Translating *Dharma*: Scottish Missionary-Orientalists and the Politics of Religious Understanding in Nineteenth-Century Bombay

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A consideration of colonial Bombay enriches the understanding of the activities and ideas of Christian missionaries and Orientalists in India and elucidates British conceptions of "the religions of India" and the production of colonialist knowledge. This article focuses on nineteenth-century Scottish missionary-Orientalists and examines how they and other Bombay-based Protestant missionaries understood the concept of religion, Christianity, and the structure, similitude and distinctiveness of "the religions" at the crucial moment when newly "discovered" religions were gaining recognition and a new vision of "world religions" was coming into being. It considers the writings on the religions and ethnographic scholarship of the Bombay Scottish missionaries, as well as their extensive and multifaceted interactions with Bombay's Hindu, Muslim, Jain, Parsi, Jewish, Roman Catholic and Andivasi communities. More specifically, it details the ways in which Bombay missionaries applied and related the concept of religion to diverse configurations of language, text, and practice that they understood as isomorphic species of the religion genus. By examining how Christian missionaries who were also Orientalists conceptualized a number of "religions" and interacted with numerous communities this article seeks to elucidate the presuppositions that shaped the ways in which Hinduism and the other "religions" of nineteenth-century Bombay were imagined.

INTRODUCTION

THE CONCEPTS OF "religion" and "the religions" must be provincialized.[1] Despite some compelling interventions (e.g., Balagangadhara 1994; King 1999; Masuzawa 2005; Oberoi 1994), religion continues to be represented as a phenomenon found the world over, past and present, and manifested as isomorphic formations (the religions) of the same basic concept. It is without question that *religion* and understanding *the religions of India* was a major preoccupation of British colonial officials, Orientalist scholars, and Christian missionaries. But unless one understands what they meant by religion and by Christianity, Roman Catholicism, Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Jainism,

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[1]As scholars of South Asian history will surely recognize, this appeal is made in the spirit of Dipesh Chakrabarty's call to *provincialize* Europe (Chakrabarty 2000).

Buddhism, Sikhism, and Judaism the processes and presuppositions through which the religions were imagined remains shrouded and snares the historian within a Procrustean bed whereby the categories themselves script and connote a set of pre-existing possibilities. A more foundational examination of the British understanding of religion, of Christianity, and of the religions of India enables one to provincialize and account for the largely taken-for-granted notions of religion and the religions.

This article focuses on how the Bombay Scottish missionary-Orientalists John Wilson (1804–1875), John Stevenson (1798–1858), and John Murray Mitchell (1815–1904) understood the concept of religion, Christianity, and the structure, similarity and dissimilarity of "India's religions." It examines the foundational assumptions and methods through which they and other Bombay-based missionaries denominated some phenomena as religions and as "genuine" expressions of the religions and used non-Christian religions as instruments to convert Bombay's population to Christianity. Such a religiously heterogeneous locale as Bombay enables one to elucidate: (1) the formation of a taxonomy of world religions that, with some modifications, remains regnant to this day; and (2) the ways in which the presuppositions and structural features of the religion concept, Christianity, and the interpretation of Roman Catholicism as both a false Christianity and a distinct non-Christian religion helped to fashion particular formations of language, texts, and practices into isomorphic species of the religion/*dharma* genus: Roman Catholic *dharma*, Jewish *dharma*, Muslim *dharma*, Hindu *dharma*, Buddha *dharma*, Jain *dharma*, and Parsi *dharma*. An examination of the Bombay Scottish missionaries' writing on the religions and their interaction with Roman Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Jains, Parsis, and Adivasis reveals patterns and presuppositions of religious understanding to a greater degree than if one were to study how an individual religion alone was imagined.

THE BOMBAY SCOTTISH MISSIONARY-ORIENTALISTS

Scholarship on how Europeans imagined South Asian religions has focused largely on Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism. Jainism and Zoroastrianism and Indian expressions of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity have been largely neglected as the loci of such studies. Scholarly focus on the construction of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism has usually been concerned with only one of these religions exclusively. While occasionally the process involved with the construction of these religions have been examined in comparison to one another, their comparisons to European ideas of Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity is almost entirely absent from the scholarly literature. Hinduism was seen as the dominant religion of India and received the lion's share of attention in British writing on Indian religion. But Hinduism was only one of several South Asian "religions" that were "discovered," explicated, and classified as a

distinct religion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. If one studies how only one individual religion, such as Hinduism, was imagined, then the underlying framework in which the religions were conceptualized remains hidden.[2] A comparative study of how several religions were imagined can reveal how they were understood and fashioned through the same conceptual template.

While some European discoveries of religions and texts occurred during the eighteenth century, it was by and large during the nineteenth century that the religions labeled Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Jainism and their associated texts were more substantially explicated, studied and compared, translated into English, and situated on a world religions map that remains essentially unchanged to this day. It was mostly during that century's second quarter that the Bombay Scottish missionaries John Wilson and John Stevenson published their work on India's religions and their translations of Hindu, Zoroastrian, Jain, and Buddhist texts and inscriptions. Their translations and publications helped to pave the way for the comparative study of religion to begin in earnest. By the 1860s, the essential data on the religions was effectively collected, enabling the comparative study of religion to be fruitfully undertaken (Sharpe 1986, 27–32). The data on the religions that was amassed was facilitated by the "new phase" in the study of the religions that began in the early nineteenth century (Pailin 1984, 3) that marked the end of the hitherto regnant four-fold system of religious classification in which everything that was not ostensibly Christian, Islamic, or Jewish was categorized as Heathenism or Paganism. A new typology of religions developed in which the categories of Heathenism and Paganism waned and were replaced by newly labeled religions such as Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Jainism. As we shall see, this new map of world religions as an organized vision had already begun to be expressed by Bombay-based Britons in the 1830s.

With John Wilson and his fellow Bombay Scottish missionaries one is able to discern the workings of the British religious imagination in action at the crucial moment when the new vision of world religions was coming into being. Unlike most other missionaries and Orientalists, Wilson not only wrote about Hinduism, Jainism, Islam, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Roman Catholicism, Judaism and Adivasi beliefs and practices, but he also interacted extensively with Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Jews, Jains, Catholics, and tribal and aboriginal peoples living throughout western India. While Orientalists such as Max Muller and Christian ministers such as Fredric Maurice have become popular names for their studies of India's religions, neither of them lived in nor traveled to India. Nor did they,

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[2]When Peter Marshall argues that the eighteenth-century "discoverers" of Hinduism fashioned Hinduism in their own image (Christianity) he touches upon the pre-cognitive template related to and a part of this article's argument (Marshall 1970, 43). However, the Hinduism that was "discovered" in the eighteenth century was part of an ongoing process of elaboration, clarification, and classification that continued well into the nineteenth century, at which time Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, and Buddhism were also discovered and posited as distinct religions. Marshall only addresses Hinduism and its late eighteenth-century non-missionary "discoverers."

along with scholars such as H. H. Wilson, interact *significantly* with the populations whose religions they were ostensibly describing. John Wilson, by contrast, was an Orientalist scholar, Christian minister, and ethnographer who lived in India and interacted with multiple communities for almost fifty years. Because he and other Scottish missionaries in Bombay wrote about several religions, from the perspective of their sacred texts and how elites and subalterns practiced and understood them on the ground, an examination of their ideas of the religions reveal the elements that made non-Christian religions *religions* distinct from and structurally equivalent to Christianity.

Though John Wilson, John Stevenson, and John Murray Mitchell were Christian missionaries, they consistently and, it seems, sincerely argued that they investigated the religions—including Christianity—from an unprejudiced scientific perspective. They emphatically denied that their descriptions of non-Christian religions were tarnished by their Christian affiliation. True to their Scottish educational background, they viewed themselves as scientific men who followed disinterested investigative methods. With the assumption that religions were stable objects of knowledge that could and should be studied, they regarded their formulation of the religions as objective descriptions of phenomena rather than subjective interpretations inflected by their Christian affiliation (Wilson 1843, 9-10; 1849, iv–v; Mitchell 1885, 12; 1905, 14–15). Notwithstanding their disinterested claims, their investigations led them to argue that non-Christian religions (including Roman Catholicism) were fundamentally false. More significant is their opinion that Bombay's Jews, Parsis, Jains, Muslims, Hindus, and Roman Catholics neither understood nor practiced their respective religions correctly.

When the Scottish missionaries sought to ascertain the "authentic" religions of Bombay they were confronted with ambiguity and syncretism in religious practice and belief that contradicted their notion that religions maintained clear and distinct doctrines and boundaries. Parsis, Roman Catholics, and Hindus made offerings of devotion to Muslim "saints." Muslims and Jews "prayed" to "Hindu" and "Heathen" gods and celebrated Hindu festivals. Hindus made vows to non-Hindu gods and the Virgin Mary and celebrated Muslim and Roman Catholic festivals. Parsis, Muslims, Hindus and Catholics made offerings at a Roman Catholic church to the "Great Mother" *mothi mauli*. The "faith" of the Khoja and Bohora Muslims was not Islam per se but "a singular mixture" of Hinduism and Islam (Wilson 1838, 534; 1840, 29; Mitchell 1848, 247–314; 1858, 222–223, 245–246, 363–364; 1899, 40, 67–69, 89, 271–272). These syncretistic practices were dismissed as religious "confusion" (Mitchell 1899, 67–69) and, as such, did not fundamentally alter how the Scots conceptualized the religions. Harjot Oberoi's observation that European accounts of Sikhism were "often far more concerned with what Sikhism ought to be like rather than what it was" (Oberoi 1994, 31-32), equally applies to how the Scottish missionaries formulated Bombay's religions. What ostensible practitioners of various religions did religiously was recognized, but, ultimately, disregarded in terms

of how they imagined the religions. In this conclusion one sees the Scots operating as "legislative intellectuals" defining and delimiting the authentic from the inauthentic features of the religions. Like a gardener, the legislative intellectual creates and maintains an ordered world by removing chaotic weeds and trimming overgrown bushes, lest they interfere with the preconceived idealized landscape (Bauman 1987). This posture is unmistakably linked to a Protestant notion of Christianity, its critique of Roman Catholicism, and the importance of the *sola scriptura* principle in Protestant thought.

An a priori framework of religious understanding prefigured how the Scottish missionaries understood and translated Indian forms of knowledge and practice into static European objects. A religion, for them, could not exist as an organic manifestation of beliefs, practices, and traditions held or undertaken without question or regard for "scriptures." Rather, they conceptualized the religions of Bombay like they conceptualized their own: religions were "systems" based upon scripturally derived doctrines and behaviors, not popular practices and ideas. Reliance on custom, tradition, and the authority of priests for knowledge of one's religion, rather than knowing one's religion's scriptures for oneself, was one explanation the Scots gave for why Indians did not know their own religions (Wilson 1832a, 30; 1838, 540–541; 1843, 1843a). More importantly, Indians, they argued, did not make the vital distinction between "religion and established practice" (Mitchell 1858, 370; Wilson 1838, 541). Not accepting this distinction, as the Scots observed, lent credence to the common assertion—expressed by Bombay's Parsis, Muslims, Jews, and Hindus—that there were different religions for different people, all of which were legitimate and true (Mitchell 1857, 3; 1858, 370; Wilson 1830c, 186–195; 1832a, 99–105; 1838, 540–541; 1843a, 29–31; Stevenson 1838). They considered this view on the religions as not only innately false and irrational (Wilson 1830a; 1832a; 1843; Mitchell 1857; Stevenson 1838), but also "completely in opposition to the Hindu religion" (Wilson 1832a, 100–105). As a religion's scriptures were presumed to be the only legitimate authority for a religion, the features of a particular religion existed without any necessary connection to how it was actually understood and practiced. This posture closely mirrors the Protestant attitude toward Roman Catholicism.

Recently, Geoffrey Oddie has argued that, in contrast to Orientalists, Protestant missionaries' experience with popular Hinduism fostered a more comprehensive understanding of Hinduism as a religion based on local and popular beliefs, traditions, and practices in addition to *shruti* and *smriti* (Oddie 2006). Oddie's compelling study, *Imagined Hinduism: British Protestant Missionary Constructions of Hinduism, 1793–1900*, is a valuable contribution to the debate on Hinduism's modern construction. However, the shift in the perception of Hinduism from a text-based religion to a religion based on popular and local beliefs and practices was far from complete and took a long time to occur. J. M. Mitchell's 1894 edition of *Letters to Indian Youth* is one text Oddie uses to demonstrate this change (Oddie 2006, 279–284). Since Mitchell arrived in

India in 1838, the ostensible change in what he believed constituted Hinduism took over fifty years to develop. More significant is the fact that Mitchell's last publication, *The Great Religions of India*, while acknowledging Hinduism's complexity nevertheless primarily identifies Hinduism as a religion based on *shruti* and *smriti* rather than popular beliefs and regional literature (Mitchell 1905, chap. 2). In addition, he maintained that other religions were also based on sacred texts, not popular and regional beliefs and practices (see Mitchell 1857; 1884; 1905).

Born in 1804 and educated at Edinburgh University, John Wilson arrived in Bombay in 1829 and became one of the most significant figures in the city's history. Imbued with a love of languages, a dedication to scholarship, and an abiding conviction that conversion to Christianity would follow from Indians knowing the reality of their own religions, Wilson as both a scholar and Christian missionary sought to know and truly master the languages and religions of Bombay's population. He was unwavering in his promotion of vernacular education and comparative religious studies, which for him was an essential missionary vocation in the religiously heterogeneous city of Bombay. In Britain and India, he was celebrated as a Christian missionary, educator, ethnographer, and Orientalist—vocations he considered intrinsically related. His involvement with the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (BBRAS) from 1830 until his death embodies the integration of these interests. In 1836, he succeeded Vans Kennedy as president of the BBRAS. Nine years later, he was elected to the Royal Society. Known as a gifted linguist, Wilson became conversant and engaged in literary and scholarly work in Hindustani, Sanskrit, Gujarati, Marathi, Avestan, Hebrew, Pali, Pahlavi, and Persian. His noteworthy contributions to the study of India included studies of caste, aboriginal and tribal peoples, the Bene Israel, and epigraphy (e.g., Wilson 1874, 1876; 1877/1976; 1843b; 1856d; 1840; 1853b; Solomon 1998, 216). He also published on Hinduism, Islam, and Zoroastrianism (e.g., Wilson 1832a; 1833a; 1837; 1843; 1844; 1856d; 1858). Although Wilson used Protestant polemical literature in his early work on Hinduism, he did not rely on it after the 1830s. Instead, he employed more standard Orientalist scholarship and his own research into Sanskrit literature. According to Martin Haug, Wilson's 1843 *Parsi Religion* was the "first work written in English which shows any acquaintance with the original Avesta texts." While Orientalists acknowledged his contribution to Zoroastrian studies (Westergaard 1852–1854, 26; Haug 1878, 32–45), his influence on Parsi understanding of their religion was substantial, especially in the response his criticism engendered (Hinnells 2000, 10–13, 138–139, 179–189; Kulke 1978, 91–102; Modi 1932, 10–25).

In Wilson's 1836 presidential speech to the BBRAS he declared that the goal of the BBRAS was the acquisition of knowledge about the languages, religions, history, and "manners and customs" of India and its peoples. Knowledge of India's religions or "systems of faith," as he often called them, was the most

essential to attain because they were the "key to the native mind." For that reason, his speech was concerned with the progress of the study of the Hindu, Muslim, Jain, and Parsi religions and the translations of those religions' sacred texts. He encouraged the BBRAS to expand its collection of religious manuscripts and for its members to undertake their translation (Wilson 1836, 306–310).

To Wilson, the goals of the BBRAS were complementary to the Christian missionary enterprise. He saw its activities and discoveries as tools the missionary could use to convert Indians to Christianity (Wilson 1836, 310–311). Even the Calcutta-based Scottish missionary and staunch Anglicist Alexander Duff, who unlike his Bombay colleagues knew no Indian classical language and had, at most, a poor understanding of a vernacular, acknowledged the usefulness of the BBRAS to the Christian missionary effort (Duff 1840, 17). Duff, however, did not share Wilson's insistence that missionaries master India's vernacular and sacred languages, religions, and "manners, customs, and habits" of its different communities. In fact, Wilson considered knowledge of "Sanskrit and other dead languages, in which their sacred books are written" as essential for the missionary to master: the more the missionary knew the better he would be able to "clearly distinguish between the branch and the stump, and apply the axe to the very root of the tree" of India's religions (Wilson 1849, 67–80; 1873, 20). Through a process of comparing and contrasting Christianity to other religions, Indian religions themselves would be utilized to convert Indians to Christianity. Specifically, knowledge of India's religions would enable the missionary to undermine confidence in them (by highlighting their errors), reveal their Christian-like elements, and present Christian truth and knowledge in a vernacular and comprehensible manner (Wilson 1836, 310–311; 1849, 67–73).

His role in the 1862 trial known as the "Maharaj Libel Case," which hinged on the definition of Hinduism, attests to John Wilson's status as an Orientalist. His testimony—in which he defined and explicated Hinduism and its transformations, manifestations, and relationship to the Vallabhacharyas—seemed to have been the opinion most valued in determining what was and what was not Hinduism (Haberman 1993, 57). As a respected scholar, he was considered an objective authority on Hinduism. It is therefore apropos that he began his testimony by attesting to his Orientalist accomplishments (Mulji 1865, App., 22–30). Sir Joseph Arnould, one of the officiating judges, acknowledged his qualifications to speak authoritatively on Hinduism when he remarked: "Dr. Wilson who has studied this subject with that comprehensive range of thought (the result of varied erudition) which has made his name a foremost one among the living Orientalists of Europe" (Mulji 1865, 141). Reverend Wilson's role in the Maharaj Libel Case is a striking illustration of the Orientalist as legislative intellectual who as a recognized and disinterested scholar was deemed competent to speak authoritatively on and to adjudicate Hinduism.

In the nineteenth century, the Scottish missionary John Stevenson was recognized for his contributions to the study of India (Pinge 1960, 303). Stevenson, a

graduate of the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, arrived in India in 1824 and was stationed first in the Konkan and then Pune. Like Wilson, he served as president of the BBRAS. He was the first to translate into English the Jain texts the Kalpa Sutra and the *Nava Tatva Sutra* or *Navatattava Prakarana* (Stevenson 1848). Decades before *The Sacred Books of the East* series appeared Stevenson translated the complete Sama Veda and sections of the Rig Veda into Marathi and English (Stevenson 1842; Mitchell 1899, 51–52). He deciphered the oldest form of the Brahmi script and published a Magadhi grammar (Solomon 1998, 206; Mitchell 1899, 50–51). His contributions to the learned journals included studies of the *Ganesha Purana*, Indian epigraphy, and Maharashtrian customs, deities, and religious ideas in relationship to Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism (Stevenson 1834; 1843a; 1843b; 1843c; 1846a; 1846b).

In their letters and publications, virtually all the Bombay Scottish missionaries discuss the region's religions and peoples. But of all of Wilson's colleagues, John Murray Mitchell was the most comparable in the breadth of his publications on the religions. Mitchell, a graduate of Aberdeen's Marischal College, arrived in India in 1838 and was stationed in Bombay and Pune until 1867, at which time he left for Calcutta. He was an active member of the BBRAS, head of the Marathi department at the Poona Sanskrit College, and, while an active missionary, served as principal of Poona College (Mitchell 1899, 320–232). "From a very early period," wrote Mitchell's nephew, "he had made the religions of India a special study" (Mitchell 1905, 6). For Mitchell, the Christian missionary must study and understand all of India's religions (Mitchell 1899, 23). When discussing religion, he followed Wilson by highlighting principles that Christianity shared with other religions (Mitchell 1857). Indeed, he "delighted in the comparative study of these religions and in tracing the points of resemblance between Christianity and Buddhism and between the Bible and Koran" (Mitchell 1905, 6). Like Wilson, he considered knowledge of India's religious traditions as crucial to both undermine them and to illuminate Christian truth through vernacular traditions. Unlike Wilson, he admired the morality, "common sense," and general view of God expressed in the *abhangs* of the seventeenth-century *bhakta* Tukaram (Mitchell 1849; 1899, 165–169). However, it is notable that neither Mitchell nor Wilson considered Tukaram's religious ideas "genuine Hinduism" (Mitchell 1849, 2–14; Wilson 1857, xxvii). In an 1882 letter Mitchell argued that *bhakti* was popular amongst the Marathas and had significance for missionary work.[3] By writing Marathi-language Christian *abhangs* in Tukaram's poetical style (Pinge 1960, 317–321) he anticipated the work of the Maharashtrian-Brahmin convert to Christianity Narayan Vaman Tilak (1861–1919). His publications on the religions spanned over half a century; many were explicitly comparative. Some of his essays on Hinduism and Zoroastrianism were reprinted—along with essays

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[3]National Library of Scotland, MS. 7826—J. M. Mitchell to George Smith (July 22, 1882).

on Islam and Confucianism written by his fellow Scots William Muir and James Legge—in texts such as *Non-Christian Religions of the World* (1890). In addition to articles and translations of Tukaram, his contributions to scholarly journals included studies of Zoroastrian literature and scholarship (Mitchell 1844–47; 1849; 1853; 1893).

Bombay's religious diversity stimulated and facilitated the Scottish missionaries' study of the religions besides Hinduism and Islam. In addition to numerous Hindu and Muslim communities, substantial numbers of Parsis, Jews, Jains, and Roman Catholics lived there. Visitors and residents frequently chronicled its religious diversity. J. M. Mitchell, for example, observed that Bombay's population was "remarkably mixed. Equal to the variety of races was the variety of religions. Hinduism (to use the term in all its vast and vague comprehensiveness); Mohammadanism in several forms; Jainism; Zoroastrianism; Judaism; and Christianity— the last especially in its Roman Catholic form. Even in ancient Alexandria the races and systems of belief could not have been more diversified" (Mitchell 1899, 23). His wife, Maria Mitchell, marveled at the city's "motley assemblage of race with their different manners, costumes, tongues, and creeds" and explicitly juxtaposed it with Calcutta's relative homogeneity (M. Mitchell 1876, 30). Such diversity explains the Scots insistence that missionaries study all of India's religions. Although they sometimes complained about the time-consuming nature of this task (see Mitchell 1858, 212), they nevertheless felt that Bombay's religious diversity made it an appealing missionary station (Wilson 1838, 225; Mitchell 1899, 23).

Bombay's historical sites, location, manuscripts, and heterogeneous and polyglot population enabled the scholarly inclined Scottish missionaries to engage in religious studies in a way not available in other parts of India. As Stevenson averred, "I have enjoyed advantages in the study of the Jain literature on this side of India, which are unattainable in Bengal" (Stevenson 1848, xxxvi). In a review of the BBRAS' research and accomplishments, John Wilson noted how Bombay's diversity and location facilitated scholarly research on Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, and Islam. To support this view he quoted John Malcolm: "there is no place in India more favourable than this to the researches of the antiquarian and oriental scholar" (Wilson 1856a, 409). In particular, Wilson agreed with Malcolm's opinion that "Bombay must be specially looked to for an elucidation of the ancient Zoroastrian faith" (Modi 1905, 170).

UNDERSTANDING THE UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIANITY

Imagination has a history that establishes the horizons of intellectual invention. Christianity structured how the Bombay Scottish missionaries understood religion, functioned for them as religion's prototypical species, and constituted the framework through which different religions were conceptualized. An

appreciation of the history of Christianity in Britain and understanding the Scottish missionaries' understanding of Christianity clarifies the framework and foundational assumptions through which they imagined "the religions" of India.

Controversies and conflicts among Christians about Christianity helped to shape how Europeans imagined non-Christian religions (Harrison 1990; Pailin 1984). A largely neglected element of this was the existence of a European Christian alterity (otherness) analogous to the alterity later ascribed to non-Christian religions. In post-Reformation Britain, Roman Catholicism was the principal example of this religious alterity. As Todd Endelman has observed, the "long-standing hatred of Englishmen for Catholics and Catholicism…closely resembled anti-Semitism" (Endelman 1999, 47–48). From the Reformation until the end of the nineteenth century, the prevailing English and Scottish attitude towards Roman Catholicism was one of emphatic hostility. This hostility partly derived from the belief that Roman Catholicism was an innately anti-British slavish, tyrannical, bloodthirsty, and superstitious religion of priest-controlled enemies abroad and virtual aliens at or near home (especially the Irish). But British anti-Catholicism was also informed by a religious and theological conflict that pitted Catholics against Protestants over the nature of and authority for Christianity. This was a legacy of the Protestant Reformers' struggle to "purify" Christianity from the abominable corruptions and idolatrous practices attributed to the Church of Rome by returning Christianity to what was considered as its sole foundation: Scripture. Nineteenth-century British Protestants continued to wage this struggle. As a result, Roman Catholicism was seen, at best, as a false, pseudo-Christianity that promoted a host of non-Christian and explicitly "anti-Christian" beliefs and rituals, which contradicted the Bible and perverted "real Christianity." The terminology Britons used to describe Roman Catholicism—"Popery" and "Romanism"—betrays its perception as a non-Christian and alien religion. Protestants claimed that scripture, not tradition and the "priest-king" (the pope), was the sole basis and authority for Christianity. As a result, British Protestant literature is replete with statements such as "the Bible is the religion of Protestants." Romanism, on the other hand, was characterized as a religion that claimed Biblical authority, but in fact eschewed and contradicted Scripture.[4]

Roman Catholicism was also postulated as a non-Christian "heathen" religion more similar to Islam, Judaism, and other forms of Heathenism than to Christianity (Barnett 1999; Harrison 1990; Poynder 1835). In some respects, it was considered even more unsavory and degraded than other non-Christian religions. As an article in a British magazine noted, the conversion of Jews to Roman Catholicism "would only be to go from bad to worse" (*Jewish Intelligence* Sept. 1855, 272). At times, Islam and Judaism were posited as religions more akin to

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[4]On anti-Catholicism in Britain, see inter alia, Barnett (1999), Brown (1997), Colley (1992), Morgan (2001, chap. 3), Norman (1968), Paz (1992), and Wolffe (1991).

Christianity than Roman Catholicism (see Almond 2003; Barnett 1999; Endelman 1999, 38). One feature of Roman Catholicism that set it apart from Christianity and other religions was the Inquisition. For Mitchell, the establishment of the Inquisition in India "horrified" Indians "of all religions" because "in their wildest fanaticism they had never thought of torturing and burning men for their religious opinions" (Mitchell 1899, 31). Here Roman Catholicism is compared to the religions of India and is singled out for its cruelty, violence, and intolerance. For eighteenth and nineteenth-century Britons, religious otherness transcended geography and belied the conventional distinction in colonial discourse analysis between the European self and the non-European Other. Indeed, as Marjorie Moran has written, "In the case of Britain, the most long-lasting discourse of the sort we call 'colonial' was not Orientalism, but rather anti-Catholicism" (Morgan 2001, 6–7).

Like evangelicals in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Britain (Brown 1961), Bombay missionaries distinguished "true Christians" from "nominal Christians." For Bombay Protestant missionaries, "nominal Christians" were, at best, considered little better than "heathens" in their religious ideas and practices (*Missionary Herald* Nov. 1829, 340; 1832, 182; Mitchell 1850, 27). In Bombay, the nomenclature "nominal Christian" was typically associated with Roman Catholic Goankars[5] who were not "real Christians" because they acted and worshipped in ways contrary to the Bible (Wilson 1832a, 77–79, 96). "Every [Christian] practice," insisted Wilson, "should be warranted by Scripture" (Smith 1878, 67). The Goankars, and the Portuguese who converted them, were not just non-Christian, but also explicitly "anti-Christian." According to Wilson, the Portuguese "gave to the Hindus the name of Christians, before they gave them Christian instruction, or before they witnessed in them an obedience to Christian precepts. They have kept them in ignorance of the Christian Shastras….They have directed them almost in every particular contrary to the scriptures" (Wilson 1832a, 106). Such actions and methods meant for the Bombay Scottish missionaries that the Roman Catholic Goankars and Portuguese who "converted" them "grievously injured the interest of Christianity" and precluded conversions by promoting the idea that idolatry, violence, and other characteristics of Popery were part of and sanctioned by Christianity (Wilson 1832a, 105–112; 1843, 53–55; 1849, 34–35; Mitchell 1858, 315, 372–373).[6]

Until the end of the nineteenth century, Protestant missionaries in Bombay almost invariably classified Catholics as religiously separate from Christians; they also argued that Roman Catholicism was as a religion distinct from Christianity

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[5]Goankar (literally, "of Goa" or "from Goa") was a term used in Bombay to refer to Indians converted to Roman Catholicism by the Portuguese and to the offspring of Portuguese-Indian unions.
[6]Brian Pennington's argument that Protestant missionaries in India "showed little hostility to Roman Catholics" and "even expressed hope that sincerely pious Catholic efforts at evangelization might succeed" (Pennington 2005, 67) does not reflect the attitude of Bombay missionaries to Catholics and Roman Catholicism.

and often indistinguishable from Hinduism. For example, the missionary-produced Marathi text *Nirnirale Dharma* [Varieties of *Dharma*/Religion] insisted that Roman Catholicism or *Roman Catholic dharma* was distinct from Christianity or *Khristi dharma* (*Nirnirale Dharma* 1851, 14–15). Bombay missionaries expressly equated Catholics and Roman Catholicism with Hindus and Hinduism (*Missionary Herald* July 1832, 212). As a result, Protestant missionaries had difficulty distinguishing between Catholics and Hindus (Mitchell 1850, 27) because Roman Catholics were "just as idolatrous as the Hindoos . . . [and] go from Hindooism to Catholicism and vice versa as it suits their convenience."[7] As one Bombay missionary explained, the Goankars were "proselytes to the Catholic faith. But they assume the name of Christian, yet they have never ceased to be idolaters; for instead of the former idols, they substituted the image of saints, to which they pay a religious homage and worship as really idolatrous as the worship paid by the Hindoos to their gods" (*Missionary Herald* Nov. 1829, 340). Not only were the Goankars represented as idolatrous and debased as Hindus, but also "probably more superstitious" than Hindus and more hostile to the Gospel (*Missionary Herald* July 1832, 212). All in all, Bombay missionaries subscribed to the standard Protestant interpretation of Roman Catholicism, which posited that its priests—referred to as "imposters" *paakhandi* and "corrupters" *bighadlelya* (*Nirnirale Dharma* 1851, 15)—disfigured, corrupted, and concealed true Christianity and prevented "an increase of religious knowledge" (*Missionary Herald* Nov. 1829, 340).

Knowledge of the Christian scriptures for the Bombay Scottish missionaries was essential to know and adopt the Christian religion (Wilson 1854, 46). Despite their baptism, John Wilson emphatically argued that Catholics could not be deemed "Christians" since they neither read nor knew the Bible (Wilson 1849, 34–35). Consequently, converting Roman Catholics to "real Christianity" was a significant part of the Bombay missionary agenda. As J. M. Mitchell asked rhetorically, "The Lord has been smiting Popery elsewhere; why may He not here?" (Mitchell 1850, 27). This meant that the Scots sought to demonstrate to the Goankars that Popery was a non-Christian religion masquerading as Christianity. To this end, they established schools for the Goankars and distributed Portuguese-language Bibles and anti-Catholic tracks such as *The Heathenism of Popery* (Wilson 1838, 446–447; Mitchell 1899 215–217). As Christianity was an object of positive knowledge that could be grasped through Bible study, the Scottish missionaries required potential converts to acquire a competence in Christian knowledge sufficient to impress upon them a conscious and reasoned belief in the Bible's singular veracity. "We wish no one to embrace it [Christianity]," Wilson insisted, "without inquiry and without conviction" (Wilson 1843, 44).

[7]Birmingham University, MS. C I 3/053/7—William Mitchell to Edward Bickersteth (August 24, 1826).

WILY PRIESTS, ESSENTIAL SCRIPTURES, AND EXCLUSIVE RELIGIONS

In British accounts of non-Christian religions differences of space, culture, and time are homogenized to the point where the Papist Other is transferred onto far off Asia. In the process, the anti-Catholic content of this discourse was replaced by or replicated into a functionally equivalent Hindu, Zoroastrian, Jain, Jewish and Muslim content. A process of displacement and projection occurred whereby Christianity's concerns and controversies formed the very foundations through which non-Christian religions were conceptualized. When Britons conceptualized non-Christian religions as idealized objects of knowledge based on "scriptures" rather than a variety of practices, beliefs, rituals, and identities without any necessary reference to sacred texts, they parsed Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Islam through the same kind of distinction British Protestants employed at home when they distinguished "real Christianity" from Roman Catholicism. Like the English and Scots from the pre-Reformation period, Muslims, Hindus, Parsis, Jews, Jains, Buddhists, and Catholics did not know their own religions because they did not know their religions' scriptures. The main cause of religious ignorance in Britain's past and India and Ireland's present was none other than the wily machinations of priests.

As mentioned above, post-Reformation Britons depicted priests as crafty corrupters and pretended guardians of Christianity. Through their monopoly over religious knowledge and their insistence on Latin as the language of Christian liturgy, worship, and scriptures, Catholic priests were portrayed as preventing the individual from obtaining correct knowledge of the Bible. Since a religion's scriptures defined a religion, priests were peddlers of a religious fraud when they deprived individuals from understanding their own religion (Barnett 1999). This meant that knowledge of one's religion required the liberation from priests.

Eighteenth and nineteenth-century Britons seem to have imagined venal and crafty priesthoods infecting virtually all non-Christian religions. Priests, whether Roman Catholic priests, Muslim mullahs, Jewish rabbis, Hindu brahmins, Jain yatis, and Parsi dasturs and mobeds, were all depicted as protecting their own base interests by manipulating and monopolizing religious knowledge and depriving the ordinary Catholic, Muslim, Jew, Hindu, Jain, and Parsi of accurate knowledge of their own religion (see, e.g., Nesbit 1832/1894; Wilson 1832a, 87–116; 1856b, 43; *Jewish Intelligence* Feb. 1835, 28–29).

> A bigoted priesthood is one of the greatest plagues that can afflict mankind. A set of men take away 'the key of knowledge' from their fellows; and for this foulest of all thefts they are struck with judicial blindness themselves and become blind leaders of the blind . . . .*The Brahmans of India, the Jesuits of Rome, the Mollahs of Persia*, are all driving the same trade—shutting knowledge from the people that they

> may pile up an unlimited dignity and influence for themselves . . . *The Pagoda-Brahmans* would root up every Missionary School in India if they dared; *the Popish Priest* would burn every Bible; and *the Mollahs or priests of Persia*, will not allow a school to be set up even 'for useful secular education in European arts and sciences.' (*Bombay Gaurdian* May 16, 1851, My italics)

This quotation from the *Bombay Guardian*, edited by J. M. Mitchell, illustrates the priestly isomorphism—shaped by anti-Catholic polemic and reinforced by "observation"—attributed to non-Christian religions.

Rabbis were a "crafty priesthood" that promoted a fabulous and superstitious religion replete with bombast and hyperbole expressly equated with Roman Catholic priests and Hindu brahmins (*Jewish Intelligence* Feb. 1835, 28–30; Dec. 1858, 376–378). Rabbis, according to John Wilson, corrupted and disfigured "real Judaism" in a manner analogous to the Catholic priests' corruption of "real Christianity." As he insisted, "From all that I have seen or read of traditional Rabbinism, I have no hesitation in saying, that it is as great a corruption of real Judaism as… Popery of Christianity" (Wilson 1847a, 2:314). Here we see Wilson positing a distinction between "real Judaism" and "Rabbinism," the de facto pseudo-religion supposedly prevalent among most Jews, isomorphic to the distinction he and others posited between "real Christianity" and Roman Catholicism. As rabbis valued "tradition" as "equally authoritative" as the Hebrew Bible, another Scotsman from the period made this isomorphism more explicit when he declared: Rabbinism "is Jewish Popery; just as Popery may be defined as Gentile Rabbinism" (M'Caul 1838, 2).

In the mid-nineteenth century, J. M. Mitchell declared that the missionary effort to convert the Bene Israel Jews to Christianity was failing because Cochin Jews resident in Bombay promoted the false Judaism of Rabbinism amongst the Bene Israel (Mitchell 1848, 307). But despite the effort of Cochin Jews to induce the Bene Israel community to adhere to Rabbinic Judaism, J. Henry Lord, a late-nineteenth-century Bombay missionary, argued that the Bene Israel—as a consequence of learning their "true scriptures" from Christians and because they did not adhere to "Talmudical writings," which Rabbinic Jews value greater "than the inspired scriptures themselves"—had been "re-possessed of their ancient faith in one of the purest forms in which it exists at the present day" (*Bombay Diocesan Record* Aug. 1883, 112). This "pure form" of their "ancient faith" was based not on the Talmud or popular practice, but instead on what Reverend Wilson referred to as their "genuine scripture" *khare shastra:* the Old Testament (Wilson 1832b, 1).[8]

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[8]Although John Wilson found the Karaites—a Jewish sect who rejected Talmudic authority—as deeply flawed and superstitious because they valued the *sound* of Hebrew chanting rather than its meaning (Wilson 1847a, 2:648–649), it is apropos that other Britons described the Karaites as "the Protestants of Judaism" (Milman 1830, 223).

"Scripture" was and, to a great extent, remains the most common feature associated with the religions. Scripture, however, is neither a universally translatable concept nor an innocuous nomenclature describing non-Christian religious literature. On the contrary, the term itself and the concept it signifies is intertwined with the contours and concerns of its Christian and European history and a host of presuppositions and associated concepts and relationships that has reconfigured non-Christian literature deemed scriptures into something resembling the Bible in the Protestant tradition. Universalizing the Protestant notion of scripture was an integral component of the Bombay Scottish missionaries' interpretive template for imagining both the older recognized religions (Islam and Judaism) as well as the newly labeled religions (Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism). To them, it was axiomatic that scriptures were a necessary component of and the most authoritative source for a religion. When they analyzed or criticized any religion qua a religion they focused more on what they determined were its scriptures than how the religion was popularly practiced. While it was not always clear to them which Hindu and Parsi texts were really the Hindu and Parsi scriptures, they never questioned the role of scriptures in relationship to a religion or the possibility of a religion existing without a scripture. With such a scripture-centric view of religion, it is apropos that Wilson and other Britons argued that some of the tribal peoples of India and Africa had no "religion" per se, although they had religious beliefs and practices (see Wilson 1849, 248; Chidester 1996).[9]

With the Bombay Scottish missionaries it becomes clear that attributing scriptures to the religions of India was a universalizing act of translation predicated on the assumption that an isomorphism existed among the religions that made them homologous to Christianity. The interchangeable way in which Bombay missionaries used the terms scripture and *shastra* exemplify the process of translation and domestication that normalized the idea that non-Christian religions possessed scriptures.[10] Like the Bible in Protestant Christian tradition, the "scriptures" of other religions were interpreted as virtual blueprints for how those religions were to be conceptualized. Accordingly, the Scottish missionaries were in agreement with Orientalists such as H. T. Colebrooke, H. H. Wilson, and Max Muller that "genuine Hinduism" was based on the "Hindu scriptures," not popular practices and local and regional literature and traditions. As J. M. Mitchell explained:

> In examining any religion whatever, the first inquiry must be, *what is the religion*,—and then comes the question, *Is the religion true*. What, then,

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[9]At the end of the nineteenth century, J. M. Mitchell—influenced by the growing field of anthropology—began to describe the religious practices and beliefs of India's Adivasis as *a religion* with a name: Animism (Mitchell 1898, 6–12; 1905, 29, 251–278).

[10]Molesworth's English-Marathi dictionary defines scripture as "sacred writing, holy writ" and renders it into Marathi as *shastra, shrut, dharmapustak*, and *dharmagranth* (Molesworth 1873, 762). In his Marathi-English dictionary he translates and defines *shastra* as "Institutes of religion, law, or letters; esp. as considered divine origin or authority; *scripture*" (Molesworth 1857, 786).

is the system which we call Hinduism? . . . The best answer to the question is this: Genuine Hinduism is that which is contained in the Shastras. (Mitchell 1857, 102)[11]

Likewise, Bombay missionaries maintained that the "shastra Zand Avesta" or "Parsi shastras" was the foundation for the "religion" denominated variously as "Parsi dharma," "the Parsi religion," "the Parsi faith," "Parsiism," or "Zoroastrianism" (Nirnirale Dharma 1851, 85; Wilson 1839, 1847b, 11; 1843a; Mitchell 1884). As all "religions" were based on their scriptures this view seems to have been the natural and obvious basis to conceptualize Zoroastrianism. As a result, their accounts of the "Parsi faith" consisted almost entirely of explication and criticism of the Avesta, which is not to say that Parsi practices and texts such as the Bundahishn and the *Zarthust-Namah* were exempt from their criticism— they certainly were not. But when they discussed Parsi "religious beliefs" and practices they usually examined them in relationship to "the Parsi *shastras*." For example, "Any inquiry into the very interesting question, *What is the religious belief of the present Parsis*, will be met at the outset by the difficulty of discovering how many and what precise books the community now deem authoritative" (Mitchell 1845, 154). Here a questioned is posed about Parsi "religious belief" that is answered with the question about what texts Parsis find authoritative. In another publication, J. M. Mitchell asks a seemingly different question and gives the same answer. "What is Parsiism? The question is not easily answered. It is difficult to discover what books are accounted sacred by the Parsis. In fact there is no agreement among the Parsis themselves, on this fundamental question" (Mitchell 1857, 128). Mitchell then revealed his Protestant presupposition about the fundamental role of scriptures in a religion when he declared that the uncertainty and disagreement about which texts Parsis considered sacred "must be exceedingly painful to the reflecting Parsi" (Mitchell 1857, 128). Thus, Zoroastrianism and "genuine Hinduism" were based on the Zoroastrian and Hindu "scriptures" just as "real Christianity" (not Roman Catholicism) and Judaism (not Rabbinism) were based on the Christian and Jewish scriptures.

Assigning scriptures to the religions of India, moreover, serves to configure them as timeless compendiums of doctrines and prescriptions divorced from how people actually understood and practiced them. As some Britons, and most of the Irish, understood and practiced their religion in a manner that was considered non-Christian, the disjuncture between the "text-book" view of the religions and how they were in reality grasped and practiced was nothing new to the Bombay Scottish missionaries. After all, they considered the Bible the sole basis of the Christian religion, which was why they argued that Roman

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[11]For Mitchell, the Hindu *shastras* are the "four Vedas, the six philosophical Shastras, and the eighteen Puranas" (Mitchell 1852, 10).

Catholicism was not Christianity. The newly labeled religions such as Hinduism and Zoroastrianism were accordingly apprehended not by how they were in fact practiced and understood by most Hindus and Parsis, but similar to the Protestant conception of Christianity, through the hermeneutic principle of *sola scriptura* (scripture alone). This was the interpretive a priori that steered Wilson and others to the conclusion that Hinduism and Zoroastrianism had scriptures (such as the Avesta and the Vedas) [12] that were functionally analogous to the Bible in Christianity and therefore the basis upon which to determine what constituted the Hindu and Parsi religions. From this perspective, John Wilson's opinion in the Maharaj Libel Case that the Vallabhacharyas were "certainly not preceptors of what is technically denominated the Hindu religion" makes perfect sense. It is all the more apt that he argued that the Vallabhacharyas relation to Hinduism was analogous to the relationship of Mormonism to Christianity; and, as he clearly stated, "I would not call the Mormonites a sect of Christians" (Mulji 1865, App., 27–29).

Even though the Scottish missionaries' observed that Bombay's population largely understood and practiced their "religions" in a manner that did not consistently comport with their religions' *shastras*, they nevertheless conceptualized the religions through the principle of *sola scriptura*. Space does not permit an explication of this in all cases; a brief examination of the Scottish missionaries' understanding of Islam can illustrate how *sola scriptura*, not popular ideas and practices, served as the hermeneutical principle to understand a religion. In short, Islam, for them, was the "religious system" of the Prophet Muhammad based on the Qur'an alone. Nowhere in the Bombay Scottish missionaries' writings do they take into account or even seem to have knowledge of other authorities for Islam such as hadith.[13] More significant, the actual beliefs and practices of Bombay's Muslims are entirely neglected in their accounts of the religion they labeled Mohammadanism. Consequently, they differentiated between the religion of Muhammad as expressed in the Qur'an and the religion "embraced by Muhammadans in more recent times"—the latter being "far more absurd" than the former (Mitchell 1857, 144). In particular, they argued that in contradistinction to Qur'anic injunction the religious practices of Bombay's Muslims—not the "foreign Mussalmans" resident in Bombay who they regarded as more knowledgeable and orthodox (see Wilson 1833, 71–72)—was "grossly idolatrous."

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[12]In Wilson's early writings, "Hindu scriptures" and "Hindu *shastras*" denote the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gita, Puranas, and Dharmashastras. As late as 1849, he used "Hindu Shastras" as a generic term for Hindu "sacred writings" (Wilson 1849, 241). However, his later work, notably his 1858 *India Three Thousand Years Ago*, the "Hindu scriptures" primarily refer to *shruti*, particularly the Vedic samhitas. In the 1850s, he admitted that his early writings on Hinduism were produced at "an early stage of my oriental studies, and not what I would wish them to be" (Wilson 1856a, 512).

[13]For their most extensive explications of Islam, see Wilson (1833a) and Mitchell (1857, chap. 8; 1905, chap. 5).

They saw Muslim "offerings and observances" at *pirs'* tombs (*dargahs*) as a form of idolatry that was "scarcely distinguishable" from the offerings and observances of "Hindus at the shrines of their *devas*." In fact, like their descriptions of the relationship between Catholics and Hindus, they perceived little difference between a Hindu *deva* and a Muslim *pir* because "frequently the Hindu deity becomes the *pir*, and the Musulman falls into decided image-worship." Take, for example, J. M. Mitchell's encounter with a Muslim pilgrim on the road to Jejuri. Mitchell queried the Muslim pilgrim as to why he was visiting Khandoba's shine when Muslims were supposed to acknowledged only one god. "'Very true,'" said the pilgrim, "'Allah is supreme but Khandoba is a *pir* (saint), and as such I worship him.'" This response, Mitchell declared, "may surprise those who have not had occasion to study Muhammadanism as it actually exists in India; but it is no exceptional case" (Mitchell 1899, 271–272).[14]

While scripture operated essentially as religion's sine qua non, it also served as religion's central differentiator functioning to distinguish one religion from another; that is, scripture was one trait all religions shared as well as the element that made religions distinct. By functioning as the element that both united and divided religions, the scripture concept allowed a particular species of religion to be both known as a distinct religion and compared to other religions. Therefore, if a religion was "discovered" out of the vast hodgepodge of "Heathenism" and found worthy of recognition and classification as a discrete species of religion, then it would perforce contain scriptures whose content was fundamentally different from but functionally equivalent to the Bible in relation to Christianity. Religions, in other words, were neither abstract phenomena difficult to grasp nor ambiguous jumbles of multifarious practices and rituals, but concrete and embodied texts (scriptures) that could be examined, critiqued, and compared to other scriptures and actual religious expressions. From this perspective, comparative religion becomes the comparative examination of scriptures.

Bombay Scottish missionary reports demonstrate how the taxonomy of world religions was understood as individual manifestations of the religion taxon. These reports list the different religions as discrete "classes." For example, John Wilson begins his 1832 report by listing the different "classes of natives" in Bombay—Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Jains, Jews, Catholics, and Christians/Protestants/Converts—before dividing the rest of the report into sections, each addressing a

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[14]In her book, *The Invention of World Religions*, Tomoko Masuzawa argues that Islam in the nineteenth century "came to stand as the epitome of the racially and ethnically determined, nonuniversal religions," notwithstanding the fact, as she points out, that Europeans were aware that "the vast majority of Muslims…were not Arabs" (Masuzawa 2005, xiii, chap. 6). However, there is no indication that the Bombay Scottish missionaries considered Islam as an "ethnic" or "Arab" religion analogous to their view of Judaism. On the contrary, they considered Islam as a religion with universal pretensions, which is not surprising since they were long-term residents of India, rather than armchair scholars in England.

different religious community. He then enumerated the different classes of "natives" in Scottish mission schools (Wilson 1833c; 1834b). How these reports were organized reveals much about how the ideas of religion and the religions were understood: the reports were structured in such a way that makes every religion distinct and exclusive in that individuals could be affiliated with only one religion. Syncretism or any type of religious overlapping could not exist within the range of possibilities allowed by the reports' organization.

TEACHING THE DIFFERENT SHASTRAS AND SACRED LANGUAGES

Throughout the nineteenth century, Scottish missionaries in Bombay "corrected" or called into question Indian knowledge of and ideas about their own religions. This activity would typically take the following form: A Hindu, Parsi, Jew, Jain, Catholic, or Muslim would propound some aspect of their "religion;" the missionary would respond by arguing that the particular idea or practice contradicted their own *shastras*; he would then make reference to or cite the particular *shastra* to authenticate his point. This legislating maneuver should not be interpreted as a hubristic demonstration of British sovereignty over Indian knowledge. Rather, for the Scots, it was an essential part of their missionary project.

Although Wilson, Stevenson, and Mitchell considered themselves disinterested Orientalist scholars, they were also Christian missionaries whose "mastery" of Indian religious knowledge was connected to a proselytizing scheme designed to engender Christian conversion through comparative religious inquiry. For them, Indian ignorance of or misapprehension about their religions was an impediment to conversion. Consequently, just as they insisted Christians and nominal Christians know Christianity, they also insisted that Hindus, Jains, Muslims, Parsis, and Jews know their religions. This did not mean that they did not "spread the Gospel." On the contrary, disseminating Christian knowledge was their unending and overarching goal. But coupled with the spread of Christian knowledge was their belief that conversion to Christianity would follow from Indians attaining a correct understanding *of what the missionaries believed* were their own religions. Once this was attained, they expected Hindus, Jains, Muslims, and Parsis would realize that their religions were false and reject them, Catholics would convert to Christianity, and Jews would accept Jesus as their Messiah (see e.g. Wilson 1830d; 1832a; 1833b; 1833c; 1847b, 93; 1856c, 93–94; Mitchell 1857).

Since it was presumed that religions were based on and embodied in scriptures, the paucity of available religious literature was one explanation for the absence of authentic religious knowledge. Thus, when Wilson observed that he had never seen a Parsi with the "body of the Zand writings" or Zand-Avesta "in a collected form" he disclosed the absence of what a religious votary should possess: the scriptures of one's religion (Wilson 1843, 13). Not to possess or

have knowledge of a religion's scriptures meant inevitably that one neither knew nor followed the writ of their religion. The Bombay Scottish missionaries saw their writings on the religions, translations of non-Christian *shastras*, and grammars of sacred languages as tools and guides that Indians could use to understand their own religions. But there was a problem; "priests" precluded most Indians from knowledge of their religions through their use of unknown languages and control over scriptures. If Indians learned their sacred languages and had access to their scriptures, they could break the priestly monopoly, investigate their religions, compare them to other religions, and realize that they were, in the main, false—leaving the way open for their acceptance of Christianity. Thus, Wilson entreated Parsis to "rigidly examine the claims of the different religious systems" (Wilson 1833b, 3) and Mitchell implored Hindus, Parsis, and Muslims to:

> Take the Bible, and deliberately compare it with the Vedas and Puranas of the Hindus, the Zend-avesta of the Parsis, and the Kuran of the Musalmans. Happily, several authoritative Hindu works have been rendered into English, so that it is easy to compare them with the Bible. So with the Kuran. It is much to be deplored that hitherto we have no satisfactory version of the Zend-avesta; for, of all arguments to convince intelligent Parsis of the falsehood of Zoroastrianism, perhaps none would be so convincing as the perusal of their own Scriptures, and a thoughtful comparison of them with the Bible. (Mitchell 1857, 174–175)

To help Indians undertake this comparative examination of the religions, the Bombay Scottish missionaries *as Christian missionaries* taught and encouraged Indians to learn their own religions and sacred languages.

"Every Parsi," Reverend Wilson insisted, "has a right to examine for himself the foundation of his religious observances" (Wilson 1833b, 4). This did not occur because the Avesta and its commentaries were written in an obscure manner in languages largely unknown to the Parsis; consequently, Parsi prayers consisted "wholly in the emission of sounds" that were not understood. Even Parsi "priests" did not fully or accurately understand the prayers they recited or the *shastras* they valued (Wilson 1843; 1856c, 93–94; Mitchell 1884, 30). According to Mitchell, this lack of understanding was not important to Parsis because "the efficacy of the prayer depends on the right sounds being uttered, and not at all the sense attached to them" (Mitchell 1884, 41). Unlike most Parsis, Wilson knew Avestan, Pahlavi, and Persian and therefore had the linguistic tools necessary, in his view, to understand the Parsi religion. He and his Presbyterian colleagues employed their knowledge of Zoroastrian literature and its languages not only to enlighten Parsis to what they considered were Zoroastrianism's errors, but also to instruct Parsis in what they contended most did not know: their own religion (Wilson 1833b; 1843; Mitchell 1857, 128–143). If Parsis

knew the "real contents" of their own "scriptures" they would undoubtedly realize that their religion was false.

> It is only because with most of the Parsis it is in an unknown tongue, that its perusal is tolerated. It is muttered by the priest, but it is not understood by the people; and it is arbitrarily interpreted according to the degree of ignorance or knowledge, of the stupidity or intelligence, of the superstition or reason, of those who may venture to inquire about its meaning. (Wilson 1843a, 342–344)

Beyond their own work, the Bombay Scottish missionaries encouraged Parsis, Europeans, and the colonial state to publish and translate Zoroastrian scriptures into Gujarati and English (Modi 1905, 172).

Dhanjibhai Nauroji's 1839 conversion to Christianity illustrates the way in which the Bombay Scottish missionaries' understood religion and Zoroastrianism and sought to convert Indians to Christianity by familiarizing them with their own *shastras*. Before he attended Scottish mission schools Nauroji admitted knowing nothing about his "religion." For him, being a Parsi meant participation in family rituals. There was no need for him to ask: What is Zoroastrianism? Under the influence of his Scottish teachers, he began to view religion as something one could study. He became familiar with the Parsi *shastras* not from mobeds but rather from reading John Wilson's 1833 *Lecture on the Vendidad Sade of the Parsis.* Nauroji eventually concluded that the Parsi *shastras* were false; and since he had already accepted the notion that a religion is its scriptures, he concluded that Zoroastrianism was false. He then realized that "the dogmas of different religions are quite irreconcileable [*sic*] with one another, they cannot all have been given by God" and began to do what the Scots advised: investigate the religions. He ultimately decided that Christianity was the one true religion. After a period as an "inquirer," he ceremonially removed his *kusti* and was baptized a Christian. This occurred only after a Parsi "priest" who could not answer his queries about Zoroastrianism convinced him that "the Parsis knew nothing of their own religion, and moreover, did not wish to know" (Nauroji 1909).[15]

Like his view of Parsis and their "religion," Reverend Wilson argued that the "inaccessible" nature of the "Hindu scriptures" and the "dead language" in which they were composed meant that most Hindus neither read nor knew the foundation of their religion. Accordingly, he had "never met a single individual who has perused a fiftieth part" of the "Hindu scriptures" (Wilson 1853a, 62–63). He thought that Hindus were especially prone to be uninformed about their own religion because Brahmins prohibited ordinary Hindus from even listening to the Vedas. Without such knowledge, Hindus were inevitably "prevented from

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[15]For a more detailed account of Nauroji's conversion to Christianity in relationship to the Bombay Scottish missionaries' conversion method, see Numark (2006, chap. 3).

thinking [about religion] for themselves" (Wilson 1834, 11–14). As a means of overcoming the dearth in Hindu religious knowledge, the Bombay Scottish missionaries taught Sanskrit at their college and in their schools, explicated the Vedas, Bhagavad-Gita, Puranas and other texts, and translated and encouraged the translations of the Hindu *shastras* into English and Marathi (Mitchell 1857, 102–127; 1858, 121–126; Wilson 1832a; 1834a; 1836; 1858).

The Scots were not the only Bombay missionaries who promoted the dissemination of Hindu religious knowledge amongst Hindus. *The Dnyanodaya*, an American-run missionary magazine, repeatedly encouraged Hindus to examine their *shastras* and translate them into Marathi. In 1847, it reprinted and translated into Marathi a series of essays originally published in Wilson's *Oriental Christian Spectator* on "The Religious System of the Modern Hindoos." Like the Scottish missionaries, the *Dnyanodaya* criticized Hindus, and especially Brahmins, for venerating the Vedas and valuing the sounds produced by its recitation but knowing "nothing of their contents" because they existed in a difficult form of Sanskrit. "We say let the Vedas be translated, and let every one read them," proclaimed the *Dnyanodaya* (Feb. 1, 1850, 78). In another issue, it broadened this stance: "We should rejoice to see all the Hindoo sacred books translated into simple Mahratta, and rendered accessible to the great mass of the people. Let Hindooism be fairly brought into comparison with Christianity. Let them both, as well as every other religion, be brought out and examined in the open light of day" (*Dnyanodaya* Dec. 1, 1846, 360). Similar statements litter the pages of the *Dnyanodaya* and are frequently accompanied by declarations that the presidency's European residents and the *Dnyanodaya* itself would facilitate and disseminate such translations.

The Scottish missionaries also lamented the fact that Bombay's Bene Israel Jews neither knew their own *shastra* nor understood Hebrew. Nineteenth-century British missionaries frequently noted the absence of Hebrew and Biblical knowledge amongst Jews the world over. As a result, Protestant missionaries complained that Jews recited Hebrew "without any regard to the meaning of particular words, or the general sense which they convey" (Wilson 1847a, 2:647). In contrast to other Jews, the absence of Hebrew and Biblical knowledge amongst the Bene Israel was not attributed to rabbinic machinations. Rather, before the eighteenth century, the Bene Israel was a Konkan *jati* cutoff from and unknown to world Jewry that neither possessed Jewish texts nor knew Hebrew apart from *Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad* "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is God the Lord is One" (*Notices of Madras and Cuddalore in the Last Century* 1858, 162–164). Following their eighteenth-century "discovery," Cochin Jews began teaching the Bene Israel Jewish prayers, prohibitions, and practices, not Hebrew language or Biblical knowledge. Only in 1840 did the Bene Israel obtain a *Sefer Torah* (Pentateuch scroll). Nevertheless, even if they possessed one earlier, they would not have been able to understand it before the Bombay Scottish missionaries taught them Hebrew (see Numark *Forthcoming*).

Notwithstanding the effort of Cochin Jews, when John Wilson arrived on the scene he found the Bene Israel "in a state of great degradation" especially in their "worship" of Hindu gods (Wilson 1831c, 103). To accelerate their abandonment of "heathenish" customs and to teach them the "religion of their fathers," Wilson and his Scottish colleagues taught them Hebrew (Wilson 1833c; 1840, 35n; Mitchell 1899, 91). Before the Scots had begun laboring amongst them, Cochin Jews had taught some Bene Israel to read the Hebrew script phonetically, without comprehending what was read. From a Jewish perspective, understanding Hebrew— while necessary for Talmudic study—was not a language necessary for Jews to know; the ability to recite Hebrew, on the other hand, was essential for Jews to participate fully in religious life, which is why the Cochin Jews focused on teaching the Bene Israel Jewish liturgy, not Hebrew language comprehension (see Numark _Forthcoming_). For the Scots, however, the ability to read the Hebrew script without understanding what was read was virtually meaningless and even counterproductive because it kept the Bene Israel ignorant of their _shastra's_ content. Accordingly, the Bombay Scottish missionaries taught Hebrew systematically to the Bene Israel with the aim of enabling them to read and comprehend their _shastra's_ "true meaning" and to translate it into Marathi. As part of this effort, they wrote Hebrew grammars in Marathi: John Wilson's _Ibri Bhashaiche Vyakaran_ (Rudiments of Hebrew Grammar) (1832) and J. M. Mitchell's _Tables of Hebrew Grammatical Forms: Drawn Up for the Use of the Beni-Israel_ (1844). Teaching Hebrew was especially important in the 1830s because very little of the Old Testament was available in a _readable_ Marathi translation. As more of the Old Testament was translated, the Scots began to use translations of Biblical books, sometimes printed specifically for the Bene Israel, as another means to teach them their own _shastra_. "The dissemination of the Marathi scriptures among the Beni-Israel…and the schools founded for their tuition," Wilson declared, "have led this interesting people to abandon the idolatry into which, during the centuries of ignorance and neglect, they had universally fallen" (Wilson 1854, 44).

The alacrity with which the Bene Israel sought to obtain their _shastra_ in their mother tongue demonstrated to J. M. Mitchell that the Bene Israel sought to know "the meaning of the word of God" and were not "satisfied with a mere utterance of the sound of the venerable Hebrew Scripture" (_British and Foreign Bible Society_ 1842, lxix). Understanding their _shastra_ and modifying their practices to accord with its dictates was not conversion to Christianity, but it was deemed a "change for the better" and a "step towards" Christianity (see Mitchell 1848; 1858, 245–246).

DHARMA AS RELIGION

Accurate translation was a paramount concern for the Bombay Scottish missionaries. They subscribed to the conventional Protestant idea of language's

translatability. Christianity's universal message and its emphasis on correct Christian knowledge, in addition to the peculiarly Protestant stress on the individual attaining unmediated knowledge of the Bible, meant that linguistic and cultural differences could not hinder the Bible's worldwide comprehension and translation. Care was certainly needed to translate the Christian message accurately and the Scots stressed the importance of employing the correct Sanskrit or Marathi vocabulary to convey Christian knowledge (Wilson 1830b; 1831b; 1854; Mitchell 1899, 77–79).

Notwithstanding their erudition and linguistic knowledge, the Bombay Scottish missionaries translated "religion" as *dharma* without misgivings. There is no evidence that they ever question the appropriateness of such translation. This is striking because the translation of other important terms into Marathi associated with religion—such as what term should be used for God and heaven—were extensively debated (Wilson 1830a; 1831b; 1854). In translating religion as *dharma*, and vice versa, the Bombay Scottish missionaries were certainly not alone. For example, *"dharma"* appears as the first and primary Marathi translation of "religion" in the foremost nineteenth-century English-Marathi dictionary—both in terms of "piety" and as "a faith" (Molesworth 1873, 717). Concealed in the vernacular, such a translation helped to reify the very concepts that were purportedly translated: the religions of India.

Through the writings of Bombay-based missionaries, one can clearly see how *dharma* is seamlessly transmuted into a particularly post-Reformation generic concept of religion. Nineteenth-century Marathi publications produced by Protestant missionaries denominate all religions as species of the *dharma* genus. For instance, the 1847 missionary-published *Panchang San* (Yearly Almanac) lists India's different religions as Christian *dharma*, Roman Catholic *dharma*, Jewish *dharma*, Muslim *dharma*, Hindu *dharma*, Buddha *dharma*, Jain *dharma*, and Parsi *dharma* (*Panchang San* 1847, 103–144). Here we see the religions of India listed as eight expressions of the *dharma* taxon. Four years later, other than the addition of Sikhism, this list of religions was itemized in the same way and order in another missionary publication: *Nirnirale Dharma* (1851).

A TEMPLATE OF UNDERSTANDING

Translation is a fitting term to describe the process through which the Bombay Scottish missionaries understood and configured the cultural and religious life of India into religions that were objects of knowledge homologous to Christianity as they understood it. Predicated on the "mimetic relationship between 'reality' and 'knowledge,'" translation is enabled by the assumption that knowledge is transparent and capable of being re-described without significant alteration (Nirajana 1992, 50). By repressing the difference and heterogeneity of that which is translated, the presumption of re-description without

interpolation and semantic transformation legitimizes the colonial aspect of translation and silences its transformative effects. While translation purports to be a process through which the source or object of investigation can be grasped and re-described without semantic modification, it is clear that the translator, in the process of comprehension and translation, situates that which he seeks to translate into his frame of reference. This can result in unintentional transfigurations that silence the heterogeneity of the translation's referent and the possibility of untranslatable difference. If one considers translation as a cross-cultural process of understanding, then surely objects of investigation are invariably understood through the translator's categories of thought.

The universalistic pretensions of Christian, humanistic, and the Enlightenment thought have buttressed the related notions of the transparency and translatability of knowledge. One central humanistic and Enlightenment assumption is the idea that humans are capable of capturing knowledge and explaining or understanding that captured knowledge in a way not bound by or intertwined with a particular cultural or linguistic formation. If meaning were restricted by language and culture, then knowledge would not be universal. This view erases fundamental differences and represses the heterogeneity of the human experience by buttressing the idea that European concepts are not particular but universal. Such pretension eschews the particularity of knowledge and invests the investigator with the potential to transcend linguistic and cultural differences to attain an unproblematic understanding of a transparent world. In the words of one well-known critic of humanistic thought, "Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us" (Heidegger 1962, 191–912). In understanding "the religions" through the lens of their own provincial forms of knowledge and experience, the Bombay Scottish missionaries exemplify the critique of presuppositionless apprehension.

Irrespective of their intentions, the Bombay Scottish missionaries understood the religions of India as distinct species of a Christian-informed religion genus. Once they concluded that a particular religion existed, they could not but conceptualize it as structurally isomorphic to Christianity. The reification of the religions into textualized objects of knowledge followed necessarily from the Protestant paradigm through which they understood the religions—a paradigm that is revealed when one examines how several religions were imagined. When they recognized a religion as *a religion* it would perforce already be structurally configured by the features of what was understood as religion. The very proposition that a particular religion existed conformed it to the religion category. Knowledge actively produces the very object it purports to describe objectively.

An understanding of how British missionaries who were also Orientalists and ethnographers conceptualized Christianity, the religion taxon, the scripture

concept, Roman Catholicism, priests, and several non-Christian religions and approached and sought to convert Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Jains, Catholics, and Jews enables the provincialization of British conceptions of India's religions and accounts for why individual Britons—who were well-read in the religious textual traditions and aware of the ways in which religion was actually practiced and understood—imagined Hinduism and other religions analogous to the way in which they conceptualized Christianity. While much of the content of what would become "world religions" existed before Europeans began to fashion and classify them, clearly the way in which Britons understood the form of "the religions" was based largely on a pre-existing a priori framework of apprehension.

Acknowledgments

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Abbreviations

IA	*INDIAN ANTIQUARY*
JASB	*JOURNAL OF THE ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BENGAL*
JBBRAS	*JOURNAL OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY*
JRAS	*JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND*
OCS	*ORIENTAL CHRISTIAN SPECTATOR*
AMP	American Mission Press
BTBS	Bombay Tract and Book Society
RTS	Religious Tract Society
WW	William Whyte

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