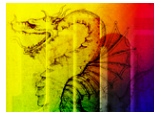


JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY HISTORY OF IDEAS



2013

Volume 2 Issue 4
Item 6

– Section 4: Reviews –

Book Reviews

A. Cavaletto, F. Varallo, E. Pasini



JIHI 2013

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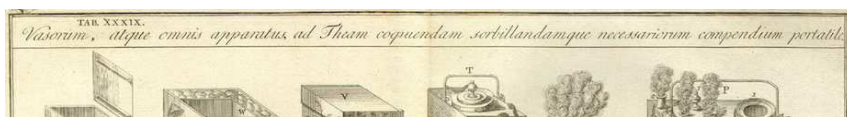
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Book Reviews

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Reviews of F. Azouvi, Le Mythe du grand silence: Auschwitz, les Français, la mémoire, Fayard, 2012; V. Huys - D. Vernant, L'indisciplinaire de l'art, P.U.F., 2012; U. App, The Cult of Emptiness, University Media 2012; J.Å. Josephson, The Invention of Religion in Japan, University of Chicago Press, 2012.



1 FRANÇOIS AZOUVI, *Le Mythe du grand silence : Auschwitz, les Français, la mémoire*, Fayard, Paris, 2012, 475 p. ISBN 9782213670997, € 25,00.

François Azouvi, philosophe, directeur de recherche au CNRS, spécialiste de Bergson et Descartes et sans doute humaniste au plein sens du terme, vient de publier il y a quelques mois chez Fayard un ouvrage qui porte sur la mémoire de la Shoah en France et qui était destiné dès le début à rompre avec une certaine routine intellectuelle, en remettant en question des idées qu'on estimait acquises. Il avait déjà consacré au sujet, dont le caractère interdisciplinaire est induit par nature, un enseignement tenu en 2009/10 à l'EHESS, où il est directeur d'études. À partir du titre (délibérément polémique) l'auteur vise à récuser, ou du moins corriger, la thèse largement diffuse, soutenue entre autres par Annette Wieworka et Serge Klarsfeld, selon laquelle la prise de conscience de la Shoah ne s'est opérée en France que vers la fin des années '70. Avant cette date, on lit chez Wieworka que la reconnaissance de la communauté nationale allait aux déportés-résistants plutôt qu'à ceux qu'on appelait les "déportés raciaux",

from what has already been written (Pächt, Haskell, Baxandall, Belting only to quote a happy few), reopens the debate and attempts to make “*entrer en résonance*” theory and praxis, to make research on the field penetrable to considerations which, far from being mere abstractions, broaden the scope and offer new perspectives more and more absent from art historical studies often a-critically following formal analyses and attributionist methodologies and the ones again aimed at building the artist’s monograph, a long-outdated genre and inexplicably brought again to the fore.

Franca Varallo



3 URS APP, *The Cult of Emptiness. The Western Discovery of Buddhist Thought and the Invention of Oriental Philosophy*, University Media, Rorschach - Kyoto, 2012, p. 304. ISBN 9783906000091, € 37,00. Jason Ānanda Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago - London, 2012, p. XIV+390. ISBN 9780226412344, \$ 90.00 cloth, \$ 30.00 paper.

In his previous book on *The Birth of Orientalism* Urs App analyzed the 18th-century phase of development of ‘modern orientalism’ as a “secular, institutionalized study of the Orient by specialists”¹, that followed a ‘premodern’ orientalism rooted in Bible studies and theology. Now he has studied the origins of some common images or conceptualizations of ‘oriental’ thought that are a sort of pre-condition to the interest of 18th-century intellectuals in Asian non-Abrahamic religions and doctrines. The 17th century had obtained through the channels of a somewhat crooked reception, and then elaborated, the general concept of an Asian (Chinese, Indian) ‘religion’, ‘philosophy’, or ‘wisdom’, the

¹ Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2010), xii. By ‘Orient’ is meant the whole of Asia and not only the so-called Near and Middle East.

depictions of which oscillated between a striking similarity to the natural theology of Christian origins and a bold assimilation to atheism—both being met with positive and negative judgments. It sparked hefty debate, to which missionaries, ecclesiastics, first- and second-rank philosophers had participated by private and public communications. Such ‘Oriental philosophy’ was steadily represented as composed of outer and inner—essoteric and exoteric—doctrines: while tracing these purported Oriental doctrines back in time, App “kept encountering characterizations of a common ‘inner’ doctrine of this philosophy that had an unmistakable scent of Zen Buddhism” (p. 3).

It turns out that this reception, as it could be expected, based as it is on internal Jesuit documents (reports and relations by missionaries and re-elaborations thereof), can be traced to a history of equivoques—but App shows in detail that their core portion originated in, or concerning, 16th-century Japan. And he has found a true “Rosetta stone” (p. 18) in a manuscript once used to reinforce a Japanese folding screen that is now preserved in Evora (Portugal), published and studied by 20th century scholars. Of many fragments, that are first-hand sources on the Jesuit Japan mission and on Japanese Christians, Latin versions exist that can be compared to them, illuminating important aspects of the (mis-)comprehension process that took place in that context.

The history of the first Jesuit mission in Japan shows that equivoques on the meaning of the words used for God, saint, religion, etc. were ubiquitous in reports by informants, official documents, letters of authorization, and in public Christian teaching using Buddhist denominations, equally affecting both parties. In the first Jesuit reports of mid-16th century, App detects (p. 31-32) in the first place what he calls ‘Arlecchino effects’ (from the famous line “C’est tout comme icy” in Nolant de Fatouville’s *Arlequin empereur dans la Lune*). Moreover, and producing decisive contradictions, a prominent influence of Zen is diagnosed, accompanied by a recurring obsession with the theme of ‘creation and nothingness’. Another main theme is the inexistence of the soul, or God being the man’s soul; and the “surprising phenomenon” of an apparently atheistic religion, whose devoted and contemplative monks would deny the very existence of God and the saints—a sure shock “to Europeans used to classifying the world’s religions in four categories: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and paganism”. Lastly makes its appearance the biographical figment that Buddha would have at a time rejected all his teachings.

The ‘Arlecchino effect’ affected also the Japanese, of course; but it became clear to them, as the Jesuits perfected themselves in the local language, that the foreign monks were intent on “destroying the Buddha dharma (...) instead of promoting it” (p. 53). At the same time, the need for a neutral rendering of Japanese doctrines was perceived on the Western side, and it started in the second half of the century a more critical production. Alessandro Valignano (or Valignani), General Visitor to the Jesuit missions in Asia, who gave lectures on Japanese and Christian religion for Japanese and European novices in 1581, his interpreter Luis Froís, and some important intellectual converts as the Tōin father and son, framed this new phase.

Urs App gives a fascinating diagram (p. 56) of the transmission of a 1556 *Sumario de los errores* and of the Tōins’ reports, through multifarious translations, later Jesuit treatises and controversy writings, Jean Le Clerc, Bayle’s *Dictionary*, and Brucker’s *Historia critica philosophiae* (finally reproduced in so many of Diderot’s contributions to the *Encyclopédie*). A similar diagram (p. 186) traces the merger of these Sino-Japanese elements with an Indo-Iranian stream that also traversed the 17th century. This reception also deeply influenced later speculation on the genealogy of creed such as Kircher’s, the reading, by albeit less imaginative Jesuits, of Confucian and Chinese Buddhist texts, and the reception by philosophers such as François Bernier, Jakob Thomasius, Thomas Burnet, G.W. Leibniz, and the already mentioned Pierre Bayle, whose identification of Oriental Ur-Philosophy and Ur-Spinozism (in App’s words) is the object of the final chapter.

If every discovery is also an invention, or a re-invention that comes through endeavours of intertwined comprehension and assimilation, it is not so striking that, just as 16th and 17th-century ‘Asian religion’ or ‘Oriental philosophy’ is revealed as an invention about Japan, the very concept of religion is an invention that Japan had to make in the 19th century, together with other concepts, to accommodate to foreign laws and rites the coexistence with which was imposed on the country by the force of weapons. Jason Josephson, in his book *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, shows that Japan had no concept of what Europeans—since the time of Cusanus’ irenic writings—had called ‘religion’, nor words for it and for similar notions, until Japanese officials were obliged to articulate it in the aftermath of the opening of Japan to the West with the Treaty of Kanagawa of 1854.

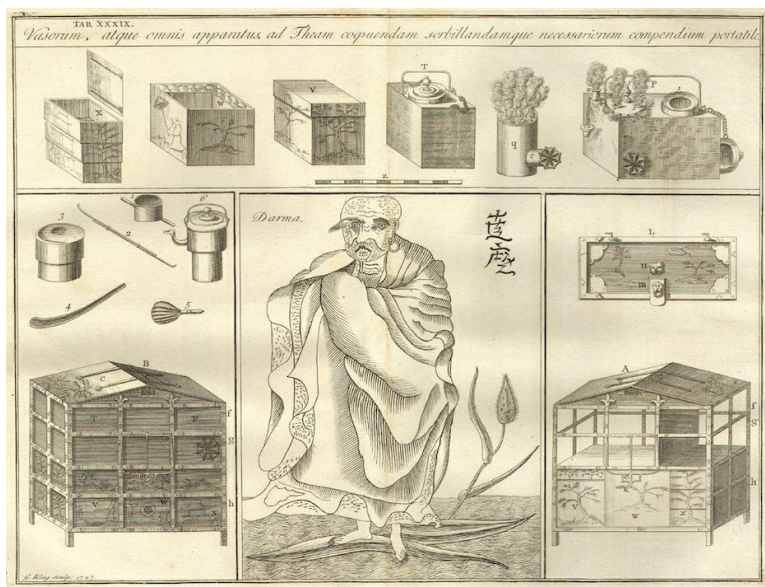
The author sees ‘religion’ as not only an anthropological category, but “a heresiographical and missionary category” (p. 45) as well; it is anyway a category that is at play in encounters similar to those that engendered the texts studied in App’s *Cult of Emptiness*, that are partly considered by Josephson too, together with later developments on Japanese ground, as a background to the facts that he studies here. He sees this exchange, at its beginning, as a history of ‘symmetrical disagreement’ between anti-Christian and Christian-apologetic early writings. “Each describes the other as demonic” (p. 49). But on the Japanese side there was “no need for a new theory of something called ‘religion’ to explain Christianity” (p. 5; a pregnant observation to which, by the way, a useless quotation of Thomas Kuhn is affixed; this book is a few times, as it happens, over-theoretic in language and authorities). Whereas the category of ‘paganism’, as we have seen, was insufficient for the needs of European writers, ‘demonology’ suited Japanese commenters enough.

So Josephson is attentive to remark that ‘religion’ “is not the inevitable outcome of an encounter between different peoples; the concept does not automatically generate itself as an anthropological abstraction” (p. 71). Japanese went through an armed political conflict at the outcome of which they had to “negotiate religion”, a process that included “inventing Japanese religions” and incorporating cognate concepts as secularism, science and superstition. This took place in a highly political setting that included the lifting of the ban on Christianity, and the granting of certain rights of ‘free exercise’. So Shinto was preserved, so to say, by considering it as a set of ceremonies, moral teachings and national ideology, a ‘non-religion’, while other practices and beliefs were labeled as superstitions. Yet Christianity and its sects or confessions, just like Buddhism, had to be considered as instances of a category (‘religions’) the character of which was not entirely clear—at least not to the appointed Japanese team of diplomatics and translators—and that brought with itself its toll of equivoques and misunderstanding.

But in this book the symmetry of events is quite strongly underlined. That process influenced, through the action of Japanese diplomacy, also the formation of European ‘Orientalist studies’ and *their* concept of ‘religion’, in particular of the Japanese religions. Again Japan was the cynosure of a new formation of Orientalism, and again the scale was much wider than that of the colonialist apperception of Near and Middle East.

When set together, in a sort of bilateral deconstruction, these books might simply prove that in difficult encounters it is always a matter of ‘invention’. Instead we cannot avoid the feeling of an un-harmonic, distant, clashing form of involuntary collaboration. What we are confronted with is more the fact that invention itself is as a complex and multilateral event as it can be, twisted within conflicts, animated by uncertain moves, by actions and reactions that respond to diversified intention and goals.

Enrico Pasini



E. Kaempfer, *Histoire naturelle, civile et ecclésiastique de l'Empire du Japon*, 1729. Table XXXIX; in the middle a portrait of Bodhidharma, “grand Saint des Japonnois” (p. lii).