

**Karin Preisendanz and Johanna Buss**, eds., *Transposition and Transformation, Controversy and Discovery: On the Christian Encounter with the Religions of Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century India*. Vienna: Publications of the de Nobili Research Library, 2021, 249 pp.

The four long essays in this volume shed light on little-known corners of Indian missionary history and reveal in microscopic detail the endlessly varied and animated texture of religious pluralism in the subcontinent, destroying any stereotypes of a monolithic missionary enterprise on one hand challenging 'the heathen in his blindness' on the other. Religious quarrels are painful, yet these essays cause one to rejoice in the sincerity and devotion of all parties, 'united in the strife that divided them' (T. S. Eliot), suggesting a serene and healing perspective on religious history.

Mitch Numark discusses a Jewish group of obscure origin, the Bene Israel, of whom it was reported in 1738 that 'they have not the books of the Old Testament, nor do they understand Hebrew' (54) except for the *Shema*. Instructed in their faith by Cochin Jews, they eventually settled in an 'Israel quarter' in Bombay and learned Hebrew and biblical lore from Protestant missionaries. This they used 'for purposes the Christian missionaries neither intended nor imagined: criticizing Christianity, more fully embracing Rabbinic Judaism, and developing a confident and resistant Judaism' (57). From 1817 American missionaries set up 'Jewish schools' for Bene Israel pupils. The Madras Jews Society, a branch of the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity Amongst the Jews, later took the lead in this venture, and when this group was dissolved in 1832, the work was continued until 1860 by Michael Sargon (1795-1870), from a Cochin Jewish family, baptized in 1818. Meanwhile non-converted Cochin Jews pursued a mission to the Bene Israel in Bombay aiming to make them more ritually and halakhically observant, in line with the Jewish emphasis on 'orthopraxy, not orthodoxy' (70).

Scottish missionary John Wilson (1804-1875), an esteemed polyglot Orientalist, won favor with the Bene Israel by learning and teaching Hebrew. 'Once they learned Hebrew the Scottish missionaries believed the Bene Israel Jews would understand their own scriptures and would realize that Jesus fulfilled Judaism and, ultimately, convert to Christianity' (83). Disappointed in this, the missionaries nonetheless rejoiced that their instruction had made the Bene Israel purer practitioners of their monotheistic religion, purged of 'heathenist' influence (90). More confident in their Jewish identity, the Bene Israel became more hostile to the missionaries at the end of the century, more determinedly 'criticizing Christianity as irrational, contradictory, and non-scriptural' (95), drawing on tracts written by British Jews. Joseph Ezekiel Rajpurkar (1834-1905), an outstanding Hebraist, exemplifies this emancipation from missionary tutelage and how far the Bene Israel had come in mastery of their own tradition since the impoverished situation of 1738.

Rammohun Roy (1772-1833), discussed in Vera Höke's essay, is called the 'Father of modern India' and his vision was rooted in Advaita Vedānta, yet he became thoroughly immersed in Christian theological controversies, and in his 1820 book, *The Precepts of Jesus* claimed to recover the original nature of Christianity a 'a pure teaching of the one undivided and formless God' (186). Unitarians loved this but Baptist missionaries in Serampore, particularly Joshua Marshman (1768-1837), defended the Trinity and the Atonement against him. However, a group of younger Baptist missionaries in fact printed Roy's book.

Studying the tombs in St Thomas' Cathedral, Mumbai, one admires the valor of so many British men who threw their—often brief—lives into missionary work and various forms of civil and military service in the city, under British governance from 1662 to 1948. In his second contribution, on the Scottish 'discovery' of Jainism in nineteenth-century Bombay, Mitch Numark shows that Jainism was identified as an independent religion much earlier than commonly thought, in the work of John Stevenson (1798-1858), translator of the *Kalpa Sūtra* and the *Navatattva-prakarana*, and of John Murray Mitchell (1815-1904) who left 'a record of over fifty years of contact with Jains living throughout western India' (195) and published Jain-related articles in their *Oriental Christian Spectator*. Relishing the religious diversity of Bombay, the scholarly missionaries interacted with their Jain students (forty-two in their schools in 1832). 'Having reified and transformed "the religion of the Hindus," "the religion of the Parsis," and "the religion of the Jains" into objective, systematic, bounded and individual religion-things... the Bombay Scottish missionaries could procure the material on those newly labeled religions similar to the information that they had already obtained on Roman Catholicism, Rabbinic Judaism, and Islam to highlight the ways in which Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Jainism were erroneous, nonsensical, unethical, and contrary to the discoveries of science and the truths of nature' (214). They confidently expected that if Indians studiously compared their religions with Christianity, conversion was sure to ensue. Their critique of priesthood and works-righteousness in Indian religion was modeled on anti-Catholic polemic. In 1876 John Wilson suddenly discovered that Jains had 'Observers of the conduct,' not priests, as Stevenson's translation had suggested. But their 'deliberate doctrine' was *īśvaro nāsti*, 'There is no operative Lord' (220).

Christophe Vielle discusses 'devotional Christianity and pre-Indology in early eighteenth-century Kerala,' in a close reconstruction of the work of Johann Ernst Hanxleben, SJ (Osnabrück 1681-Velur, 1732), whom his biographer Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomaeo (1748-1806) lists with Roberto de Nobili and Costanzo Beschi as a leading missionary Sanskritist surpassing all European scholars of the time. Author of Malayalam and Sanskrit grammars, he is known for Christian poems in these tongues, notably 'The New Hymn' an epic on the life of Christ, well edited and much studied, and used in the liturgy

and in oral transmission. Such labors are of imponderable significance both for the foundations of Indology and for the inculturation of the Gospel.

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