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Knowledge*

Annie Rachel George and Arnapurna Rath

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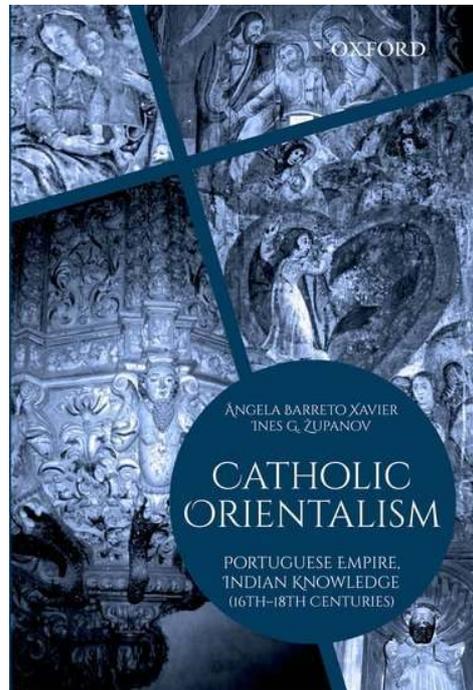
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## REFERENCES

Xavier, Ângela Barreto and Ines G. Županov. 2015. *Catholic Orientalism: Portuguese Empire, Indian Knowledge*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 416 pages.

- 1 *Catholic Orientalism: Portuguese Empire, Indian Knowledge* by Ângela Barreto Xavier and Ines G. Županov provides fresh insight into the study of Orientalism. The focus of the book is on one of the earliest traditions of Orientalist knowledge production—Catholic Orientalism. The authors define Catholic Orientalism as “a set of knowledge practices geared to perpetuate political and cultural fantasies of the early modern Catholic protagonists and their communities ...” (Xavier and Županov 2015:xxi). This book is a historical study of the “Orientalist” works produced by Catholic agents of the Portuguese empire. In order to bring out the influence of knowledge production by the “Catholic” empire, Xavier and Županov attempt to retrace the trajectory of Catholic knowledge as it came into contact with the



colonies and developed into a massive volume of literary and cultural records. These documents are spread across various archives like the Biblioteca Nacional and the Biblioteca Publica in Lisbon, the Archivio della Congregazione di Propaganda Fide in Rome, and the Historical Archives of Goa in Panjim, among others in various European and Indian cities. The historical period addressed by the book primarily extends from the fifteenth century to the nineteenth century. The “knowledge practices” examined by the authors throughout the volume are illustrated through works on natural history and medical texts (pp. 77–115), administrative documents such as land records, inventories of temple lands and fortresses, and collections<sup>1</sup> such as the *Livros das Comunidades* (pp. 46–77), missionary texts, and translations of mythologies (pp. 115–58, pp. 202–45).

- 2 The purpose of the book, as laid out in the Prologue, is to “follow the path of knowledge production about and in India ... and to (re)draw the map of Catholic knowledge” (xxi). It is a journey through several geographical and cultural settings under the Portuguese empire, in order to unravel the layers of practices that constitute Catholic Orientalism. The book takes its readers on a quest that traverses the territories of Rome, Portugal, and France among other European regions and the colonies of Portugal in South Asia, specifically the regions of Goa, Diu, Bassein, and other Portuguese provinces in India.
- 3 The discourse on Orientalism concerns itself with the imagination and “construction” of the “Orient” by the West. Early travel writers such as Marco Polo (c. 1254–c. 1324) wrote about the exotic lands of the Orient in their travelogues. These texts portray the Orient from a Eurocentric perspective and are often studied as skewed portrayals of Eastern realities, influenced by European political interests. Orientalist imaginations about India and other Asian regions have received much attention through years of scholarship, especially so after the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). Xavier and Županov add to this discourse by arguing that Catholic Orientalism has been consistently sidelined in the study of Orientalism. The authors bring to light a vast corpus of early orientalist work by Portuguese Catholic agents in an attempt to reinstate Catholic Orientalism in the

discussion on Orientalism. According to the authors, the “fleeting and work-in-progress nature” (Xavier and Županov 2015:319) of Catholic Orientalist knowledge, lack of printed documents and stable information channels, the abrupt end of the Portuguese empire in South Asia (p. 288, p. 319) and the destruction of archives by natural calamities (p. 339) are some of the reasons for the neglect of the Catholic knowledge practices discussed in this work. The book attempts to bring Catholic knowledge practices into the discussion on Orientalism and emphasize its role in the formation of all later “Orientalisms.” The authors endeavor to prove that these practices of constructing India for the European imagination “fed into” all future practices of Orientalism, including British efforts to produce knowledge about India (p. 289).

- 4 The book is divided into three sections: “Imperial Itineraries,” “Catholic Meridian” and “Contested Knowledge.” “Imperial Itineraries” introduces the beginning of the Portuguese empire in India. Portuguese attempts to create their own imperial identity and establish their position in the hierarchy of empires take place simultaneously with their ventures into the Indian Ocean. The creation of “mental maps” about India in the imagination of Europeans was shaped by the literature and arts emerging out of imperial ventures in India. The first chapter introduces the earliest Portuguese orientalist like Joao de Barros (1496–1570) and Garcia de Orta (1501–1578). Barros’ *Asia* is introduced as “the first truly orientalist work” (p. 20). He was a grammarian, historian and moralist and an important official in the House of India (p. 18), which was the institution that controlled maritime commerce. Barros’ *Asia* was a “narrative of Portuguese overseas experiences” (p. 21), written on the basis of manuscripts Barros accessed in the House of India.
- 5 The second chapter “Empire and the Village” attempts to describe the ways in which “raw” information was gathered at the village level, in order to be used as “useful knowledge” for the empire. This information which included land records, lists of temples and their assets, and details of traditional village administration in Portuguese territories like Goa travelled from the colony (periphery) to the seat of power (center) and was processed and sent back to the colony as Portuguese “knowledge.” The transactions that took place among the natives and Portuguese agents in these processes are important in the study of the contribution of local Indians to the production of “Portuguese” knowledge. These agents included administrative officials, missionaries, individual travelers and adventurers. Xavier and Županov bring to light the relationship between the natives and these agents in descriptions of village life as reflected in Portuguese records. The Portuguese created “registers” on village administration and recorded minutes of meetings and conversations between villagers, enabling readers to get a glimpse of village life during Portuguese rule. According to Xavier and Županov, there are up to a hundred registers for a single village between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, affording a rare insight into the development of the relationship between the villagers and their colonizers (p. 57, p. 58).
- 6 In the second half of the sixteenth century, missionaries entered the field as producers of knowledge about the East. The *Estado da India* justified its rule partly through the argument of religious superiority and conversion. For missionaries, the need to understand indigenous knowledge and interpret it for a European audience was necessary to fulfill their religious calling. Translation of indigenous religious texts was necessary to understand indigenous religions and refute their tenets so that Christianity could be firmly established. These missionary endeavors led to systematic studies of

Indian languages and religions. The result of this was a massive corpus of grammars, dictionaries, translated texts and original compositions in native languages along with administrative documentation of Church activities. Missionaries like Roberto Nobili conducted “experiments” in creative forms of Christianity in order to engage with the intellectual tradition of the Brahmins. Rather than preach Christianity as it was practiced in Europe, Nobili attempted to insert Christianity into the framework of Indian religious thought. The translation of the Christian message into local poetic forms was one of the ways in which missionaries attempted to reinvent Christianity. In the process, the missionaries themselves were culturally translated as is illustrated by the life of Roberto de Nobili. He was well-known for his physical transformation into an Indian monk. He dressed like the locals and ate the food eaten by high-caste Brahmins of the region, transforming himself in the process of translating Christianity for the locals. Županov, in a previous work titled *Disputed Missions: Jesuit Experiments and Brahmanical Knowledge in Seventeenth-Century India* (1999) analyses the life and epistolary correspondence of Nobili as a significant voice located on the borders between the “Orient” and the “Occident.” Nobili separated Indian “civility” from “religion” and grafted Christian meaning onto indigenous semiotic forms.

- 7 Xavier and Županov argue that the systematic foundation of religious and linguistic works laid out by the Catholic missionary enterprise led to the development of the comparative study of religions and linguistics under the British in later years. British scholars accessed Jesuit writings through intermediaries like Abbé Dubois and A. Muttusami Pillai<sup>2</sup> and referred to these writings while composing their own scholarly works about India (Xavier and Županov 2015:320, 321).
- 8 In the chapter “Portuguese Linguistic Empire: Translation and Conversion” in the section titled “Catholic Meridian,” the relationship between linguistic mastery, translation and religious conversion is taken up for discussion. The Portuguese empire had aspirations to establish the Portuguese language in the colonies along with Christianity. For this, it was necessary to establish the superiority of Portuguese as a language in relation to native languages. Portuguese was “classicized” by establishing its familial relationship to Latin, the language of the Church. By the same logic, native languages were depicted as inferior because they were unrelated to Latin. However, missionaries recognized the absolute necessity of learning the local idiom for proselytizing. Portuguese, therefore, never really replaced regional languages completely in the colonies, although the Portuguese administration undertook stringent measures to establish Portuguese as the language of the region. Despite the 1684 ban on regional languages, translation and religious conversion were inextricably linked as the translation of religious texts into local languages was directly related to the conversion of locals to Christianity.
- 9 A major contention of the authors in this work is that Protestant missionaries who began arriving in India in the eighteenth century and British orientalist scholars appropriated the knowledge produced by Catholic agents without acknowledging them. They utilized the works that were of use to them in their enterprises and neglected the rest. Catholic works were also dismissed as overly religious or unscientific while at the same time their work was being used to build other “scientific” interpretations of the region. The material amassed by Catholic orientalists can be found in the archives of these later “Orientalisms,” albeit unacknowledged. According to Xavier and Županov, the Jesuit missionary Memnius Rene Gargam wrote about “*samcroudam*” as a “mother language” in 1728 (p. 317), long before the British scholar William Jones’ celebrated “discovery” of

Sanskrit and the Indo-European languages. Apart from this, English scholars like Francis Whyte Ellis used the Jesuit Beschi's writings for the Tamil literary renaissance of the nineteenth century without giving credit to Beschi's works (p. 320, p. 321). Several other instances of appropriations by the agents of "High Orientalism" are discussed by the authors in this book. The anticlimactic end of the ambitious project of the Catholic empire is partially attributed to such "theft" by later scholars (p. 317, p. 319).

- 10 Catholic knowledge, according to the authors, "did not travel in a straight line" (p. 290). Its journey is characterized by entangled histories, multiple protagonists and numerous archives. There are histories by administrators, individual travelers and missionaries. The contest for power between the Portuguese *padroado real* and the Roman *propaganda fide* is also one of the factors contributing to the fragmented nature of Catholic Orientalist archives. The book highlights the "glaring historical absences" (p. 288) in these repositories of knowledge. These "absences" could refer to the invisibility and silence of Catholic knowledge in the historical discourse on orientalism or to the physical absence of manuscripts that disappeared into the fragmented itineraries of knowledge production and dissemination (p. 290, 291). Xavier and Županov argue that it is not only the materials *present* in the archives that are important to understanding the Catholic enterprise of knowledge-production but also the materials that are *absent* or unacknowledged, that are valuable resources in understanding the trajectory of Catholic knowledge. Although it was termed "religious" and "unscientific", Catholic knowledge paved the way for the "scientific" knowledge production of British times (p. 48, p. 288).
- 11 The book reflects the massive volume and impact of Catholic orientalist practices and the richness of its archives. The relationship with power and knowledge is explored throughout the entire volume, through the predominant theme of "Portuguese" Catholicism. The authors bring out the agency of individual, "native" actors in shaping knowledge about South Asian regions. In the final chapter, "Archives and the End of Catholic Orientalism" the authors trace three itineraries of how the knowledge produced in the colonies ended up in archives in Rome and Paris as well as in British orientalist works, then eventually waned into oblivion. In the "Epilogue", Xavier and Županov draw a parallel between the tragedies staged by the Viceroy Marquis de Tavora and his wife in their palaces in Goa and later in Lisbon. Tavora was the Viceroy of Goa between 1750 and 1754 and his court was a symbol of the splendor of the Portuguese empire. The viceroy and his wife were eventually executed in 1759 for conspiring against the King (pp. 331–40). Similar to the tragic fate of the Tavoras, the splendor of Catholic orientalism began to decline. The book summarizes the manner in which the Portuguese empire that began with high hopes of a grand empire ended, in the authors' opinion, in "tragedy" (p. 329) with the arrival of the British Empire.
- 12 The authors call the wide body of knowledge discussed in this volume—ranging from religious treatises to administrative volumes—"Catholic Orientalism" to "signal their connection to the apparatus of political power" (p. 287) and their influence on the "High Orientalism" that was to follow in the nineteenth century. The correlation between the Estado da India and the Catholic Church could have been contextualized in more detail for a more non-academic readership. At some points in the book, one gets a sense that "catholic knowledge" and "Portuguese knowledge" are synonymous to one another. Although it is undeniable that the Catholic mission in India had an overarching Portuguese influence, it would have helped to untangle the complexities associated with their relationship. As the authors admit in the "Prologue," the area of study is vast and

the book introduces important issues that are impossible to deal with in detail within the confines of one volume.

- 13 The book is lucid and provides excellent insight into the missing links in the study of Orientalism. It rescues Catholic knowledge practices from oblivion, opening them up to renewed historical evaluation and study. In the closing words of the authors in the “Epilogue,” threads of the story remain to be unraveled (p. 340). This leaves the reader wishing for more detailed and sustained discussion on the themes opened up by the authors in this pioneering work.

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## NOTES

1. These collections of administrative documents were created by Portuguese agents at the village level in order to produce “useful knowledge ... for the governance of local societies at the micro level” (p. 46). The rulers of Portugal commissioned agents to create maps of the territories under their control and institutions such as the “House of India” were set up in order manage imperial information (p. 51). These institutions created collections that included “inventories of goods, descriptions of territories, maps, seas, routes and so forth” (p. 51).

2. Abbé Dubois was a missionary who belonged to the Société des Missions-Étrangères and worked in Mysore. He wrote a manuscript in French in 1808, titled *Mœurs, institutions et cérémonies des peuples de l’Inde* and sold it to the British. It was later found out that large portions of his text were borrowed from a manuscript by a Jesuit, Laurent-Gaston Cœurdoux (p. 321). A. Muttusami Pillai was employed by the college of Fort St. George as a *munshi* or a teacher who taught Tamil to the Tamil teachers who trained the civil servants of the East India Company (p. 238, p. 320). Tamil “literati” like Pillai were *pundits* trained by the Jesuits and other Catholic agents and were important figures in British knowledge production.

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## AUTHORS

### **ANNIE RACHEL GEORGE**

PhD student, Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar

### **ARNAPURNA RATH**

Assistant Professor, Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar