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APP, URS. *The Birth of Orientalism*. Encounters with Asia Series. Philadelphia and Oxford: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010. xviii + 550 pp. \$79.95 (cloth).

Urs App, a Swiss historian of religions, has written a major work on the history of early European attempts at understanding Asian religions. As can be seen already from the title, the study is critically related to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (New York, 1978). App ends where Said begins—at Napoleon and the establishment of nationally organized Asian studies in European imperial states. App is expressly critical of the attitude generated by Said's scholarship towards research on early European scholarship on Asia. One point is Said's concentration on Islam and the Middle East (440). App argues that in terms of religious thought and cultural development in general, Europeans' encounter with the non-Abrahamic religions further to the east was far more important than Islam. Another, even more serious object of criticism is what App rightly calls "bumper sticker labels", namely the easy litany of concepts like "Western imperialism," "colonialism," "economic and political interests" (xi, 457), with which too much of the history of intellectual exchanges between Asia and Europe tend to be interpreted nowadays. App replaces these labels with religious motivation as the basis for early European interest in knowledge on Asian religions, and consequently he focuses in his research solely on a number of individual intellectuals, rather than on institutions such as the church, fraternities, trading companies, or states.

*The Birth of Orientalism* is without doubt a seminal work. It is based on extensive and deep reading of original texts in various Germanic and Romance languages, as well as in Japanese and Chinese. App is thus able to present a grand pan-European intellectual endeavor, rather than narrow national histories. Time and effort have not been spared in looking for hard-to-find archival sources in various libraries of the world. The focus of the book is on scholarship on the religions of China and India, more peripherally on Japan, Southeast Asia and Tibet. Its temporal focus is on the eighteenth century, with research widening also to the seventeenth and sixteenth centuries where

the argument needs it. The literary work of a great number of European savants are analyzed, from Alessandro Valignano, Matteo Ricci and João Rodrigues to Voltaire, Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg, Denis Diderot, Joseph de Guignes, Andrew Ramsay, John Holwell, Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron, Constantin-François Volney, and many more. As a result we can read detailed stories of themes such as the long history of attempts at categorizing the various religions found in the east, attempts to combine Biblical and Asian religious cosmologies and time lines with each other, conceptual searches for the location of the Paradise, attempts at constructing an original monotheistic world religion, and successful efforts at linguistic discoveries. App is so thorough in his studies that he is constantly able to show who corresponded with whom on what ideas, and occasionally he is even able to pinpoint exactly the way a savant read the work of another savant, picking specific wordings out of it, while ignoring others, thus essentially changing the argument for his own ends. App presents centuries of zealous linguistic and religious scholarship, but also a history of misunderstandings, frauds, forgeries and plagiarisms. This history reveals a Sisyphus like encounter with the religious enigmas that Asia presented to Europeans, who struggled generation after generation for better understanding. This ongoing struggle lead to the gradual transformation of the European way of thought from medieval biblical studies, to the grand expansion of curiosity to all kinds of spiritual and natural questions, which we nowadays know as the Enlightenment.

The principal audience for whom App has written his book is clearly other historians of religion, more extensively historians of ideas in general. They form a large international scholarly community, and they certainly are a group that will benefit most from the book's wealth of detail and sharpness of argument. For others the over 500 pages of text and notes may present somewhat too much concentration on detail, and the text of course contains an amount of repetition. Instead of concentrating on individual scholars and their relations, even to the point of naming all chapters after some savant, App could have structured his work as an analysis of specific concepts and ideas. This is actually what he also does; even if a chapter may be titled after Voltaire or Diderot, the

majority of the text always deals with other authors relevant to a specific point that App wants to make. However, this is a pioneering work, and perhaps writing person specific intellectual stories rather than conceptual stories was necessary to get the work done. A final questionable point in the book is that nearly all quotations from original sources are translated into English. This is normal practice, but it should not be, especially if the audience is so narrowly scholarly as it is in this case. Turning all argumentation into English flattens considerably the intellectual depth of research. A single glimpse of an alternative strategy on page 420, where App presents both an original French quotation and its English translation, shows how useful it would have been throughout the book. The ideal for historical research presented in Leopold von Ranke's *Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1514* (Leipzig 1824, vii) is a beautiful one, and "wie es eigentlich gewesen" should refer not only to archive materials and other original sources, but also to original languages, especially when studying large scale multinational intellectual endeavours. Technically this strategy could be accomplished, for instance by placing translations in footnotes. Rather, systematic hiding of original languages appears to be a cultural problem at the current phase of the intellectual development of humankind, when monolingualism still tends to be a strong norm even in highly advanced international scholarship.

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