. Noronha’s writings on India, including matters of religion, combine “a sense of *realpolitik*” with “a set of strongly articulated prejudices” (p. 227) regarding a whole spectrum of aspects of Indian society and culture, ranging from military incompetence to general moral degeneracy. Secondly, we spend time in the company of Charles de Bussy, the man who many believed might have conquered India for the French. As someone involved in the complicated wars around Hyderabad in the 1740s, Bussy can be forgiven for feeling at times the need to “pull out of this labyrinth” (quote p. 229) – but also for playing a game infinitely more complex than that of a mere French military leader taking orders from Pondicherry. It is rather striking, then, how unobtrusive Bussy’s views on Indian culture and society were, compared to the elegance and nuance of earlier French writings on India, for example those of Bernier. It is in this context that the epithet “Asiatic” gained traction as a derogatory term referring specifically to India.

Thirdly, we meet Colonel Antoine-Louis-Henri Polier, the Franco-Swiss co-producer of the Persian letter book *I'jāz-a-Arsalāni* today at the BnF in Paris. In Polier's family, military and savant tendencies came combined, but the man himself went a step further by "going native" (p. 249) as a mercenary involved with the warlord Najaf Khan at Awadh, and then serving at the Mughal court from the 1770s. Eventually, Polier, perhaps encouraged by developments in Calcutta at the time, became an accomplished linguist with a keen interest in Indian manuscripts. But again, in this career path the scholarly is not easily untangled from the military. For one thing, Polier's linguistic skills – apart from his Hebrew and some Arabic brought from an erudite Protestant family background – make most sense as part of his involvement with the Perso-Islamic culture of Iranians, Afghans, and converted Indians including Kayasthas, Khatris and others. Finally, Subrahmanyam explores the life of Alexander Walker, another Scot who, along a somewhat tortuous career path, put together yet another, very large collection of Indian papers.

What Subrahmanyam brings out of all this is the "development of a paradox" (p. 284): in a time of highly contested power relations in India, "Europeans" (one may of course by this point disagree with such a designation) were very much caught up in conflicts that constrained their ability to engage in fully-fledged scholarly projects to understand India; once the English conquest was firmly on its way, a new form of "colonial civility" could develop and "even the luxury of self-doubt" became possible in an increasingly tame environment (p. 284) – hence the fact that the colonial archive of the nineteenth century is "quantitatively richer" but also "qualitatively simpler" (p. 284) – an assertion very much in line with what Xavier and Zupanov have to say about their material. Appropriately and unsurprisingly, *Europe's India* ends with an essay that, "By Way of Conclusion", offers further questions rather than definitive answers. It also gestures to what some readers will have felt increasingly to be the other story to be told: that of "*India's Europe*" (p. 286). One is inevitably left with a feeling that this ought to be the theme of another book, extending what is, here, an inspiring panorama but also one painted in wider strokes of the brush than the rest of the volume.

### 3. Conclusions

Clearly, we are still at some distance from gaining a good enough overview of the first three centuries of India's and Europe's relationship of mutually cultivated "fear and love" (Chatterjee 1998). For the time being,

the one thing that can be said with any amount of certainty is that simplistic narratives – both those glorifying and those demonising the role of Europeans in the knowing and making of India – are unhelpful. But such a conclusion, important though as it is in itself, would also be rather meagre in the face of the richness of *Catholic Orientalism* and *Europe's India*. So, what else can we take away from these two ambitious explorations? One comment I feel compelled to make here is that, if three of the best-prepared historians of our day have not been able to untangle the complicated stories of Europe's engagement with Indian religion, then resisting the sweeping simplifications of so-called theorists may in the future come down to a more resolutely collective effort of historicizing things, and digging even deeper into the often underexplored materials of the early modern period. One might envisage multiple smaller projects to unsettle the ideologically driven (or, really, just plainly opportunistic) confabulations produced by academics fashioning themselves as critics of Empire and Enlightenment, and bring the complexities of European-Indian historical relations fully into the debate about "Othering" and European hegemony.

Another point to take away is that, whilst the situation is almost impossibly complex on the front of knowledge produced to tackle India's religious universe, there is life beyond that theme. Both *Catholic Orientalism* and *Europe's India* offer fascinating explorations into the circumstances of knowledge making concerning aspects other than religion. It makes sense to take things from here by engaging more vigorously than so far in the study of European knowledge on Indian political power, for example, without obsessing over the supernatural. I am here thinking, mainly, of the way Europeans and Indians interacted in the making, understanding and representing of spatial structures and forms – that is, the making of the early modern state and how it involved cross-cultural observation. Diplomacy springs to mind as an area only sparingly explored so far, holding much promise when it comes to processes of mutual cognition and representation – and of course the recent rise of "New Diplomatic History" will inevitably generate a wider interest in the epistemic processes that occurred in contexts of formalized, cross-cultural encounters and negotiations.

Whilst we have some understanding of the construction of European images of particular Indian rulers, we know considerably less about the way Europeans perceived India's complex political space and political cultures, and how the mapping of the subcontinent may have been a joint cultural enterprise of different people talking to each other about geography, political rule, justice, natural resources, borders, and the emerging notion of territory. Clearly, the image of Mughal rulers played an important role in

Europe in connection with the creation of absolutist monarchies and their critique. But what about all the other rulers in the region? And what about European appreciations of the spatial configurations of Asian empires in general, the ways political powers engaged with economy and commerce, the management of cultural diversity in the “Orient”, the patronage of the arts, the links between authority, language and writing? We still know relatively little about how all these aspects of Asian political cultures exerted their influence in Europe (and in its American colonies) before 1800, and what exactly went the other way.

Religion is important of course, but the amount of attention it has received among South Asianists working on almost any period of history is at times uncanny. It will certainly be worth our while to develop some of the other aspects raised in the two fine books here discussed. It will also be important to take up further challenges beyond their remit. Cartography, metageography and architecture are three important areas almost entirely absent from Xavier’s, Zupanov’s and Subrahmanyam’s works, and there is clearly much potential in taking their study ahead. Post-representational and biographical approaches may, in this context, enrich the panorama – one is reminded here of the way art historians in particular have engaged in the study of technique when talking about European-Asian artistic exchanges, and how economic historians have looked at technology to understand the making of global trade. Here is something botanical historians may wish to take inspiration from as well as historians interested in the representation of military, administrative, and other areas of culture with a strong practical dimension. The ways in which information on all areas of Indian life was generated, transmitted and reworked, sometimes conditioned by the social praxis of the time, by economic and other power relations, or by the conventions of diplomacy and textual production, are all promising, emerging topics of enquiry – especially if taken in conjunction with, rather than against, four decades of a lively historiography of representations inspired by the simple recognition that power and knowledge are always intertwined. *Catholic Orientalism* and *Europe’s India* are, as it stands, two significant milestones on a journey that is far from over.

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### EM BUSCA DAS ORIGENS DO ORIENTALISMO: NOVAS PERSPECTIVAS NA HISTÓRIA DAS REPRESENTAÇÕES

Este artigo-recensão chama a atenção para duas publicações recentes com potencial para reavivar o debate em torno das origens do Orientalismo: *Catholic Orientalism*, por Ângela Xavier e Ines Zupanov (2015) e *Europe's India*, por Sanjay Subrahmanyam (2017). Ambos os livros respondem a Said à distância, explorando histórias de conhecimento imperial pré-britânico na Ásia. Enquanto o foco em *Catholic Orientalism* incide sobre materiais portugueses (e alguns italianos, espanhóis e franceses), *India's Europe* abarca um panorama mais amplo para incluir escritos britânicos. Ambos os livros tentam criar clareza num campo particularmente complexo, especialmente quando se trata de entender as representações das religiões da Índia. Os aspectos mais promissores a ter em conta são o aparecimento de novos materiais primários, especialmente em

Portugal, e o crescente entrelaçamento de biografias europeias com processos sociais e culturais asiáticos.

**Palavras-chave:** história cultural, época moderna, literatura de viagens, orientalismo, Índia.



### EN QUÊTE DES ORIGINES DE L'ORIENTALISME: NOUVELLES APPROCHES EN HISTOIRE DES REPRÉSENTATIONS

Cet article discute l'apport de deux publications récentes susceptibles de relancer le débat sur les origines de l'orientalisme : *Catholic Orientalism*, par Ângela Xavier et Ines Zupanov (2015), et *Europe's India*, par Sanjay Subrahmanyam (2017). Les deux livres ont pour objectif de répondre à Saïd à distance, en explorant l'histoire de la connaissance impériale pré-britannique en Asie. Tandis que *Catholic Orientalism* met l'accent sur les documents en portugais (et en italien, en espagnol et en français), *Europe's India* propose une vision plus large en incluant des écrits britanniques. Les deux livres tentent de clarifier un domaine particulièrement complexe, notamment en ce qui concerne l'analyse des représentations des religions indiennes. Les aspects les plus prometteurs à prendre en compte sont l'apparition de nouveaux matériaux de base, en particulier au Portugal, et l'interdépendance croissante des biographies européennes avec les processus sociaux et culturels asiatiques.

**Mots-clés:** histoire culturelle, époque moderne, littérature de voyages, orientalisme, Inde.