

“Religions, Sects, and Heresy” – Religion on the Indian Subcontinent in Early Modern German Texts

Antje Flüchter

RESÜMEE

Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Konzeptionalisierung von Religion und die Wahrnehmung von Religionen. Zunächst wird gefragt, wie frühneuzeitliche Europäer die religiösen Gruppen in Indien bezeichneten, um in einem zweiten Schritt das Konzept von Religion mit dem des „Heidentums“ zu kontrastieren. Als letztes wird nachgezeichnet, mit welchen Kriterien eine Hierarchie zwischen den Religionen konstruiert wurde. Da Religion in der Frühen Neuzeit eine Grundstruktur des gesellschaftlichen Lebens darstellte, können diese Fragen nicht nur anhand theologischer Traktate behandelt werden. Daher werden Texte protestantischen Theologen neben solche von meist weniger gebildeten deutschen Angestellten der niederländischen Ostindien-Kompanie (VOC) gestellt. Es zeigte sich, dass es keine einheitliche Wahrnehmung der indischen Religionen gab. Die Kategorie Religion diente dazu, die Wahrnehmung der Vielfalt Indiens zu strukturieren, und war in der Frühen Neuzeit eine der wenigen Möglichkeiten, die europäische Überlegenheit zu konstruieren. In der Frühen Neuzeit wurden die Religionen meist in eine graduelle Hierarchie gebracht, diese Art der Ordnung trat in der kolonialen Phase hinter der Dichotomie Orient-Okzident zurück.

When Vasco da Gama reaches the Southern Indian city of Calicut in 1498, he encounters Moorish merchants and a Christian society. On the way to see the King of Calicut, his Indian escort shows him several churches, one of which they enter: It is huge as a cloister, with nicely carved stone, and a tiled roof. Inside, there is a chapel with a bronze door and da Gama notices a small image that the locals tell him displays the Mother of God. Vasco da Gama and his companions say their prayers before the image. The

travel account goes on to describe further similarities (and contrasts) to familiar Western Christian churches and practices: Along the walls of the church are small graves and the churchmen wear cords around their upper body, "like our priests wear their stole." They sprinkle holy water, but also give all of the travelers white clay to put on their foreheads and necks as the local Christians do. There are many pictures of saints painted on the walls, all with glories, but, and that astonishes the Portuguese, they look a bit strange: they have huge teeth, which stick out of their mouths by several inches and – even worse – they have four or five arms each.¹ The modern reader of this travel account might be surprised by encountering a Christian society in Southern India or the church as an important place in the *adventus* ritual. If, however, the reader has some knowledge of Indian religions, the detail about the alleged Christian priest's cords might evoke associations with the Brahmin cord. This suspicion is corroborated when da Gama receives clay to mark himself; for the modern, globally interested reader, the riddle is solved when the author describes the wonderment over the long teeth and the many arms. This could not be a Christian church; it was rather a temple, possibly a Vaishnava temple. But what about the early modern reader? What about the perceptions of these early Portuguese travelers? Did they have the epistemic tools to recognize an Indian temple? The common interpretation is that the Portuguese simply misunderstood these Indian temples as Christian churches.² One of the goals that motivated their adventurous journey to Asia was to track down the legendary Priest John as a mighty ally against the Islamic powers, and hence they expected to meet Christians in the East. Vasco da Gama found what he was looking for.

This anecdote and its possible interpretations lead to the heart of the question how religions are perceived and conceived within a transcultural perspective. In this paper, this question is applied to early modern German discourses about India. I will begin by analyzing the semantic field of 'religion': How did Europeans name religious groups in early modern India? In a second step, the paper asks how religion was conceptualized in transcultural encounters. Here, religion will also be contrasted with the concept of 'heathendom,' or non-Christian faiths. The third step will be to examine the criteria for constructing a hierarchy among religions, one of which crucially concerned the degree of rationality in a religion. In this third section, the study's timeline will extend to the nineteenth century, because the definition of reason and rationality changed drastically between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries.

I intend to tackle this problem and my questions by analyzing German Protestant texts about India.³ The corpus of sources mainly consists of two kinds of texts published in

1 V. d. Gama, *Die Entdeckung des Seewegs nach Indien. Ein Augenzeugenbericht 1497–1499*, Berlin 1986, pp. 85–86.

2 For example: S. Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama*, New Delhi et al. 1997, esp. pp. 130–3.

3 The Catholic perspective is deliberately left out in this article. Jesuits tracts and compilations were very important for the erudite European discourse like the Protestant tracts analyzed here, whereas for German discourse, they became important only in the early eighteenth century with J. Stöcklein, *Der Neue Welt-Bott oder Aller-*

the seventeenth century: On the one hand, there are academic theological tracts, on the other hand, travelogues by employees of the VOC, the Dutch East India Company.⁴ Regarding the former, two are discussed: the book *Unterschiedliche Gottesdienste in der ganzen Welt* (Different Religious Services Around the World)⁵ by the Anglican clergyman Alexander Ross. Its German edition, published in 1674, included a text by Bernhard Varenius, another clergyman. I will also examine, as a second example, the book *Offne Thür zu dem verborgenen Heydenthum*,⁶ by the Dutch reformed clergy Abraham Rogerius, who lived from 1632 to 1642 in Palicat, a Dutch factory town in India. Rogerius's book was published in German in 1663. Both texts were important in early modern discourses about India; both were, for example, quoted and integrated in Olfert Dapper's compilation *Asia, Oder: Ausführliche Beschreibung Des Reichs des Grossen Mogols*.⁷ The inclusion of information in compilations is important in several respects. The reception process was rather selective, so it is interesting to note what was transferred or remembered, perhaps even becoming part of generally accepted knowledge, and what was forgotten. Research, however, has often focused only on learned or scholarly discourse although more than one perception on religion in India existed. Therefore I want to contrast the

hand so lehr-als geist-reiche Brief, Schrifften und Reis-Beschreibungen, welche von denen Missionariis der Gesellschaft Jesu aus beyden Indien, und andern über Meer gelegenen Ländern, seit Ann. 1642 [...] in Europa angelangt seynd. Jetzt zum erstenmal theils aus handschriftlichen Urkunden, theils aus den französischen Lettres édifiantes verteuert und zusammen getragen [...], Augsburg/Graz 1726–1758. For the Jesuit discourse, the differentiation between the social and the religious is important; thus, they can simultaneously praise the Indian customs and despise their religions. See A. Flüchter, *Mission als Grenzüberschreitung: katholische Missionare in Indien*, in: C. Roll et al. (eds), *Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen*, Köln 2010 (forthcoming).

- 4 See R. v. Gelder, *Het Oost-Indisch avontuur: duiters in dienst van de VOC (1600–1800)*, Nijmegen 1997.
- 5 A. Ross/B. Varenius, *Unterschiedliche Gottesdienste in der ganzen Welt [...] Beschreibung aller bewusten Religion, Secten und Ketzereyen, so in Asia, Africa, America und Europa von [...] Welt [...]*, Heidelberg 1674. The English original had at least 36 editions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. On the relevance of Ross, see: H. Zedelmaier, *Der Anfang der Geschichte: Studien zur Ursprungsdebatte im 18. Jahrhundert*, Hamburg 2003, pp. 185–7; J. Sheehan, *Sacred and Profane: Idolatry, Antiquarianism and the Polemics of Distinction*, in: *Past and Present* 192 (2006), pp. 35–66.
- 6 A. Rogerius, *Offne Thür zu dem verborgenen Heydenthum: Oder Warhaftige Vorweisung deß Lebens und der Sitten samt der Religion und dem Gottesdienst der Bramines, auf der Cust Chormandel, und denen herumliegenden Ländern/mit kurzen Anm. aus d. Niederländ. Übers. Samt Christoph Arnolds auserlesenen Zugaben von d. asiat. african. U. amerikan. Religionssachen [...]*, Nürnberg 1663. Rogerius's work was and is praised because of its rather objective perspective towards non-Christian religion. Recently, it was proven that he relied heavily on older texts, written by Jesuits, cf. J. Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens: Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert*, München 1998, p. 172; J. v. Goor, *Toleranz und Anerkennung von Andersartigkeit. Über die Wertigkeit und Nützlichkeit des Menschen in den Gebieten des VOC Handelsmonopols*, in: H. Lademacher/R. Loos/S. Groenvelde (eds), *Ablehnung – Duldung – Anerkennung. Toleranz in den Niederlanden und in Deutschland. Ein historischer und aktueller Vergleich*, Münster et al. 2004, pp. 234–53, esp. p. 238.
- 7 O. Dapper, *Asia, Oder: Ausführliche Beschreibung Des Reichs des Grossen Mogols Und eines grossen Theils Von Indien: In sich haltend die Landschaften Kandahar, Kabul, Multan, Haikan, Bukkar, Send oder Diu, Jesselmeer, Attak, Peniab, Kaximir, Jangapore, Dely, Mando, Malva, Chitor, Utrad, Zuratte oder Kambaye, Chandisch, Narvar, Gwallar, Indostan, Sanbat, Bakar, Nagrakat, Dekan und Visiapour. Nebenst einer vollkommenen Vorstellung Des Königreichs Persien, Wie auch Georgien, Mengrelien, Cirkassien und anderer benachbarten Länder*, Nürnberg 1681. But even if Ross and Rogerius were important for the knowledge of Indian religion in the seventeenth century, nowadays they are rather overshadowed by other works like the Jesuit texts of Athanasius Kircher's *China illustrata*, Roberto de Nobili's works, or the texts written by German missionaries in Tranquebar, such as those of Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg.

texts mentioned so far with the perception of religion in travelogues written by German employees of the VOC, who mostly worked as sailors and soldiers. Their travels are unique, because these authors were usually not very learned or at least not erudite in the classical sense. Their travel accounts were only rarely integrated into encyclopedias and therefore not often included within accepted knowledge about India.⁸ However, the travel writing of VOC sailors and soldiers mirrors a more everyday perception of India, a perception "below" the learned discourse. In short, research focusing only on the learned discourse is misleading. In the second and third parts of this paper, these two kinds of sources are compared with texts that reorganized the information on India in German and European discourses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

If we speak of early modern India, the image of colonial British India, the so-called British Raj, is often overpowering. Yet, before the second half of the eighteenth century, the situation was quite different in terms of power asymmetries: Until the death of Mogul Aurangzeb in the year 1707, the Mughal hegemony over the Indian subcontinent was nearly unchallenged. The Indian-European encounter took place under the condition of Indian hegemony. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, European groups had to ask permission to gain access to the Indian markets. This fundamental power asymmetry had implications for the perception of Indian societies and state systems; because of it, early modern European travelers did not perceive Indian societies as different and inferior, but rather as different and more powerful, if not superior.⁹ Under these conditions, only a few opportunities existed to construct or mark alterity and European superiority. It must be stressed that, as far as governing structures were concerned, the Europeans looked rather for similarities than for alterity, whereas religion was one of the few aspects besides gender roles where it was possible to stress alterity and perceive European superiority.¹⁰

1. The Semantic Field

In the sources analyzed here, many different terms were used to label Indian religious groups. Labeling was an important step in the process of getting to know something as well as of explaining the Indian experience to a European audience.¹¹ Moreover, percep-

8 On the selective transfer of knowledge between different kinds of texts and media see: A. Flüchter, "Aus den fürnehmsten indianischen Reisebeschreibungen zusammengezogen". Knowledge about India in Early Modern Germany, in: *Intersections: The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks* 14 (2010), pp. 337–60.

9 In India, different European groups encountered different Indian societies; all these groups formed a network. Between some groups, communication was more frequent than between others; nevertheless, it is misleading to start an analysis of European perception in India with the assumption of a ubiquitous underlying dichotomy dividing Europe and Asia.

10 The author is preparing a book about the perception of Indian state structures in early modern German discourse, see: *Von der Vielfalt der Bilder zu der einen Wahrheit: Indische Staatlichkeit im deutschen Diskurs der Frühen Neuzeit (1500–1750)* (forthcoming 2011).

11 In published texts, considerations about the expected readers, their knowledge, and their expectations cannot be overestimated, see S. Burghartz, "Translating Seen into Scene?" *Wahrnehmung und Repräsentation in der frühen Kolonialgeschichte Europas*, in: S. Burghartz/M. Christadler/D. Nolde (eds), *Berichten – Erzählen – Be-*

tion is always structured by the terms that are used, or even more, by the labels and terms that already exist in the respective language and are thus available for use.¹²

There were a number of negative labels for non-Christian religions in India – or more precisely, religions different from the one the author believed in, because inter-Christian polemic used similar labels. One of the most trenchant labels was “verfluchte Abgötterei und Lust-Seuche der Heyden” (the damned idolatry and heathen plague of lust), as an editor tellingly wrote in the preface in a travel account by the VOC employee Christian Burkhardt.¹³ In another travel account, a Dutch clergyman, also employed by the VOC, contrasted the Christian religion with the “Heydnische Greuel” (the heathen atrocity).¹⁴ Designations like these, however, are rather rarely found.

Several different words were used in early modern German texts to label religions in India; the most commonly found terms will be analyzed here: *Ketzerey* for heresy, *Sekte* for sect, *Glaube* for belief or faith and *Gesetz* for law. Not as frequently as might be expected, non-Christian religions are sometimes termed *Ketzerey* (heresy). Secular travelers rarely used this term. It is more often found in the ethnographic works of ecclesiastics, as in the subtitle of the important work of the clergyman Alexander Ross examined here.¹⁵ In his foreword, Ross lamented that the world was full of religions, sects, and heresy.¹⁶

Sekte (sect) was used even more frequently than heresy and it is in fact the most common term indicating religious groups used in the travelogues written by the VOC employees. The ordinary use of this term characterizes a faction of a religion. Whereas nowadays sect is understood as having a pejorative connotation, in early modern travel accounts *Sekte* is used rather neutrally, except if applied to Christian sects¹⁷ and except for the fact that all non-Christian groups were ultimately understood as deficient. “Sekte” is used for the Muslim as well as for the Indian non-believer: Among the “Mahometisten” there were some who belonged to the “Hassanischen Secte”¹⁸ who followed not the Turkish but “the Persian sect,” as Johann Albrecht von Mandelslo put it.¹⁹ The subgroups of the

herrschen. Wahrnehmen und Repräsentation in der frühen Kolonialgeschichte Europas, Frankfurt a. M. 2003, pp. 161–75.

12 M. Juneja / M. Pernau, Einleitung, in: M. Juneja (eds), Religion und Grenzen in Indien und Deutschland: auf dem Weg zu einer transnationalen Historiographie, Göttingen 2008, pp. 9–53, esp. pp. 14–16.

13 C. Burkhardt, Ost-Indianische Reise-Beschreibung / Oder Kurtzgefaßter Abriß von Ost-Indien/und dessen angränzenden Provinzien, bevorab wo die Holländer ihren Sitz und Trafiquen maintainieren etc., Halle/Leipzig 1693, To the reader, no pagination.

14 J.C. Hoffmann, Reise nach dem Kaplande, nach Mauritius und nach Java: 1671–1676. Neu hrsg. nach d. zu Cassel im J. 1680 ersch. Orig.-Ausg., Haag 1931, p. 74.

15 The subtitle of the German translation is: Beschreibung aller bewusten Religionen, Secten und Ketzereyen (A Description of All Known Religions, Sects, and Heresies).

16 The world is with “gar zu vielen Secten und Ketzereyen,” that is “mit gar zu vielen Religionen überhäuft,” A. Ross/B. Varenus, Gottesdienste (as in note 5), p.)(iii.

17 Alexander Ross, e.g., wrote in a negative way about the many different opinions of the heretic Christian sects, see A. Ross/B. Varenus, Gottesdienste (as in note 5), p. 884.

18 J. Andersen / V. Iversen, Orientalische Reise-Beschreibungen. In der Bearbeitung von Adam Olearius, Schleswig 1669, ed. Dieter Lohmeier, Tübingen 1980, p. 55.

19 J.A. v. Mandelslo, Des Hoch-Edelgebohrnen Johann Albrechts von Mandelslo Morgenländische Reise-Beschreibung: worinnen zugleich die Gelegenheit und heutiger Zustand etlicher fürnehmen indianischen Länder, Provinzien, Städte und Insulen ... beschrieben werden, ed. Adam Olearius, Hamburg 1696, p. 75. Johann Albrecht

Indian non-believers, mostly called Benjanen or Jenitven,²⁰ were also called "Sekten."²¹ However, concerning the Indian non-believers, it is debatable if *Sekte* was primarily a religious concept since it included social and political aspects. It was difficult for early modern Europeans to cope with the diversity among Indian people in general and also with the social formation that later on was termed caste. The VOC employees used many phrases for the different and socially distinct Indian societies: *Kaste* (caste), *Geschlecht* (house or family), *Zunft* (guild), or likewise *Sekte*. And there is one more term that oscillates in a similar way between a religious and a sociological meaning, namely, *Nation* or nation²² in the early modern sense. In some of the German VOC travel accounts, "Nation und Religion" seems to be used like a hendiadys.²³ The Indian "Jentiven" and "Benjanen" could also be understood as two "Nationen." Another VOC employee wrote: Two "Nationen" lived on the Coromandel Coast, namely the "Mohren" or Moors and the "Jentiven." This traveler, Johann Jacob Saar, was not very much interested in religious aspects, so in the following paragraph he distinguishes the "Mohren" and "Jentiven" according to their clothing and their "Humors," that is, in a proto-medical sense; because of their different humors, they are always in antagonism and often wage war against each other.²⁴ Saar makes no mention of religious difference at all.

Sometimes *Sekte* is used as a synonym for religion, mostly regarding Islam. For example, the VOC employee Johann Sigismund Wurffbain used *Sekte* and *Religion* as synonyms to

von Mandelslo was a young nobleman from Schleswig-Holstein-Gottorf who traveled via Persia to India. His travelogue is included in this study because it was published by Adam Olearius, who also published the reports by Jürgen Andersen and Volquart Iversen, both VOC employees. Olearius edited all three texts quite thoroughly, so the intertextual relations between their reports are very close.

- 20 On the terms *Jentiven* and *Benjanen* as well as the problematic modern term Hinduism, see the second part of this article.
- 21 J. Andersen/V. Iversen, *Reise-Beschreibungen* (as in note 18), pp. 204–5. J.S. Wurffbain, *Vierzehn Jährige Ost-Indianische Krieg= und Ober=Kauffmanns= Dienste. In einem richtig geführten Journal und Tage-Buch. In welchen Viel Denckwürdige Begebenheiten wohlbeglaubte Erzählungen/fern entlegener Länder und dero Einwohner annehmliche Beschreibungen/ausländischer Gewächse und Thiere deutliche Erklärungen/sambt vielen in Handlungs-Sachen dienlichen Wichtigkeiten vorgestellt werden*, Sulzbach/Nürnberg 1686, p. 132; J. v. Twist, *Aus der Indianischen Beschreibung Johannis von Twist/der Niederländischen Compagnie Handlungs-Direktoren in den Indianischen Städten*, in: A. Ross/B. Varenus, *Gottesdienste* (as in note 5), pp. 1021–7, esp. p. 1022. Nowadays special, mostly ascetic groups inside Hinduism are also called *Sekten*; however, that is again a different concept of *Sekte*, cf. A. Michaels, *Der Hinduismus. Geschichte und Gegenwart*, München 1998, p. 349.
- 22 The term nation is much older than the modern nation state. It described a group and it mostly related the identity of a group to its origin. Important research concerning the humanist discourse of nation has been done, cf. H.G. Münkler/H. Grünberger, *Nationale Identität im Diskurs der Deutschen Humanisten*, in: H. Berding (ed.), *Nationales Bewußtsein und kollektive Identität*, Frankfurt 1996, pp. 211–47; C. Hirschi, *Wettkampf der Nationen. Konstruktionen einer deutschen Ehrgemeinschaft an der Wende vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit*, Göttingen 2005. The analyses of travelogues, however, has demonstrated that the term nation was used by ordinary people in a more arbitrary way.
- 23 J.J. Merklein, *Reise nach Java, Vorder- und Hinter-Indien, China und Japan. 1644–1653*. Neu hrsg. nach d. zu Nürnberg im Verl. von Endter 1672 gedr. verb. Ausg. des 1663 zum 1. Mal ersch. Textes, Haag 1930, p. 54; J.A. v. Mandelslo, *Reise-Beschreibung* (as in note 19), p. 74.
- 24 "Weil Sie aber dabey unterschiedlichen Humors sind, stehen sie immerzu in Differenz, und führen grosse Krieg untereinander." J.J. Saar, *Reise nach Java, Banda, Ceylon und Persien. 1644–1669*. Neu hrsg. nach d. zu Nürnberg im Verl. Tauber 1672 gedr. verb. Ausg. des im Jahre 1662 zum 1. Mal ersch. Textes, Haag 1930, p. 126.

label Muslim groups.²⁵ But he also used *Sekte* as a contrast to Christianity when he wrote about a woman from the Banda Islands who was raised in the “reformierte Religion” but returned as a grown-up to the “Mahometanischen Secte.”²⁶ Maybe the root of this labeling Islam a Christian sect was the idea that Islam is a heretic sect of Christianity; this old idea can still be traced in some of the early modern theological tracts.²⁷ The author of the travel account just quoted had a secular background; this might be evidence for the general popularity of this anecdote. The different uses of the term *Sekte* are also evident if we consult Dapper’s compilation, in which *Sekte* is used for religious subgroups such as the Brahmins, as well as for larger collectives.²⁸

Islam, and more often Christianity, could also be labeled as *Glaube* (faith or belief).²⁹ If it refers to Christian belief, an opposite term might be *Aberglaube* or *Irr-Glaube* – false belief – used mostly by theologians and in compiling tracts; for example, by Bernhard Varenius or Alexander Ross. This use of *Aberglauben* can still be found in the eighteenth century, in the German translation, for example, of Bernard Picart’s book *Ceremonies et Coutumes religieuses de tous les Peuples du Monde*.³⁰ The meaning of the German term *Aberglaube* can also refer to superstition; used as such, it does not categorize a religion but characterizes certain practices, for example, the “Aberglaube” to care for the way the crows fly in the morning.³¹ However, German authors also use a Latin loan word, *superstitiones*, in the same sense. The VOC employee Merklein described the *superstitiones* of the Muslims in the kingdom of Jamby, who were pagan rather than Turkish.³² Thus he implied that Muslims were less superstitious and more rational, a criterion for ranking religions that I will tackle in the last part of this paper. In this connotation, superstition or *Aberglaube* is more often found in the reports of secular travelers.³³

25 J.S. Wurffbain, *Reisen nach den Molukken und Vorder-Indien* (1638–1646), Haag 1931, vol. 1, p. 50. Wurffbain also wrote on the islands Kay and Arrow (p. 102); cf. also P. Della Valle, *Reiß-Beschreibung in unterschiedliche Theile der Welt: Nemlich In Türrkey, Egypten, Palestina, Persien, Ostindien, und andere weit entlegene Land-schafften; Samt einer außführlichen Erzählung [...]; Erstlich [...]* in *Italianischer Sprach* beschrieben, und in 54 Send-Schreiben [...] verf. [...]; vol. 4: In sich haltend eine Beschreibung der anmercklichsten Städte, und Oerter in Indien, und denen Höfen ihrer Fürsten, Genf 1674, second letter, p. 52.

26 J.S. Wurffbain, *Reisen* (as in note 25), vol. 1, p. 149.

27 For example Alexander Ross wrote about a Nestorian monk who helped Muhammad to write the Qur’an, A. Ross/B. Varenius, *Gottesdienste* (as in note 5), p. 278. On the Christian perception of Islam, or the “Turkish religion” as a heresy see also the essay by Thomas Kaufmann in this volume.

28 O. Dapper, *Asia* (as in note 7), pp. 19 and 104.

29 Jürgen Andersen labeled the Islam on Java and Sumatra as “Glaube,” see J. Andersen/V. Iversen, *Reise-Beschreibungen* (as in note 18), pp. 15, 17.

30 B. Varenius, *Kurtzer Bericht von mancherlei Religionen der Völcker*. Aus dem Lateinischen verteutschet durch E.F., in: A. Ross/B. Varenius, *Gottesdienste* (as in note 5), pp. 942–1016, here: p. 979; A. Ross/B. Varenius, *Gottesdienste*, foreword, p. (iiiiv); D. Herrliberger, B. Picart and J. F. Stapfer, *Heilige Ceremonien, Gottes und Götzen-Dienste aller Völcker der Welt. Oder Eigentliche Vorstellung und summarischer Begriff, der vornehmsten Gottes-Dienstlichen Pflichten, Kirchen- und Tempel-Gebräuchen, der Christlich- und abgöttischen Völcker der gantzen Welt: Welche Nach des Berühmten Picarts Erfindung in Kupfer gestochen, und verlegt worden*, [Zürich] 1748, p. 9.

31 J. Andersen/V. Iversen, *Reise-Beschreibungen* (as in note 18), p. 33.

32 J.J. Merklein, *Reise* (as in note 23), p. 20.

33 To write about Indian superstition was also a way to express one’s own intellectual superiority; however, it is misleading to understand this only in a European-Indian comparison. Moreover, it should be understood in the context of confessional polemics. Merklein as well as Andersen, the two quoted VOC employees, were Prot-

Another term used in describing oppositions is *Gesetz*: "Christlicher Glauben" as opposed to both "Mahometanisches Gesetz"³⁴ and the law which God gave the Jews. In the texts under analysis, *Gesetz* was not used in connection with any other religion than Islam and Judaism, even if a report exhaustively described the rules of such a religious group. The comparison of Christendom as a "religion of belief" with Judaism or Islam as a "religion of law" is a classic pattern in Christian theology.³⁵ It is, however, interesting that this pattern was also used in the travel reports of the VOC employees, meaning that it was not purely an element of theological discourse. As for the label *Lehre*, it is used by a VOC employee only with reference to Islam, either neutrally as in "mahometanische Lehre" or together with a pejorative adjective signifying the deceptive teaching of the Qur'an ("betrüglische Lehre des Alcorans").³⁶

The most common term for religion in the analyzed tracts and travel accounts, however, is *Religion*. If the travel accounts have an ethnographic structure, one often finds chapters like "Von der Malabaren Religion," about the religion of the peoples from the Malabar Coast.³⁷ These accounts describe the "Religion" and way of life of the non-Christians.³⁸ If the authors of the travelogues wrote in the mode of an itinerary, the respective group is characterized as belonging to the Islamic "Religion" and there are similar formulations for other religious groups.³⁹ A town might have many different kinds of "Religionen."⁴⁰ Nevertheless, one difference is important to stress: there is a Christian, Islamic, or Jewish *Religion* but not a pagan one. That is, *pagan* is not used as an adjective in the reports, but rather as a genitive construction. This may be a hint that the authors did not perceive the pagan religions as a unity or as *the* heathendom, a point that I will come back to later in this article. This neutrality of the term religion is found not only in the writings of secular travelers, but is also comparable to the semantic use in clergy tracts. Abraham Rogerius's German edition is entitled *Religion und Gottesdienst* of the pagans,⁴¹ while in Alexander

estant. For the general discussion about superstition and magic, see K. v. Greyerz, Grenzen zwischen Religion, Magie und Konfession aus der Sicht der frühneuzeitlichen Mentalitätsgeschichte, in: G.P. Marscha (ed.), Grenzen und Raumvorstellungen (11.–20. Jahrhundert) – Frontières et conceptions de l'espace (11e–20e siècle), Zürich 1996, pp. 329–43; W. Behringer, Wissenschaft im Kampf gegen den Aberglauben. Die Debatten über Wunder, Besessenheit und Hexerei, in: R. v. Dülmen/S. Rauschenbach (eds), Macht des Wissens. Die Entstehung der modernen Wissenschaftsgesellschaft, Köln/Weimar 2004, pp. 365–90.

34 J.S. Wurffbain, Reisen (as in note 25), vol. 1, about Amboina: p. 75.

35 J.T. Pawlikowski, Judentum und Christentum, in: G. Müller (ed.), Theologische Realenzyklopädie: Studienausgabe, Teil 1, Berlin 2002, pp. 386–403, here: p. 393. For uses of this theological argument by Lutheran reformers see the contribution by Thomas Kaufmann to this volume.

36 C. Burckhardt, Reise-Beschreibung (as in note 13), pp. 157, 160.

37 A. Herport, Reise nach Java, Formosa, Vorder-Indien und Ceylon. 1659–1668. Neu hrsg. n. d. zu Bern im Verl. Sion-leitner 1669 ersch. Orig.-Ausg., Reisebeschreibungen von Deutschen Beamten und Kriegsleuten im Dienste der Niederländischen West- und Ost-indischen Kompagnien 1602–1797, ed. S.P. L'Honoré Naber, Haag 1930, p. 120 et passim.

38 For example J.J. Merklein, Reise (as in note 23), p. 97 et passim.

39 Concerning the "Javaner" see J.S. Wurffbain, Reisen (as in note 25), vol. 1, p. 62.

40 J. Andersen/V. Iversen, Reise-Beschreibungen (as in note 18), p. 30.

41 Interestingly enough that seems to be a special subtitle for the German edition; there is no comparable subtitle in the Dutch original (De open-deure Tot het verborgen heydendom, Leyden 1651) or the French translation (Amsterdam 1670); the importance of Rogerius's works at least in the context of the VOC is evident because

Ross's compilation there is a special chapter in which he compares the "christlichen und islamischen Religion" because – as he states – these are the most powerful religions in the world.⁴² Bernhard Varenius's report has a similar title.⁴³ Hence, *Religion* was not used in the sense of the true religion or the revealed religion, and thus religion is not the epitome of an exclusive claim on truth.⁴⁴ Rather, *Religion* is used as a neutral term which needed some adjective to characterize or evaluate it. The 'true' religion was always the one to which the author himself belonged. Attributes for other religions included: the "abergläubisch und pythagorisch" (superstitious and Pythagorean) religion, as Ross writes about the people in Cambaya, or "abgöttisch" (idolatrous) for the people of Siam.⁴⁵ In his foreword to a travel account, Adam Olearius confronts the only redemptive religion with an infamous superstitious religion ("allein seligmachende" versus "schändlich-abergläubische Religion").⁴⁶ Thus adjectives often used for non-Christian or, in the context of the analyzed texts, non-Protestant religions were "abergläubisch," "blind," or "verblendet" (deluded, blind). The heathens were characterized as "unwüssend" (ignorant).⁴⁷ We can see here that a very important difference between religions was their – assumed – degree of rationality, another point to which I will return later on.

As a preliminary finding of this selective analysis, it can be concluded that there were many terms used to label religions in India. There is, however, a difference between the analyzed texts. It is perhaps not surprising but nevertheless important to state that the VOC employees were much more arbitrary in choosing a term than the theologians. All the same, some terms, like *Gesetz* (law) were reserved for particular religions. Perhaps even more important is the fact that for the VOC employees, religion was not a distinct field of perception but was linked to other ascriptions. This interconnectedness is most evident in the use of the term *Sekte*. This observation may also be an indication that the boundaries between religions in early modern India were not drawn as strictly as they are in the present, but were rather permeable.⁴⁸ The more general conclusion of this semantic analysis is that not only Christianity but all religions – that is, all groups we nowadays understand as religions, as well as all kinds of veneration of anything supernatural, any system of ideas that related to such transcendency and that explained the world – were

Merklein relates Rogerius's description of "Religion, Leben und Sitten" of the 'heathen.' J.J. Merklein, *Reise* (as in note 23), p. 97.

42 A. Ross/B. Varenius, *Gottesdienste* (as in note 5), p. 278, also in the English original of Ross's work: A. Ross, *Pan-sebeia: or, A view of all religions in the world: with the several church-governments, from the Creation, to these times. Together with a discovery of all known heresies, in all ages and places, throughout Asia, Africa, America, and Europe*, London 1653.

43 Varenius uses also *religio* in his works in Latin, cf. B. Varenius, *Tractatus, in quo agitur de Japoniorum religione*, Amsterdam 1649.

44 Cf. R. Brandner, *Was ist Religion?*, Würzburg 2002, pp. 14–15.

45 A. Ross/B. Varenius, *Gottesdienste* (as in note 5), p. 140.

46 A. Olearius, *Vorwort*, in: J. Andersen/V. Iversen, *Reise-Beschreibungen* (as in note 18), p. XV.

47 A. Herport, *Reise* (as in note 37), pp. 121, 150; J. Hoffmann, *Reise* (as in note 14), p. 2; J.S. Wurffbain, *Reisen* (as in note 25), vol. 1, p. 76.

48 Cf. M. Juneja-Huneke, *Mission, Encounters and Transnational History – Reflections on the use of Concepts across Cultures*, in: A. Gross/V. Kumaradoss/H. Liebau (eds), *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India*, Halle 2006, pp. 1025–45, esp. pp. 1031–3.

called *Religion* in the seventeenth century. This conclusion leads to the second part of this paper.

2. The Function and Concept of Religion

Most ordinary VOC employees shared their Protestant denomination with the here analysed theologians, but often they had different educational and social backgrounds, which is certainly one reason for the different uses of terms and labels concerning Indian religions. For an analysis of the perception of religion in early modern German texts, it is also important to ask about the function of describing or mentioning non-Christian religions in India in the respective texts and for the intended audience.⁴⁹ Therefore, in the second half of this article, the function of religion in the texts of the VOC employees and in the theological encyclopedias will be compared. To give this comparison more depth, the concepts of religion used are contrasted with the concept of 'heathendom.'

German VOC employees wrote about religion and religious practices, but not as often as the authors of more erudite reports did. Religion functioned in their texts as a tool to construct alterity in at least three ways, which were all different from the general idea of Christian and European superiority in a missionary sense. First, there was frequently a more or less latent bias against non-Christian religions, expressed in adjectives like "abschewlich" (infamous); their service was "abgöttisch" (idolatrous); the heathen themselves are "blind," "verblendet," or "unwissend" (blind, deluded, or ignorant). This construction of alterity fulfilled a compensatory function. The assumption that Christianity was the superior religion may have helped these dependent, poor, and (in the VOC) mistreated sailors and soldiers to cope with their experiences. Second, the writers were not so much interested in the belief systems per se, but in the description of exotic religious practices as an acknowledgement of the anticipated reader's curiosity: The publications needed to be sold. Third, religion was above all a criterion to organize the diversity experienced in Indian trade towns. In the travel accounts, we sometimes find a very simple pattern, such as in the above report by Johann Jacob Saar: Two *Nationen* exist in India, the *Mohren* and the *Jentiven*.⁵⁰ However, for the most part the picture is much more differentiated and more complicated. Jürgen Andersen, a VOC employee born in Schleswig-Holstein, characteristically described the inhabitants of Surat, the most important trade town of the seventeenth-century Mughal empire, as follows:

Es wird allhier grosser Handel geführt von vielen Nationen/so theils ihre Wohnung in der Stadt haben/als von Engelländern/ Holländern/ Arabern/ Persern/ Türcken/ Armen-

49 Lucian Hölscher stresses that the notion of religion changes with time and always has to be renegotiated, see L. Hölscher, Zum Wandel der religiösen Semantik in Deutschland seit der Aufklärung, in: H.G. Kippenberger/J. Rüpkke (eds), Europäische Religionsgeschichte. Ein mehrfacher Pluralismus/2, Göttingen 2009, pp. 723–46, esp. pp. 723–4.

50 J.J. Saar, Reise (as in note 24), p. 126.

*ern und Juden/ [...]. Die continuierlichen Einwohner seynd Guhusatten/ Cambajer/ Benjanen/ Brahmanen/ Decanarier und etliche Rasbuten.*⁵¹

The groups in Surat are defined here in terms of both different and overlapping criteria, variously characterized as ethnic or regional (the English, Dutch, Arabs, Persian, Turks, Armenians, people from Deccan, Gujarat or Rajasthan), in terms of religious affiliation (Jews, Benjanen, Brahmins), or because of caste: the reference to Brahmins can also be understood as a social criterion. In other words, religious affiliation is represented here as only one criterion among others to distinguish groups.

Needless to say, the works of the Protestant clergymen Abraham Rogerius and Alexander Ross had a more elaborated concept of religion. Both authors conceptualize *Religion* in the strict sense as the true religion and in a wider sense as an anthropologic constant. Ross wrote that religion is a human quality that distinguishes humans from animals, comparable to reason.⁵² There are many religions in the world that might delude one, but all men, even the very barbaric ones, recognize a religion and a god.⁵³ Abraham Rogerius also declares that all humans recognize the invisible God in the visible things of the world.⁵⁴ Therefore religion for these theologians was a broadly applied term and not one restricted to the single 'true' religion. If we take a look at Zedler's *Universallexicon*, we find a similar concept of religion: *Religion* in the strict sense is defined here as service and veneration towards the true God, but in the wider sense, the entry distinguishes between revealed and natural religions because every people in the world, even the most barbaric, cruel, and wild people, have developed a kind of veneration towards a god.⁵⁵ It is thus important to note that the concept of religion as a universal of humankind is not a discovery of the eighteenth century or High Enlightenment. Burkhard Gladigow has traced it back to Renaissance thinkers like Marsilio Ficino.⁵⁶ Moreover, as was shown, this was not only a philosophical idea, but a common way of thinking. Similar quotations can be found in David Herrliberger's German translation of Picart's compilation of global religious practices, *Ceremonies et Coutumes religieuse de tous les Peuples du Monde*.⁵⁷

51 J. Andersen /V. Iversen, Reise-Beschreibungen (as in note 18), p. 25; similar to Ahmedabad: p. 31, and Palicat: p. 20; or J.A. v. Mandelslo, Reise-Beschreibung (as in note 19), about Surat: p. 34 and Gujarat in general: p. 74.

52 "Welche Religion ist eine Eigenschaft/die nicht weniger dem Menschen wesentlich ist/und ihn von den unvernünftigen Thieren unterscheidet/als die Vernunft selbst." A. Ross/B. Varenius, Gottesdienste (as in note 5), p.)(iiiiv.

53 "Wiewol sonst barbarisch/je dennoch ein Religion angenommen/und eine Gottheit erkandt haben." A. Ross/B. Varenius, Gottesdienste (as in note 5), p.)(iii.

54 Rogerius develops an interesting concept of religion or of the relation between the religions and God: God gave the "Gesetz" to the Jews, but they were afterwards divested of this divinely revealed word; hence, they had to count on their natural reason and thus philosophy evolved.

55 J.H. Zedler, Religion, in: J.H. Zedler (ed.), Grosses vollständiges Universallexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste [...], (1731–1754), vol. 31, Halle/Leipzig 1742, col. 443–52, esp. col. 443.

56 B. Gladigow, Europäische Religionsgeschichte der Neuzeit, in: H. G. Kippenberger /J. Rüpkke (eds), Europäische Religionsgeschichte. Ein mehrfacher Pluralismus/1, Göttingen 2009, pp. 15–37, esp. pp. 25–27.

57 "Alle Völker auf dem Erdboden, sie mögen so blind seyn, als sie immer wollen, und ihr Gottes= und Götzen-dienst mag so abgeschmackt und ungereimt sein als er immer wil, erkennen doch ein höchstes und unabhäng-

In addition to the idea that a universal concept of religion did not evolve before the eighteenth century, there is the notion that early modern people assumed that there was 'one' heathendom with many sects in addition to the three monotheistic religions. The application of this assumption is evident because it can be found in Zedler's *Universallexicon*. In the lemma "Heydenthum," the world contains four religions: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Heathendom.⁵⁸ That is, all religions in the world can be divided into four groups: the three revealed religions or religions of the book, and all others as one entity. In the seventeenth century, this 'heathendom' was sometimes understood as a creation of the devil and his art of delusion. Thus Adam Olearius writes in the foreword to a travel report: The devil was very successful with the children of faithlessness ("Kinder des Unglaubens"); he was successful in being venerated by many nations of East and West India not only as the Lord of the world, but as God.⁵⁹ This conception manifested itself in the many illustrations of pagan divine service that all address the same god, probably beginning with the early sixteenth-century illustration by Jörg Breu the Elder of a statue of a god in Calicut, printed for the German edition of the travel account of Ludowico de Varthema. In the compilation *India orientalis* by Theodor de Bry and his sons, the same devilish iconography for a god is found again, but now used to illustrate the veneration of the Chinese in Bantam. In Abraham Rogerius's *Offne Thür*, the same iconography is applied to a Chinese god in China.⁶⁰ De Bry's widely read compilation was important for the pictorial household of the European imagination; thus, his image of a devil-like god became an integral part of European knowledge about non-European pagan belief,

liches Wesen, von welchem alles abhängt, und welches deßwegen soll verehret werden." See D. Herrliberger et al., *Heilige Ceremonien* (as in note 30), p. 15.

58 J.H. Zedler, Heydenthum, in: J.H. Zedler (ed.), *Universallexicon* (as in note 55), vol. 12, Halle/Leipzig 1735, col. 1998–2004, here: col. 1998. Jonathan Z. Smith has shown the relevance of this fourfold schema by quoting from a number of early erudite tracts about the world's religions, see J.Z. Smith, *Religion, Religions, Religious*, in: M.C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, Chicago/London 1998, pp. 269–84, esp. p. 275. However, it is debatable if the concept of homogeneous idolatry or paganism also structures the individual chapters of these works. If we read Rogerius or Ross, they show the connections but also the differences between the religions beyond Islam, Christianity, and Judaism; moreover, they do not understand paganism as deriving from one shared origin.

59 Olearius wrote, "daß er von unterschiedlichen Nationen in Ost- und West-Indien nicht nur als Fürste der Welt sondern als ein Gott öffentlich geehret und angebetet wird." J. Andersen/V. Iversen, *Reise-Beschreibungen* (as in note 18), p. 57.

60 The illustration by Jörg Breu is reproduced in: L. d. Varthema, *Reisen im Orient*. Eingeleitet, übersetzt und erläutert von Folker Reichert, Sigmaringen 1996, p. 152; see also the later edition of the Varthema report: L. d. Varthema, *Hodœporicon Indiae Orientalis: das ist: Warhafftige Beschreibung der ansehlich Lobwürdigen Reyß, welche der Edel gestreng und weiterfahne Ritter H. Ludwig di Barthema von Bononien aus Italia bürtig inn die Orientalische und Morgenländer, Syrien, beide Arabien, Persien und Indien auch in Egypten und Ethyopien, [...], Leipzig 1610, p. 152; T. De Bry, *Dritter Theil Indiae Orientalis*. Darinnen erstlich das ander Theil der Schiff-fahrten Johann Huygens von Lintschotten auß Holland/so er in Orient gethan/begriffen/und [...] gesehen und erfahren/eygendlich beschrieben wirt; II. Der Holländer Schiffahrt in die Orientalische Insulen/Javan und Sumatra [...]; III. Drey Schiffahrten der Holländer nach obermelten Indien [...] / Alles auff's trewlichst von newem auß den Niederländischen Exemplarien in Hochdeutsch bracht/und in guter Disposition zusammen gefügt. Sampt Vielen schönen künstlichen Figuren und Landtafeln in Kupfer gestochen und an Tag geben, Oppenheim 1616, plate XXIV; A. Rogerius, *Thür* (as in note 6), p. 696.*

an integral knowledge that was produced in Europe, however, and not in Asia nor by travelers to Asia.

One touchstone for conceptualizing non-Christian religions as one worldwide entity was the experience of the many religious groups in India. As mentioned, travelogues as well as compilations about Indian religion did not describe a single 'heathen' religion. The Europeans did indeed recognize several known religious groups in India, several Christian and Islamic denominations, and Jews, but they also encountered many other groups and had problems conceptually categorizing them. Corresponding to what has been suggested by postcolonial studies concerning Hinduism and its construction in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, early modern travelers did not recognize a single monolithic Indian religion. Very rarely do we find the label Hindu in German texts before the second half of the eighteenth century, while the most common labels for Indian religious groups are *Jentiven*, *Banianen*, and *Brahmanen*. There are many explanations for these labels, such as that *Jentiven* may come from the Portuguese *gentoo* meaning "heathen" in general; or that *Banianen* refers to *Jainas*, members of another religion practiced in present-day India; or to a specialized group of tradesmen. But the early modern use is not that explicit or unambiguous. Sometimes the *Jentiven* are understood as a sect of the *Benjanen* similar to the *Fakire*, *Rajputen*, and *Brahmanen*;⁶¹ sometimes the Brahmins are the priests of the *Benjanen*⁶² and sometimes a distinct religion or a nation.⁶³ Finally, there is another indication that travelers and theologians did not perceive non-Christian religions as a unity. Contrary to the generally known number of religions mentioned (i.e., four), European travelers recognized another distinct religion in India: the Parsis. This "seltzame" (strange) religion⁶⁴ is described in many travel reports and is never part of the Indian "heathendom." Most travel reports only mention that members of this religion fled from Persia when Muhammad brought his "new religion" to this country; that they worshipped fire; and that they had special burial ceremonies. But Henry Lord, an English clergyman who spent five years in Surat as a chaplain in the early seventeenth century, followed up his quite influential book about the *Banians*, *A Discovery of the Sect of the Banians*, by a second volume, *The Religion of the Persees*, both published in 1630. While the first part of his book relates a long conversation he had with a Brahmin, he also befriended a *dastūr* to get to know more about the Parsis, and he refers to both the Brahmin *śāstras* as well as to the Persian Avesta, which he calls Zundavastaw.⁶⁵ Therefore

61 J. Andersen /V. Iversen, Reise-Beschreibungen (as in note 18), p. 204.

62 J.A. v. Mandelslo, Reise-Beschreibung (as in note 19), p. 80.

63 One traveler, the German Friken, who is not really interested in religion, declared the *Jentiven* to be mostly believers in the "mohammedanischen Religion"; however he is rather alone in his statement. C. Friken, Ost=Indianische Reisen und Krieges-Dienste. Oder eine Ausführliche Beschreibung was sich solcher Zeit – nämlich von Anno 1680 bis Anno 1685 – zur See als zu Land in öffentlichen Treffen und Scharmützeln, in Belagerungen, Stürmen und Eroberungen der Heidnischen Plätze und Städte im Marschieren und in Quartieren mit ihm und seinem beigefügten Kameraden hin und wieder begeben, bearbeitet und eingeleitet von Joachim Kirchner, Berlin [1692] 1926, p. 97.

64 J. Andersen /V. Iversen, Reise-Beschreibungen (as in note 18), p. 201.

65 H. Lord, A display of two forraigne sects in the East Indies: vizt: the sect of the Banians the ancient naties of India

religion is not only assumed to be a human constituent in the seventeenth century, but, outside of Europe, Europeans, VOC travelers, *and* churchmen experienced more than four religions. Future research could analyze in which contexts, for which audiences, and according to whose underlying interests the fourfold scheme or the larger diversity was highlighted.

3. The Hierarchy of Religions and the Question of Rationality

This pluralistic conceptualization of religion, however, did not imply tolerance or the assumption that all religions were equal. If *Religion* was understood as a global phenomenon, its distinguishing characteristics became even more important. In the travelogues written by the VOC employees, religions are ordered in a hierarchy based on their degree of "civilization" in a wider sense.⁶⁶ Rogerius, Ross, and other authors argue in a more theological sense: Their concept of *Religion* is shaped according to the Christian model. This had consequences for the way that Europeans tried to become acquainted with other religions. Christian clergymen always looked for holy books; they expected every religion to have a book with the most important laws and articles of faith and they consulted religious experts, whereas lay people rather tended to look at visible practices. If Christianity provided the model, other religions were, not astonishingly, understood as deficient. But this type of comparison and this thinking in analogies are not only a proof of European ignorance. They are also a mode of early modern thinking, a thinking that was organized in hierarchies and analogies rather than dichotomies.⁶⁷ Conducting an academic inquiry today by assuming these dichotomies instead of looking for the boundaries and oppositions constructed in a particular situation seems problematic and anachronistic. The quest for comparable characteristics, even deficient ones, amply proves that an author accepted that religions were comparable. The model of Christianity also had consequences for the hierarchy of religions: Two aspects are most important in the seventeenth century, namely, the degree of true revelation and the degree of rationality. The

and the sect of the Persees the ancient inhabitants of Persia. together with the religion and maners of each sect collected into two bookes by Henry Lord sometimes resident in East India and preacher to the Hoble Company of Merchants trading thether, imprinted at London 1630. Thus Henry Lord was much earlier with his text than Anquetil-Dupéron.

66 At the bottom of this hierarchy are people who have no elaborated religion, as the VOC chaplain Hoffmann postulated about the so-called *Hottentots*, see J. Hoffmann, *Reise* (as in note 14), p. 31; Martin Wintergerst conceded, at least, that they knew about a godly life ("göttlichen Lebens") and believed in someone like a god, whom they called "ihren grossen Capitain," see M. Wintergerst, *Reisen auf dem Mittelländischen Meere, der Nordsee, nach Ceylon und nach Java*, 2 Bde., Haag 1932, p. 31. Jürgen Andersen wrote similarly about some 'heathens' at the Coromandel coast "puhr lauter Heyden/welche weder Gott noch Teuffel/weder Helle noch ewiges Wolleben glauben," see J. Andersen/V. Iversen, *Reise-Beschreibungen* (as in note 18), p. 98. The superiority of Islam over heathendom is also evident, see e.g.: J.S. Wurffbain, *Reisen* (as in note 25), vol. 1, p. 102, similar in J. Hoffmann, *Reise* (as in note 14), p. 71; J.J. Merklein, *Reise* (as in note 23), p. 20.

67 Of course there were also dichotomies and binary perspectives in early modern times, but these were not as important and fundamental as in modern times. Moreover, one has to be careful to distinguish between a general discourse and social practices.

difference between natural and revealed religions has a long tradition within Christianity, and we continue to find it in the lemma “Religion” in Zedler’s *Universallexicon*, referring to theologians like Rogerius. Here the difference spelled out is that pagans serve God because of their false and very imperfect knowledge; they make up stories instead of knowing the truth. Jews believed in serving God’s revealed word, but they perceived only a part of it. Finally, whereas Christians held the true way of performing religious service according to the whole and perfect revelation of God’s will, Muslims obeyed a deluded revelation.⁶⁸

The second criterion is the degree of rationality believed to inhere in a faith. It is important in this context to note that while the concept of rationality is not ahistoric and that although rationality in the seventeenth century is not the same as in modernity, it was nevertheless an important criterion to estimate religions prior to the Enlightenment. This can be shown in the travel accounts of VOC employees; and the clergymen argue along similar lines in their tracts. Rogerius and Ross claim that their description of the other, deficient religions proves the rationality of their own Christian or Protestant Christian faith, which is the best religion as well as the most reasonable one. Knowledge of different, other, and strange or exotic-appearing practices stabilized the belief in one’s own religion. For example, Abraham Rogerius complains: “The pagan theology conceals the godly truth with dark clouds of error” (“finstern Wolken des Irrtums”).⁶⁹ Bernhard Varen describes the “Indianer-Religion” in Cambaya as crazy and superstitious foolishness (“wahnsinnige und aberglaubische Thorheit”).⁷⁰ Alexander Ross writes that the opinion of many heretic Christian sects are against sense and reason (“sind dem Verstand und Vernunft gantz zu wider”).⁷¹ The importance of rationality in evaluating religions continues into the present.

Finally, two important books about religion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries will be consulted concerning their concept of rationality in religion. Bernard Picart collected and illustrated *Ceremonies et Coutumes religieuses de tous les Peuples du Monde* (1723), and this book is praised as both one of the most fascinating anthologies of the early Enlightenment and as one of the first textbooks of comparative religion.⁷² For Picart, all religions are comparable and he considered it unimportant whether the religion was based on a revelation. He argued on a similar basis as the older tracts: Whereas for them the plurality of religions proved that there is a god, for him they proved that there was one original, reasonable religion. However, this faith had become degenerated

68 “Der Unterschied derselben bestehet darinn, daß die Heyden Gott dienen aus einer falschen und sehr unvollkommenen Erkenntniß, nach ihrem eiteln Sinn und ihnen selbst erdichteten Weise; die Juden Gott nach seinem geoffenbarten Willen zu dienen vermeynen, aber nur ein Theil desselben annehmen wollen; die Christen wahren Gottesdienst nach der gantzen und vollkommenen Offenbarung des göttlichen Wissen richten; die Mohometaner einer fälschlich angegebenen Offenbarung folgen.” J.H. Zedler, Religion (as in note 55), p. 443.

69 A. Rogerius, Thür (as in note 6), p.)(iiiiv.

70 B. Varenius, in: A. Ross/B. Varenius, Gottesdienste (as in note 5), p. 1018.

71 B. Varenius quoting A. Ross/B. Varenius, Gottesdienste (as in note 5), p. 884.

72 P.v. Wyss-Giacosa, Religionsbilder der frühen Aufklärung: Bernard Picarts Tafeln für die „Cérémonies et Coutumes religieuses de tous les Peuples du Monde“, Wabern/Bern 2006, p. 14.

and corrupted by the clergy's innovations and the people's foolish practices.⁷³ Picart collected his information from earlier sources, such as Rogerius and Ross. This concept of a natural and reasonable religion is characteristic of a deistic point of view and can be traced back to Herbert of Cherbury in the early seventeenth century.⁷⁴ For Picart, the criterion for judging a religion still is reason and rationality. Yet, the definition of reason has changed. Picart was a converted Calvinist Christian, and his work is an instrument of criticism of religion. The main difference is that the model after which he shaped his concept of religion was now an internalized and, in the Enlightenment sense, reasonable religion. And while Rogerius and other theologians in the seventeenth century wanted to contrast a reasonable Christendom with the other less reasonable religions, Picart's aim was to compare and unmask Catholic *and* 'heathen' ceremonies.⁷⁵ In Picart, religion is still used as an instrument to mark alterity and to construct superiority. However, now it is not so much Christianity against non-Christian religions, but an enlightened rational concept of religion against almost every other religion, at least against all that have external ceremonies and rites. In Picart's view, Calvinism seems to be the only rational religion.

In the nineteenth century, another shift in the construction of alterity can be noticed, still within the field of religion. Charles Coleman's book about Hindu mythology from 1832 is a striking example of this shift: On the one hand, it stands within the tradition of a fascination with Indian gods that had caught the European imagination from the sixteenth century onwards. On the other hand, he constructs an alterity between *Orient* and *Occident* with his work. He describes the irrational and cruel religion of the unreasonable and childish Indians. Their Gods are "nothing but monstrous personifications of vice,"⁷⁶ and even their witches are not as decent as in ancient England: "Instead, however, of the former appearing, as in Scotland, on the blasted heaths, or, as in ancient times in England, bestriding a broom-stick and decently dressed, in the cavalier hat and cloak of scarlet dye, they [the Indian witches] are generally discovered dancing naked at midnight, with a broom tied round their waists, either near the house of a sick person or on the outskirts of a village."⁷⁷ About satī, or widow burning, he writes: "Among the many abominations which stain the practice of the Hindu religion, that of the suttee, with the no less barbarous practice of infanticide, are of the greatest."⁷⁸

73 See P. v. Wyss-Giacosa, *Religionsbilder* (as in note 72), p. 48.

74 B. Gladigow, *Religionsgeschichte* (as in note 56), p. 25: The German translation of Picart's work has a foreword written by Pastor Stapfer, whose text is even closer to the ideas of Rogerius and Ross, see D. Herrliberger et al., *Heilige Ceremonien* (as in note 30).

75 P. v. Wyss-Giacosa, *Religionsbilder* (as in note 72), p. 107.

76 C. Coleman, *The mythology of the Hindus: with notices of various mountain and island tribes, inhabiting the two peninsulas of India and the neighbouring islands, and an appendix comprising the minor Avatars, and the mythological and religious terms of the Hindus*, New Delhi et al. 1995, p. (viii).

77 *Ibid.*, p. 150.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 166.

Conclusion

There is no such thing as a single transcultural perception of early modern Europe, but rather several ones. It constrains our perspective if we focus only on learned or erudite discourses. The travelers' different backgrounds have to be considered, but even more so the context and the motivation in publishing their Indian experiences. For the VOC employees, religion may have been a way to feel superior – at least in one respect. But first and foremost, and in general, “religion” was one criterion among others to organize their perception of India's diversity. To recognize their counterpart's religion was a strategy of survival, because religion often structured the manner of communication and interaction. For the VOC employees, religion was not a distinct system, but intertwined with politics and society.

In the seventeenth century, non-Christian religions in India were labeled as “Religion,” because early modern German texts about religion in Indian assume that there are many religions in the world. Thus the texts examined here did not understand religion as restricted to the one true (i.e. Christian) religion. But this plural conception did not imply an equality of religions. Rather, the Christian concept was shaped – unsurprisingly – after the model of Christian religion. Yet, I have argued against a history of epistemic progress in the course of the Enlightenment, a history that claims that the early modern European travelers were less able to see and understand non-Christian religion than the enlightened travelers and authors of the eighteenth century. Religion was undoubtedly a marker of alterity from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries; yet, although the degree of rationality was always crucial, both alterity as well as rationality were concepts that were defined in different ways: In the seventeenth century, Christianity was the true and reasonable religion and the relation among religions was understood as a gradual hierarchy. In the eighteenth century, rationality was associated with a former religion of reason, whereas most of the contemporary religious practices were understood as degenerated forms of this original religion. The relationship amongst the various religions continued to be constructed as a gradual hierarchy. In the nineteenth century, the boundary between European reason and Oriental irrationality became an important, if not fundamental, binary perspective on the world that also overshadowed the religions themselves.