



Friedrich Max Müller
& the *Sacred Books*
of the East

ARIE L. MOLENDIJK

OXFORD

FRIEDRICH MAX MÜLLER AND THE
SACRED BOOKS OF THE EAST



Portrait of Friedrich Max Müller
Photo W. Forshaw, *Cassell's Universal Portrait Gallery*,
London, Paris, and Melbourne 1895, p. 319.

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‘On us a new light has come’

E. A. Freeman, 1873

Preface

The *Sacred Books of the East* series teaches us at least one lesson, according to its *auctor intellectualis* Friedrich Max Müller, namely that ‘we are not the only people who have a Bible’. In his view, these scholarly translations would contribute to both the historical study of oriental religions and to our own religious self-understanding.¹ Müller had no doubts that the serious study of the Orient would be beneficial ‘for us’ in intellectual as well as religious respects. The editorial work of Max Müller was much appreciated not only in the West, but also in India. In the 1960s the *Sacred Books of the East* were accepted in the Indian Translation Series of the UNESCO Collection of Representative Works (1948–2005), jointly sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Government of India.²

The idea to devote a larger study to the series emerged during my stay at the International Consortium for Research in the Humanities ‘Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe’ at the Ruhr University of Bochum, from May 2010 to May 2011. Somewhat remotely, the title of the consortium reminded me of Max Müller’s overly optimistic views of the deep connections and fruitful exchanges between East and West. I developed this project in some detail later on and was happy to be able to pursue this venture during my sabbatical in 2012–13 at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS) in Wassenaar. I am grateful to the directors and hosts of both institutions, professors Volkhard Krech and Lucian Hölscher in Bochum, and Professor Aafke Hulk in Wassenaar. The NIAS library staff were of tremendous help in getting copies of rare books to my study in the old Wassenaar villa where the Fellows had their rooms. NIAS also funded the costs for the correction of one chapter of the book. The somewhat secluded location provided

¹ Max Müller, ‘Forgotten Bibles’, *Nineteenth Century* 15 (1884) 1004–22, p. 1021; reprinted in *Last Essays*. Second Series: Essays on the Science of Religion, London etc.: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901, pp. 1–35.

² Cf. <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0006/000681/068108fo.pdf>>; Etiemble, “‘Connaissance de l’Orient’”, *Le Courrier* [published monthly by the UNESCO in 32 languages] 39 (Janvier 1986), 9–11, 32, note 7.

an excellent environment for concentrated reading and writing, and—no less important—for exciting conversations over lunch, dinners, and cultural events. My thanks also go to the Board of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Groningen, which generously facilitated these sabbaticals.

In the spring of 2012 I did research in the archives of Oxford University Press and of the Bodleian Library of the University of Oxford, where the Max Müller Papers are kept. The librarians and archivists of both institutions were very helpful indeed. I especially want to thank Dr Martin Maw, the Press archivist, and Colin Harris, Superintendent of the Special Collections Reading Rooms, Weston Library, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. Material from the OUP Archives is published by permission of the Secretary to the Delegates of Oxford University Press. Permission to quote from unpublished manuscript material from the Bodleian Libraries was given on behalf of the Keeper of Special Collections, Dr Chris Fletcher. I am also grateful to Oxford University Press and its editorial staff—especially Tom Perridge and Karen Raith—for accepting the book and seeing it through publication, to the manuscript readers for their helpful comments, and to Kim Richardson for his meticulous copy-editing.

I was able to present and discuss my work with colleagues and friends on several occasions. The expert colloquium ‘Friedrich Max Müller and His Asian Interlocutors: Academic Knowledge about “Oriental Religions” in Late Nineteenth-Century Europe’ (University of Heidelberg, 14–15 November 2014) was fruitful in exploring Müller’s connections in Asia. I am grateful to the contributors and especially to the organizer of this colloquium, Hans Martin Krämer, for stimulating conversations on the varied production of knowledge about ‘oriental religions’. The international conference ‘Friedrich Max Mueller and the Role of Philology in Victorian Thought’, at the German Historical Institute in London, 16–18 April 2015, was a wonderful opportunity to discuss various aspects of Müller’s work in the context of Victorian scholarship. My thanks go to both convenors, John R. Davis (Kingston University) and Angus Nicholls (Queen Mary University of London).

I would also like to thank the following colleagues and friends for their assistance, encouragement, and criticism along the way: Lourens van den Bosch, Norman Girardot, Anna Sun, Birgit Meyer, Ivan Strenski, Jan N. Bremmer, Christoph Jedan, Kees van Deemter, Herman Paul, Sarah Barnette, Sarah Coakley, Mark Chapman, and Hetty Zock.

Arie L. Molendijk

Utrecht

January 2016

Conventions, Archaisms, and Archives

Unless otherwise indicated, any emphasis in quotations is that of the original texts. The quotations are provided in their original forms to preserve archaisms and idiosyncrasies that might otherwise be lost. Being no specialist in the cultures and religions treated in the series, I followed the transliteration of foreign names and concepts that I encountered and left out special, diacritical signs. Although Müller himself added 'Max' to his surname in England, I use the simple 'Müller' as well.

This book, in particular the second chapter, is based on archival research. The Max Müller Papers in the Bodleian Library of Oxford University are an important source for any study of Müller.¹ On the subject of this monograph, however, not much is available. The extensive correspondence with the translators is not to be found here. Perhaps materials disappeared, were sold, or were part of the collection of books that was shipped to the University of Tokyo after Müller's death in 1900.² In the huge fire caused by the Great Kanto Earthquake on 1 September 1923 the Max Müller Library in Tokyo was destroyed.³ Fortunately, the publisher of the series, Oxford University Press, has kept records on the progress of the series; these are by no means complete, but nevertheless provide useful information.

¹ <<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/bodley>>: Ms. Eng. D. 2356; MS Autogr. E. 11, fols 53–4.

² 'The Max Muller Library for Japan', *The New York Times*, 21 July and 14 August 1901. 13,000 books and 81 Sanskrit manuscripts were bought by Baron Iwasaki for the library of the University of Tokyo; cf. Noburu Koyama, 'Cultural Exchange at the Time of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance', in: Phillips O'Brien, ed., *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1902–1922*, London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 199–207, esp. pp. 203f.; Müller, *The Life and Letters of Friedrich Max Müller*, edited by his wife [Georgina Müller], 2 vols, New York and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902, vol. II, pp. 438f. Hisaya Iwasaki (1865–1955) was the heir of Yataro Iwasaki the founder of the Mitsubishi business group, and according to the NYT the richest man in Japan at the time.

³ Koyama, 'Cultural Exchange', p. 306.

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Introduction

The edition of the fifty massive volumes of the *Sacred Books of the East* (1879–1910, hereafter SBE) was one of the most ambitious and daring editorial projects of late Victorian scholarship. The German-born philologist, orientalist, and religious scholar Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900) persuaded Oxford University Press to embark on this venture. ‘Müller’s grand design’¹ was supported financially by Oxford University Press and the India Office of the British empire. Müller resigned from his Oxford chair of comparative philology to become the general editor of this megaproject. He engaged an international team of renowned scholars (among whom James Legge, James Darmesteter, Hendrik Kern, Julius Eggeling, Thomas William Rhys Davids, Kashinath Trimbak Telang, and Hermann Oldenberg) to translate the ‘sacred texts’. The series used and defined categories of the study of language and religion. The study of religion was often called ‘comparative religion’ at the time, indicating the importance of the comparative method for this emerging discipline. The series also contributed significantly to the Western perception of the ‘religious’ or even ‘mystic’ East,² which was textually represented in English translations. Because the focus here is on the concepts and methods captured in the edition, my endeavour may be called an ‘intellectual history’ of the *Sacred Books of the East*. This type of history aims at understanding ideas and approaches from the past by contextualizing them. The key idea is

¹ Peter Sutcliffe, *Oxford University Press. An Informal History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, p. 45.

² Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion. Postcolonial Theory, India and ‘The Mystic East’*, London and New York: Routledge, 1999.

that the series embodies formative ideas in the emerging comparative study of religion and culture.³

Whereas Max Müller is almost forgotten in England and Germany, he is still remembered in India with the greatest respect. In his biography of Müller, the famous Bengali writer Nirad C. Chaudhuri tells his readers how as a child he came to know about him. Chaudhuri had learned from his father who 'was not a highly educated man in the formal sense' that Müller had established 'that our languages and the European languages belonged to the same family . . . and that we Hindus and the Europeans were both peoples descended from the same original stock'.⁴ This 'discovery' gave a boost to Indian self-understanding, Hindus now seeing their country as the cradle of higher civilization *tout court*. Another example of Müller's fame is the fact that during her state visit to the German Democratic Republic in 1976 the Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi proposed a toast to Max Müller (who was born in Dessau in Eastern Germany), which caused some embarrassment among her hosts, who were not aware of their famous compatriot.⁵ The edition of the *Sacred Books of the East*, to which Müller devoted the last twenty-five years of his life, was seen at the time as one of his biggest scholarly, entrepreneurial, and also religious achievements: 'the chief religious achievement of the nineteenth century', as one of his admirers noted in his memoirs.⁶

The theologian and astronomer James Maurice Wilson (1836–1931), who had been senior wrangler at Cambridge in 1859,⁷ wrote to his friend Max Müller: 'Science has discovered much in the Victorian era, but I think that no discovery will bear such lasting fruits as some of yours, and your great edition of the *Sacred Books of the East*.' The use of the notion of 'discovery' is telling for the nineteenth-century understanding of scholarship, including the

³ For reappraisals of 'intellectual history' or—perhaps less fashionably—'history of ideas' see Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan, eds, *Modern European Intellectual History. Reappraisals and New Perspectives*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982, and Donald R. Kelley, *The Descent of Ideas. The History of Intellectual History*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002.

⁴ Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary. The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller P.C.*, Delhi etc.: Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 5.

⁵ <<http://everything2.com/title/Max+M%25FCller>>.

⁶ Moncure Daniel Conway, *Autobiography. Memories and Experiences*, 2 vols, London etc.: Cassell, 1904, vol. II, p. 302.

⁷ Senior wrangler is the top mathematics undergraduate at the University of Cambridge in a particular year.

contribution of the humanities. The 'lasting fruits' also refer to the spread of Müller's work among 'the masses'. Wilson wrote from his vicarage in Rochdale near Manchester that in his last sermon he had quoted from the Vedas the saying of Brahma that 'those who honestly worship other gods, involuntarily worship me'. Thereupon, 'a working man, as he went out, thanked me for that quotation, and told me he had been reading one of your books. That quotation in a sermon on the Epiphany, and that remark by a weaver, could not have been made but for you.'⁸ So, scholarly 'discoveries' could have beneficial religious outcomes. Until the present day you can still order a reprint of the *Sacred Books of the East* with an Indian press or consult the volumes at the Internet Sacred Texts Archive, which presents documents from various religious traditions.⁹

What did Max Müller have in mind when in the mid-seventies of the nineteenth century he started this huge, ambitious project, which was to engage him for the rest of his life? In a speech he gave in 1874 at the International Congress of Orientalists in London he addressed not only the issue of 'sacred books', but also his idea of an edition of these texts, which was to be prepared by a team of translators. In this address Müller pointed to what he saw as one of the great dangers of scholarship in his time, the danger of 'extreme specialisation'. To counter this tendency, he argued, one should make knowledge productive and available to the general public. Therefore, the scholars assembled at the Oriental Congress must work together. Making use of military metaphors Müller summarized his idea as follows:

[I]f we want to see real progress made in that work with which we are more specially entrusted, the re-conquest of the Eastern world, we must work with one another, for one another, like members of one body, like soldiers of one army, guided by common principles, striving after common purposes, and sustained by common sympathies.¹⁰

⁸ Müller, *The Life and Letters of Friedrich Max Müller*, 2 vols, London, New York, and Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1902, vol. II, p. 311 (American edition, p. 327), letter of 16 January 1894.

⁹ <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/sbe/index.htm>>.

¹⁰ Müller, 'Address [to the Aryan Section]', in *Transactions of the Second Session of the International Congress of Orientalists* (London, September 1874), London, 1876 [Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1968], pp. 177–204, p. 180, reprinted in *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. IV: *Essays Chiefly on the Science of Language* (1875), London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1880, pp. 317–58, p. 337.

Such great works can only be carried out by a well-directed joint effort. In this spirit Müller suggested to take on ‘a translation of the *Sacred Books of Mankind*’.¹¹ Although the phrase ‘*Sacred Books of the East*’ was not used here, it is evident that Müller envisioned Eastern religions in particular.

According to Müller, the East is basic for our understanding of Western culture because ‘the most vital elements of our knowledge and civilisation . . . came to us from the East’. This conviction led to an amazing sense of entitlement. Even a scholar such as Müller, who was very sympathetic to the East and to India in particular, thought that the ‘East is ours, we are its heirs, and claim by right our share in its inheritance’.¹² This ‘imperial’ type of discourse, including the entanglement of oriental studies and colonialism, has been severely criticized from Edward Said’s controversial, but path-breaking study on orientalism onwards.¹³ In the study of the East the idea of comparison was prominent. Müller thought that comparing was *the* golden road towards the advancement of knowledge. He was utterly convinced that the comparison of these sacred books would show not only differences between religions, but first and foremost what they have in common. In his view the comparison of religions and of their sacred books will ultimately bring us a higher form of religion.

There are only few scholars who have specifically focused their research on the edition of the *Sacred Books of the East*. This comes as somewhat of a surprise, if one considers the vast amount of literature on the various aspects of Müller’s work. The most extensive book is Lourens van den Bosch’s monumental monograph, which offers a fine overview of Müller’s work and publications.¹⁴ It also shows how hard it is to come to grips with an oeuvre as vast as Müller’s.¹⁵ Only two scholars, Anna Sun and Norman Girardot, have specifically addressed the edition of the *Sacred Books of the East*. Both have

¹¹ Müller, ‘Address [to the Aryan Section]’, p. 180 (italics in the original).

¹² Müller, ‘Address [to the Aryan Section]’, p. 183.

¹³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1978), London etc.: Penguin, 1995.

¹⁴ Lourens P. van den Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller. A Life Devoted to the Humanities*, Leiden: Brill, 2002.

¹⁵ Two expert overviews of Müller’s work, focusing on religion, are Ivan Strenski, *Thinking about Religion. An Historical Introduction to Theories of Religion*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006, chapter 3, and David Chidester, *Empire of Religion. Imperialism and Comparative Religion*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014, chapter 3.

researched the Oxford archives for their respective books on the controversies over the religious nature of Confucianism in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and on James Legge, the missionary, Sinologist, and later Oxford colleague of Müller, who contributed no fewer than six volumes to the series. Girardot and Sun treat the series in the context of their respective subjects, and did not have the space to provide an in-depth analysis of the edition as such.¹⁶

This book will provide a critical reflection on the conceptual and theoretical agenda of the series. I will engage thoroughly with Max Müller's views in setting up this grand design, as he was the one who conceived the series and put his mark on it. The perspectives and ideas of the other translators played at best a subordinate role in defining the series. They were first and foremost linguistic and historical specialists—knowledgeable in their fields of expertise, but not so much interested in the design of the series. In the introductions to their translations they hardly said anything about the series as a whole. Moreover, there is no substantial correspondence with the translators on the *Sacred Books of the East* left in the Max Müller papers in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. As Max Müller is the intellectual father of the series, this monograph—written by a historian of Western ideas and scholarship—is very much about Max Müller and how he conceptualized the series in relation to its context—first and foremost the history of the humanities, and the role of England as a colonial power. I will combine close reading of texts with theoretical reflection on the defining moments in the making of the *Sacred Books of the East* series.

Müller's polished and meandering texts and detailed discussions of an amazingly wide-ranging gamut of subjects do not make for easy reading and interpretation. The mode of presentation I have chosen is not merely to give an overview of Müller's doings and sayings in various contexts, but to offer the gist of his argumentation and rhetoric in a particular article or lecture. Just heaping up Müller's

¹⁶ Anna Sun, *Confucianism as a World Religion. Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013, esp. pp. 57–66. Norman J. Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China. James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage*, Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2002, esp. pp. 245–66 and the extensive endnotes, which contain much relevant information (pp. 642–50); cf. Norman Girardot, 'Max Müller's *Sacred Books* and the Nineteenth-Century Production of the Comparative Science of Religions', *Religions* 41/3 (2002) 213–50. Important passages are more or less the same in Girardot's book and article.

statements on various subjects is not always helpful. His use of terms is not rigorous and he always adjusted his text to his audience. This is the main reason why I do not put too much stress on possible developments in Müller's thinking. That is not to deny that his thinking on particular subjects, such as race, did evolve. But if we want to understand the various ways he phrased his views, we should rather take into account the varying contexts and the different audiences he addressed, and keep in mind that Müller was a rather volatile thinker.

The prestigious edition of *The Sacred Books of the East* is in the parlance of present-day academia a 'particularly fruitful site for detailed analysis'.¹⁷ The series deserves scholarly attention in at least three major respects. First, together with other great projects such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* and James Hastings's *Encyclopedia of Religions and Ethics* (T. & T. Clark, 1908–21), the edition is a fine example of large-scale scholarship in the humanities. Second, the project is an important basis from which to analyse and understand the development of the humanities (especially the study of languages and religions) in the late nineteenth century. Third, although the edition was sold by Müller as a 'scientific' project which would enhance the prestige of Oxford University Press (as it actually did), it carried deeper ambitions as well, which deserve further inquiry. It involved at least a particular view of religion and—as I would claim—of civilization, canonical books, texts in general, and 'the East' as well. These perspectives will guide the discussion of the *Sacred Books of the East* in this monograph. More specifically, the book will address the following clusters of issues, which are related but deserve treatment in their own right.

A first step in contextualizing and providing a better understanding of the grand project of the series consists of a thematic exploration of the life and work of Max Müller. Chapter 1 will show his extraordinary influence as one of the most prominent public intellectuals of his time. The discussion is organized around thematic aspects such as prestige, personality, way of working, controversies, fields of work, and personal networks in the metropolis and the Orient. An

¹⁷ Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions. Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 265.

understanding of Müller's character, abilities, and ambitions helps to explain the success of the series.

Chapter 2 concentrates on how Müller conceptualized and initiated the *Sacred Books of the East* series. The initial idea and the aims of the project, as well as the way in which Müller convinced donors and the Press to commit to the undertaking, are analysed here. More specifically, the sources of inspiration for the project, the contract and pay, the prospectus, the dedication and motto, and the progress and continuation of the series are discussed. The selection of contributors and texts is dealt with in the second part of the chapter. With the possible exception of James Legge, with whom Müller spoke about the project in general, the contributors were mainly concerned with their own translations.

The series exemplifies a particular approach to scholarship. In Chapter 3 the basic concepts and ideas involved in the edition are analysed. Especially important are Müller's views on texts ('book religions'), canonicity, and translation, 'Aryan' and 'Semitic' languages and religions, as well as on 'the East' in general. Various aspects of 'translating' the East into the West, including the use of indigenous informants ('walking manuscripts') and Müller's typical blend of a sympathetic form of orientalism, are discussed and related to the more general debate on orientalism. At least textually, the indigenous religious specialists are subjected by Müller to imperial scientific authorities, who have their own superior scholarly expertise.

Chapter 4 concerns methodological issues. Key to the paradigm shift in the study of culture in the nineteenth century is the idea of comparison. The chapter will demonstrate that Müller's view of comparison is intimately related to a broadly defined historical approach, which he contrasts to a theoretical approach that allegedly neglects 'historical facts'. At first sight it may seem that Müller merely defended an empirically grounded method, but it turns out that 'Mr Müller's Science' is embedded in deep moral convictions about a shared human history, which has even a providential character. Just like other branches of cultural study at the time, Müller's project has a clear moral edge to it.

Chapter 5, 'Religion of Humanity', goes deeper into these issues. Müller envisioned a sort of enlightened form of religion, which should benefit all mankind. His plan to include the Old Testament and the New Testament in the series could not be carried out, because conservative influences were too strong in Oxford at the time. His

religious upbringing, his missionary inclinations, as well as his position in Oxford as a more or less liberal-minded Lutheran are addressed here.

Chapter 6 compares the series with other contemporary grand editorial projects, such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the Migne edition of the church fathers. Can the series be seen as a token of the founding of 'big science' around 1900? In which ways did the edition define a new approach to the study of religion? Did the series contribute to the emergence of a new discourse of 'world religions'? What was the status of the series in the emerging field of the comparative study of religion? Did it—as is sometimes claimed—basically change the discipline? To what extent were the *Sacred Books of the East* a monument of imperial power?

The Afterthoughts focus on the tension between antiquity and modernity in Max Müller's thinking. According to him we need to know the ancient oriental roots of the West to understand our own modern culture and religion. To penetrate into these depths, however, we cannot and must not take ancient statements at their face value. Only a 'charitable' interpretation will lead to an understanding of the 'true and original purport' of Eastern texts. Under the aegis of modern historical and philological scholarship a new idea of 'religion' is developed and promoted.

The Right Honourable Max Müller

I like criticism, but it must be my way.

(Mark Twain)¹

ENTITLED

Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900) knew what he was worth. In April 1886 he was notified that Queen Victoria, to whom he had recently presented the first twenty-four volumes of the *Sacred Books of the East* during a dinner party at Windsor, wanted to knight him. He politely declined, because the honours bestowed on him by other governments were much higher.² How great was the delight that some ten years later he was appointed a member of Her Majesty's Privy Council. 'It was exactly the right distinction, placing him at once in his proper position', his wife stated in the commemorative biography (*The Life and Letters of Max Müller*) she published two years after his death.³ He was the only non-political member of this highest advisory board of the British empire. The Max Müller Papers of the Bodleian Library keep a large bound volume with letters of

¹ Mark Twain, *Chapters from My Autobiography* (reprint from *North American Review*, 1906–7), New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 7 September 1906, p. 322.

² LLB II, 187; LLA II, 196. LLA and LLB refer, respectively, to the American and British edition of [Georgina Müller], *The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Max Müller*, 2 vols, London, New York, and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902.

³ LLB II, 344; LLA II, 363. Cf. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary. The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller P.C.*, Delhi etc. 1974, p. 366, who cites the letter of Prime Minister Lord Salisbury, from 17 May 1896, in which he informed Müller about the new distinction. Müller was sworn in on 30 June 1896.

congratulation. He proudly used the title 'Right Honourable' (Rt. Hon.), which came with this distinction.

Shortly after his death on 28 October 1900, his son W. G. Max Müller published the autobiographical fragments that his father had dictated to him on his deathbed. Müller senior started telling that after the publication of his recollections of his friends under the title *Auld Lang Syne* in 1899, several people had asked for 'a much fuller account of myself'. In *My Autobiography* he summarized his vita in one meandering sentence:

People wished to know how a boy, born and educated in a small and almost unknown town in the centre of Germany, should have come to England, should have been chosen there to edit the oldest book of the world, the Veda of the Brahmans, never published before, whether in India or in Europe, should have passed the best part of his life as a professor in the most famous and, as it was thought, the most exclusive University in England, and should actually have ended his days as a Member of Her Majesty's most honourable Privy Council.⁴

The Privy Council appears here as the culmination of a life story that began in the small German town of Dessau and brought him to England, where he was 'chosen' (a dim religious tone is struck) to edit the *Rig-Veda*, allegedly the oldest book of the world, neither published in the metropolis nor in colonized India.

Max Müller had started his editing work in Paris at the suggestion of the famous Sanskrit scholar Eugène Burnouf, and moved in 1846 to London to study the manuscripts in the library of the East India Company, which would also sponsor the publication of the six large volumes with Oxford University Press. To supervise the printing he moved to Oxford. In a characteristic Müllerian phrase: 'I saw, that after all it would be better for myself, and for the Veda, if I were on the spot, and I decided to migrate from London to Oxford'.⁵ Here at this famous and ('as it was thought') most exclusive university he became a professor and was finally, in a late stage of his career, appointed a member of the Privy Council of Queen Victoria. This is a rich text, which shows in a nutshell some of Müller's key interests and sensitivities, such as his good connections in the world of British and

⁴ Müller, *My Autobiography. A Fragment*. By the Rt. Hon. Professor F. Max Müller, K.M., London and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901, p. 9.

⁵ Müller, *My Autobiography*, p. 211.

European royalty. 'His weakness was emperors', as one of his students once remarked.⁶ Müller's wife, Georgina Grenfell, whom he was allowed to marry after courting her with intervals for a period of more than five years, shared at least Max's sense of entitlement. In the biography of her husband she made public an 'intimate' moment of the ceremony, at which her husband was sworn in as a member of Her Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council: 'As he knelt before the Queen, she whispered to him in German, "I am delighted to see you here, Professor!"'.⁷

Do we need to know how well connected or even vain Friedrich Max Müller was in a study of the edition of the *Sacred Books of the East*? I am inclined to answer this question in the affirmative. Good connections, charm, and the ability to persuade people were essential in securing the whole project. Another question is how much and what in particular do we need to know about Müller in the context of this study. That is hard to specify in advance, but an understanding of the person and personality of Max Müller is doubtless important for the exploration of the conception and execution of this series of fifty volumes. The series was Müller's idea and he went to great lengths to get it off the ground and to make it a success. Therefore, the focus of this book is very much on Müller.

SOURCES

During his lifetime Müller published, as said, recollections of his colleagues and friends in the two-volume *Auld Lang Syne* and started writing his autobiography, published by his son in 1901, covering the period till his early days in Oxford in the 1860s.⁸ These are rather stylized accounts that highlight the role of 'circumstances' in the story of the rising star he became in the second half of the nineteenth century in Victorian Britain, India, and in the

⁶ Heimo Rau, 'Friedrich Max Mueller. The Man and his Life', in: Rau, ed., *F. Max Mueller. What He Can Teach Us*, Bombay: Shakuntala, 1974, pp. 1–15, here p. 2. Lewis R. Farnell, *An Oxonian Looks Back*, London: Martin Hopkinson, 1934, p. 114.

⁷ LLB II, 347; LLA II, 366.

⁸ Müller, *Auld Lang Syne*, 2 vols, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1898–9, and *My Autobiography*.

broader world. By 'circumstances', as he called it, are primarily meant his friends, family, colleagues, and sponsors. Also the *Life and Letters* that his widow published hardly give an even picture of Müller's achievements. The translations of the letters in this biography cannot be trusted in all respects. Nevertheless, these three books are very important sources for a biographical sketch. I will try to balance the inevitable one-sidedness by using other sources, contemporary and secondary studies of his work and life. There exists an amazingly broad range of studies that deal with the work of Max Müller. In histories of the study of language, mythology, religion, and even cultural anthropology (ethnology) his work and thoughts are often discussed.

In biographical respect two studies are outstanding in my view, each in its own way. The first is the book by the 'renowned Indian scholar' (as the blurb on the inside flap cover formulates it) Nirad C. Chaudhuri, who moved to Oxford to write and finish his biography. It is a very personal book, which makes clear how great the fame of Müller still was in India in the 1970s.⁹ Chaudhuri is a fascinating figure in his own right, who published his last book, *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse*, at the age of one hundred.¹⁰ For the biography of Müller he used unpublished material and gave a particularly moving account of the love of Max and Georgina, no doubt one of the great love stories of Victorian Britain. The second book is Lourens van den Bosch's broadly conceived study with the telling subtitle *A Life Devoted to the Humanities*, which starts with a 'biographical essay' of almost 200 pages, before dealing with the key subjects of Müller's intellectual life.¹¹ Based mainly on published material, Van den Bosch's work deals with the important events and achievements in Müller's career. Much of what you want to know about his life and work can be found here.¹²

⁹ Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*. Chaudhuri's rather personal account does not give exact references to the sources he had used.

¹⁰ Michael T. Kaufman, 'Nirad C. Chaudhuri, Author, Dies at 101', *The New York Times*, 3 August 1999, opined that this booklet had 'its share of the author's characteristic fondness for outrageous or contrarian views'.

¹¹ Lourens P. van den Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller. A Life Devoted to the Humanities*, Leiden: Brill, 2002.

¹² In my concise description of the life and work of Max Müller in this chapter I will only occasionally refer to the work of van den Bosch and Chaudhuri. I am indebted to their books, which offer much more detail.

EARLY LIFE

Given the considerable size of his work, the wide range of topics he discussed, and the extensive networks Müller was involved in, together with his talent for popularization, it is almost impossible to give a succinct overview of his life and work. Every summary implies decisions and is therefore arbitrary. I plead guilty in this respect before I begin. Nevertheless the reader needs a framework to understand Max Müller's curriculum vitae and to avoid getting lost in a seemingly continuously expanding story. Underlying his lifetime achievement was an enormous capacity for work, executed in a highly disciplined way. From his early days he did as much as he could. Starting his work on the *Rig-Veda* in Paris he famously reported that he methodologically skipped a night's sleep every two days to move on as quickly as possible.¹³ Of course, there were setbacks, some of them caused by grief, but he considered work to be a good medicine in this respect.¹⁴ Even during long stays abroad on doctor's advice he carried on his large correspondence, wrote pieces for newspapers, and kept on working on his many projects.

Friedrich Max Müller was born in Dessau on 6 December 1823. He was the son of Adelheid von Basedow, the eldest daughter of the prime minister of the small duchy of Anhalt-Dessau, and the distinguished Romantic poet Wilhelm Müller (1794–1827). His father died before Max was four years old and is nowadays chiefly remembered as the writer of poems such as *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Die Winterreise* set to music by Franz Schubert. Müller junior was named after his mother's brother Friedrich, and after Max, the leading character of Carl Maria von Weber's nationalistic opera *Der Freischütz* (The Freeshooter), which had its premiere in Berlin in June 1821. Weber was his godfather and Müller even considered becoming a musician himself, but was dissuaded from doing so by another close friend of the Müllers, the composer Felix Mendelssohn. After settling in Oxford he adopted Max as part of his surname, 'Müller alone, as he always said, being as distinctive a name as Smith without any prefix in

¹³ Müller, *My Autobiography*, p. 168. Actually the regime he set out for himself was more radical: 'My plan was as follows: to sit up the whole of one night, to take about three hours' rest the next night, but without undressing, and then to take a good night's rest the third night, and start over again.'

¹⁴ Müller, *My Autobiography*, p. xi, from the preface by his son.

England'.¹⁵ In some books you will find Müller in the index under 'Max Müller'.

He got a thorough classical education at the Nicolai Gymnasium in Leipzig. Müller studied, among a wide range of other subjects, classical languages, and Sanskrit in Leipzig, graduating at the age of nineteen with a dissertation on the third book ('De Affectibus') of Spinoza's *Ethica*.¹⁶ Here he also started his translation of the *Hitopadesha*, a popular Sanskrit treatise including fables, which he dedicated to his teacher Hermann Brockhaus.¹⁷ In the spring of 1844 he moved to Berlin, where he attended among many other courses those of the comparative linguist Franz Bopp, which he found disappointing, and Friedrich Schelling's lectures on mythology. After one year he went to Paris to study with the eminent philologist Eugène Burnouf (1801–52), whose lectures on the *Rig-Veda* 'opened a new world to me'.¹⁸ This was a turning point in his life, as he decided to collate and copy manuscripts of this ancient text and prepare an edition. This decision brought him to England, where the library of the East India House in London kept masses of 'splendid' manuscripts that were of immediate relevance for his project. Just to copy the relevant material 'would take at least two or three years of merely mechanical labour'.¹⁹

THE EDITION OF THE *RIG-VEDA*

The *Rig-Veda Samhita* (or *Sanhita*) is the oldest collection of sacred texts of Hinduism, at the time also referred to as the 'Sacred Books of the Brahmans'.²⁰ Müller's plan to include the commentary by the fourteenth-century Indian scholar Sayana (Sayana[h]arya) in his edition meant a lot of extra work, as he made clear to his mother in a letter from 11 June 1845: 'The Commentary written in Sanskrit fills

¹⁵ LLB I, 2; LLA I, 2.

¹⁶ For a list of the fifty-three courses he attended, see Müller, *My Autobiography*, pp. 120–2.

¹⁷ Müller, *Hitopadesha. Eine alte Indische Fabelsammlung*, Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1844.

¹⁸ LLB I, 34; LLA I, 38, from Müller's diary.

¹⁹ LLB I, 53; LLA I, 56, Müller to Burnouf, July 1846.

²⁰ LLB I, 58; LLA I, 61, referring to Müller, *My Autobiography*, p. 195; American edition, p. 202.

four folios, each of a thousand pages, which must all be copied out and compared to other MSS [manuscripts], and this is the most and necessary work.²¹ The commentary was considered to be of great benefit in the understanding and interpretation of obscure passages in the *Rig-Veda*.²² To execute this gigantic project Müller was badly in need of income. Friends of Müller in London—prominent among them the Prussian ambassador, Baron Christian von Bunsen (1791–1860), being himself an amateur in oriental studies—convinced the board of directors of the East India Company to pay Müller £4 per sheet, on the basis of fifty sheets a year.²³ The first volume appeared in 1849, the last and sixth volume was presented in 1874 to Queen Victoria, who would receive the title Empress of India in 1876. Once the edition was sold out, the Maharaja of Vijayanagara sponsored a somewhat revised edition by a generous gift of £4,000.²⁴

In the preface of the first volume Müller thanked not only the main scholars and friends who had helped him, such as Alexander von Humboldt, Burnouf, von Bunsen, and Horace Wilson, the then Boden Professor of Sanskrit in Oxford, but foremost the Court of Directors of the East India Company, quoting from their letter in which they agreed to support this work: ‘The Court consider that the publication of so important and interesting a work as that to which your proposals refer, is in a peculiar manner deserving of the patronage of the East-India-Company, connected as it is with the early religion, history, and language of the great body of their Indian subjects.’²⁵ The editing of these ancient Sanskrit texts is here clearly related to colonial interests.²⁶ This sacred text of Hinduism was more

²¹ LLB I, 36; LLA I, 38.

²² Müller’s decision to include a translation of this much later and sizeable commentary was criticized at the time by—among others—his opponent William Dwight Whitney. See G. Beckerlegge, ‘Professor Friedrich Max Müller and the Missionary Cause’, in: John Wolffe, ed., *Religion in Victorian Britain*, vol. V: *Culture and Empire*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997, pp. 177–219, esp. p. 183.

²³ Müller, *My Autobiography*, pp. 192–6.

²⁴ Van den Bosch, Müller, p. 39; LLB II, 217; LLA II, 228; Müller, ed., *Rig-Veda-Sanhita, the Sacred Hymns of the Brahmans, together with the Commentary of Sayanacharya*, published under the patronage of The Honourable the East-India-Company, 6 vols, London 1849–74 (1849, 1854, 1856, 1863, 1872, 1874), reissued in the 1890s.

²⁵ Müller, *Rig-Veda-Sanhita*, vol. I, p. vi.

²⁶ Müller, *My Autobiography*, pp. 12–15, referred to political ‘circumstances’, in particular the Indian Mutiny (Rebellion) of 1857, which allegedly induced the

or less produced in Oxford, the volumes presented by the Prince of Wales on a tour in India to his colonial subjects, and were studied by Brahmin pundits near Poona (nowadays: Pune).²⁷ At the same time the edition had to meet the highest standards of scholarship and Müller gave an ample overview of the manuscripts he used and his editorial policy. It is also evident that this project is much more than just making ancient texts of the foremost British colony available. The study of Sanskrit establishes according to Müller a deep connection between India and Europe: '[it] owes its permanent interest chiefly to the fact that the ancient language of India has proved to be most intimately connected with the classical languages of Europe'.²⁸ The edition was meant to shed light on the cultural, religious, and linguistic affinities between the East and the West, which will be one of the major themes of this book. After publishing the sixth and last volume of the *Rig-Veda* in 1874, Müller immediately started the preparations for his second, truly gargantuan editorial project of the *Sacred Books of the East*.

CAREER IN OXFORD, 1850–74

The edition of the *Rig-Veda* established Müller's reputation as one of the leading Sanskrit scholars in the world. He also brought out a translation of the *Rig-Veda* in 1869 and published *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature* in 1859.²⁹ However, he could not devote all his time to this specialized work, as he was appointed Deputy Taylorian Professor of Modern European Languages and Literature in Oxford in the winter of 1850/1. After the death in 1854 of Francis

directors of the Old East India Company to subsidize the edition; cf. Robert A. Yelle, *The Language of Disenchantment. Protestant Literalism and Colonial Discourse in British India*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 100f.

²⁷ Bernard S. Cohn, 'Representing Authority in Victorian India', in: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Rangers, eds, *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 165–209, p. 182; LLB I, 116 and 267; LLA I, 121 and 281.

²⁸ Müller, *Rig-Veda-Sanhita*, vol. III, preface.

²⁹ Max Müller, ed. and trans., *Rig-Veda-Sanhita, the Sacred Hymns of the Brahmins*, vol. I: *Hymns to the Maruts or the Storm-Gods*, London: Trübner, 1869; Max Müller, *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature. So far as it illustrates the primitive religion of the Brahmins*, London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1859.

Trithen, his predecessor in this chair, Müller was made full professor. He lectured and published in the history of German (*Faust*, *Nibelungenlied*), French, and English literature.³⁰ As a student he had been member of a literary club, to which also Theodor Fontane, nowadays considered to be the greatest German novelist of the nineteenth century, belonged. Later Fontane gave a very favourable impression of their early friendship.³¹ In 1857 Müller anonymously published a romantic novel, *Deutsche Liebe* (German Love), which went through twelve editions during his lifetime.³²

At the Taylorian Institution for European Languages (established in 1845) Müller lectured on comparative philology, which laid the ground for his famous and controversial studies in the 'Science of Language'. In April 1861 he gave his first series of lectures on language at the Royal Institution, which made him a star in England. Among the listeners were Faraday, Tennyson, and John Stuart Mill, and the ensuing edition went through fourteen editions during his lifetime and was translated into French, German, Italian, Russian, Swedish, and Dutch.³³ Here he lectured on the power of words, and for the first time stated his proposition that language was the essential barrier between man and animal.³⁴ In 1868 the university abolished the Taylorian chair and created for Müller a new chair

³⁰ Charles Firth, *Modern Languages at Oxford. 1724–1929*, London: Oxford University Press, 1929, pp. 34–6; cf. Müller, *Chips of a German Workshop*, vol. III: *Essays on Literature, Biography, and Antiquities*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1870, second edition, 1880.

³¹ Theodor Fontane, *Von Zwanzig bis Dreissig. Autobiographisches nebst anderen selbstbiographischen Zeugnissen* (1898), Munich: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1967, pp. 89–95; cf. LLB I, 17–19, 22; LLA I, 18–20, 24.

³² [Müller], *Deutsche Liebe. Aus den Papieren eines Fremdlings* (1857), hrsg. und mit einem Vorwort begleitet von Max Müller, vierte Auflage, Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1873. The novel was also translated into English. For a biographical interpretation of the booklet see Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, pp. 174–6, and van den Bosch, *Müller*, pp. 65f.

³³ LLB I, 248; LLA I, 260f.; Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 180; The second series of lectures were given in 1863; Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 2 vols, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1861–4, seventh edition, London 1873. George Eliot studied Müller's lectures carefully and referred to the first volume as this 'great and delightful book' (in a letter to Sara Sophia Hennell, 14 January 1862); cf. [George Eliot], *The George Eliot Letters*, edited by Gordon S. Haight, vol. IV (1862–8), New Haven and London, 1955, pp. 8f.; [George Eliot], *George Eliot's Notebooks*. A transcription, edited by John Clark Pratt and Victor A. Neufeldt, Berkeley etc.: University of California Press, 1979, with many references to Müller.

³⁴ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, vol. I, p. 403: 'Language is our Rubicon, and no brute will dare to cross it.'

in Comparative Philology, including a raise of pay from £500 to £600. In his inaugural address 'On the Value of Comparative Philology as a Branch of Academic Study', held on 27 October 1868, Müller introduced the new field, pointing to the fundamental importance of Sanskrit for the comparative study of languages. He also used the occasion to make some criticism of the Oxford system, which provided not enough opportunities for 'studies which command no price in the fair of the world' and spent too much money on non-resident fellows.³⁵ On purpose Müller did not speak about the introduction of a German or 'Humboldtian' university system, as he knew about prejudice against Germany and him being a German.³⁶

Gradually he settled in Oxford. In 1851 he was made an honorary M.A. and elected member of Christ Church, while in 1856 he became a curator of the Bodleian Library, resigning this position in 1863 before holding it again from 1881 till 1894. Against resistance he was appointed sub-librarian of the Bodleian in 1865, a position he held till 1867.³⁷ To his great pleasure he was elected—as the first foreigner and non-Anglican—to a fellowship at All Souls College in 1858.³⁸ He had become a naturalized British citizen in 1855.³⁹ He spent quite some time acquiring the English language, and he mastered the language 'with extraordinary rapidity and accuracy', becoming 'a facile, graceful and impressive writer, and eloquent speaker, of

³⁵ Friedrich Max Müller, *Inaugural Lecture on the Value of Comparative Philology as a Branch of Academic Study* (1868), in Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. IV: *Essays Chiefly on the Science of Language* (1875), London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1880, pp. 1–43. The statutes of the new chair are given in note 1, the critique of the prevalent system of fellowships can be found at pages 8 and 9, and the importance of Sanskrit is summarized in the following sentence: 'A comparative philologist without a knowledge of Sanskrit is like an astronomer without a knowledge of mathematics' (19).

³⁶ Marc Schalenberg, *Humboldt auf Reisen? Die Rezeption des 'deutschen Universitätsmodells' in den französischen und britischen Reformdiskursen (1810–1870)*, Basel: Schwabe, 2002, pp. 264–9.

³⁷ K. A. Manley, 'Max Müller and the Bodleian Sub-Librarianship, 1865', *Library History* 5 (1979) 33–47, who quotes S. C. Malan's letter to the librarian Cox, 13 November 1865, 'I am sorry to see you are going to have a resident German in the Bodleian... poor Oxford becomes more & more Yankee-like, & less English... it won't improve thus, no assuredly' (42); cf. LLB I, 311; LLA I, 327f.

³⁸ LLB I, 212; LLA I, 223.

³⁹ Van den Bosch, *Müller*, p. 57; LLB I, 205; LLA I, 215. The naturalization may have something to do with his new role as examiner of candidates for the Civil Service of India; LLB I, 169; LLA I, 178f. and LLB II, 246f.; LLA II, 259.

English', as the obituary in the *London Times* had it.⁴⁰ His writings were according to one of his students 'a delight to read'. His pronunciation, however, was less perfect, and jokes were made in Oxford about his German accent.⁴¹

Although he became a respected member of the University of Oxford, he was never completely at ease in this exclusive community, where it was indeed hard for outsiders to familiarize themselves with the Oxford men.⁴² There are quite a few events and remarks in the *Life and Letters* that substantiate this fact. His good manners and charm helped him to achieve success, but private letters to non-Oxonians and especially his autobiography show the distance between the pious Lutheran with liberal inclinations that he was and the Anglican orthodoxy of a clerical Oxford in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. 'There is only one chance of salvation for Oxford—fellowships open to all and no clerical restrictions.'⁴³ The process of professionalization and secularization of Oxford (and Cambridge) would take till the end of the nineteenth century. A long battle had to be fought over the clerical governance of the university, the religious character of the curriculum, and the obligation of the fellows to subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England.⁴⁴

The power of the Anglican clergy at Oxford was not to be underestimated, as Müller experienced personally. In May 1860 Horace Wilson, Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, died suddenly. One of the obvious candidates for this well-endowed chair (£1,000) was Müller, but he was opposed by Monier-Williams (1819–99), who had been Professor of Sanskrit at the East India College at Haileybury till it was

⁴⁰ 'Death of Professor Max Mueller', *London Times*, 29 October 1900, quoted after Rau, ed., *F. Max Mueller*, pp. 139–48, here p. 142. In the old days 'facile' had a positive connotation.

⁴¹ A. H. Sayce, *Reminiscences*, London: MacMillan, 1923, pp. 36f.

⁴² Farnell, *An Oxonian Looks Back*, p. 276: 'It needed effort [to make friends in Oxford], for intimacy and even acquaintance does not arise easily and spontaneously, as one might suppose, in Oxford; for though the members of the University live within easy distance of each other, the colleges and their common-rooms have an exclusive tendency; and it is quite possible for a professor or any scholar or scientist of European fame to live a long life in Oxford, and yet some of our leading men will not have made his acquaintance.'

⁴³ LLB I, 163; LLA I, 172, Müller to Bunsen, 14 January 1855.

⁴⁴ T. W. Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian Britain*, London and Canberra: Croom Helm, 1982.

closed in 1858. The Oxford chair of Sanskrit was established with money bequeathed to the university by Joseph Boden 'as a means of enabling Englishmen to proceed in the conversion of the natives of India to the Christian religion'. In his submission Monier-Williams stressed this point.⁴⁵ Like many Oxford chairs at the time the Boden professor was elected by a body of all masters of arts of the university, many of them being country clergymen. Both men campaigned fiercely for this position; Monier-Williams allegedly admitted that he had spent £1,000 on the election.⁴⁶ The contest was covered by newspapers and declared to be 'a question of national interest'.⁴⁷ Monier-Williams's piety, practical scholarship, and Englishness were contrasted with Müller's provenance from Germany and his liberal inclinations. Despite the endorsement of Müller even by orthodox peers such as Edward Pusey (1800–82), one of the leaders of the Oxford Movement, he was defeated by 223 votes (610 against 833 for Monier-Williams). This was a very bitter defeat for Müller, and Monier-Williams spoke in personal notes of the 'irreconcilability and implacable hostility of a man of great power and influence', which was 'a serious hindrance' in carrying out his own work.⁴⁸

PERSONAL LIFE IN OXFORD

In her biography of her later husband, Georgina Adelaide Grenfell (1835–1916) described her first encounter with Max Müller as follows:

⁴⁵ 'Monier Williams's and Friedrich Max Müller's Submissions to the Members of Convocation of the University of Oxford, 1860', in: John Wolffe, ed., *Religion in Victorian Britain*, vol. V: *Culture and Empire*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997, pp. 332–5.

⁴⁶ Richard Symonds, *Oxford and Empire. The Last Lost Cause?* (1986), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, p. 107.

⁴⁷ G. Beckerlegge, 'Professor Friedrich Max Müller and the Missionary Cause', in: John Wolffe, ed., *Religion in Victorian Britain*, pp. 177–219, p. 196. The contribution covers the battle over the Boden chair in some detail.

⁴⁸ Symonds, *Oxford and Empire*, p. 108: Indian Institute, Oxford, M. Monier-Williams MS 'Notes on a Long Life Journey' (n.d.), p. 372; cf. LLB I, 247; LLA I, 258f., Müller to Stanley, 17 April 1861; LLB I, 250; LLA I, 262f., Müller to Renan, 17 November 1861: 'calumnious falsehood and vulgar electioneering tactics caused the result, and deprived me of the one sphere where I might have worked with all my heart and soul. However, I have got over that.'

On November 26 [1853] Max and his future wife met for the first time at her father's house. Mr. Froude, her uncle by marriage, had often spoken of his clever young German friend, and his brother-in-law asked him to bring Max Müller for a Saturday to Monday visit. Years after, he told her that as soon as he saw her, he felt, 'That is my fate'. The party assembled at Ray Lodge was a pleasant one, and he at once fascinated all present by his brilliant, lively conversation and exquisite music. He was very dark, with regular features, fine bright eyes, and a beautiful countenance full of animation, and it was difficult to reconcile his youthful appearance with his already great reputation.⁴⁹

The next reference in her biography was to the six happy weeks during which they saw each other in the spring of 1856, 'little foreseeing the painful three years of total silence and separation' they would have to endure, before her father finally agreed to their marriage.⁵⁰ The wedding took place on 3 August 1859.⁵¹

Mrs Max Müller was naturally not much inclined to give details of their courtship and marriage. It is thanks to Nirad Chaudhuri's research that we now know important facts of these years of separation and contact. Georgina's mother, Charlotte Adelaide Elliot, died in 1840, and so Georgina was brought up by her father, Riversdale Grenfell, and her unmarried aunt, the eldest Miss Grenfell, who played an intermediary role during the long periods Georgina and Max spent separated from each other. Max Müller must have fallen immediately in love with Georgina and asked his friend James Froude to take Miss Grenfell into confidence to explore the possibilities of marriage. In a great letter to Froude she made it very clear that the age of Georgina (being nineteen years old at the time) and more in particular Max's salary and lack of means were severe obstacles and that she would no longer invite Müller to Ray Lodge.⁵²

Then there is a gap of two years in this amazing story, between the spring of 1854 when the family rejected Müller's proposal and the spring of 1856, when Max and Georgina declared their love for each other.⁵³ Chaudhuri's discovery of Georgina's diary makes it possible to tell the story in more detail. Her diary is indeed, as Chaudhuri writes, an extraordinary document, which describes 'her suffering

⁴⁹ LLB I, 147; LLA I, 154.

⁵⁰ LLB I, 180; LLA I, 189f.

⁵¹ LLB I, 228; LLA I, 239.

⁵² Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, pp. 116f., Miss Grenfell to Froude, 10 February 1854.

⁵³ Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, pp. 147 and 154.

over three years' on sixty-eight pages.⁵⁴ Her family saw Müller's 'little income' of more than £750 as a major obstacle.⁵⁵ Charles Kingsley, who had married a sister of Riversdale Grenfell and who was a friend of Müller, pointed to the luxury in which Georgina was brought up and declared that Max's income simply would not do and would make her suffer, with the following consequences:

Her family see what her husband cannot, and then come endless presents. You cannot refuse them, ought not: but they are most galling to all valiant men. She cannot refuse them because they go to her children or enable her to save for her children, and so is established a habit of aristocratic pauperism which does no soul good. And worse, it tempts her to get into the chronic habit of pleading poverty, giving hints, all but begging.⁵⁶

This depiction of the loss of financial self-sufficiency and the ensuing dependence on relatives is powerful, but did not convince Max, who kept on writing letters to the old Miss Grenfell, indicating how deeply felt his love was. At some stage she allegedly came 'forward with an offer to remove the money difficulty out of her own income'.⁵⁷ Still this would not convince her brother to consent.

Georgina turned down various other suitable candidates for marriage. Then at a concert she saw Max from a distance and fainted. In her diary she captured the remarkable incident:

Last Thursday the 12th May [1859] I saw Müller at a concert. It was agony. I saw him come in, he only saw me at the end. I always knew it would harrow up the very core of my heart whenever it happened and so it did. So near, and yet so far off—no word, no sign between us, whose very souls cling so together. Yet thank God it has happened, for it has undeceived myself and others, who fancied it was all over. I have submitted so quietly, so cheerfully to my father's stern will that many think the sacrifice was light. Few know how my whole life's joy is gone . . . He looked well and at peace. God grant that it may really be so and give me grace to trust on. 'A little longer' and he and I shall meet where none can part us.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 155.

⁵⁵ Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 154, Georgina's diary, 7 June 1856. Album Georgina Grenfell, BL, MS. Eng. C. 2714 (Max Müller Papers, Bodleian). Van den Bosch, *Müller*, p. 75, n. 309.

⁵⁶ Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 160, Kingsley to Müller, n.d., probably written 1856/7.

⁵⁷ Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 169.

⁵⁸ Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 170.

This text and—one could say—the whole occasion, were at least to some extent scripted. This story could not have been told and the event could not have happened in other ages and in other parts of the world. The idea of fate, that their love was predestined, the religious framing of the event, and the doom laying over the affair, were all part of a specific Romantic idea of love. But, as you reader already know, this was not the end of it. A doctor was called in, who said that her will to live had gone. Her father finally gave in. As the old Miss Grenfell broke the news to Müller, he answered: 'I feel broken in mind and body. Do you know that so much happiness is hard to bear?'⁵⁹

Notwithstanding Victorian and Romantic conventions which prevailed at the time in dealing with matters of love and—for that matter—death, it is safe to say that Max Müller's life was marked by emotions. Emotions were lived through and also kept track of in diaries and journals. In the diary he kept over seven years on 486 folios we can read of the devastating impact the death of his eldest daughter, Ada, in 1876 at the age of only fifteen years had on him. His dark mood grew even stronger, when his second daughter, Mary (1862–86) died, after giving birth to her second child. Max and Georgina's third daughter, Beatrice (1864–1902), died at the time Georgina finished the *Life and Letters* of her deceased husband. The couple were survived by their only son, William (Wilhelm) Grenfell Max Muller (1867–1945), who served as a diplomat in Constantinople and Washington, D.C.

Friedrich Max Müller does not appear to have been a light-hearted German Lutheran. One of his favourite sayings was that life is a serious matter (*Das Leben ist ernst*).⁶⁰ Anxiety was never far away. Of course, there was reason to be afraid of death in the nineteenth century, as many children died at early age and mothers died in childbirth. But not many grandfathers will have written letters to their newborn grandsons in a similar vein as Müller did:

I am glad that you like your Grandmama; I like her too, and I know she will be very kind to you, and she will not mind your crying. I do not wonder at your crying; it is a hard world you enter, as you will find out by and by. Many people would cry all their lives, if they were not

⁵⁹ Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 171, Müller to Miss Grenfell, 8/9 June 1859.

⁶⁰ LLB II, 364; LLA II, 384, letter to his son, 28 November 1897.

ashamed of it... And now when you have cried yourself out, try to sleep, and forget the beginning troubles of your life. Your grandfather is trying to do the same, but he does not always succeed.⁶¹

Chaudhuri calls Müller's private diary of almost 1,000 pages on the death of his daughter Ada, in which he sometimes addressed her in person, somewhat pathetic and even morbid. There may be elements of self-indulgence in these writings, but for Müller it was—in our modern parlance—a good way of coping with grief und suffering, which was not per se unpleasant.⁶² 'Grief, the absorption in the quiet recollection of what was, but is no longer, is a pleasure, a consolation, a blessing.'⁶³

In the *Thoughts on Life and Religion*, published a few years after Müller's death, Georgina collected sayings not only from his published work, but also from private letters and diaries, that could bring comfort to readers. This genre is termed 'sage writing', a concept forged by John Holloway to re-evaluate the work of Victorian writers such as Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, and John Ruskin.⁶⁴ The work of contemporary American writers such as Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson is also captured under this heading. Müller was familiar with the work of these writers and entertained many of them at his house, as they visited Oxford. Other 'sages' from India (*yogis*, *samnyasins*, in Müller's parlance) frequently visited his house. In the second volume of *Auld Lang Syne* he recollected memories of his many Indian friends,⁶⁵ and shortly before his death he edited a small volume with sayings of the 'Indian Saint', the mystic Ramakrishna (1836–86), in which he showed the high level of the spirituality and philosophy of (ancient) India.⁶⁶

The house of the Müllers at 7 Norham Gardens was open to the many colleagues and students, nobility, and friends from England

⁶¹ Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 275.

⁶² Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 283–99: 'the consolations of memory'.

⁶³ Müller, *Thoughts on Life and Religion*, ed. by his wife, London: Archibald Constable, 1906. The quotation is taken from p. 203.

⁶⁴ John Holloway, *The Victorian Sage. Studies in Argument*, London: MacMillan, 1953.

⁶⁵ Müller, *Auld Lang Syne*, vol. II.

⁶⁶ Müller, *Ramakrishna. His Life and Sayings*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1898, p. v; cf. Vivekananda's discussion of this booklet in: Vivekananda, 'Ramakrishna. His Life and Sayings' (1899), *Complete Works*, vol. IV, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1966, pp. 409–21.

and abroad.⁶⁷ Their daughters were no small part of the attraction of the place,⁶⁸ as the photos of the girls taken by the Revd Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll, also make clear.⁶⁹ Although Müller loathed big dinner parties and social obligations, he liked receiving guests at the beautiful house he lived in from 1867 onwards.⁷⁰ This was much appreciated by many visitors, but still from an insider's perspective Müller's hospitality still did not reach the same level of Oxford men such as his friend Henry Liddell (1811–98). A fascinating account in this respect is given in the published memories of the classical scholar and later vice-chancellor Lewis Farnell (1856–1934):

Max Müller, whom I knew more intimately [than Liddell], could not reach this height, being a German; but of all the scientific Germans that I have met he was perhaps the most refined and attractive; apart from his great philological learning, his father who was a poet had instilled into him a strong literary sense; which saved him from any touch of pedantry.⁷¹

Although Farnell has a sharp pen and delights in exposing weaknesses of his colleagues, basically he is not that critical of Müller and very much appreciates what Müller had done for him. That is why his text is so revealing: it shows that being a German and being a real gentleman at the same time was something almost impossible to achieve in Victorian Oxford.

Farnell added to his observations that Müller had the advantage of marrying 'a distinguished and gifted lady of the Grenfell family and of the best Victorian type, a marriage which mellowed his Teutonism'.⁷² She was well educated, spoke several foreign languages, translated his novel *Deutsche Liebe* into English, edited Müller's *Life and Letters*,

⁶⁷ For a picture of the house see van den Bosch, *Müller*, p. 119.

⁶⁸ Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 282.

⁶⁹ Helmut Gernsheim, *Lewis Carroll. Photographer*, revised edition, New York: Dover, 1969, p. 65: diary entry 30 May 1867, photo of the Müllers and their two children: 'Quite the loveliest children I have seen for a long time'.

⁷⁰ LLB I, 335, 341; LLA I, 353, 359; *Auld Lang Syne*, vol. I, pp. 120–2, here p. 120: 'It requires not only mental, but considerable physical strength to stand the wear and tear of London life, and I confess I never could understand how some of my friends, Browning, Tyndall, Huxley, M. Arnold, and others, could manage to do any serious work, and at the same time serve the Moloch of Society to whom so many men and women in London offer themselves and their children as willing sacrifices year after year.'

⁷¹ Farnell, *An Oxonian*, p. 114.

⁷² Farnell, *An Oxonian*, p. 114.

and published a book on her journey with Max to Constantinople.⁷³ One of Max's friends surmised that his books may have been corrected by her.⁷⁴ Georgina was a character in her own right and her contribution to Max's work is probably greater than the sources show. Her role, however, was hardly acknowledged at the time. The same is true for other female collaborators and translators. Edith Simcox's assistance, for instance, is not mentioned in Max Müller's translation of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and is only documented in manuscript sources.⁷⁵

By the time the family moved to Norham Gardens, Müller's financial quarrels must have been largely solved. As a professor and prolific author he must have earned enough money to keep a household including servants. Although Georgina's father is said to have lived in great style and, therefore, could not leave her much money,⁷⁶ her inheritance must have helped too. His wealth at the time of his death was almost £19,000.⁷⁷ Having lived in relative poverty as a student, money was always an important concern for Müller and he negotiated good allowances for his work all the time. I found only one reference to servants in the materials I studied, and that is characteristically in a letter to his wife from 7 June 1883, where the suitability of Fred Conybeare, a not very wealthy young don, as a marriage candidate for his daughter Mary is discussed. Although one can live on £800 a year, Müller doubts if they will be happy with this sum. 'I know Mary and her ideas of what is nice, and generous, and comfortable. I should be sorry for Fred if she had to do without a [lady's] maid.'⁷⁸ Ironically, this is the same kind of objection that was raised against his own marriage, based on the same stereotypical view of the wishes of upper-class Victorian women, to which their husbands had to cater.

⁷³ Georgina Müller, *Letters from Constantinople*, London etc.: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897; cf. Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism. Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem*, London and New York: Tauris, 2004.

⁷⁴ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, pp. 36f.

⁷⁵ Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. In *Commemoration of the Century of its First Publication*, translated into English by F. Max Müller (1881), second edition, revised, New York: MacMillan 1915. Susanne Stark, 'Behind Inverted Commas'. *Translation and Anglo-German Cultural Relations in the Nineteenth Century*, Cleveland etc.: Multilingual Matters, 1999, p. 32.

⁷⁶ Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 114.

⁷⁷ R. C. C. Fynes, 'Müller, Friedrich Max (1823–1900)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004; online edition 2007.

⁷⁸ Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 285; cf. p. 301: 'one of Müller's maidservants'.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Judgements about Müller's personality and work vary enormously. In a memorial meeting at the University of Columbia right after he had died Müller was called the greatest scholar of his generation, whereas another American scholar thought him 'one of the greatest humbugs of the century'.⁷⁹ His American friend Moncure Conway disputed the impression given in a New York paper that Müller was 'somewhat vainglorious'. Conway admitted that Müller's appearance ('his erect mien, his handsome, courtly look') could lead perhaps to such an impression, but argued that he actually was a very hospitable man with many friends from all over the world. One day before his death the *New York Times* published a notice that Müller 'was pronounced to be sinking fast to-day'.⁸⁰ The next day the announcement followed: 'Prof. Max Mueller Dead. Famous Orientalist Passes Away at Oxford'. Much praise was lavished upon 'one of the giants of learning'. A couple of days later an unsigned column in the same newspaper struck a different tone and spoke of lack of sound judgement on the part of the deceased scholar. His alleged failure to obtain a high rank in science (linguistics) was attributed to 'defects of mental constitution which were recognized by others much more readily than by himself'.⁸¹ Another piece in the same issue of the *New York Times* was similarly critical and addressed the 'triviality of many of his writings'.⁸² Almost a month later the same newspaper published a more positive evaluation of Max Müller.⁸³

In one account Müller was said to be 'pushful',⁸⁴ and to achieve what he achieved there must be at least an element of truth in this characterization. In his autobiography he described the following

⁷⁹ Moncure D. Conway, *Autobiography. Memories and Experiences of Moncure Daniel Conway*, 2 vols, London etc.: Cassell, 1904, vol. II, p. 280; Stephen G. Alter, *William Dwight Whitney and the Science of Language*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005, p. 201. The *New York Times* of 1 November 1900 announced the memorial meeting at 7 November, 4.30 p.m., in the Schermerhorn Hall: <<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F50F12F93E5B11738DDDA80894D9415B808CF1D3>>.

⁸⁰ NYT, 28 October 1900.

⁸¹ 'Max Mueller', NYT, 3 November 1900.

⁸² Montgomery Schuyler, Jr (1877–1955), 'Max Muller's Service to Science', NYT, 3 November 1900.

⁸³ An., 'An Appreciation of Max Muller', NYT, 1 December 1900.

⁸⁴ Edmund Craster, *History of the Bodleian Library 1845–1945*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952, p. 104.

incident in his early Oxford years. A very suitable candidate for the position of sub-librarian in the oriental department of the Bodleian was passed over, because he had publicly declared 'that the people of Canaan were Semitic, and not, as stated in Genesis, the children of Ham'.⁸⁵ 'I did not disguise my opinion', Müller wrote, and for more than a year he did not speak with the responsible person, 'though we met almost daily at the library'.⁸⁶ And when you read the autobiography and the biography by his wife carefully there are more signs of conflicts and uneasiness. Müller expected the unconditional support of his friends and asked much from his collaborators. His tact was—as far as I can judge—matched by his perseverance and power of persuasion. His Oxford colleague Mark Pattison, whom Müller respected, gave a harsh explanation of Müller's failure to obtain the Boden chair: 'It was due first and chiefly, to his own unpopular manners and to the experience his own friends (including myself among the number) have had of his inability for real attachment. We all knew that he only valued us so far as we could be of use to him.'⁸⁷

Müller thought Pattison reserved and kept complaining about the lack of stimulating conversation in Oxford.⁸⁸ He never felt really at home in his second fatherland, could not get used to Oxford conventions and manners and its orthodox religious climate. In his own view he must have done so much to adapt, and was still considered a foreigner, despite being a member of important institutions, such as All Souls College, the Bodleian Library, and Oxford University Press. Probably Pattison was right that Müller was on his guard with respect to Oxford colleagues and their ways of handling things, which he considered as not being straightforward. This issue cannot be solved in this short sketch. His success as an author, being able to reach large audiences and write popular books, which were translated into many languages, going through a considerable number of consecutive editions, must have caused at least some envy too. In his 'informal

⁸⁵ Müller, *My Autobiography*, p. 252.

⁸⁶ Müller, *My Autobiography*, p. 252.

⁸⁷ Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 218, without mentioning a source; the same passage is quoted in Peter Sutcliffe, *Oxford University Press. An Informal History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, p. 47, who does not give a source either. V. H. H. Green, *Oxford Common Room. A Study of Lincoln College and Mark Pattison*, London: Edward Arnold, 1957, p. 219, again without giving a source. Manley, 'Max Müller and the Bodleian Sub-Librarianship, 1865', p. 34, n. 4, refers to Bodleian Library, MS Pattison 130: Mark Pattison's diary, 7 December 1860.

⁸⁸ Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 218. LLB I, 195; LLA I, 205.

history' of Oxford University Press, which does not take much trouble to explain Oxford to outsiders either, Peter Sutcliffe put it as follows: 'Anybody as popular in the world at large as Max Müller was likely to come under some suspicion in Oxford. His good looks, charm, and engaging manners could not be expected always to stand him in good stead.'⁸⁹

His many popular expositions did his scholarly reputation no good. Already in 1867 Müller's friend Matthew Arnold reported from Berlin to the British government department of education that Müller 'was losing all scientific importance' in the German capital because of his focus on 'secondary and popular aims'.⁹⁰ It is hard to say how popular Müller exactly was, but my impression is that he was one of the most publicly visible intellectuals of his day. Besides specialized works and editions, he published series of bestsellers; pirate editions of his lectures circulated, even translations were brought out before the original edition was sanctioned by Müller. His articles could be found in journals all over Europe and the United States, such as the *Nineteenth Century*, *Blackwood's Magazine*, *Contemporary Review*, *Cosmopolis*, *Fortnightly Review*, *Edinburgh Review*, *Scholarly Review*, *Open Court*, *Deutsche Revue*, *Quarterly Review*, and *Fraser's Magazine*. He gave the prestigious Hibbert Lectures and Gifford Lectures, the last series no less than four times in a row, and was a much sought-after lecturer. He spoke to audiences on a large range of topics, not only in fields he was most well known for, such as comparative linguistics, mythology, religious studies, and Western and Eastern philosophy of religion and thought, but also on such themes as 'how to work?' and 'why I am not an agnostic'. He was a regular contributor to the *London Times*, his trips and lecture tours were covered by the international media, and he presented his views on educational, social, and political issues as well. His public correspondence with the famous German historian Theodor Mommsen on the Boer War attracted a lot of attention.⁹¹ It is no doubt legitimate to compare him with later public intellectuals who are

⁸⁹ Sutcliffe, *Oxford University Press*, p. 46.

⁹⁰ Matthew Arnold, *The Letters of Matthew Arnold*, 6 vols, ed. Cecil Y. Lang, Charlottesville and London: The University Press of Virginia, 1996–2001, vol. III (1998), p. 125, 19 March 1867, to Henry John Roby.

⁹¹ *The Question of Right between England and the Transvaal. Letters by the Right Hon. F. Max Müller with Rejoinders by Professor Theodor Mommsen*, Westminster 1900; cf. van den Bosch, Müller, pp. 170f., and Johannes H. Voigt, 'Die

better known nowadays; philosophers such as Bertrand Russell and Jean-Paul Sartre come to mind, and more recently Noam Chomsky, Richard Dawkins, and Jürgen Habermas.

COLLECTED WORKS AND AREAS OF RESEARCH

There is no complete, or nearly complete, bibliography of the works of Max Müller. The best we have is a booklet that he presented to his friends and colleagues at the fiftieth anniversary of his doctor's degree from the University of Leipzig in 1893.⁹² This publication was probably only circulated privately among friends, colleagues, universities, and academies. In public libraries in the Netherlands there is only one copy available, the one that was sent to the Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde (Society of Dutch Literature), of which Müller was a foreign member. Many honours were conferred upon Müller. The booklet contains a list of almost fifty honorary doctorates, orders, and memberships of British, German, and other learned societies, prominent among these the membership of the French Institute (1859), with which he was especially pleased.⁹³ Another distinction Müller wore with pride was his knighthood of the Order Pour le Mérite for Sciences and Arts of Prussia (K.M.), which he received in 1874.⁹⁴

The bibliography in the festive booklet, however, is far from complete, as only more or less independent publications are listed, and hardly any in journals. Only a few non-English publications are

Auseinandersetzung zwischen Theodor Mommsen und Max Müller über den Burenkrieg', *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 17 (1966) 65–77.

⁹² Friedrich Max Müller, *An Offering of Sincere Gratitude to My Many Friends and Fellow-Labourers For Their Good Wishes on the First of September 1893. The fiftieth anniversary of my receiving the doctor's degree in the university of Leipzig* [Oxford 1893]. Besides pictures and a list of honours and memberships of learned societies, this booklet contains a 'Catalogue of [his] Principal Works', all in English, 'compiled by M. W.' (probably his assistant and later professor Moritz Winternitz, who also prepared the index of the *Sacred Books of the East*; cf. the end of Chapter 2).

⁹³ LLB I, 220; LLA I, 231.

⁹⁴ LLB I, 462f.; LLA I, 488f.; cf. F. Max Müller, *The Science of Thought*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1887, p. xiii. The preface includes a list of honours and two pages of 'principal publications', almost all of them editions and translations; LLA and LLB II, Appendices G and H.

included, among them the novella *Deutsche Liebe*, a discussion of the ablative, a biographical entry about his father, and his 1872 Strasbourg lecture on the results of comparative philology.⁹⁵ A bibliography of Max Müller's work still is very much a desideratum. The lack of a good bibliography is no minor obstacle to the study of Müller's work. Very often one encounters a reference to a passage in his work in literature, which does not correspond to the edition you have at your desk. There were many, not only pirated editions, but also re-editions, whether expanded or not, English and American editions, and even Indian editions, which may have different page numbering. It would probably take a collective effort of scholars from different continents to compile a more or less complete and reliable bibliography.

For a start it is worthwhile looking at the 'Collected Works of F. Max Müller', published towards the end of his life. Müller himself probably approved of the arrangement of these twenty volumes. Here is the list as printed in one of the volumes:⁹⁶

- Vol. I Natural Religion. The Gifford Lectures 1888
- Vol. II Physical Religion. The Gifford Lectures 1890
- Vol. III Anthropological Religion. The Gifford Lectures 1891
- Vol. IV Theosophy; or, Psychological Religion. The Gifford Lectures 1892

Chips from a German Workshop [new edition, which differs considerably from the first edition of the *Chips*, vols V–VIII: 1894–5]

- Vol. V Recent Essays and Addresses
- Vol. VI Biographical Essays
- Vol. VII Essays on Language and Literature
- Vol. VIII Essays on Mythology and Folklore
- Vol. IX The Origin and Growth of Religion. As Illustrated by the Religions of India. The Hibbert Lectures 1878

⁹⁵ See the translation of the lecture in Müller, *Selected Essays on Language, Mythology and Religion*, vol. I, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1881, pp. 174–251.

⁹⁶ There is also mention of fourteen or eighteen volumes, but the whole collection finally would have twenty volumes. These are not easy accessible, but in volume X *Biographies of Words and the Home of the Aryas* (1887/8, reprinted in the collected works December 1898; May 1905; October 1912 [archive.org]), I found the listing I present here. The years between brackets are added by me and refer to the first edition of the book. The years given in the list refer mostly to the first time the lectures were held.

Vol. X	Biographies of Words and the Home of the Aryas [1887/8]
Vols XI–XII	The Science of Language. Founded on Lectures delivered at the Royal Institution in 1861 and 1863, 2 vols
Vol. XIII	India: What Can it Teach Us? [1883]
Vol. XIV	Introduction to the Science of Religion. Four Lectures 1870
Vol. XV	Ramakrishna. His Life and Sayings [1898]
Vol. XVI	Three Lectures on the Vedanta Philosophy 1894
Vol. XVII	Last Essays. First Series: Essays on Language, Folklore, &c. [1901]
Vol. XVIII	Last Essays. Second Series: Essays on the Science of Religion [1901]
Vol. XIX	The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy [1899]
Vol. XX	The Silesian Horseherd ('Das Pferdebürle'). Questions of the Hour Answered [1903; German original: 1899]

This list has a somewhat eclectic character. Important studies such as the *Science of Thought* (1887) and *Contributions to the Science of Mythology* (1897) were not included. Translations, editions, and more specialized studies, as well as the first series of *Chips from a German Workshop*, were not included either. Practical considerations of which books were in demand may have played a role in the selection. The collection of sayings of Ramakrishna seems at first sight not to be essential to a series of Müller's collected works.

Editions and translations were a substantial part of Müller's efforts. You could even defend the thesis that the first half of his life was to a great extent devoted to the edition of the six volumes of edition princeps of the *Rig-Veda* and the second half to the edition of the *Sacred Books of the East*. Apart from this he edited Sanskrit texts from Japan,⁹⁷ and did not shy away from the task of translation from

⁹⁷ F. Max Müller, ed., *Buddhist Texts from Japan* = *Anecdota Oxoniensa*. Texts, Documents, and Extracts, chiefly from manuscripts in the Bodleian and other Oxford libraries, Aryan Series, vol. I, Part 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881; F. Max Müller and Bunyiu Nanjio, eds, *Sukhavati-Vyuha. Description of Sukhavati, the Land of Bliss* = *Anecdota Oxoniensa*. Texts, Documents, and Extracts, chiefly from manuscripts in the Bodleian and other Oxford libraries, Aryan Series, vol. I, Part 2, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883; F. Max Müller and Bunyiu Nanjio, eds, *The Ancient Palm-Leaves* = *Anecdota Oxoniensa*. Texts, Documents, and Extracts, chiefly from manuscripts in the Bodleian and other Oxford libraries, Aryan Series, vol. I, Part 3, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884.

German texts.⁹⁸ Not only Sanskrit texts, but also German literature were translated and edited. Müller attached great importance to his translation of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, as he considered Kant the 'greatest philosopher of modern times',⁹⁹ opining that, if the Vedas represent the early stage of the development of the 'Aryan mind', in Kant we find its fulfilment.¹⁰⁰ However important philological and editorial detail may have been for Müller's daily work, ultimately it served a higher goal, connecting languages, cultures, and religions which were for a long time thought to be rooted in different traditions.

Müller saw his scholarship as a 'science'. In later work he discerned four 'sciences' to which he had contributed: (the study of) language, mythology, religion, and thought.¹⁰¹ What we would call nowadays philosophy was part of these sciences. The four Gifford Lectures on Natural, Physical, Anthropological, and Psychological Religion were all considered to be part of the 'Science of Religion'. These lectures contributed to—what could be called—a process of rationalization and spiritualization of religion itself. Müller developed an 'enlightened' form of (Christian) religion, which in his view was, or could be, shared between the East and the West. This ideal and also his contributions to the classification of languages ('Aryan', 'Semitic', 'Turanian')¹⁰² made and make him into a disputed and somewhat controversial scholar. Harsh judgements are sometimes pronounced upon him in debates concerning orientalism and the power relations involved in producing the 'Orient' and its texts.¹⁰³ But it isn't only from a present-day perspective that Müller's work is controversial.

⁹⁸ F. Max Müller, *The German Classics from the Fourth to the Nineteenth Century* (1858), new edition, 2 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886.

⁹⁹ *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason. In Commemoration of the Century of its First Publication*, translated into English by F. Max Müller (1881), second edition, revised, New York: MacMillan 1915, p. xxxiv.

¹⁰⁰ *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, p. lxxvii.

¹⁰¹ Müller, *Contributions to the Science of Mythology*, 2 vols, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897, pp. v–vi.

¹⁰² Friedrich Max Müller, 'Letter on Turanian Languages', in: C. C. J. Bunsen, *Christianity and Mankind*, 7 vols, London 1854–5, vol. III (1854), pp. 263–521; cf. George W. Stocking, Jr, *Victorian Anthropology*, New York and London: Free Press, 1987, pp. 58–60; and Chapter 3 of the present work.

¹⁰³ For a more detailed discussion on this topic see Chapter 3.

MOST CONTROVERSIAL THEORIES

Notwithstanding—or perhaps also because of—his popularity Müller's work was severely criticized in his own time. The critique focused mainly on his theories of the origin of language and mythology. Theorizing the origins of language was a popular endeavour at the time. Müller did not deny that some words were derived from interjections and imitations, but these are not conceptual words, which are according to him the main issue in linguistics. In a somewhat obscure exposition in his 1861 lectures at the Royal Institution, Müller famously located the origin of languages in a limited number of roots, technically 'phonetic types'. These are 'simply ultimate facts', compared by Müller with the Platonic ideas. If he had left it at this, he would not have been ridiculed as much as has been the case.

However, he engaged in speculations about how these roots had come into existence. He explained this by the analogy that each metal—if struck—has a particular sound. In a comparable way primitive man must have responded to impressions from the outside by forming 'vocal expressions'.¹⁰⁴ Man 'possessed . . . the faculty of giving more articulate expression to the general conceptions of his mind'.¹⁰⁵ Müller went on to say that this faculty was 'not of his [man's] own making', suggesting it was a gift of God. Furthermore this faculty is termed 'an instinct of the mind as irresistible as any other instinct', implying that roots were formed more or less automatically (there was no room for conscious deliberation about the formation of different vocal expressions), thus explaining the original unity of languages. Notwithstanding the alleged lack of deliberation, Müller spoke of 'the creative faculty', which gave to each general concept, 'as it thrilled for the first time through the brain, a phonetic expression'.¹⁰⁶

This train of thought led to lots of confusion, misunderstanding (if you want), and ridicule ('Ding Dong Theory'). Nevertheless, Müller stuck to this theory, explaining it by referring to the conscious element in it. He claimed that we have to recognize that 'roots are the phonetic expressions of the consciousness of our own acts'.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language* (1861–4), 2 vols, seventh edition, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1873, vol. I, p. 440, n. 57.

¹⁰⁵ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, vol. I, p. 440.

¹⁰⁶ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, vol. I, p. 441.

¹⁰⁷ F. Max Müller, *Three Introductory Lectures on the Science of Thought*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1888, p. iv. In this text he explained the constitution of a

Opponents did not understand Müller's constant readjustments and considered his thoughts confused. Francis Galton, the famous 'father of eugenics', with whom Müller had a public exchange of thoughts, considered Müller's definitions 'elusive', and, therefore, did not pursue the matter further.¹⁰⁸ The editor of Galton's letters found Müller's reasoning that there can be no thought without words 'very obscure'.¹⁰⁹ In his *Descent of Man* (1871) Charles Darwin commented on this idea as follows: 'What a strange definition must here be given of the word thought.'¹¹⁰ Müller had a public discussion with Charles Darwin,¹¹¹ who was not convinced, as Müller was, that language was the decisive barrier between man and animal. In a very polite letter, in which he thanked Müller for the copy of his *Lectures on the Science of Language*, Darwin stated: 'He who is fully convinced, as I am, that man is descended from some lower animal, is almost forced to believe *a priori* that articulate language has been developed from inarticulate cries.'¹¹²

Another tenet of Max Müller's thought that was severely criticized were his views of the role of mythology in the development of human thought. Famously, Müller called mythology 'diseased language', which basically meant that people substantialized and reified words,

concept in five stages: 1) consciousness of our own repeated acts; 2) *clamor concomitants* of these acts; 3) consciousness of that *clamor* as concomitant of the act; 4) repetition of that *clamor* to recall the act, and 5) *clamor* (root) defined by prefixes, suffixes, etc., to recall the act as localized in its results, its instruments, its agents, etc.

¹⁰⁸ Müller, *Three Introductory Lectures*, Appendix with the most important documents. For Galton's judgement see Francis Galton, *Memories of My Life*, London: Methuen, 1908, p. 283.

¹⁰⁹ *The Life, Letters and Labours of Francis Galton*, edited by Karl Pearson, 3 vols, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914–30, vol. II (1924), p. 274.

¹¹⁰ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871/7), in: Paul H. Barrett and R. B. Freeman, eds, *The Works of Charles Darwin*, vols XXI and XXII, London: Pickering, 1989, vol. XXI, p. 93, n. 63.

¹¹¹ L. P. van den Bosch, 'Language as the Barrier between Brute and Man: Friedrich Max Müller and the Darwinian Debate on Language', *Saeculum* 51 (2000) 59–89; van den Bosch, Müller, pp. 186–8; Linda Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, pp. 73f., Müller's main contributions are Müller, 'Reply to Mr. Darwin', *Contemporary Review* (January 1875), reprinted in *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. IV, pp. 433–72; Müller, 'In Self Defence' (1875), *Chips*, vol. IV, pp. 473–549.

¹¹² Charles Darwin, *More Letters of Charles Darwin. A Record of His Work in a Series of Hitherto Unpublished Letters*, ed. Francis Darwin and A. C. Seward, 2 vols, London: John Murray, 1903, p. 45, Darwin to Müller, 3 July 1873. LLB I, 452; LLA I, 478.

forgetting their original meaning.¹¹³ Early on in his *Lectures on the Science of Language*, Müller had explained this process of reifying and even deifying simple attributes as follows:

Mythology . . . is in truth a disease of language. A mythe [*sic*] means a word, but a word which, from being a name or an attribute, has been allowed to assume a more substantial existence. Most of the Greek, the Roman, the Indian, and other heathen gods are nothing but poetical names, which were gradually allowed to assume a divine personality never contemplated by their original inventors. *Eos* was a name of the dawn before she became a goddess, the wife of *Tithonos*, or the dying day.¹¹⁴

In his view this is an inevitable process in the history of mankind. In his path-breaking essay on comparative mythology from 1856, Müller had already addressed the ‘mythopoeic period’, in which this ‘unconscious [or] fossil poetry’ was formed.¹¹⁵ On the one hand this development is ‘an inherent necessity of language’, but on the other it is ‘the dark shadow that language throws on thought’.¹¹⁶ Thus, a critique of mythologies—including those of a Christian provenance—was needed.

Colleagues such as J. G. Frazer, the author of the *Golden Bough*, fundamentally disagreed with Müller that human history started from rational presumptions, which look very similar to nineteenth-century rationalism, and developed later ‘absurd (superstitious) reasons to account for a sensible practice’.¹¹⁷ From various angles Müller’s theory met criticism. Articulating his difference of opinion with Müller, the cultural anthropologist E. B. Tylor took ‘material myth [based on real and sensible analogy] to be the primary, and verbal myth to be the secondary formation’.¹¹⁸ The most criticized

¹¹³ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, vol. II, pp. 392f.

¹¹⁴ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, vol. I, p. 12.

¹¹⁵ Friedrich Max Müller, ‘Comparative Mythology’ (1856), in: Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. II, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1867, pp. 1–143, p. 52.

¹¹⁶ F. Max Müller, ‘On the Philosophy of Mythology’ [lecture at the Royal Institution, 1871], in: *Selected Essays on Language, Mythology and Religion*, 2 vols, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1881, vol. I, pp. 577–623, p. 590 (shortened version in *Chips*, vol. V, pp. 46–83 [53–97], p. 65 [56]).

¹¹⁷ Letter from J. G. Frazer to Henry Jackson, 22 August 1888, in: Robert Ackerman, ed., *Selected Letters of Sir J. G. Frazer*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 46–9.

¹¹⁸ Greg Schrempf, ‘The Re-education of Friedrich Max Müller. Intellectual Appropriation and Epistemological Antinomy in Mid-Victorian Evolutionary Thought’, *Man* 18 (1983) 90–110, referring to Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. I, London: Murray, 1873, pp. 298f.

idea, however, was Müller's stress on the role of solar gods, which he detected everywhere in religious history. A typical passage that betrays his awareness of the abounding critique of this idea is the following:

What we call the Morning, the ancient Aryas called the Sun or the Dawn . . . [E]very time we say 'Good Morning', we commit a solar myth . . . Every 'Christmas Number' of our newspapers—ringing out the old year and ringing in the new—is brimfull [*sic*] of solar myths. Be not afraid of solar myths, but whenever in ancient mythology you meet with a name that, according to the strictest phonetic rules (for this is a *sine qua non*), can be traced back to a word meaning sun, or dawn, or morning, or night, or spring or winter, accept it for what it was meant to be, and do not be greatly surprised, if a story told of a solar eponymos was originally a solar myth.¹¹⁹

Apparently Müller was not much impressed by the numerous authors who were deeply suspicious of his theory and the way he applied 'the strictest phonetic rules'.¹²⁰ Even Richard Littledale's jesting contribution, in which he demonstrated that Max Müller himself was a solar myth, did not kill the theory, to the great dissatisfaction of some scholars, who attributed this failure to the 'inexpugnable love of what is false and fantastic deep down in the hearts of the great majority'.¹²¹

IN DISREPUTE

Müller was much more involved in controversies than he was inclined to admit in his publications, in which he stressed that he valued scholarly truth much over personal strife and dispute. Not

¹¹⁹ Max Müller, *India. What Can it Teach Us?* London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1883, p. 198.

¹²⁰ Richard M. Dorson, 'The Eclipse of Solar Mythology', in: Thomas A. Sebeok, ed., *Myth. A Symposium* (1955, 1958), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965, pp. 25–63; cf. Dorson, *The British Folklorists. A History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968, pp. 163–74.

¹²¹ William Ridgeway, *The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races in Special Reference to the Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915, p. 13. Cf. R. [Richard] F. Littledale, 'The Oxford Solar Myth' (1870), in R. Y. Tyrrell et al., eds, *Echoes from Kottabos*, London 1906, pp. 279–90; Bernhard Maier, 'Habent sua fata libelli. Thoughts on an Early Parody of Max Müller and Other Classics in Comparative Religious Studies', *Religion* 42 (2012) 495–519.

only did he discuss his views publicly with Galton and Darwin, but he argued also extensively with the British ethnologist Andrew Lang¹²² and, most fiercely, with the American linguist William Dwight Whitney, who complained about the prevailing 'Müller-worship'.¹²³ Although there are a few exceptions, generally the controversial theories discussed above have led to a rather critical appraisal, especially of Müller's linguistic work, in the twentieth century. Probably Ferdinand de Saussure gave in his posthumously edited *Course in General Linguistics* one of the more generous appraisals of Müller's work, saying: 'Max Müller popularised the subject in a series of brilliant if somewhat superficial lectures (*Lectures on the Science of Language*, 1861), but it is not by too much conscience that he sinned.'¹²⁴ Scholars of comparative religion are often more positive about Müller as the one who paved the way for the new field of religious studies.¹²⁵ Emile Durkheim still devoted a chapter of his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* to refute some of Müller's claims,¹²⁶ but it would be an exaggeration to say that Müller's work is held in high esteem nowadays.

Some scholars see an incongruity between Max Müller's international renown in the nineteenth century and his 'well-nigh total oblivion today'.¹²⁷ But already in his lifetime opinions about the merit of his achievements differed to a considerable extent. It would be important to study in more detail in which respects he was criticized. My impression is that much of the criticisms focused on issues addressed above and did not so much concern his other work, especially not the editorial work. This does not mean that the editions are beyond critique. Appreciations and translations of texts are in

¹²² Dorson, 'The Eclipse of Solar Mythology', passim.

¹²³ Alter, *William Dwight Whitney and the Science of Language*, p. 199. Alter devotes a whole chapter to the 'Battle with Max Müller' (pp. 174–206).

¹²⁴ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916), Paris: Payot, 1980, p. 16; English version: *Course in General Linguistics*, translated by Roy Harris, London: Duckworth, 1983, p. 3 (the second half of the sentence is missing in the translation); cf. F. de Saussure, *Writings in General Linguistics* (2002), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 186.

¹²⁵ Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion. A History* (1975), second edition, London: Duckworth, 1986.

¹²⁶ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915; French original 1912), London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971, pp. 71–86.

¹²⁷ Tomoko Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime. The Quest for the Origin of Religion*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 60.

several respects antiquated, but Müller's 'sciences' and editions were major events in the history of Victorian scholarship.¹²⁸ Certainly he is not considered to be of the same calibre as Max Weber or Emile Durkheim, who are sometimes venerated as saints of the emerging fields of sociology and cultural anthropology (of religion). Nevertheless, Müller's work defined fields of study and contributed much to perceptions of 'religion', 'book religions', 'the East', and, last but not least, the comparative method. His claims nowadays seem completely over the top. He wrote, for instance, that the 'Science of Religion may be the last of the sciences which man is destined to elaborate; but when it is elaborated, it will change the aspect of the world, and give new life to Christianity itself.'¹²⁹ But notwithstanding such utopian vistas, his work did have quite some impact.

MEETING CRITICISM

Style defines man—and it is certainly important to keep this dictum in mind when writing a book about Max Müller. He was verbose, to say the least, and took his time to expound his views. His style was meant to be entertaining,¹³⁰ and he was indeed successful in drawing and keeping the attention of his audiences. The way he handled criticism is also characteristic of the man he was. A quick glance at the prefaces to the fifth and sixth editions of his *Lectures on the Science of Language* may illustrate this. Although he claimed to have revised the fifth edition carefully, and to have added some new facts to 'strengthen certain arguments' and to have 'omitted or altered what was really no longer tenable', there were only 'one or two cases' in which he had had to express himself 'more definitely and clearly'.¹³¹ Five years later in the preface to the sixth edition, he seems to have made more serious amendments:

¹²⁸ For an early critical appraisal of Müller's edition of the *Rig-Veda* and his work as a Sanskritist see Ernst Windisch, *Geschichte der Sanskrit-Philologie und Indischen Altertumskunde*, 2 vols, Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1917–20.

¹²⁹ Max Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I: *Essays on the Science of Religion*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1867, pp. xix–xx.

¹³⁰ LLB I, 274; LLA I, 288f.

¹³¹ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 1873, vol. I, p. xiv, from the preface to the fifth edition, 20 September 1866.

I think that those who have done me the honour of carefully examining and freely criticising my Lectures will find that none of their remarks has been neglected; and I can honestly say that, where I have retained my own opinions against the arguments of other scholars, it has not been done without careful consideration.¹³²

This sounds very open-minded, but Müller did not make fundamental revisions.¹³³ His basic conviction comes to the fore, as he explained that he had to resist the temptation to refute his critics, 'particularly when one finds oneself blamed, as happens not unfrequently, for having followed Copernicus rather than Ptolemaeus'.¹³⁴ No small comparison, if ever. Furthermore, he said that controversy—'particularly in public'—is unfruitful and that, fortunately, he had never 'wasted one hour in personal controversy'.¹³⁵ Arguments matter, not the persons that propound them. As we know, Müller fought his battles, and in this sense his statements are one-sided, to say the least. But his phrasing and style indicate that he did not particularly like sharp exchanges of words and skirmishes and preferred a civil attitude (he had fought some duels in his student days),¹³⁶ suggesting, if possible, that he stood above the parties.

Characterizing his style of thinking, I would say he had an *esprit de synthèse*, seeing continuities and similarities between various views, whereas many of his opponents thought him inconsistent or even opportunistic, as he synthesized a variety of perspectives and theories and did not hesitate to rephrase and readjust his views. More analytically minded opponents could not follow him and accused him of obscurantism and changing his position, without admitting this. Müller was a volatile thinker, who pursued his goals with great zeal. He was a wheeler-dealer, a scholar, and an entrepreneur at the same time, who succeeded in realizing many of his ambitions. One of his major achievements was the edition of the *Sacred Books of the East*. The next chapter will show how he got this grand project off the ground.

¹³² Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 1873, vol. I, pp. ix–x, from the preface to the sixth edition, April 1871.

¹³³ Cf. also William Dwight Whitney, *Max Müller and the Science of Language. A Criticism*, New York: Appleton, 1892, p. 2: one looks in vain for 'any serious modification'.

¹³⁴ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 1873, vol. I, p. x.

¹³⁵ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 1873, vol. I, p. x.

¹³⁶ Müller, *My Autobiography*, pp. 116f.; cf. Müller, *Contributions to the Science of Mythology*, p. xxv.

2

The Making of a Series

And shall we allow him to carry his stores of Eastern learning away?

(Henry Liddell)¹

INCEPTION

How did the series of *The Sacred Books of the East* (1879–1910) come into being? In this chapter I will focus on the early stages of development and on the main events during its long history. The core ideas which made this series into a groundbreaking event in intellectual history will be analysed in the next chapter. But questions as to who may have inspired Müller's project, at what time precisely the terminology crystallized into 'sacred books of the East', how he persuaded people to finance the whole undertaking, the design of the series, and the problems that arose are addressed here. The main developments took place in the period 1874–84, when it was also decided to continue the project and to edit another twenty-five volumes in the second series of translations. Although it is not my intention to discuss in detail the making of every single volume, I will present a cursory overview of the work of Müller's team of translators.

Besides the published volumes, the archives of the Bodleian Library, which keeps the Max Müller Papers, and the archive of Oxford University Press will be the main sources for telling this story.

¹ Speech of Dean Liddell, 15 February 1876, LLB II, 450–3, here p. 453; LLA II, 479; cf. n. 2 for the abbreviations.

The Clarendon Press which published the series is an imprint of Oxford University Press and the 'delegates', the directors of the Press, one of them being Max Müller, had to decide on which books were to be printed. The 'enormous' correspondence that Müller conducted with the translators has not been preserved.² Müller's collaborators had no great say in the design of the series and the letters must have been mainly about payment, the quality of the English translation (especially by the non-native speakers), and about the many textual and linguistic problems that arose during the whole process. According to one anonymous spokesman, probably an American friend of Müller, the separate volumes 'were arranged by Prof. Müller, every page passing through his hands for revision before final publication'.³ This estimation may have been exaggerated (Müller mastered not all the languages involved in the series), but doubtless he did not take his editorial tasks lightly.

It is evident that it was Max Müller who conceived the idea of bringing out a translation of the main texts of the ancient religious traditions of the world. To understand religions—he argued—you need primarily texts. At a very prominent occasion, in his second lecture on the science of religion at the Royal Institution on 26 February 1870, Müller spoke of the 'aristocracy of real book-religions in the history of the world'.⁴ On the basis of the classification of languages and the founders of religious traditions he discerned eight religions, using the following labels: Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism, on the one hand, and Mosaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism, on the other, to be completed with the Chinese religions of Confucius and Lao-tse. 'With these eight religions the library of the Sacred Books of the whole human race is complete.'⁵

² Müller, *The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Friedrich Max Müller*, edited by his wife [Georgina Müller], 2 vols, New York and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902, vol. II, 12 (abbreviated as LLA [American edition] II, 12). British edition: LLB II, 11. The word 'enormous' is used here by the editor.

³ Anon., 'An Appreciation of Max Muller', *New York Times*, 1 December 1900.

⁴ F. Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (London, 1873), reissued: London and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1899, p. 56. For the book Müller edited the lectures, but the quotation is also to be found in the original publication of the second lecture in *Fraser's Magazine*, edited by James Anthony Froude, new series, 1/5 [May] (1870) 581–98, here p. 581.

⁵ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1899, p. 57 = *Fraser's Magazine* 1 (1870) 582; cf. p. 63 = *Fraser's Magazine* 1 (1870) 585: 'library of the sacred books of the world'.

At this moment he did not speak of the 'sacred books of the East' and clearly he did not envision an edition of translations of these books.

At the time he gave these lectures Müller spent most of his efforts on the edition of the *Rig-Veda*. Not until this edition, on which he worked for more than twenty-five years, neared its completion did Müller start thinking of a new—and even bigger—editorial project. In the summer of 1874 he completed this Herculean work and embarked on a trip to Italy to rest from his prolonged exertions. In this period he considered other options, among these to return to his native Germany. '[M]y heart is drawing me to Germany', he wrote to a German friend, the Berlin professor in Egyptology Karl Richard Lepsius (1810–84).⁶ A realistic opportunity arose, as in 1872 he was he offered a chair at the newly refounded German Kaiser-Wilhelm-Universität of Strasbourg, after the end of the Franco-Prussian war and the return of Alsace-Lorraine to Germany. He lectured in Strasbourg, but decided not to accept the position. In a letter from 20 June 1874 to the German crown prince Friedrich Wilhelm, who would become Emperor Wilhelm II in 1888, he explained why:

I do indeed realize just now, how my heart clings with all its fibres to Germany. The work which brought me to England first of all, and which has kept me incessantly occupied here for twenty-five years, the publishing of the *Veda*, will be finished this summer, and I shall then feel a free man. If I could be of more use in Germany than here, I should like to return to Germany, though I have grown old. I was very happy in Strassburg; it was like an intellectual sea-bath . . . The Alsations ought to have been made to feel proud of their new Strassburg in spite of themselves, and just one course of lectures did not suffice for that. I had hoped that, as in former times for Bonn, so now for Strassburg, Germany would send her best men, in order to create there a new spiritual Byzantium, a capital of German art, science, and learning. But this was not thought of.⁷

The years around 1875 mark a period of transition for Müller, and he seriously thought of a change of place. Although he stressed the fact that he had grown old, he still had ambitions—ambitions which he thought could not be fulfilled in Strasbourg. One of his demands was

⁶ LLB I, 463; LLA I, 489, letter of 18 June 1874.

⁷ LLB I, 464; LLA I, 490; cf. Müller's letter of 14 December 1873 to Klaus Groth, with a similar argumentation for rejecting the offer (LLB I, 458; LLA I, 484).

that he would lecture only during one semester, as he needed more time for his research projects.⁸

The idea of editing the *Sacred Books of the East* appears in Müller's edited letters early in 1875. On 1 April 1875 he suggested to Lepsius that the edition of the 'Sacred Writings of Mankind' could be done mainly by German scholars and be supported by the Berlin Academy. In this case the English translations would have to be made later from the German translations. 'The thought struck me the other day in Sorrento, when I was ill in bed.'⁹ What do you think about this, he asked, suggesting that there was some hurry to come to a decision, as he had already contacted his English publishing house about a primarily English edition. Müller liked to play on several boards at the same time. He had also begun to contact potential translators.¹⁰

The first reference to the edition is to be found in Müller's address to the Second Congress of Orientalists, held at the Royal Institution in London in September 1874. In this speech Müller pointed to the necessity 'to carry out great works' by joint effort (*viribus unitis*). The example he mentioned is 'a translation of the *Sacred Books of Mankind*'.¹¹ Interestingly, this is not just presented as a mere idea, as Müller added that 'important progress' had been made 'for setting on foot this great undertaking'.¹² During—and perhaps even before—this congress Müller had contacted colleagues and tried to engage

⁸ LLB I, 448; LLA I, 473, letter to his mother of 16 February 1873.

⁹ LLB I, 484f.; LLA I, 512, letter to Lepsius of 1 April 1875.

¹⁰ LLB I, 483; LLA I, 510, Müller to James Legge, 13 February 1875: 'I am trying very hard to get a number of scholars together for a translation of these works, but the task is no easy one.' This is the first mention of the SBE in the published letters of Müller; cf. Norman Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China. James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage*, Berkeley etc.: University of California Press, 2002, p. 161.

¹¹ Müller, 'Address [to the Aryan Section]', in: *Transactions of the Second Session of the International Congress of Orientalists* (London, September 1874), London, 1876 [Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1968], pp. 177–204, p. 180 [reprinted in *Chips of a German Workshop*, vol. IV: *Essays Chiefly on the Science of Language* (1875), London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1880, pp. 317–58, p. 337]. Girardot, *The Victorian Translation*, pp. 255f., erroneously mentions 1873 as the year in which the London Oriental Congress took place. Another important document for understanding the beginnings of the SBE is Max Müller, 'Review of M. D. Conway, *Sacred Anthology. A Book of Ethnical Scriptures*, London: Trübner, 1874', *Academy* 6/7 (31 October 1874) 476–7. I will come back to this review, in which we find for the first time in Müller's work the precise wording of the title of the edition.

¹² Müller, 'Address [to the Aryan Section]', p. 180.

them for the edition.¹³ This address provides us, as Norman Girardot correctly states, 'with a crucial clue as to the actual inception of the *Sacred Books* project'.¹⁴

In his meticulously researched article on Max Müller's edition of the *Sacred Books of the East*, Girardot mentions also an undated prospectus, which allegedly would have appeared in the winter of 1874–5, as proof of Müller's plan.¹⁵ However, I have not been able to trace this prospectus in the Oxford archives, and as Girardot does not give a specific reference to where he found it, and the prospectus is undated, it does not provide verifiable evidence of when the 'great undertaking' started.¹⁶ The Max Müller Papers in the Bodleian Library and the archive of Oxford University Press don't give earlier clues. In his letter of 1 April 1875 to Lepsius, he still talked about Longmans as a possible publishing house.¹⁷ The decision to publish the *Sacred Books of the East* with Clarendon Press must have been taken at a later stage.

PLANS TO LEAVE OXFORD

Müller felt frustrated in Oxford: 'Here I am a nobody in the University.'¹⁸ With the death of his brother-in-law Charles Kingsley (1819–75) 'another cable snapped that tied me here'.¹⁹ He wanted

¹³ At the 1874 Congress of Orientalists the following scholars who would (or were supposed to) contribute to the SBE were present: S. Beal, E. B. Cowell, J. Eggeling, and Legge; cf. *Transactions of the Second Session of the International Congress of Orientalists*, pp. 447–53.

¹⁴ Norman Girardot, 'Max Müller's *Sacred Books* and the Nineteenth-Century Production of the Comparative Science of Religions', *Religions* 41/3 (2002) 213–50, p. 224, n. 23.

¹⁵ Girardot, 'Max Müller's *Sacred Books*', pp. 224f., n. 23. As far as I see it, Girardot did not repeat this claim in his book on James Legge, Girardot, *Victorian Translation of China*, pp. 644f., n. 51. Parts of the article and the book are more or less identical.

¹⁶ As the many boxes of Girardot's research project on Legge are stored in his basement, he did not have the materials at hand (personal communication, 27 March 2013).

¹⁷ LLB I, 485; LLA I, 512.

¹⁸ LLB I, 492; LLA I, 520, letter of 22 August 1875 to his friend A. P. Stanley, then dean of Westminster Abbey. I am not convinced by Girardot's suggestion that Müller's reports about his low status at Oxford have 'sometimes' a disingenuous character (Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*, p. 163).

¹⁹ LLB I, 482; LLA I, 509, letter to Lepsius of 13 February 1875.

to leave England and settle in a not too big German town, such as Dresden. The last push seems to have been the conferment of an honorary degree on his old rival Monier-Williams, which Müller saw as a personal affront.²⁰ Müller was in a poor state of mind, as he handed in his letter of resignation to the vice-chancellor on 1 December 1875. This event did not go unnoticed in the media, and three weeks later even the *New York Times* published the text in full.²¹ In this rather formal letter, Müller digressed on his achievements and plans. The edition of the *Rig-Veda* may be finished, he stated, but there is still a lot to be done, and these plans will not materialize if he keeps his position as a professor of comparative philology, after serving the university for twenty-five years:

I have published the first volume only of my translation of the Sacred Hymns of the Brahmins, and there are seven more to follow. There is some other work, too, connected with this, the most ancient and most important monument of Sanskrit literature, which, if life and health are spared, I would like to finish. This I could not hope to achieve if I attempted to discharge at the same time . . . the duties incumbent on a professor of comparative philology in this university.²²

Müller wrote that he had to choose between ‘Sanskrit and comparative philology’, and did not mention the edition of the *Sacred Books of the East* as such in this letter. As far as we can judge, it was not decided yet how and where this plan would be executed. Although Lepsius had answered that the Berlin Academy had no money to publish the ‘*Bibliotheca Sacra*’, there were good contacts with the University of Vienna to get the edition ‘on its feet’, as Müller wrote in a letter of 7 January 1876.²³ And Müller had not burned all his boats in Oxford, as he left it in the hands of the university, if his services ‘have given me any equitable claim to a retiring pension’.²⁴

This hint was not misunderstood by his Oxford friends, and Henry Liddell, a former vice-chancellor and at the time Dean of Christ Church, took the lead to secure Müller’s stay in England. On 21 January 1876 Liddell wrote to Müller that some patience was needed,

²⁰ Van den Bosch, *Müller*, p. 117, who cites the correspondence with Stanley.

²¹ Müller’s letter of resignation, 1 December 1875; Max Müller Papers, Bodleian, MS. Eng. C. 2808; ‘Max Mueller’s Resignation’, *New York Times*, 22 December 1875.

²² Müller’s letter of resignation, 1 December 1875.

²³ LLB II, 1–2; LLA II, 1–2, Müller to Georg von Bunsen, 7 January 1876.

²⁴ Müller’s letter of resignation, 1 December 1875.

but that much of what Müller wanted (including the edition of the 'series you propose') could probably be realized, as the vice-chancellor was in favour of this plan.²⁵ Müller would keep half of his salary to devote himself to the 'Ancient Literature of India' and the other half would be used to appoint a deputy at Müller's vacant chair of comparative philology. This proposal met at least some resistance, and Lewis Carroll protested publicly against it, his main concern being that the new professor would only get half the salary.²⁶ As the idea that Müller would edit 'for the University Press all the sacred books of the world' became public, the fear was expressed that this would 'drain the University Press to its last penny'.²⁷ Liddell held an ardent speech to convince his colleagues at the convocation of February 15, and the proposed decree was carried by ninety-four votes to thirty-five.²⁸

It was evident that Müller had real options to leave Oxford and was willing to continue his work at another learned institution. In a letter to Georg von Bunsen, the son of his benefactor Baron von Bunsen, on 7 January 1876, he wrote that he had made up his mind to leave Oxford, as he had 'an urgent call to Vienna' with a most attractive proposal to publish 'an *opus magnum*, the translation of the sacred writings of humanity'.²⁹ They promise 'also a high salary, and all the assistance I can desire'.³⁰ In his speech at the Convocation of Oxford University, Liddell referred to this offer from Vienna twice, first to explain that they should hurry to attempt to retain Max Müller in Oxford, and second to show what would be lost if he left for the Sanskrit chair in Vienna:

And shall we allow him to carry his stores of Eastern learning away? Just at the moment... when it is announced that the Sovereign of our Islands is about to assume the proud title of Empress of India, shall we suffer the groundwork of the old Indian Faith to be translated, not

²⁵ Liddell to Müller, 21 January 1876, Bodleian, MS. Eng. C. 2808, 131–2.

²⁶ Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, printed leaf, dated 4 February 1876, Bodleian, MS. Eng. C. 2808, 156–7; cf. Lewis Carroll, *Lewis Carroll's Diaries. The Private Journals of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll)*, ed. by Edward Wakeling, 10 vols, Clifford: The Lewis Carroll Society, 1993–2007, vol. VI (2001), p. 446, entry 3 February 1876.

²⁷ Bibliophilus, 'The Sacred Scriptures of the World', 14 February 1876, to the editor of the *Times*, Bodleian, MS. Eng. C. 2808, 152.

²⁸ Bodleian, MS. Eng. C. 2808, 161.

²⁹ LLB II, 1; LLA II, 1, Müller to Georg von Bunsen, 7 January 1876.

³⁰ LLB II, 1; LLA II, 1, Müller to Georg von Bunsen, 7 January 1876.

into English, but into German, and published by the munificence of the Austrian Government, who neither have, nor can have, any immediate connexion with India?³¹

Liddell clearly played on nationalistic sentiments, as he closely linked Müller's expert knowledge and the British empire, of which Queen Victoria would become officially empress on 1 May 1876. The edition and translation of other sacred books were not mentioned, perhaps because it was seen more as a joint venture of a team of scholars, and, therefore, less apt to argue that Müller should be kept in Oxford. After the meeting Liddell walked up to Müller's house at Parks End to congratulate him on this outcome. The next day Müller thanked the vice-chancellor and wrote to him that he 'look[ed] forward with great satisfaction to spending the remaining years of [his] life at Oxford'.³²

The power play had succeeded. The pressure cooker that was created by Müller's letter of resignation had resulted within three months in securing the edition for Oxford. Müller explained to his German family and friends that 'they have caught me again in Oxford'.³³ All was done that he could desire: 'my income remains the same . . . and I have full leisure, and they have given me *carte blanche* for printing my *Bibliotheca Sacra*'.³⁴ To Stanley he wrote that he was surprised by the 'real kindness of so many people who I thought would care little whether I stayed or went away', and that the offer of the 'University Press to print the translations of the Sacred Books of the World' convinced him to stay.³⁵ Apparently, he was promised to get payment for the edition, although the formal contract was signed later.

Still the project had not got its final name. In the minutes of the directing board of Oxford University Press—the so-called delegates' orders—the project is referred to as 'a translation into English of (a selection of [later addition, ALM]) the Sacred Books of the five

³¹ Speech of Dean Liddell, 15 February 1876, reprinted in LLB II, 450–3, here p. 453.

³² Printed letter to the vice-chancellor, 16 February 1876, Bodleian, MS. Eng. C. 2808, 170a.

³³ LLB II, 7; LLA II, 7f., Müller to his mother, 20 February 1876.

³⁴ LLB II, p. 7f.; LLA II, 8, Müller to Georg von Bunsen, 17 February 1876.

³⁵ LLB II, 8; LLA II, 8f., Müller to A. P. Stanley, 21 February 1876.

great Oriental Religions' for the first time in the report of the meeting of 28 January 1876. The proposal is 'accepted generally' within a week, and only later on the discussion about Müller's remuneration is started. The first mention of a salary for Müller is to be found in the minutes of the delegates' meeting of 27 February 1876, with reference to a letter of Müller's that is lost. In this letter he allegedly recapitulated his conversation with Liddell, the secretary of the press. The minutes summarize the proposal as follows: 'The Delegates propose to pay him £300 [a year] as editor, (without deducting half of that sum from the profits from his own translations, as Prof. Max Müller offered). Profits to be divided at the normal rate between Prof. M. M. and the Press, after all expenses have been paid. (Prof. Müller held that he had no claim to any further share of profits).'³⁶ The final contract with Max Müller as 'editor of the "Sacred Books of the East"' was dated and signed on 19 October 1877.³⁷

The year 1876 was evidently a crucial year for Müller, which brought a decisive change of work, coordinating one of the biggest editorial projects of late Victorian Britain. In the summer of this year the Müllers moved to their new house at Norham Gardens in Oxford, and then left England for a trip of eighteen months to travel in France, Germany, and Italy.³⁸ During his long journey he continued his efforts to engage colleagues as translators, which resulted in a time-consuming correspondence. With James Legge, one of the key translators, Müller discussed Sinological matters as well as the prospectus of the *Sacred Books of the East* that he was preparing.³⁹ Before turning to the prospectus that outlined and defined the whole endeavour, it must be asked if we can say more about ideas and authors that inspired the whole undertaking. How was it triggered?

³⁶ This summary is to be found in the index to the delegates' minutes 1821–98, Archive, Oxford University Press.

³⁷ Anna Sun, *Confucianism as a World Religion. Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2013, pp. 62f., Girardot, *Victorian Translation*, p. 255, including a reproduction of the front page of the agreement. I have not been able to find this copy in the archive of Oxford University Press. Delegates' orders, 19 October 1877, states that the vice-chancellor signed the contract on that day.

³⁸ LLB II, 7; LLA II, 7.

³⁹ Girardot, *Victorian Translation*, pp. 609f., n. 137.

INSPIRATION

In Müller's work there are countless references to the importance of editing authoritative religious texts, also called 'sacred books' of the 'religions of the world'.⁴⁰ It is also evident that he attached special value to the Eastern religions, which could only be studied in a proper way 'after the discovery of Sanskrit'.⁴¹ In this section, however, I will address the more specific question if there any sources of direct inspiration for a *translation* of a *series* of sacred books. In the nineteenth century various anthologies of texts from various cultures and religions were brought out. One of the most popular editions of the mid-nineteenth century was that by Jean-Pierre Guillaume Pauthier (1801–73). In 1840 he had published *Les Livres sacrés de l'Orient*, which went through various editions and was later even included in one of largest editorial programmes of the age, J. P. Migne's 'universal library of the clergy'.⁴² It is claimed that Müller's title was doubtless a direct translation from Pauthier,⁴³ but if this is so obvious, why did it take such a relatively long time for Müller to settle on the definitive title of his series? Besides, there is no evidence for this claim.

A more direct source of inspiration may have been the work of the American essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82), with whom Müller corresponded in the early 1870s and who was a guest at his house in May 1873.⁴⁴ Apparently Emerson had received a copy of Müller's *Science of Religion* in 1872, before the official edition

⁴⁰ Müller, 'Buddhism' (1862), in: Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1867, pp. 182–231, p. 187.

⁴¹ Müller, 'Lecture on the Vedas or the Sacred Books of the Brahmins [Leeds, March 1865]', in: Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I, 1867, pp. 1–49, p. 24.

⁴² J.-P.G. Pauthier and G. Brunet, eds, *Les Livres sacrés de toutes les religions, sauf la bible, traduits ou revues et corrigés par Pauthier et Brunet, publiés par M. l'abbé Migne, éditeur de la bibliothèque universelle du clergé*, 2 vols, Paris: Migne, 1865–6. The first edition is from 1840: G. Pauthier, ed., *Les Livres Sacrés de l'Orient*, Paris: Firmin Didot, 1840. On Migne see R. Howard Bloch, *God's Plagiarist. Being an Account of the Fabulous Industry and Irregular Commerce of the Abbé Migne*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

⁴³ Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance. Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984 [French original 1950], p. 109.

⁴⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Ralph L. Rusk, 6 vols, vol. VI, New York: Columbia University Press, 1939, pp. 238ff.

appeared in 1873.⁴⁵ Müller dedicated this edition to Emerson, referring to the inspiration he received from Emerson's 'writings during the last twenty-five years'.⁴⁶ The editor of Emerson's correspondence writes that the friendship between the two men is 'of special interest in the light of Emerson's long-lived enthusiasm for the sacred books of the Orient'.⁴⁷ In his famous essay on 'books', Emerson referred in particular to the 'majestic expressions of the universal conscience', as he spoke of the 'Bibles of the world, or the sacred books of humanity'.⁴⁸

The most probable direct source of inspiration for Müller, however, was Moncure Conway's *Sacred Anthology* of religious texts.⁴⁹ Conway (1832–1907) compiled these 'Eastern flowerets' not for critical scholars, 'but to provide thoughtful readers with some idea of the ethical and religious geography, so to say, of the world'. The anthology was actually used in Unitarian churches in Britain and the United States 'for pulpit lessons', according to Conway's recollections.⁵⁰ Conway wrote that he had known Müller for more than thirty years and that Müller's favourable reception of the collection had

⁴⁵ In a letter of 21 January 1872, Emerson thanked Müller for this book. The series of lectures had been first published in *Fraser's Magazine* of 1870, whereupon pirate editions appeared. Emerson's copy must have been one from the small 'private edition' that Müller had circulated among 'some of my friends' before the official edition was brought out; cf. Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, preface, p. vii.

⁴⁶ The dedication refers to Emerson's visit to Oxford in May 1873 as well. The preface is dated 12 May 1873.

⁴⁷ Emerson, *Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. VI, p. 238.

⁴⁸ Emerson, *Society and Solitude* (1870), *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Centenary Edition*, vol. VII, London etc.: Constable, 1903, chapter 'Books', pp. 187–221, here pp. 218–19. There is no proof that Müller read or possessed this book. After his death his library was sold to Japan and was later destroyed by fire. For Emerson's fascination with the Orient see Carl T. Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought. Nineteenth-Century Explorations*, Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press, 1981, pp. 46–51. Cf. also Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854), London: Everyman's Library [136], 1992, p. 95: 'and as for the sacred Scriptures, or Bibles of mankind, who in this town can tell me even their titles?'

⁴⁹ Moncure D. Conway, ed., *The Sacred Anthology. A Book of Ethnical Scriptures*, London: Trübner, 1874 (preface December 1873).

⁵⁰ Moncure D. Conway, *Autobiography. Memories and Experiences of Moncure Daniel Conway*, 2 vols, London etc.: Cassell, 1904, pp. 300f. In a letter of 13 March 1873 to Conway, Müller said that he had 'no objection to your printing a number of verses from the *Dhammapada*' (LLB I, 450; LLA I, 475). See Rogers, *Buddaghosha's Parables*, translated from Burmese by Captain T. Rogers. With an introduction, containing Buddha's *Dhammapada*, or 'Path of Virtue', translated from Pali by F. Max Müller, London: Trübner, 1870.

contributed to its success. Conway had sent the first copy of the book to Müller.⁵¹ Moreover, he claimed that his anthology had induced Müller to undertake the publication of the *Sacred Books of the East*. They must have met personally at the 1874 Oriental Congress in September in London, where in his opening speech Müller quoted from the anthology.⁵² He wrote a rather favourable review that appeared in the *Academy* in its issue of 31 October 1874.⁵³ In his view the anthology pointed to a 'hitherto strangely neglected' subject. The mistakes in the translations are according to Müller not Conway's fault, as he only brought the texts together. Müller is thankful for this collection and stressed that he trusts 'that this book will arouse a more general interest in a long-neglected and even despised branch of literature, the Sacred Books of the East'.⁵⁴ A series was born.

THE CONTRACT

The index to the delegates' minutes shows that the series was one of the most discussed editions of the Clarendon Press. The index contains eight large numbered sheets titled 'Müller—Prof. F. Max—Sacred Books of the East', covering the years 1876–82, during which the first and the second series were conceived.⁵⁵ Right from the start the delegates saw the project as intimately related to the main British colony of India and they tried to get support for it. In the same special meeting in which they approved of a 'translation into English of

⁵¹ Conway, *Autobiography*, pp. 280 and 302. Already in 1876 the anthology went through its fifth edition. The first proof of their acquaintance is a letter from Müller to Conway of 14 September 1870, printed in LLB I, 383f.; LLA I, 405f.

⁵² Conway, *Autobiography*, p. 302: 'Max Müller told me that the interest in Oriental literature stirred up by the anthology induced him to undertake publication of the "Sacred Books of the East", and asked me about the financial support likely to be obtained'. Both attended the London Oriental Congress; cf. the list of participants in *Transactions of the Second Session of the International Congress of Orientalists*, pp. 447–53.

⁵³ Max Müller, Review of M. D. Conway, *Sacred Anthology*, in: *Academy* 6/7 (October 31, 1874) 476–7.

⁵⁴ Müller, Review of Conway, *Sacred Anthology*, 476–7.

⁵⁵ The relevant index comprises the period 1821–98. In the years after 1898 the series is only occasionally discussed.

selected Sacred Books of the five great Oriental Religions', Liddell (being the secretary of the delegates) was 'requested to communicate further with the India Office with the view of obtaining assistance towards the work'.⁵⁶ In an earlier personal letter Liddell had written to Müller that the India Office might be interested and that, as a very important part of the series relates to India, it 'ought to be published under Anglo-Indian authority'.⁵⁷

Thereupon things moved quickly. Liddell, most of the times referred to in the minutes as the Dean of Ch.Ch. [Christ Church], presented at the delegates' meeting of 20 February 1876 a draft letter to Lord Salisbury, the then secretary of state for India, proposing that the India Office should pay half of the costs of the production of the volumes, each £230. Later this amount was raised, and a next proposal stated that the India Office should pay half of the total costs of a volume, including the payments to the editor and translators.⁵⁸ Subsequently a reaction of Sir Henry Maine, at the time member of the council of the governor general of India, was solicited. Maine offered 'unofficially' to pay £150 of the salary of Max Müller for a period of no longer than eight years, and £2 per sheet with a maximum of ninety sheets a year. The conditions were that the ancient texts that would be translated had to be held as authoritative 'by some considerable portion of Indian society' and that previous approval by the secretary of state for India was necessary.⁵⁹ These points would lead to much debate and controversy.

The official letter of the delegates to the council referred to the previous unofficial correspondence with Sir Henry Maine, and was sent out on 29 April 1876. Before stating the terms the letter pointed to the great use of the edition of the *Sacred Books of the East* 'to both the native Indians and to those who are brought into relation with them', which is a rather circumspect and evasive formulation to refer to the colonial interests at stake. The plan was to bring out three volumes annually, which would consist on average of twenty-five to thirty sheets (400 to 480 pages) each. Müller would select the books and determine the order of publication. He would also select the

⁵⁶ Ord. Del., 3 February 1876. Archive OUP. In the preceding meeting of 28 January 1876, Müller had offered the translation of a selection of 'the Sacred Books of the five great oriental religions'; cf. Sun, *Confucianism*, pp. 62, 197f., n. 52 (with a slightly different quotation).

⁵⁷ Liddell to Müller, 21 January 1876. Bodleian, MS. Eng. C. 2808, 131-2.

⁵⁸ Ord. Del., 3 March 1876.

⁵⁹ Ord. Del., 31 March 1876.

translators 'and arrange with them all matters relating to the translating, annotating, and editing the works'.⁶⁰ The translators would receive £4 per sheet of sixteen pages, and for his work as general editor Müller would get £300 per year. On top of this Müller would also be reimbursed for his own translations. One and a half thousand copies would be printed of each first edition. As far as the financial 'aid' of the Council of India is concerned the delegates stick to the proposals by Henry Maine (half of Müller's salary and £2 per sheet, with a maximum of ninety sheets a year), including the provisions concerning the relevance for Indian society and the approval of the Indian secretary of state. Furthermore, as also suggested by Maine, the council would buy at least 100 copies at a price not exceeding 10s. 6d. a volume and would not ask for any share of the profits.

Although the terms of the contract were outlined quickly, only on 19 October 1877 was the final agreement with Müller signed.⁶¹ Müller's irritation is palpable in his letter to the delegates of June 1877, in which he deems the negotiations about the legal terms 'unnecessary and vexatious'.⁶² Various other factors contributed to the delay as well. It took time to get the support of the India Office and to engage the various translators.⁶³ I will not describe this whole process in detail, but in his letter of 12 February 1877, Müller raised some serious points which deserve our attention. Firstly, it would be impossible to publish three volumes regularly each year, and therefore the clause in questions had to be changed into '24 vols to be published if possible in eight years'. This suggestion was accepted by the delegates. Secondly, Müller suggested that a lengthy clause be added as to what would happen if the series would not be completed before the end of September 1884 (payment to the editor would be stopped until the work was finished), and how the payment would be settled in case of his death. The delegates agreed on this proposal as well.

In the same letter Müller asked if proof sheets could be sent to Indian translators (which is fine with the Press), and who would determine 'whether translations require corrections in a second edition'. Müller speculated thus on a second edition and foresaw

⁶⁰ Letter from delegates to Lord George Hamilton, M.P., Secretary to the Council of India, 28 April 1876, copied in the delegates' order book, 28 April 1876, p. 331.

⁶¹ Sun, *Confucianism*, pp. 62f.

⁶² Letter from Müller, 20 June 1877.

⁶³ Contracts with the translators had to be drawn up as well.

problems with the translations.⁶⁴ Understandably, the delegates did not want to go into this possible messy area and reserved the right to keep such decisions to themselves.⁶⁵ Müller also raised the issue that some translators might like to have the right to publish French or German translations of their work. 'Would it be nice to make the translation International?'⁶⁶ In this matter the delegates consulted the publisher of the university, Alexander MacMillan, whose opinion that this idea was not 'desirable' came not as a complete surprise. Müller did not attempt to change the minds of the delegates and consented.⁶⁷

THE PROSPECTUS

In the meantime Müller had printed a prospectus for the series to inform those concerned in a succinct way about the whole undertaking. It was titled: 'The Sacred Books of the East, translated, with introductions and notes, by various oriental scholars, and edited by F. Max Müller' (Oxford, October 1876).⁶⁸ The text is also published as the last part of the preface to the first volume of the series. In this section I shall present the factual information provided in this circular, whereas the formative ideas will be treated in the next chapter.

First Müller addressed the interest of the edition, which according to him is not only useful to theologians and missionaries, but has a more general historical importance as well, because these texts are the earliest records of civilizations. As such they are not only valuable to

⁶⁴ Müller to the delegates, 12 February 1877: 'E.g. has the Editor the right to insist on a new translation, thus mulcting the original translator?'

⁶⁵ Del. Ord., letter to Müller, 10 March 1877 (Letter Book 14, p. 27).

⁶⁶ Müller to the delegates, 12 February 1877. International is spelled with a capital I in Müller's letter and the minutes.

⁶⁷ Del. Ord., 16 March 1877 (referring to MacMillan's advice) and 27 March 1877 (referring to Müller's letter).

⁶⁸ The printed circular (four pages) is in the OUP Archive, under the new signature SBE Files: OS/I/2/5; cf. Max Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879, second edn 1900, reprinted 1965, pp. xl–xlv. The text is also printed in Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, edition 1899, pp. 298–306. Probably somewhat later (1877) Müller printed his undated 'Regulations agreed upon between the Editor and Contributors to the Sacred Books of the East' (OUP, SBE Files: OS/I/2/5, *Sacred Books of the East 1887–1908*, packet 41). The seven regulations concern technical details, apart perhaps from the second, that the translation has 'to follow, as much as possible, the arrangement of the original text'.

understand the earliest phases of (Eastern) religions, but they also provide information on 'the moral sentiments, the social institutions, the legal maxims of some of the most important nations of antiquity'.⁶⁹ The emphasis is on providing information. The next line of argument shows that this general historical interest is not the main criterion for inclusion. The texts need to have a 'sacred' character, which means that they must have received 'general recognition or sanction'. The word sacred is used by Müller as a synonym of 'canonical'.⁷⁰ Homeric hymns do not qualify, and texts such as the Egyptian Book of the Dead are also excluded, because their interpretation is 'as yet so difficult' that they only have an interest for specialists and are 'hardly available for historical purposes'.⁷¹ Canonical books of historical interest—this seems to be the basic idea of the series.

The 'Jewish and Christian Scriptures', however, were left out as well. Müller just mentioned this in passing, but we will later see that he regretted this omission. The next step in the prospectus is to outline the relevant 'great and original religions which profess to be founded on Sacred Books'. Referring to his *Introduction to the Science of Religion*⁷² he mentioned the following religions:

- 1) The religion of the Brahmins
- 2) The religion of the followers of Buddha
- 3) The religion of the followers of Zarathustra
- 4) The religion of the followers of Khung-fu-tse
- 5) The religion of the followers of Lao-tse
- 6) The religion of the followers of Mohammed.⁷³

These religions have preserved their original texts 'in manuscript', which seems to be an additional condition for inclusion, which is not further explained. Although there is a desire for 'trustworthy' complete translations, there are still some difficulties to be overcome, regarding the 'critical restoration of the original texts', the examination of grammar and metre, and the knowledge of the exact meaning of words.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xl.

⁷⁰ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xli.

⁷¹ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xli.

⁷² Müller referred here to his *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, p. 104, where the same (8 minus 2 = 6) number of religions were mentioned (pp. 104–6).

⁷³ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xli. I don't follow Müller's spelling exactly.

⁷⁴ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xlii.

Müller stressed the point that making a translation demands a sacrifice on the part of the scholars, who would prefer to continue their specialist studies. Moreover, the series is to be funded, which 'was the most serious difficulty of all'. Müller expressed his fear that the edition would not be a commercial success, but was very happy that he had been given support, without being specific over who financed the series. Then Müller warned his readers that they might be disappointed, as these texts contain much that is 'extremely childish, tedious, if not repulsive'.⁷⁵ In the last part of the prospectus Müller discussed which texts he wanted to include in the series and already speculated on its continuation after the first twenty-four volumes would have been finished. At the very end of the prospectus he gave a list of the names of the contributors, which was included in the preface of the first volume as well, enlarged by an overview of selected works.⁷⁶ In the preface he also went deeper into the difficulties of translating such ancient texts.

GETTING THE SERIES OFF THE GROUND

It took a huge effort to get the series started. The two major issues were (1) securing the financial 'aid' of the India Office and (2) to get the first translations in time. The controversy with the India Office started in May 1878, when it objected to the inclusion of Chinese texts in the series, as this was not agreed upon in the contract.⁷⁷ In his letter on behalf of the India Office on 23 May 1878, Edward Stanhope also objected to the engagement of Arthur Coke Burnell (1840–82) for the translation of the 'Laws of Manu', 'since he appears not to have leisure for his official duties' as a member of the Indian Civil Service.⁷⁸ In the end Burnell would not be able to fulfil this task. The 'Laws of Manu' was finally brought out in 1886 as volume XXV of the series in a translation by Georg Bühler.

⁷⁵ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xliii.

⁷⁶ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, pp. xlv–xlvii. In the second half of this chapter I shall discuss the selection of texts and translators.

⁷⁷ In his letter of 29 April 1876, the secretary of the press had stated that the Council of India will pay, 'provided the work translated belong to the ancient literature held to be of religious or legal authority by some considerable portion of Indian society and be written in some Aryan or Semitic language' (OS/1/2/5), quoted in Sun, *Confucianism*, p. 63.

⁷⁸ Del. Or., 23 May 1878.

Müller explained that he had never expected that the India Office would financially support the edition of the 'Sacred Books of China', for which he had engaged his friend and colleague James Legge. On the other hand Müller claimed that one of the texts in question, a 'Life of Buddha', was not an exclusively Chinese book, as there existed Sanskrit and Tibetan versions too. In their official answer on 2 July 1878, the delegates did not contest the objections of the India Office to financing the two Chinese books of the Shu King and the Shih King,⁷⁹ but they did insist that Müller as the general editor had the right to decide which books were included in the series and which not. A long exchange of letters followed, in which the India Office disputed the right of selection, but finally they gave in. In March and April 1879 the delegates and the India Office came to a preliminary agreement upon the financial conditions, which bound the contribution of the India Office to the maximum of £487 10s. per year for a period of no longer than eight years. As Henry Maine had explained from the outset, the contribution of the India Office was linked to its colonial mission and thus could not be extended over the boundaries of the British empire. It would take till the end of November 1879 for the India Office to withdraw its objection to the inclusion of Chinese works.⁸⁰

Müller felt somewhat frustrated in his efforts to speed up the start of the series. In September 1878 he returned a cheque for £150, because he would not manage to publish the three planned volumes of the *Sacred Books of the East* in time.⁸¹ This move, however, was also a way to heighten the pressure on the translators who caused the delay. The delegates wrote to Müller that there would be no ground for complaint if three volumes could be brought out by Easter 1879.⁸² In a letter of 19 June 1879 to the India Office, the delegates wrote that the first three volumes 'are ready, and that orders have been given to the binder to deliver 100 copies of each at the India Office'.⁸³ The first book was Müller's translation of some of the Upanishads.⁸⁴ The second and the

⁷⁹ These Confucian texts were translated by Legge and appeared as volume III of the *Sacred Books of the East*.

⁸⁰ Del. Or., 26 November 1879, letter from India Office to the delegates.

⁸¹ Del. Or., 27 September 1878.

⁸² Del. Or., 27 and 31 January 1879.

⁸³ Del. Or., 19 June 1879, letter to the India Office.

⁸⁴ Max Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879, second edn 1900, reprinted 1965. The second part appeared five years later: Max Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 15, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884, reprinted 1965. In the bibliography of this study all volumes of the series are listed.

third volumes of the series were Georg Bühler's edition of the *Sacred Laws of the Aryas* and Legge's edition of the *Sacred Books of China* (the texts of Confucianism). Probably all three volumes were brought out in June 1879. Legge's preface was dated 18 April 1879.⁸⁵

DEDICATION AND MOTTO

The first volume with texts from the Hindu Upanishads, which was edited by Max Müller, is one of the most important documents to understand the purpose of the series. Müller dedicated the whole series to the three men whom he thought had contributed most to its inception and funding. In his letter of 14 May 1879 Müller wrote to Liddell that the first three volumes would be ready for publication next week and that he wanted to dedicate the edition to Lord Salisbury, the later prime minister, to Sir Henry Maine, and to Liddell himself. 'I believe it was chiefly owing to your exertions, and to the interest taken by Lord Salisbury and Sir H. Maine, that the work could be carried out.'⁸⁶ As Liddell hesitated to be included in this 'triumvirate',⁸⁷ Müller insisted that Liddell had done more than both other men (who had in the meanwhile accepted) to start the series, which was definitely the case.⁸⁸ Finally, Liddell accepted,⁸⁹ and the series was dedicated—I paraphrase Müller's wording, including the functions he mentioned—to the Right Honourable the Marquis of Salisbury (Chancellor of the University of Oxford, and lately Secretary of State for India), Sir Henry J. S. Maine (Member of the Council of India), and the very reverend H. G. Liddell (Dean of Christ Church). Müller wrote that he was 'largely indebted' to them for this successful 'attempt to make known to the English people the Sacred Books of the East'. This phrase was printed on one of the first pages of the book, before the table of contents and the preface. Major Oxford men and politicians (two of them high officials in the India Office of the British

⁸⁵ James Legge, *The Sacred Books of China. The Texts of Confucianism* (Part I: the Shu King, the Religious Portions of the Shih King, the Hsiao King), SBE 3, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879, reprinted 1965. The prefaces of Bühler and Müller are not dated.

⁸⁶ LLB II, 60f.; LLA II, 63, Müller to Liddell, 14 May 1879.

⁸⁷ Liddell to Müller, 16 May 1879, Bodleian, MS. Eng. C. 2806/1, fols 59.

⁸⁸ LLB II, 61; LLA II, 64, Müller to Liddell, 20 May 1879.

⁸⁹ Liddell to Müller, 21 May 1879, Bodleian, MS. Eng. C. 2806/1, fols 60–1.

empire) contributed to introducing the English people to Eastern religious texts. India brought home—so to speak.

Whereas the beginning of the series was hard work and lobbying, the selection of the motto—about man's natural inclination to some form of religion—from a text by the Anglican divine bishop William Beveridge (1636–1707) was presented by the Müllers as a series of meaningful coincidences. Apparently Lady Victoria Welby (1837–1912), a philosopher in own her right, who is said to have invented the term 'significs' and corresponded with major philosophers such as C. S. Pierce, William James, Bertrand Russell, and members of the Dutch Significs Group,⁹⁰ found Beveridge's *Private Thoughts on Religion* in a cupboard containing books that had belonged to her mother-in-law.⁹¹ The passage in question 'almost at once caught her eye'. Then she copied it and 'sent it to Max Müller as strikingly applicable to his work'.⁹² In a letter on 16 May 1879 Müller thanked her and said he was delighted and could not wish for a better motto.⁹³ Her letter came just in time, he wrote, and in a conversation they had later that summer he would have told her that 'it was exactly what I wanted, and if it had reached me but a few hours later it would have been too late'. He had to 'wire the binder to stop work'.⁹⁴ Müller would have said to her that it 'had all the effect upon me of what is called a miracle'.⁹⁵ An exchange of letters followed in the summer of 1879, in which they discussed among other things their concepts of a loving God.⁹⁶ Welby's first publications—prominent among these *Links and Clues* (1881)—were on Christian theology.

Why had this text such a strong effect on Müller? Lady Welby later recalled that she was indignant about the accusations that the series

⁹⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victoria,_Lady_Welby>; cf. [Frederik van Eeden], *Frederik van Eeden-Genootschap. Mededeling XIV: Lady Welby* [selections from the correspondence between Van Eeden and Lady Welby], 1954. Victoria Welby, *What is Meaning. Studies in the Development of Significance* (London 1903), Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1983.

⁹¹ LLB II, 62; LLA II, 65 (the wording stems from Georgina Müller). There exist many reprints, and the original edition must be from around 1660, as it is said that Beveridge wrote the book at the age of twenty-three.

⁹² LLB II, 62; LLA II, 65.

⁹³ LLB II, 63; LLA II, 66, Müller to Welby, 16 May 1879. She recalled that they first met at the deanery of Westminster, some twelve years before.

⁹⁴ LLB II, 62; LLA II, 65, quotation from Welby, for which no reference is given.

⁹⁵ LLB II, 62; LLA II, 65.

⁹⁶ LLB II, 64f.; LLA II, 67f.

was a disservice to Christianity.⁹⁷ In a cautious phrasing in a letter to her on 1 June 1879, Müller wrote about our advanced knowledge (compared to the seventeenth century) of ‘so-called heathens’ and claimed that we should rejoice in ‘every spark of truth that enlightened the darkness of our fellow creatures’.⁹⁸ It is evident that the long extracts from William Beveridge’s *Private Thoughts* resonated extremely well with Müller. Beveridge spoke of the natural inclination of the human soul ‘to some religion’, and mentioned the fact that all believers, of course, think they serve God rightly. Being baptized and educated in the Christian religion, Beveridge admitted that he may be biased. Therefore, he had decided—at least rhetorically—‘not to entertain it any longer without being convinced by solid and substantial arguments, of the truth and certainty of it’. The last part of the citation he gave must have impressed Müller in particular:

That . . . I may make diligent and impartial enquiry into all religions, and so be sure to find out the best, I shall for a time, look upon myself as one not at all interested in any particular religion whatsoever, much less in Christian religion; but only as one who desires, in general, to serve and obey Him that made me, in a right manner, and thereby to be made partaker of that happiness my nature is capable of.⁹⁹

Beveridge’s book takes in a pious vein the plurality of religions very serious and claims that the truth and certainty of Christianity have to be established ‘by solid and substantial arguments’. His reputation as a devout Christian made him an ideal witness to Müller’s programme of the *Sacred Books of the East*.

THE PREFACE TO THE SERIES

Before his introduction of some forty-five pages to the selection of the Upanishads in the first volume of the *Sacred Books of the East*, Müller

⁹⁷ LLB II, 62; LLA II, 65.

⁹⁸ LLB II, 63; LLA II, 66, Müller to Welby, 1 June 1879.

⁹⁹ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE I, p. v [not numbered]. There are some minor differences between Müller’s quotation and the original text, which I have followed: William Beveridge, *Private Thoughts on Religion, and the Christian Life*, with an introductory essay by Thomas Chalmers, Glasgow: William Collins, 1836, pp. 59–62.

presented a general preface of more or less the same length to the series as whole. The preface consists of four parts:

- 1) the preface in the narrow sense (of almost thirty pages),¹⁰⁰
- 2) the 'program of a translation of the Sacred Books of the East', which for its main part reproduced the prospectus of October 1876 (in small print),
- 3) the 'transliteration of oriental alphabets',¹⁰¹ and
- 4) a one-page list of the 'approximate pronunciation of the Roman letters as representing the Sanskrit alphabet'.

The structure of the first and most lengthy part will be treated here. The third and fourth parts have a more technical character and will be touched upon in my later discussion of Müller's ideas on translation. The programme of translation, including the prospectus of 1876, has already been discussed. Müller added here only a few remarks on the setbacks he had experienced, because translators could not fulfil their obligations due to 'sorrow and sickness',¹⁰² as well as a list of contributors and works selected for translation.

The preface in the narrow sense was considered to be of a general interest. A substantial part of it was reprinted in the *North American Review*.¹⁰³ The preface is well structured, according to the three 'cautions'. Firstly, Müller drew attention to the mixed character of some of the texts. Next to beautiful and true things they contain 'so much that is not only unmeaning, artificial, and silly, but even hideous and repellent'.¹⁰⁴ Müller used rather crude formulations to characterize this mixed character, perhaps also to emphasize the contrast with the character of the Old and New Testaments.¹⁰⁵ Besides, he explained this 'wild confusion of sublime truth with vulgar stupidity',¹⁰⁶ by pointing to the complex process of oral tradition,

¹⁰⁰ The contents page presents the four parts as being part of the preface as a whole, whereas the first part has no separate heading and is printed after the general heading 'Preface to the Sacred Books of the East' (in full capitals).

¹⁰¹ The transliteration was added as a kind of appendix to many other volumes of the series as well.

¹⁰² Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xxxix.

¹⁰³ Max Müller, 'Sacred Books of the East', *North American Review* 128 (1879) 631–46. The first three pages were omitted, as well as some smaller passages.

¹⁰⁴ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xii.

¹⁰⁵ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xv.

¹⁰⁶ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, pp. xv–xvi.

priestly influence, and the difference between Western and Eastern perspectives. In strong terms he defended the inclusion of such passages in the translation, against the older 'purely aesthetic' point of view, defending the new scholarly, historical approach.¹⁰⁷ 'We want to know the ancient religions as they really are.'¹⁰⁸

Müller's second caution concerned the question how to make proper use of translations. Translations can never in his view take the place of originals. It is far easier to misunderstand the translation than the original, he claimed. The modern Western world is hardly related any more to these ancient Eastern forms of thought and religion. The contrast between 'modern' and 'ancient' also plays a role in the third caution. If it is already very difficult to translate a recent French or German book into English, how hard it must be to bridge a three thousand-year gap between the ancient East and the modern West. We cannot expect more, Müller argued, than an 'approximation of our language to theirs'.¹⁰⁹ It is important, however, 'whether there is or whether there is not, hidden in every one of the sacred books, something that could lift up the human heart from this earth to a higher world, something that could make man feel the omnipresence of a higher Power, something that could make him shrink from evil and incline to good, something to sustain him in the short journey through life, with its bright moments of happiness, and its long hours of terrible distress'.¹¹⁰ This remark sounds like an ultra-short summary of Müller's own philosophy of life. Notwithstanding its darker overtones, it resonates rather well with the motto chosen from the work of William Beveridge.

CONTINUATION OF THE SERIES

During the years 1876–9 the series was frequently discussed by the delegates of the Clarendon Press. After the edition was established, there was apparently not much need to put it on the agenda again. The only significant fact in 1880 was the request of Emile Guimet (1836–1918), the French industrialist who founded the Musée Emile

¹⁰⁷ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xvii.

¹⁰⁸ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xx.

¹⁰⁹ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xxvii.

¹¹⁰ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xxxviii.

Guimet of religious history, initially established in Lyon in 1879, and later transferred to Paris,¹¹¹ to bring out a French translation of the *Sacred Books of the East*. No agreement was reached about the terms.¹¹² Also in later years the delegates were rather reluctant to allow translations, anthologies, or cheap reprints.

A new round of discussion started in the winter of 1881–2, as Müller proposed to continue the series. First the subject was deferred to a later time,¹¹³ but already in March 1882 Müller brought a more detailed proposal to the attention of the press. In a printed letter on 18 March 1882 of some twenty pages to Dean Liddell, Müller outlined his plans.¹¹⁴ Although the secretary of state for India was only willing to give limited support,¹¹⁵ the delegates decided in November to continue the work and to publish the second series.

Müller began his long letter thanking Liddell for his support for the *Sacred Books of the East* in England, at the very moment he had received, in 1875, an offer from the Austrian government to ‘transfer [his] services to Vienna’.¹¹⁶ (A slight reminder to raise the awareness of his readers.) It is time, he continued, to present an account of his ‘stewardship’ to the delegates and the secretary of state for India. Notwithstanding the setbacks, Müller reported, fourteen volumes were finished, eight were in press, and the remaining two volumes were expected to be ready by October 1884. Actually, both volumes would appear a year later.¹¹⁷ Then he gave a reasoned overview of what was achieved, adding a table with three categories: published

¹¹¹ The name of the museum has been changed, but the collection of Asian art can still be admired at the Place de Léna in Paris: <<http://asemus.museum/museum/musee-national-des-arts-asiatiques-guimet/>>.

¹¹² Del. Or., 16 April 1880 and 7 May 1880.

¹¹³ Del. Or., 4 November 1881.

¹¹⁴ Del. Or., 14 April 1882 (including a copy of Müller’s letter). The text is also published in Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, edition 1899, pp. 306–16, in which the last part with the list of (nearly) completed volumes and the more specific argumentation for continuation of the series is left out.

¹¹⁵ The index to the delegates’ orders summarized the offer of the India Council as follows: ‘Sec. of State [for India] declines to subsidise SBE [Series?] II; but will (a) take [?] 50 copies of 24 vols.; (b) subsidise books of Ancient Hindu Law; (c) will subsidise vols. xxv–xxix.’ The last offer has to do with the fact that Müller had already contracted more translations, to make sure that he would meet his obligations with the press, and thus surpassed the original plan to bring out twenty-four volumes.

¹¹⁶ Letter to Liddell, 18 March 1882, p. 3; cf. the discussion in Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*, pp. 344–6.

¹¹⁷ T. W. Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenberg, *Vinaya Texts*, translated from the Pali, Part III: *The Kullavagga*, IV–XII, SBE 20, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885;

volumes, volumes to be published before 1884, and a total number of twenty-nine books, for which contracts had been signed. This was done, he explained, partly because some translations were larger than expected and had, therefore, to be published in more volumes, and partly because it was deemed necessary to provide for more translations, as it was to be foreseen that not all contributors could deliver in time.

Finally, Müller concluded that the edition, which he had purposely not presented as 'a commercial speculation', had nevertheless made the usual profit.¹¹⁸ He continued to highlight the generous support of his 'fellow-workers', who had accepted poor payment and could have easily gained more money by doing other work. 'It is they who make the sacrifice, it is the University Press that will make the profit.'¹¹⁹ To strengthen his case for the continuation of the series Müller offered extracts of letters of contributors who were willing to do so.¹²⁰ Müller did not try to renegotiate a higher remuneration for his colleagues, but insisted instead that there is 'an almost unanimous wish' among his colleagues to continue the work 'on the same conditions as before'.¹²¹ Müller stressed the financial advantage of continuation, the principle of giving integral translations (including 'tedious and repulsive' parts), how much time he had invested in the series, and his own willingness to continue his service. The start of the *Sacred Books of the East* had had some setbacks, but Müller succeeded in speeding

E. W. West, *Pahlavi Texts*. Part III: *Dina-I Mainog-I Khirad, Sikand-Gumanik Vigar, Sad Dar*, SBE 24 [cf. 5, 18, 37, 47], Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885.

¹¹⁸ Letter to Liddell, 18 March 1882, pp. 9–10; cf. however, Sun, *Confucianism*, p. 65, referring to her interview with Martin Maw, the current archivist at Oxford University Press, who divulged that for many years the edition was the 'white elephant' for the Press, precious, expensive, yet rather 'useless'. My guess would be that in case of (severe) losses the delegates would have discussed the continuation of the series in more detail, and I did not find any evidence for Maw's hypothesis.

¹¹⁹ Letter to Liddell, 18 March 1882, p. 10.

¹²⁰ Del. Or., 14 April 1882 (including a copy of Müller's letter). These extracts are not reprinted in Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (1873), edition 1899, pp. 306–16.

¹²¹ Letter to Liddell, 18 March 1882, p. 19. They got £4 for every printed sheet of sixteen pages, which amounts to £100 for a volume of 400 pages (or £120 for a volume of 480 pages), whereas Müller as general editor received £300 a year. Girardot, 'Müller's *Sacred Books*', p. 230, n. 34, states that Müller received £2,400 for the first set of twenty-four volumes. See the section 'The Contract' of this chapter. According to Girardot 'the Press was ruthless in docking honorariums for corrections made in the page-proofs', Girardot, 'Müller's *Sacred Books*', p. 228, n. 27.

up the pace of the work of his collaborators, and in 1885 the first series was completed. The second series would take much longer and would only be finished after Müller's death in 1900.

SELECTION

Six religions are represented in the *Sacred Books of the East*: Hinduism (the Vedas of ancient India), Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Islam.¹²² The 'Jewish and Christian Scriptures' are left 'out of consideration' without further argumentation.¹²³ The six religions that are included are characterized by Müller in a typically personified way. The first religion is that 'of the Brahmins', the next five are listed according to their presumed founders as the followers of Buddha, Zarathustra, Khung-fu-tse, Lao-tse, and Mohammed. The distribution among these religions is uneven. In a laconic way Müller claimed that for Islam, 'all that is essential is a trustworthy translation of the Koran'.¹²⁴ E. H. Palmer's translation of the Qur'an was published in 1880 in two volumes.¹²⁵ Müller's close associate James Legge translated *The Sacred Books of China*, including four volumes on Confucianism and two on Daoism. In his programme of the *Sacred Books of the East*, Müller was—probably for strategic reasons—not always very specific about the question of which texts were to be translated. As far as the 'Sacred Books of the Zoroastrians' were concerned, he only detailed that they will 'require fuller notes and commentaries in order to make a translation intelligible and useful'.¹²⁶ In this rubric we find James Darmesteter and L. H. Mill's translation of the Zend-Avesta in three volumes, and five volumes of 'Pahlavi Texts', which were all translated by E. W. West. Twenty-one volumes were devoted to Hinduism, ten to Buddhism, complemented by two volumes with 'Jaina Sutras', translated by Hermann Jacobi. In the original plan there had been 'hardly room'

¹²² In the beginning Müller spoke about only five ancient oriental religions. Probably the religions of China were taken as one category.

¹²³ 'Program of Translation', SBE 1, p. xli. I will discuss the exclusion of the Old and New Testament from the series in the last section of this chapter.

¹²⁴ 'Program of Translation', SBE 1, p. xlv.

¹²⁵ A list of all the translations is included in the bibliography of the present book.

¹²⁶ 'Program of Translation', SBE 1, p. xlv.

for a translation of 'some of the Gain books, of the Granth of the Sikhs, and of similar works illustrative of the later developments of religion in India'.¹²⁷

In the whole series there was a heavy bias towards the Indian religions. In his prospectus of 1876 Müller promised to give a—much asked for—translation of the *Rig-Veda*, 'with a few explanatory notes only, such as are absolutely necessary to enable readers who are unacquainted with Sanskrit to understand the thoughts of the Vedic poets'.¹²⁸ At the same time he would continue his *traduction raisonnée* of the hymns, which was intended for Sanskrit scholars. The translation for non-specialists would appear in the second series.¹²⁹ First Müller contributed two volumes with a selection of the principal Upanishads,¹³⁰ which he called 'theosophic [*sic*] treatises of great interest and beauty'.¹³¹ Given the growing popularity of these 'treatises' (Arthur Schopenhauer's positive appreciation of them is only one indication), it does not come as a surprise that the series opened with Müller's edition of the Upanishads. His next contribution to the series was a translation from the Pali of the *Dhammapada*, a collection of sayings attributed to the Buddha, a translation that Müller had published earlier in 1869. The series would also include law texts and later works such as the now famous *Bhagavadgita* and the popular *Vaya-purana*. Although Müller said right from the beginning that he could 'not adhere strictly to this outline', he gave a list of the translations that were foreseen.¹³²

This selection was not evident. In his extract from letters that supported the continuation of the series, Müller cited a—probably unsolicited—proposal 'sent to me by Dr. Hommel of Munich, who thinks that the Sacred Books of the Semitic nations are not sufficiently represented'.¹³³ The German orientalist Fritz Hommel (1854–1936), who was the teacher of Gershom Scholem, the founder of the modern study of the Kabbalah, suggested four extra volumes, containing Sumero-Assyrian hymns, passages from the Talmud, passages from old Arab poets, and documents of the Mandeans. In his own original

¹²⁷ 'Program of Translation', SBE 1, p. xliv. Müller spelled 'Gain' instead of 'Jain'.

¹²⁸ 'Program of Translation', SBE 1, p. xliv.

¹²⁹ SBE 32 and 46. The work was begun by Müller himself and continued by his colleague Hermann Oldenberg.

¹³⁰ SBE 1 and 15.

¹³¹ 'Program of Translation', SBE 1, p. xliv.

¹³² 'Program of Translation', SBE 1, pp. xlv and xlv–xlvii.

¹³³ Letter to Liddell, 18 March 1882, p. 18.

exposition, Müller had already explained that neither the ancient Greeks and Romans, nor the Celts or Slavs, 'have left us with anything that deserves the name of Sacred Books'. The Homeric hymns—as Müller called them—have neither a sacred nor a canonical character, which was a condition for inclusion in the series. The recently deciphered texts from Egypt, Babylonia, and Assyria (Mesopotamia) do not qualify either in his view, although he admits that they may be called sacred literature. Moreover, the interpretation of the hieroglyphic and cuneiform texts 'is as yet so difficult that, for the present, they are of interest to the scholar only'.¹³⁴ This suggests that at a later time texts such as the now famous Gilgamesh epic might become part of the series.

It is not easy for me—not being a specialist in oriental religions—to pass judgement on the selection of the texts. There are very few authors who are explicit in this matter. The only one I know of is Norman Girardot, emeritus professor at Lehigh University, a specialist in Daoism, who claims the following:

Aside from the flagrant slighting of the rich textual heritage of Islam . . . the most egregious case of shortsightedness concerns the completely inadequate and distorted representation of East Asian religious traditions. As seen from the numerical breakdown of texts, the non-Aryan traditions of Asia receive not only less coverage than the Brahmanical and Buddhist texts but actually less than the Persian Parsi scriptures. Note, for example, the total exclusion of texts referring specifically to Japan, Korea, or to any of the traditions of Southeast Asia and the failure to give any kind of truly balanced selection of East Asian Buddhist texts. The fact that Vajrayana materials were generally excluded is not unexpected given the endemic bias against ritualistic, magical, and 'corrupt' traditions.¹³⁵

This is a strong verdict, and indeed—as said—the bias towards Indian religions cannot be overlooked. The choice to represent East Asian religions by Confucianism and Daoism was at the time perhaps tenable, but does not do justice to East Asian religious traditions. Moreover, the inclusion of these two traditions *as religions* can be disputed as well. Anna Sun has described in detail how the series contributed to the definition of Confucianism as a world religion,

¹³⁴ 'Program of Translation', SBE 1, p. xli.

¹³⁵ Girardot, 'Müller's *Sacred Books*', p. 226, n. 26.

which is heavily contested up to the present day. Also the suggestions of Fritz Hommel show the limited scope of the series. To some extent, Müller and his co-workers, of course, were aware of the limitations of their project. It can also be argued that the choices depended at least partly on the available translators and their competence and willingness to invest time in translations which were time-consuming and poorly paid for. Traditional oriental interests played a role—intellectually and financially, as the India Office subsidized the series and was not willing to pay for most of the texts that Girardot finds lacking. The idea about which ancient, Eastern religions were at the cradle of a universal history of civilizations determined the scope of the series. Notwithstanding the criticisms that can and must be made both from a contemporary and a present-day perspective, we must also acknowledge that the series tried to cover and did cover a broad span of religious traditions from the East.

DIFFICULT TO TRANSLATE

One of the recurring themes in the various introductions to the translations is how difficult it was—even for the specialist translators—to come up with an intelligent and intelligible rendering of the ancient texts and manuscripts. Even if the technical jargon is tackled and the major linguistic puzzles are solved, there still remains according to Müller ‘a vast amount of what we can only call meaningless jargon’ in the Upanishads.¹³⁶ In his translation of some of the Buddhist sutras, T. W. Rhys Davids (1843–1922), the British orientalist and founder of the Pali Text Society, and an early campaigner for what would become the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, heaved the following sigh:

I cannot hope that the renderings of the many technical terms, now for the first time submitted to the judgment of students of early Buddhism, will all stand the test of time. So perfectly dovetailed is the old Buddhist system, so utterly different from European Christianity are the ideas involved, so pregnant are the expressions used with deep and earnest religious feelings resting on a foundation completely apart from our

¹³⁶ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 15, p. xx.

own, that the translation of each term becomes a problem of great difficulty and delicacy.¹³⁷

Therefore, he decided not to present a 'mere word-for-word-translation', but to try to convey an impression of 'the unconscious eloquence which springs from deep religious emotion'.¹³⁸ Hendrik Kern pointed to corrupt passages, which could not be rendered literally,¹³⁹ Georg Bühler found the problems he encountered in earlier translations he had made 'infinitely less complicated than those connected with the metrical law-books and especially with the Manu-smṛiti', which were published as the twenty-fifth volume of the series,¹⁴⁰ and L. H. Mills 'laboured under no common difficulties' in finishing the third and concluding volume of the translation of the Zend-Avesta.¹⁴¹

Older translations and studies could be helpful, but not always. In the introduction to his translation of the Zend-Avesta, the French orientalist James Darmesteter (1849–94), professor at the École Pratique des Hautes Études and later at the Collège de France, complained about the damage done by Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1805), whose allegedly inelegant presentation had caused a debate about the authenticity of the Avesta literature. Voltaire could not believe that such silly tales, absurd laws, and grotesque description of gods and demons were the work of a presumed sage such as Zoroaster.¹⁴² Although Max Müller was equally critical of Anquetil-Duperron's Latin translation of the Upanishads, he detected a positive consequence as well. 'This translation,' Müller claimed, 'was written in so utterly unintelligible a style, that it required the lynxlike perspicacity of an intrepid philosopher, such as Schopenhauer, to discover a thread through such a labyrinth.'¹⁴³ In the introduction to his magnum opus, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Arthur Schopenhauer praised the work of Anquetil-Duperron, thanks to which he 'received the benefit of the Vedas'.¹⁴⁴ This ancient wisdom 'has been the solace of my life, it will be the solace of my death!'¹⁴⁵

¹³⁷ SBE 11, p. xxv.

¹³⁸ SBE 11, p. xxvi.

¹³⁹ SBE 21, p. xxxviii.

¹⁴⁰ SBE 25, p. xi.

¹⁴¹ SBE 32, p. ix. More biographical information on the contributors to the SBE is presented in the next section of this chapter.

¹⁴² SBE 4, pp. xv–xvi. See the famous article on Zoroaster in Voltaire's *Dictionnaire philosophique*.

¹⁴³ SBE 1, pp. lviii–lix.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted after SBE 1, p. lix.

¹⁴⁵ Quoted after SBE 1, p. lxi, taken from Schopenhauer's *Parerga and Paralipomena*, volume II, chapter 16 on Sanskrit literature.

The sometimes lengthy introductions of the translators concern mainly linguistic problems, the character of the translated texts, and sometimes a relevant piece of history of religion. Rarely or only indirectly (as in the above case of Müller's comments on Schopenhauer) do they address the importance of the texts for present-day religion. Full translations—including repetitions and tedious or repulsive passages—were Müller's explicit objective. He defended himself against the objection that he had not made the series more attractive and popular. He deemed it necessary to study the ancient religions 'in their own canonical texts', which should put an end to 'vague assertions as to their nature and character, whether coming from the admirers or the detractors of those ancient creeds'.¹⁴⁶ These historical documents should not be tampered with. After the painstaking work of precise translation has been done, scholars may pass judgement on the moral value of these texts. Personally, Müller believed that 'hidden under . . . much rubbish' there are 'nuggets of gold' to be found in the volumes of the *Sacred Books of the East*.

TRANSLATORS AND COLLABORATORS

At the start of the undertaking Max Müller wrote that he had 'good collaborators' and that the edition provided him with 'a new object in life'.¹⁴⁷ He expected that the series would occupy him for the rest of his life, and indeed it took a lot of his time and energy. Müller's wife hinted at the many difficulties her husband encountered over the years in bringing the volumes to completion. Illness or even the death of contributors caused much delay. Promises were not kept, translators asked for payment in advance, and mistakes in calculating the time needed for the work were abundant. She wrote that her husband used to say that the only contributor who never disappointed him was James Legge.¹⁴⁸

In his request for the continuation of the series, Müller mentioned the death of the orientalist scholar Robert Caesar Childers (1835–76). Furthermore, he acknowledged that the work of the following

¹⁴⁶ Letter to Liddell, 18 March 1882, p. 19.

¹⁴⁷ LLB II, 8; LLA II, 9, letter to Stanley, 21 February 1876.

¹⁴⁸ LLB II, 12; LLA II, 12.

contributors was seriously delayed by illness: the British Sanskritist E. B. Cowell (1826–1903), the German Indologist Richard Pischel (1849–1908), and the Indian Indologist Rajendralal Mitra (1823/4–91). Of these three scholars only Cowell would finally contribute a translation of a major Buddhist Mahayana text.¹⁴⁹ Müller mentioned more setbacks: ‘similar causes delayed very considerably the work entrusted to Professor Bhandarkar, Rev. S. Beal, Professor Jacobi, Professor Kielhorn, and Mr. K. T. Telang’.¹⁵⁰ Beal, Jacobi, and Telang would finish their translations at a later time. The Indian scholar and reformer Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar (1837–1925) and Lorenz Franz Kielhorn (1840–1908), who worked with Max Müller in Oxford in the years 1862–5 on the edition of the *Rig-Veda* and would later become professor of Sanskrit in Pune (spelled at the time as Poona) and Göttingen, would not be able to contribute to the series.

In the end twenty translators contributed to the *Sacred Books of the East* as a whole. Almost all translations saw the light during Müller’s twenty-five-year editorship. One volume appeared in 1904 and the extensive index was finished in 1910. The majority of the team consisted of British and German scholars, or at least they were born and educated in English- and German-speaking countries.¹⁵¹ The nationality is sometimes hard to decide, as some of the scholars moved to other countries and acquired new citizenship. Maurice Bloomfield, whose translation of Hindu hymns appeared in 1897 as the forty-second volume of the series, was born in 1855 in Austrian Silesia (now Poland) and moved at the age of twenty-two to the United States, where he graduated from Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina. He studied Sanskrit with W. D. Whitney at Yale, and continued his studies in Baltimore, Berlin, and Leipzig, to become a professor of Sanskrit and comparative philology at Johns Hopkins. As we saw, Müller acquired a British passport, and Julius Eggeling lost his German nationality. Both German scholars spent

¹⁴⁹ SBE 49. For the biographical data I draw primarily on several larger works of reference, many of them of an older date, such as the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Further sources are mentioned in the discussion of the authors involved. This and the following sections of this chapter aim to provide some biographical information about the translators, without any pretence to be exhaustive.

¹⁵⁰ Müller, ‘Letter to the Dean of Christ Church’ (18 March 1882), reprinted in Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, edition 1899, pp. 306–16, here p. 307.

¹⁵¹ For reasons of convenience I will discuss their work in the next section.

most of their working life in Great Britain. The outbreak of the Great War took Eggeling by surprise during his holiday in Germany, where he could obtain neither a German nor a British passport. His wish to return to his position in Scotland was not fulfilled, and he died in March 1918 in a Westphalian village, ‘among his beloved woods and surrounded by grandchildren’.¹⁵²

There was only one contributor from France, the already mentioned James Darmesteter, who was born of Jewish parents in the Alsace and married the English writer Agnes Mary Frances Robinson (1857–1944).¹⁵³ This meagre representation of French scholars may reflect the relative and temporary impoverishment of French oriental studies in the last quarter of the nineteenth century,¹⁵⁴ but may also be due to the fact that the draft translations had to be made in English, which was a major hindrance for many foreign—especially French—scholars. Most of the non-native speakers had good connections with Britain, which might explain their mastery of English. There is still a separate portfolio in the archives of Oxford University Press with correspondence about the reprint of Darmesteter’s translation of the first volume of the *Zend-Avesta*. Darmesteter corresponded (as a matter of course) in French, and Max Müller wrote to the secretary of the press that because of the ‘rapid progress . . . [in] Zend studies’ in previous years the translation (published in 1880) was ‘antiquated and could not be simply reprinted’. Darmesteter was paid for the revision, as was E. W. West ‘for his assistance in seeing the work through the Press after the Translator’s death’ in October 1894.¹⁵⁵

Two scholars from small European countries contributed: Viggo Fausböll from Denmark and Hendrik Kern from the Netherlands. Michael Viggo Fausböll (1821–1908), pioneer of Pali scholarship and professor of Sanskrit in Copenhagen, translated the *Sutta-Nipata* from the Pali, which was published together with Müller’s older

¹⁵² A. A. MacDonell, ‘Professor Julius Eggeling’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (January 1919) 124–8, p. 128.

¹⁵³ Gaston Paris, ‘James Darmesteter’ (1894), in: Paris, *Penseurs et poètes*, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1896, pp. 1–61, who quotes from Max Müller’s eulogy (*Times*, 20 October 1894) and discusses the Jewish and German background of his deceased friend.

¹⁵⁴ Girardot, ‘Müller’s *Sacred Books*’, p. 228, n. 28.

¹⁵⁵ Del. Or., 14 June 1895. Müller’s judgement is to be found in his letter of 23 July 1893 to Lyttelton Gell.

translation of the *Dhammapada* as volume X of the series. Fausböll was and still is held in high esteem. His edition and translation of this Buddhist text, according to a recent review, laid the foundations of its study. 'His great edition of the Jatakas including the ancient commentaries (London 1877–1897) is still unsurpassed.'¹⁵⁶ Fausböll's edition of the *Dhammapada* with a Latin translation was seminal, according to Müller, who claimed that the difference between a scholar such as Fausböll 'and the ordinary scholars who can read what has been read and translated before' is about the same as that 'between a Stanley exploring the darkest Africa and a tourist who now goes to Egypt personally conducted by Messrs. Cook & Co'.¹⁵⁷ Müller pointed in particular to the Pali dictionary of 'his friend' Childers and Fausböll's edition as the stepping stones for his own translation. Pali had never been more than a side issue for him. When he studied the language in the mid-forties in Paris it was 'a kind of annexe of Sanskrit'.¹⁵⁸ In the preface Müller thanked both scholars for their help and cited the following phrase from the introduction to his former translation of 1870: 'I can claim for myself no more than the name of a very humble gleaner in this field of Pali literature.'¹⁵⁹

Johan Hendrik Caspar Kern (1833–1917), most of the times referred to as Hendrik (or H.) Kern,¹⁶⁰ was born in the Dutch East Indies and studied Sanskrit in Leiden and Berlin (with Albrecht Weber), taught in Benares, moved back to the Netherlands, and became in 1865 professor of Sanskrit in Leiden. He is considered to be one of the founders of oriental studies (including the study of Austronesian languages) in the Netherlands. The Leiden Kern Institute of Indology still bears his name. He was a prolific author, who wrote an authoritative history of Buddhism in India and translated *The Saddharma-Pundarika, or The Lotus of the True Law* for the series. Darmesteter, Fausböll, and Kern were all renowned and

¹⁵⁶ Burkhard Scherer, 'Review Fausböll, *The Dhammapada* (1855, second edition 1900), Secundarabad 2000', *Indo-Iranian Journal* 44 (2001) 172–3.

¹⁵⁷ Müller, Preface, *The Dhammapada. A Collection of Verses. Being one of the canonical books of the Buddhists, translated from the Pali*, SBE 10, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881, p. xii.

¹⁵⁸ Müller, Preface, *The Dhammapada*, p. ix.

¹⁵⁹ Müller, Preface, *The Dhammapada*, p. xv.

¹⁶⁰ He is not to be confused with his namesakes, prominent among them his son Johan Hendrik Kern (1867–1933), who taught English and Sanskrit at the University of Groningen, and switched to the Leiden chair in 1924.

internationally acclaimed scholars. The two contributors from the New World, Maurice Bloomfield, who was a naturalized American, and Lawrence Heyworth (L. H.) Mills (1837–1918), who was born in New York and educated at New York University, are probably not that well known. On the invitation of Max Müller Mills came to Oxford in 1887, where he became a professor of Persian and finished the third volume of the Avesta translation for the *Sacred Books of the East*.

Only two scholars from Asia contributed to the series, Kashinath Trimbak Telang (1850–93) and the Japanese Buddhist scholar Junjiro Takakusu (1866–1945). Telang was by profession a judge at Bombay High Court and the first secretary of the Indian National Congress. Educated at the Elphinstone College in Bombay, he had an intimate knowledge of Sanskrit and a very good command of English, which enabled him to contribute the translation of the *Bhagavadgita* to the series.¹⁶¹ Takakusu only contributed a translation of a relatively short Buddhist text, the *Amitayur-Dhyana-Sutra*, which he made from a Chinese translation. Takakusu studied Sanskrit in Oxford, and upon his return to Japan became an influential and much-honoured professor at Tokyo Imperial University.¹⁶² The content of the text disappointed Müller, as he wrote in the introduction to the last (forty-ninth) volume of the series, to which Müller himself also contributed. Nevertheless he decided to publish this translation. He gave two reasons: the first was the wish of ‘my friends in Japan who expected a complete translation of their three sacred books’, and second his own principle ‘that nothing should be suppressed that might lead us to form a favourable or unfavourable, if only a correct judgment of Buddhism in its Mahayana dress, as professed by millions of people in China and Japan’.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ See Michael Bergunder, ‘Die Bhagavadgita im 19. Jahrhundert. Hinduismus, Esoterik und Kolonialismus’, in: Bergunder, ed., *Westliche Formen des Hinduismus in Deutschland* (Neue Halesche Berichten. Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte und Gegenwart Südindiens, volume VI), Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen, 2006, pp. 187–216, here pp. 197f. In 1875 Telang had already published an English verse translation of the *Bhagavadgita* in India. In his knowledgeable introduction to the eighth volume of the series Telang did not—as far as I can see—refer to this earlier translation.

¹⁶² On Takakusu, see also Hans Martin Krämer, ‘Bringing the Pure Land to Europe. Max Müller and His Japanese Interlocutors’, unpublished paper, November 2014.

¹⁶³ Müller, Introduction, SBE 49, p. xxi.

GERMAN AND BRITISH CONTRIBUTORS

Müller recruited six contributors from Germany, all Indologists and well versed in Sanskrit (among other languages). This testifies to the major contribution of German scholarship to the study of the Orient in the second half of the nineteenth century and to the focus of their work on India.¹⁶⁴ Julius Eggeling, Hermann Jacobi, Julius Jolly, Georg Bühler, George Frederick William Thibaut, and Hermann Oldenberg contributed to the series. Julius Eggeling (1842–1918) studied Sanskrit in Berlin and Breslau, where he met T. W. Rhys Davids. In 1867 Eggeling moved to England and assisted Müller in editing the fifth volume of Müller's edition of the *Rig-Veda*. He became secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society and professor of Sanskrit at University College in London. From 1875 onwards he occupied the chair of Sanskrit and comparative philology at the University of Edinburgh. Eggeling translated five volumes of the *Satapatha-Brahmana*.¹⁶⁵

Hermann Jacobi (1850–1937) studied in Berlin and Bonn, came in 1872–3 to London to do research on Indian manuscripts, and travelled with Georg Bühler to India to collect manuscripts. For the *Sacred Books of the East* he translated one volume of Jain sutras. After his return to Europe he became professor of Sanskrit in Münster, Kiel, and Bonn. Johann Georg Bühler (1837–98) studied in Göttingen, Paris, and England.¹⁶⁶ At the India Office and at the Bodleian Library he researched mainly Vedic manuscripts. Max Müller and Bühler soon became friends,¹⁶⁷ and Müller recommended him for a professorship of oriental languages at Elphinstone College in Bombay, where he probably met Telang, who was a student at the college at the time. In 1880 Bühler returned to Europe and became professor at the University of Vienna. He was a specialist in Indian law and contributed three volumes of law texts to the *Sacred Books of the East*. In 1898 Bühler drowned in Lake Constance. His unexpected and tragic death was a great shock for Müller, who had often consulted his friend about issues concerning the edition. Georgina Müller

¹⁶⁴ Ursula Wokoeck, *German Orientalism. The Study of the Middle East and Islam from 1800 to 1945*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009.

¹⁶⁵ MacDonell, 'Professor Julius Eggeling'.

¹⁶⁶ Julius Jolly, *Georg Bühler 1837–1898*, Strassburg: Trübner, 1899; Moritz Winternitz, 'Bühler, Georg', in: *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, volume XLVII, Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot, 1903, pp. 339–48.

¹⁶⁷ LLB I, 223; LLA I, 234, from Georgina Müller's text.

wrote that Bühler's advice was 'readily given, and was always valuable and to the point'.¹⁶⁸

Julius Jolly (1849–1932) was trained in Berlin and Leipzig and became in 1877 professor of Sanskrit and comparative linguistics at the University of Würzburg. He specialized in Indian law and medicine, and received honorary degrees from the universities of Göttingen and Oxford. In 1882–3 he lectured as Tagore Professor of Law in Calcutta, and he translated two volumes with Indian law texts for Müller's series.¹⁶⁹ Thibaut (1848–1914) was baptized Georg Friedrich Wilhelm, which he later anglicized. In 1871 he became Müller's assistant, and moved in 1875 to India, where he worked as a professor at several colleges. He translated three volumes of Vedanta sutras for Müller. Hermann Oldenberg (1854–1920) had also visited India, but pursued most of his career in Germany. He studied classical philology and Indology in Göttingen and Berlin. In 1889 he became professor in Kiel, and in 1908 he moved to Göttingen. He was a specialist in Buddhism. His book about the Buddha was translated into English, French, and Russian, and was a classical study far into the twentieth century. Together with Rhys Davids he edited three volumes of Theravada Vinaya texts (translated from the Pali) for the *Sacred Books of the East*, and after this joint work was finished he contributed another three volumes with translations of Vedic texts.¹⁷⁰

Six British scholars contributed to the series: James Legge, Samuel Beal, Edward William West, Edward Byles Cowell, Edward Henry Palmer, and Thomas William Rhys Davids. Their work covered a broader geographical and linguistic span than that of the Germans, as they translated Chinese, Persian, Pali, and Arabic texts as well. James Legge (1815–97) was a Scottish Congregationalist and studied at Highbury Theological College in London to become a missionary in China and Hong Kong, where he lived for nearly thirty years. He translated Chinese classical texts with the help of three Chinese students, who he brought to Britain, where they were received by Queen Victoria. In the mid-1870s he returned to England and

¹⁶⁸ LLB II, 374; LLA II, 394, from Georgina Müller's text.

¹⁶⁹ Ingo Strauch, 'Vorwort', in: Julius Jolly, *Kleine Schriften*, volume I, edited by Heidrun Brückner and Ingo Strauch, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012, pp. ix–xii.

¹⁷⁰ Helmuth von Glasenapp, 'Nachwort', in: Oldenberg, *Der Buddha. Sein Leben, seine Lehre, seine Gemeinde* (1881), 13th edition, edited by Helmuth von Glasenapp, Stuttgart: Cotta, 1959, pp. 455–9.

became the first professor of Chinese at the University of Oxford. On several occasions Max Müller had publicly complained about the fact that there was no such chair, and he supported avidly the founding of the chair and Legge's bid to occupy it.¹⁷¹

Legge's work for the *Sacred Books of the East* was crucial. Already in a letter of 10 March 1876, Müller promised Legge that he 'may reckon for China on five or six volumes of 400–500 pages each, to be printed like my *Chips* [of a German Workshop, ALM], the Notes being intended to be only such as are absolutely necessary to enable an educated man to understand the translation'.¹⁷² Although the India Office would not support the publication of indigenous Chinese texts (as opposed to Buddhist texts that were translated into Chinese), Müller and Legge succeeded in bringing out six volumes in all. To the first series Legge contributed two volumes with Confucian texts,¹⁷³ followed in 1885 with two volumes of the *Li Ki* (the Confucian Book of Rites). Two volumes with a selection of Daoist texts appeared in 1891. A controversy—sometimes referred to as the 'term debate'—arose about Legge's translation of the Chinese words *Ti* and *Shang Ti* by God.¹⁷⁴ A complaint was sent to the general editor about the fact that Müller allowed Legge to do so in a series under his supervision.¹⁷⁵ In the preface to his second contribution to the series, Legge explained that this rendering is not his private interpretation: 'on its first employment by the Chinese fathers, [the term *Ti*] was intended to express the same concept which our fathers expressed by God'.¹⁷⁶

Apart from Takakusu's translation of a short Buddhist text from the Chinese, one other longer Buddhist text in Chinese was included

¹⁷¹ Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*, pp. 158–67.

¹⁷² LLB II, 12; LLA II, 13, Müller to Legge, 10 March 1876.

¹⁷³ In the first volume Legge called special attention 'to passages in the *Shu*, embodying, more or less distinctly, religious ideas' by marking these with an asterisk; Legge, *The Sacred Books of China. The Texts of Confucianism*, SBE 3, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879, p. xxx.

¹⁷⁴ Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*, pp. 228–34, 277–82, 372–3, and *passim*; Girardot, 'Finding the Way'. James Legge and the Victorian Invention of Taoism', *Religion* 29 (1999) 107–21; Girardot, 'James Legge's (1815–1897) Influence on the Study of Chinese Religion and the Comparative Science of Religions' (paper, Aberdeen Conference, March 2013); cf. LLB II, 91f.; LLA II, 95f.

¹⁷⁵ Müller replied in the *Times*, 30 December 1880. For a discussion of the term debate see Sun, *Confucianism*, pp. 57–60, and chapter 2 of her book; Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*, pp. 271–84.

¹⁷⁶ Legge, 'Preface', *The Yi King*, SBE 16, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1882, p. xx.

in the *Sacred Books of the East*. This was a 'Life of Buddha', 'translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by Dharmaraksha'. The translator had not been able to compare Dharmaraksha's translation with the Sanskrit original, and admitted that there may be mistakes and omissions.¹⁷⁷ The text was translated by Samuel Beal (1825–89), who had graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge. He was a chaplain in the Royal Navy, appointed to H.M.S. *Sybil* during the China ('Second Opium') War of 1856–8. In 1877 he became professor of Chinese at University College London. Tim Barrett concluded that 'with the possible exception of Samuel Beal', Legge was the 'first professional British scholar in Chinese studies to win an international reputation', thereby pointing to Beal's relatively high status in the history of British Sinology.¹⁷⁸

Edward William West (1824–1905) was educated at King's College London, and prepared for the series five volumes of Pahlavi texts, one of which is titled 'Marvels of Zoroastrianism'. His occupation is mostly described as civil engineer, working in the Bombay Presidency, but he must have been one of the major authorities on Pahlavi literature. He held an honorary doctorate from the University of Munich, and was a member of American and Bavarian learned societies. Edward Byles Cowell contributed to the last volume of the series, a translation of a Buddhist Mahayana text. He studied in Oxford, where he met Max Müller, 'who was my constant guide in my Sanskrit studies'.¹⁷⁹ In 1856 he became professor of English history at Presidency College, Calcutta. He discovered a manuscript of Omar Khayyam's quatrains, which he sent to his older friend Edward Fitzgerald, who made the famous translation of the *Rubaiyat*.¹⁸⁰ In 1867 Cowell became the first professor of Sanskrit at Cambridge University.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Samuel Beal, 'Introduction', *The Fo-Sho-Hing-Tsan-King. A Life of Buddha by Asvaghosha Bodhisattva, translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by Dharmaraksha* A. D. 420, SBE 19, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883, pp. ix–xxxvii, here p. xxxv.

¹⁷⁸ T. H. Barrett, *Singular Listlessness. A Short History of Chinese Books and British Scholars*, London: Wellsweep, 1989, pp. 75–6, quoted after Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*, p. 145.

¹⁷⁹ LLB I, 120; LLA I, 125f., Cowell to Georgina Müller, 24 December 1900.

¹⁸⁰ A. C. Benson, *Edward Fitzgerald*, London: MacMillan, 1905, pp. 98f. On the friendship between Fitzgerald and Cowell, see also Robert Bernard Martin, *With Friends Possessed. A Life of Edward Fitzgerald*, London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1985.

¹⁸¹ Christopher N. L. Brooke, *A History of the University of Cambridge*, volume IV (1870–1900), Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 428f.; 'Cowell',

The translator of the Qur'an, Edward Henry Palmer (1840–82), was born in Cambridge, the son of a schoolmaster, and began his career as a clerk in the City of London. Nevertheless he managed to return to Cambridge and to enrol at St John's College, where he started his oriental studies. He travelled in the Near East, and became in 1871 Lord Almoner's Professor of Arabic in Cambridge. His poor financial position (the professorship paid only £40 per year) led him to accept the offer of the British government to assist an expedition into Egypt. He and his companions were ambushed and killed. A search party found their remains, which were interred in St Paul's Cathedral between those of Nelson and Wellington. He was commemorated as a romantic adventurer-scholar, whose publications were perhaps not the most accurate, but succeeded in conveying a sense of excitement to his readers.¹⁸²

Thomas William Rhys Davids (1843–1922) was the eldest son of a Congregational minister from Wales. He studied Sanskrit in Breslau, and became a civil servant in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). In 1881 he delivered the Hibbert Lectures on the history and growth of Indian Buddhism. From 1882 to 1904 he occupied the chair of Pali at the University of London, and in 1905 he became professor of comparative religion at the University of Manchester. Together with his wife, Caroline Augusta Foley, Rhys Davids promoted Theravada Buddhism and the study of Pali in Britain. They were both presidents of the Pali Text Society. He contributed six volumes with Buddhist texts (translated from the Pali) to the series of the *Sacred Books of the East*. His own philosophy of life was much influenced by the 'noble truths' of Buddhism, and many of his publications are still in print with Indian presses.¹⁸³

Dictionary of National Biography, Second Supplement, vol. I, London: Smith, Elder, 1912, pp. 427–30.

¹⁸² Brooke, *A History of the University of Cambridge*, volume IV, p. 429; R. L. Bidwell, 'Edward Henry Palmer (1840–1882)', *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)* 13/1 (1986) 45–50.

¹⁸³ Ananda Wickremeratne, *The Genesis of an Orientalist. Thomas William Rhys Davids and Buddhism in Sri Lanka*, Delhi etc.: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984; Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*, pp. 393–4; Charles Hallisey, 'Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravada Buddhism', in: Donald S. Lopez, Jr, ed., *Curators of the Buddha. The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995, pp. 31–61, here pp. 34–7.

CONTRIBUTORS CONCLUDED

Oldenberg, Rhys Davids, Legge, and Max Müller were the most prolific contributors, each translating (or contributing to the translation of) six volumes of the *Sacred Books of the East*. Together they were responsible for twenty-one volumes of the series. Eggeling and West each translated five volumes, and Bühler and Thibaut each took care of three books of the series. These eight German and British scholars did the bulk of the work. Most of the twenty translators had studied one or more oriental languages and obtained an established academic position in their field of expertise. Depending on how fierce one applies the criteria, there were hardly any amateurs involved. E. W. West, who was civil engineer in India, and Palmer may be seen as exceptions. Yet Cowell did not trust his own Arabic enough to examine Palmer in this field. Palmer's translation of the Qur'an is said to be a rather free rendering of this ancient text, whereas many of his colleagues aimed to present literal translations. This goal could not always be achieved, because the original texts were sometimes so obscure that interpretation could not be avoided.

Many of the contributors knew each other personally, or had studied with older colleagues. Sanskrit scholars were clearly over-represented in the team, and many of them worked in India (mostly for colonial educational institutions), or at least visited the country for a longer period. Having a position in Sanskrit meant more often than not that one mastered other languages such as Pali or Persian as well. A relatively large part of the originally Sanskrit texts were translated from later translations into Pali or Chinese. There were only a few theologians or men who took holy orders among the translators. Samuel Beal was an Anglican clergyman, and James Legge was a dissenter and missionary for China. The Lutheran Max Müller had no great sympathies for what he saw as the rigid practices of the Church of England, but in Oxford he attended Anglican services. Generally spoken the translations were done by religious outsiders—some of them even sympathized with the oriental religions, or practised a non-Christian religion (as the contributors from the East did). Nonconformist scholars and broad church academics played an important role in furthering oriental studies and the 'science of religion' in England.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Girardot, 'Müller's *Sacred Books*', p. 219, n. 14.

The contribution of Scots such as James Legge, William Robertson Smith, and James Frazer to a new approach to the study of religion was remarkable. E. B. Tylor, the first professor of anthropology at the University of Oxford, was not a member of the Church of England either, as he came from a family of wealthy Quakers.

THE INDEX

The preparation of the index to the forty-nine volumes turned out to be a labour of Sisyphus. The assignment was given to Moriz Winternitz (1863–1937), who had come to Oxford in 1888 to assist Max Müller in the preparation of the second edition of the *Rig-Veda*. He also translated two series of Müller's Gifford Lectures into German. In 1899 he became first *Privatdozent* and later professor of Indian philology and ethnology at the German University of Prague, where he met Albert Einstein at musical evenings. In the spring of 1894 Max Müller had first suggested to Winternitz that he compile an index. In June 1894 Winternitz sent a proposal to the delegates of Oxford University Press, whereupon they asked for a specimen, which was approved of 'not until March, 1895'.¹⁸⁵ Müller and Winternitz did not want 'a bare list of names and important words, with strings of references which no one would have the patience to read through'. Instead they decided upon 'an *analytical* Index with *extracts* and even *verbal quotations*', which gave users an easy access to passages they looked for.¹⁸⁶

According to his own report, Winternitz had prepared 70,000 slips, which had been sorted and arranged alphabetically, before he left for Prague in 1898.¹⁸⁷ Because of his new obligations the preparations had to be stopped for nearly two years. After resuming his work in 1900, he came to the conclusion 'that the huge mass of slips before me represented only the raw material from which the building had to be reconstructed'.¹⁸⁸ As it made no sense to collect all passages bearing

¹⁸⁵ Winternitz, 'Introductory Note', in: M. Winternitz, ed., *A General Index to the Names and Subject-Matter of the Sacred Books of the East*, SBE 50, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910, pp. xi–xiv, p. xi.

¹⁸⁶ Winternitz, 'Introductory Note', p. xi (emphasis in the original).

¹⁸⁷ Winternitz, 'Introductory Note', p. xii.

¹⁸⁸ Winternitz, 'Introductory Note', p. xii.

on subjects such as ancestor worship, animals, Brahman, Buddha, fire, funeral rites, future life, god, gods, prayer, sacrifice, and soul (these are the examples mentioned), subheadings and subdivisions had to be made. This could not be done according to 'one uniform scheme', Winternitz wrote. It was decided to classify on the basis of practical usefulness (not consistency)—sometimes according to religion and sometimes to subject matter. He did not want to list all the devices he had used to construct this 'time-saving machinery'.¹⁸⁹ This resulted in an index of almost 700 pages with clearly devised entries. In several instances quotations were given, but these were apparently kept to a minimum. Winternitz must have left out much of what he had collected.

A further complication was that at the time that Winternitz began his work several volumes of the series still had not appeared. Some were near completion, and in 1897 no less than four volumes were published, but the last two contributions appeared with considerable delay in the years 1900 and 1904. Although in his preface Winternitz thanked the delegates for their patience 'with the many delays',¹⁹⁰ they did not do much to oblige him. In 1898 they denied him permission to publish his manuscript 'Genie of Eastern Thought', which included selections of the *Sacred Books of the East*. At that time they were not even willing to send him 'the slips for the proposed work now in the possession of the Press'.¹⁹¹ Probably the slips were sent to Prague at some later time. It is also documented that they tried to get the index 'out of Winternitz by threats and abuse'.¹⁹² We do not know exactly how much he was paid for his work.¹⁹³

Winternitz apologized for inconsistencies which were caused by different translations of the same terms by different translators. Sometimes he had also to take into account different spellings of the same names in different volumes. He gave as many cross-references as possible to avoid 'serious inconvenience'.¹⁹⁴ By all these efforts he hoped that the index would be 'a sort of Manual of

¹⁸⁹ Winternitz, 'Introductory Note', p. xiii.

¹⁹⁰ Winternitz, 'Introductory Note', p. xiv.

¹⁹¹ Del. Or., 2 December 1898, p. 67, agenda item 9*.

¹⁹² Handwritten note, 13 April 1904, SBE files OS/II/2/5, *Sacred Books of the East* 1887–1908.

¹⁹³ Del. Or., 7 February 1896, mentioned that Winternitz was paid £17.17.0 'instead of £5.5.0 for Index'.

¹⁹⁴ Winternitz, 'Introductory Note', p. xiii.

the History of Eastern Religions'.¹⁹⁵ However, no theories were to be presented, only a 'scientific classification of religious phenomena'.¹⁹⁶ Allegedly theoretical terms such as animism, fetishism, taboo, or totemism are not to be found in the index, just *religious facts*, as Winternitz proudly claimed. In his preface to the index, A. A. Macdonell, a student of Max Müller and at the time Boden Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Oxford, underlined the merits of the index, which provided scientific classifications of its subjects: 'Thus, in the article on Agni, the Indian God of fire, the material relating to that deity is arranged under no fewer than twenty-four subdivisions'.¹⁹⁷ The index is in his view 'a handbook for the study of Oriental religions', and, therefore, if he were asked to select any one of the fifty volumes, he would 'certainly choose the last'. Finally, Macdonell congratulated the delegates, as the edition has 'contributed not a little towards establishing [the] now unrivalled position [of the Press] as a centre of Oriental publication'.¹⁹⁸ In a recent article on 'Indian Classics', Roberto Calasso shows himself still very much impressed by Winternitz's index.¹⁹⁹

Perusing the index is a fascinating experience, as it shows the sheer quantity of entries and cross-references. Most of them are short, referring to an amazing variety of names, especially of gods, goddesses, and other religious persons, places, and entities. Notwithstanding Winternitz's claim to represent the facts and nothing but the facts, the volume captures theoretical notions such as sacred, sacrifice, immortality, salvation, justice, and morality (divided according to the various religions) as well. The entry 'morality' refers the reader further to 'good works', 'righteousness', 'sin', and 'virtue'. 'Sacred' has the following entries: 'sacred beings' (cross-reference to 'gods'), 'sacred books', 'sacred cord' (cross-reference to 'costume'), 'sacred duties' (cross-reference to 'works'), 'sacred feasts', 'sacred objects', 'sacred syllables', 'sacred times', and 'sacred twigs' (cross-references to 'plants' and 'Baresma').²⁰⁰ Under 'holy' we find the

¹⁹⁵ Winternitz, 'Introductory Note', p. xiii.

¹⁹⁶ Winternitz, 'Introductory Note', p. xiv (italicized in the original).

¹⁹⁷ Macdonell, 'Preface' (February 1910), SBE 50, pp. vii–ix, p. ix.

¹⁹⁸ Macdonell, 'Preface', p. ix.

¹⁹⁹ Roberto Calasso, 'Indian Classics. The Big New Vision', *The New York Review of Books* 62/14 (2015) 64–8.

²⁰⁰ Baresma is explained as a 'bundle of sacred twigs, held by the Parsi priest when reciting prayers'.

following entries: 'holy persons', 'holy places', 'holy women' (see 'nuns'), and 'holy word'. The last item refers the reader further to the entries 'Mathra Spenta', 'prayers', 'revelation', 'sacred books', and 'Zoroastrianism'. It is evident that Winternitz tried to provide many relevant cross-references, without bothering too much with consistency.

Moral and also juridical notions are very well represented. Law texts were an important part of the series. But everyday notions were not forgotten. There is much more on 'birds', 'cattle', 'cows', and other animals than for instance on 'birth'. Included are also many cognitive or even theoretical entries on 'atoms', 'cause', 'world', 'psychology', 'self' (including references to 'Atman', which has its own entry as well), 'cognition', 'knowledge', 'revelation', 'mysticism', and 'emancipation', in the sense of 'final release' and 'liberation'. 'Emancipation' is one of the few cases where we find a quotation, which is taken from one of the Vedanta sutras: 'we know from Scripture that this Supreme Lord, when pleased by the faithful worship of his Devotees . . . frees them from the influence of Nescience . . . allows them to attain to that supreme bliss which consists in the direct intuition of His own true nature; and after that does *not* turn them back into the miseries of Samsara'.²⁰¹ My impression is that most quotations chosen by Winternitz aim to transmit to Western readers moral and religious insights from Eastern religions.

Other aspects—including the practical and ritual dimensions of religions—were indexed as well. The terminology may not be state of the art, but under 'rites' (there is no entry 'rituals') the reader is referred to 'auspicious rites', 'ceremonies', and 'works'. Entries on 'funeral rites' and 'etiquette' are included as well. The major transitions in human life, such as birth, circumcision, marriage, old age, death, and afterlife ('future life', as well as 'heaven' and 'hell'), and 'transmigration' from one 'caste' (which is also amply dealt with) to another, are meticulously represented. 'Sacrifice' is one of the most extensive entries, being subdivided according to religion and subject matter. More specifically, the reader finds 'general rules and classifications' (of sacrifice), 'sacrificial apparatus (utensils, vessels, materials, &c.)', 'duty of sacrificing, results of s.', 'relative value or worthlessness of s.', 'symbolical s.', and 's. and the gods'. Animal

²⁰¹ Winternitz, *Index*, p. 193 (SBE 48, p. 770). Italics and dots are taken from the original. Nescience is used as a synonym of ignorance (not-knowing).

and human sacrifices have separate entries. The different position of women and children is addressed, as well as 'homicide', 'infanticide' (see 'women, [section] g'), 'abortion', and 'menstruation'. Even a subject such as 'sexual intercourse', which was precarious for a Victorian readership, gets ample attention. Diseases and deformations ('cripples' and 'idiots', who cannot inherit) have separate entries. The officials ('priests'), texts, practices, ideas, gods, and sacred things of all kinds are dealt with alphabetically. Although the index does not conform to present-day standards of consistency and transparency, it is a tremendous achievement. It has not become the manual Winternitz hoped for, but it is a powerful instrument to research the contents of the other forty-nine volumes of the series.

AFTERMATH

With the publication of the index in 1910 the project of the *Sacred Books of the East* was brought to a conclusion. The history of the reception of the series and of the later reprints by Indian presses as part of the UNESCO World Heritage Programme is not to be told here. A few developments during the last years of Müller's editorship, however, deserve special mention. Firstly, starting in 1897 the topic of a 'cheap edition for America' was amply discussed by the delegates. An American organization, identified in the minutes as '[the Society for] Christian Literature', which resided in New York, asked for the permission to reprint the series. Although the delegates did not seem to be inclined to reject this request out of hand, and the American publishing house Scribner's & Sons approached the press about this matter,²⁰² there is no evidence that the cheap edition was actually brought out in the United States. In general—as the rejection of Winternitz's similar request already indicated—they were rather reluctant to permit translation or reuse even of parts of the series. Some requests, however, were granted. The Danish scholar Nathan Söderblom got permission to reprint a Pahlavi text from the fifth volume for his 'Comparative Eschatology'.²⁰³ The largest exception,

²⁰² Del. Or., 3 February 1899.

²⁰³ Del. Or., 14 August 1900. Nathan Söderblom, *La Vie future d'après le Mazdéisme à la lumière des croyances parallèles dans les autres religions. Etude*

which is not documented in the minutes, is the American edition of selections of the Vedic hymns, the Zend-Avesta, *Dhammapada*, Upanishads, the Qur'an, and the 'Life of Buddha' for the 'World's Great Classics', a series of more than fifty volumes presenting the great English, German, French, and Russian literature of the nineteenth century, classical orations (Cicero, among many others), and some philosophical (Plato, Aristotle) and religious texts.²⁰⁴

Secondly, it is worth noticing that as late as 1898 Max Müller made an attempt to include at least the Old Testament in the series. Formally, he transmitted a proposal of Paul Haupt (1858–1926), at the time professor of Semitic languages at Johns Hopkins, to publish the translation that Haupt had made for his 'Polychrome Bible'.²⁰⁵ This was a critical edition of the Hebrew text, including a new English translation with notes, in which the different sources of the text were indicated by various colours. All we know is that the idea was rejected.²⁰⁶ Earlier attempts are not documented. Probably, it was clear from the onset that this was not a feasible option and would jeopardize the whole undertaking. In 1879 Max Müller believed that the edition would do much 'towards lifting Christianity into its high historical position'. 'I look forward to the time when those who objected to my including the Old and New Testaments among the *Sacred Books of the East* will implore me to do so.'²⁰⁷ This hope was

d'eschatologie comparée, translated from the Swedish, Paris: Leroux, 1901. Permission was also given to Mrs Edith Ward 'to reprint extracts in her book on Buddhism' (Del. Or., 7 June 1901).

²⁰⁴ Epiphanius Wilson, *Sacred Books of the East*. Including selections from the Vedic Hymns, Zend-Avesta, *Dhammapada*, Upanishads, the Koran, and the Life of Buddha. With critical and biographical sketches by Epiphanius Wilson, A.M., revised edition, New York: the Colonial Press, 1900. I did not succeed in procuring the first edition, which must have appeared shortly before. Epiphanius Wilson (1845–1916) edited many other volumes with selections of (religious) texts from ancient civilizations. The so-called 'library committee', which was responsible for the whole series of the 'World's Great Classics', included Timothy Dwight, Richard Henry Stoddard, Arthur Richmond Marsh, Paul van Dyke, and Albert Ellery Bergh.

²⁰⁵ [Paul Haupt, ed.], *The Sacred Books of the Old Testament. A Critical Edition of the Hebrew Text*. Printed in colors, with notes prepared by eminent biblical scholars of Europe and America, Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1893–.

²⁰⁶ Del. Or., 2 September 1898.

²⁰⁷ LLB II, 67; LLA II, 70f., Müller to Lady Welby, 27 July 1879; cf. LLB II, 141; LLA II, 148, Müller to Nanjio, 23 May 1883 and LLB II, 174; LLA II, 182, Müller to G. Cox, June 1885: 'The Old Testament stands on a higher ethical stage than other sacred books—it certainly does not lose by comparison with them. I always said so, but people would not believe it. Still, anything to show the truly historical and human

not fulfilled. Opponents such as Monier-Williams went on to attack this assumption and spoke of a 'veritable gulf' and 'bridgeless chasm' that existed between the Bible and the *Sacred Books of the East*.²⁰⁸

Thirdly, the delegates continued discussing the progress of the series, the need for reprints, and even new editions with adapted translations. At some time—I would say at the very latest after the devastating impact of World War II—the translations were deemed out of fashion.²⁰⁹ Till World War I the press still sold many copies of the series, not only hundreds of the newly published volumes, but also the older contributions sold on average between ten and sixty copies each year.²¹⁰ After Müller's death in 1900 the possibility of 'obtaining a [new] supervisor of the series' was considered,²¹¹ but the suggestion was not acted upon. Henry Frowde's proposal to bring out a prospectus of the series as a whole, after volume XLIX was published, was not executed either.²¹² The following instruction to the printer of the series marked the end of publication of the *Sacred Books of the East* by the Clarendon Press and the beginning of World War II: 'Please destroy the blocks and moulds, melt the plates and let us have credit for the metal.'²¹³ Profit and prestige, indeed, is what in the end the series brought the press.

character of the Old Testament would be extremely useful in every sense, and would in no wise injure the high character which it possesses . . . it might be done in a review of the *Sacred Books of the East*, showing how the Old Testament is like, and how it is unlike them.' As far as I know, the Revd G. Cox did not take up this hint.

²⁰⁸ M. Monier-Williams, *The Holy Bible and the Sacred Books of the East. Four Addresses, to Which is Added a Fifth Address on Zenana Missions* (1887), London: Seeley, 1900, p. 18; cf. p. 30 to get a sense of Monier-Williams's cultural pessimism, who feared 'a deluge of atheism, irreligion, and immorality at the very threshold of our homes'.

²⁰⁹ Letter from R. C. Zaehner to Spicer, 4 December 1958, 'there would be little point in reprinting some or all of them [SBE] as they stand since many of the translations are now quite out of date'.

²¹⁰ Sheets on sales, SBE 1887–1908 (OS/I/2/5).

²¹¹ Del. Or., 27 September 1901.

²¹² Henry Frowde, memorandum, 12 April 1904, to the secretary of the delegates, SBE 1887–1908 (OS/I/2/5).

²¹³ Separate file on the index volume, numbered L.B. 5411, typed note, dated 3 June 1940.

3

Concepts and Ideas

The East is ours, we are its heirs, and claim by right our share in its inheritance.

(Max Müller)

Smaller and bigger projects, whether they concern the construction of bridges or even new cities, the drafting of laws or an entire constitution, the edition of a series or an encyclopaedia, presuppose and entail concepts and ideas. Without a sound idea of what one wants to achieve and the tools one needs, the envisioned project will almost certainly fail. Here I shall discuss some of the concepts and ideas that formed Max Müller's series of the *Sacred Books of the East*. Methodological issues such as the comparative method will be discussed in the next chapter.¹

TEXTS, SACRED BOOKS, AND BIBLES

Friedrich Max Müller spent most of his working life reading, editing, translating, and interpreting ancient texts. It was his strong conviction that without texts we cannot understand ancient civilizations and religions. In a similar way as fieldwork now defines the modern cultural anthropologist, the study and mastery of languages defined textual scholars such as Müller in the nineteenth century. The edition

¹ The distinction between concepts as such and concepts that involve methodological issues is, of course, somewhat arbitrary, as many concepts are embedded in methodological programmes, but is made here for reasons of convenience.

of ancient texts was important in itself, but finally served a higher goal: the understanding of ancient history. The discovery of old manuscripts in the recent past and their critical edition provided the basis for the scholarly study of history, especially of religious history, as these texts primarily concerned religious practices and ideas.² One could even claim that it was these very texts that made the new ‘science of religion’, as Müller termed the comparative study of religions, possible. Müller described the new task of the scholarly study of religions in an almost reverential way:

It [is] the duty of those who have devoted their life to the study of the principal religions of the world in their original documents, and who value religion and reverence it in whatever form it may present itself, to take possession of this new territory in the name of true science, and thus to protect its sacred precincts from the inroads of those who think that they have a right to speak on the ancient religions of mankind, whether those of the Brahmans, the Zoroastrians, or Buddhists, or those of the Jews and Christians, without ever having taken the trouble of learning the languages in which their sacred books are written.³

Amateurs without proper linguistic skills are to be kept away from the new ‘territory’, as Müller preferred to call it, which was laid bare by the ‘discovery’ of these ancient texts. True scholars who are respectful, as Müller would stress time and again, of their subject of study must claim this field and protect it from intruders who are not entitled to go there, because they don’t know the original languages of the documents. A new, ‘scientific’ priesthood, one is inclined to comment, has to protect this sacred area.

This interpretation is corroborated by the fact that Max Müller and his wife actually framed Müller in his capacity of editor of the *Rig-Veda* as a scholarly saint. In the biography of her deceased husband, Georgina wrote that at the end of the 1850s ‘the natives of India’ began to speak of Max Müller as ‘Moksha Mûlara’, ‘which was thus explained by one of their Pundits: “He who has by publishing the

² Max Müller, ‘Buddhism’ (1862), in: Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1867, pp. 182–231, pp. 186f. about the necessity to study religions on the basis of their ‘original documents’ and the fact that these texts were only recently discovered.

³ F. Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1873, p. 35. New edition: London and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1899.

Veda for the first time in a printed form gave (*ra*) the root, (*mûla*) the foundation, the knowledge of final beatitude (*moksha*), he is called Moksha Mûlara”⁴ His biographer Nirad Chaudhuri recalled the fact that Müller was often named this way in Bengali magazines and books and assumed that this had been done in India by Indians, until he learned that in the first volume of the edition of the *Rig-Veda* Müller himself had Sanskritized his name as ‘Moksha Mûlara’.⁵

Müller provided the East with purified editions of their own religious traditions. In her biography Georgina Müller presented ‘an interesting account’ from a Western colleague (Martin Haug, 1827–76), director of an institution of Sanskrit studies in Pune, that illustrates this process of transmission of sacred texts to religious specialists in India. The colleague told Müller of a great meeting of Brahmin pundits who corrected their own manuscripts of the *Rig-Veda* on the basis of Müller’s edition. The element of purity is handsomely interwoven in the story. We are told that these men ‘would not touch the books themselves’, as they thought that cows’ blood was used in preparing the ink used for printing the edition. With a hint at their oral tradition the reader is told that ‘Müller’s carefully prepared text was read aloud’, and that they corrected their own manuscripts accordingly. The fact of the correction of the manuscripts is mentioned twice in this short passage of Müller’s biography. The authority of the text produced by Western scholarship is apparently accepted by Indian pundits, who even concluded that this edition ‘must be written by a great Pundit versed in the *Vedas* and *Sastras*’.⁶ Western philological methods researching the authorship, the reliability, and the possible stratification of texts produced the new foundation for Indian indigenous tradition.⁷ The colleague also wrote to Müller saying how difficult it was to get ‘trustworthy copies of ancient Sanskrit MSS’, as the Brahmins ‘do not admit Europeans to their libraries’, and when

⁴ LLB I, 225; LLA I, 236; cf. LLB II, 87; LLA II, 91, Müller to Emerson, 19 April 1880: ‘The translator of the *Upanishads*, Moksha Mulara, sends greetings and best wishes to his American Guru, Amarasunu, on his seventy-seventh birthday.’ LLA and LLB refer, respectively, to the American and British edition of [Georgina Müller], *The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Max Müller*, 2 vols, London, New York, and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902.

⁵ Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary. The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller P.C.*, Delhi etc.: Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 140. The interpretation by the pundits is according to Chaudhuri ‘an etymological flight’.

⁶ LLB I, 267; LLA I, 281.

⁷ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, pp. 25f.

copies are made and given to Westerners they are 'intentionally bad and incomplete'.⁸ Müller's achievement is honoured by pointing to the acceptance of his edition by Indian religious specialists, as well as by reference to the reluctance and even mischief in handing over their manuscripts or at least copies of manuscripts to Western scholars, who are presented as the experts who can prepare purified and trustworthy editions of these texts.

Western scholarly authority allegedly overthrows indigenous Eastern authority. Müller made this point explicitly and very clearly. 'We' cannot accept that the interpretation of Indian commentators, for instance, is always the right one. 'On the contrary, these native interpretations, by the very authority which naturally might seem to belong to them, are often misleading, and we must try to keep ourselves, as much as possible, independent of them.'⁹ Notwithstanding the fact that Müller stressed the importance of a respectful attitude towards the East, he spoke from a strong authoritative point of view, opposing 'them' and 'us'. Authority only seemingly belongs to them. This has to be kept in mind, as sacred books are by definition authoritative books. Influential religious books such as Thomas à Kempis's *Imitatio Christi*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, or Dante's *Divina Commedia* are excluded from the series because 'their doctrines are not binding', as they lack 'canonical sanction'.¹⁰ Müller's authoritative stance does not imply, of course, that his claims were always accepted in the East.

In a discussion of the question what has to be understood by a 'sacred book', Müller explained that the criterion that these books had to be 'revealed' was not acceptable to him. He came up with the following definition:

So we agreed to treat as Sacred Books all those which had been formally recognised by religious communities as constituting the highest authority in matters of religion, which had received a kind of canonical sanction, and might therefore be appealed to for deciding any disputed points of faith, morality, or ceremonial.¹¹

⁸ LLB I, 267f.; LLA I, 281f.

⁹ Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion* (Gifford Lectures, Glasgow, 1892), London and New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1893, p. 143.

¹⁰ F. Max Müller, *Natural Religion* (Gifford Lectures Glasgow 1888), London and New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1889, p. 539.

¹¹ Müller, *Natural Religion*, p. 539.

In this view texts are considered to be sacred because of the authority conferred upon them by *later* generations (and not by their founders). Therefore, they have 'a kind' of canonicity, which may be used to decide conflicts. These uncertain formulations show that Müller was somehow aware of the fact that the selection of texts was based on a Western, and even Protestant, model of scriptural authority, which was not found so easily in other cultures. The idea that these texts play a fundamental role in present-day quarrels is undercut by ultimately taking away the interpretative power and authority from the religious commentators of these traditions.¹²

Books are fundamental for Müller's idea of the new science of religion. At various occasions he explained what a book is. Papyri and hieroglyphic inscriptions don't count as such. The term may be used for ancient Chinese texts, 'but in ordinary parlance a book implies alphabetic writing, and something intended to be read by an educated public'.¹³ At another place he added as a further characteristic that a book has to be divided into 'chapters and verses, having a beginning and an end'.¹⁴ This last addition seems to be a rather modern description of a book, almost in terms of a novel with a narrative structure. A collection of proverbs does not seem to fit the description very well. Probably we should not overemphasize any narrative implications in this definition, as Müller considered the Veda, 'with its ten books or *Mandalas*, its 1017 hymns or *Suktas*', to be the prime and even earliest example of a book.¹⁵ In any case the use of an alphabet and the idea that it must be read by a literate elite are defining characteristics of a book. Questions concerning the material production of books and copyright come not into view.

Müller's discussions of books and sacred books in particular don't go much into theoretical niceties, but present overviews of religions that have sacred books and list these in some detail. A common classification is that of 'book-religions' and traditions that have no

¹² Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason. Science and the Imagination of Modern India*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999, pp. 86f., relates an Indian disputation from 1895, where Müller was consulted to settle the controversy.

¹³ F. Max Müller, 'On the Proper Use of Holy Scriptures', president's address, annual meeting, 23 November 1893, *Abstracts of the Society of Historical Theology*, Oxford University (1893) 5–26, p. 20.

¹⁴ Müller, *My Autobiography. A Fragment*. By the Rt. Hon. Professor F. Max Müller, K.M., London and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901, p. 189.

¹⁵ Müller, *Autobiography*, p. 189.

sacred scriptures.¹⁶ It is evident that Müller attached great importance to texts and putting together a 'library of the sacred books of the world', but he did not overlook the fact that these cover only part of religious history.¹⁷ Neither did he overlook the fact that the religious books go back to oral tradition. Müller even claimed that all the ancient sacred books were first composed and handed down orally. We should not think this impossible, he added, as we 'have no idea of the almost miraculous powers of the human memory before the invention of writing'.¹⁸

Müller stressed that writing was a late invention in human history and that many sacred ancient books have been lost in the course of time.¹⁹ As the sacred books are of a relatively late date, 'our knowledge of ancient religions will always remain very imperfect'. The writings are late compared with the times they claim to describe. This does not imply that there can be no older elements in these 'modern books', but according to Müller one has to use them carefully. He warned his audiences to be aware of the differences and not to see likenesses where they don't exist. Therefore, he made a plea for a literal translation, which does not cover up the differences between these ancient texts and later writings, in which seemingly similar expressions were used.²⁰

In modern scholarship Müller is often presented as one of the champions of textual religion, favouring texts and editions over lived practices and even transforming religious traditions into textual frames. To a certain extent this view is correct, but on the other hand he could be rather critical of the way sacred books were used by religious experts and believers. 'Sacred books often become a kind of fetish, requiring an implicit and unquestioning faith.'²¹ The origin and inspiration of the texts are forgotten and the 'old ideas of what is true and divine are almost absorbed in the one idea of what is written and orthodox'.²² The founders of ancient religions did not write texts, and Müller used the difference between the original religion and its

¹⁶ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1899, p. 67; cf. F. Max Müller, *Natural Religion*, chapter 20 on sacred books.

¹⁷ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1899, p. 63.

¹⁸ Müller, 'On the Proper Use', p. 21.

¹⁹ Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, pp. 30–3.

²⁰ Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, p. 57. Müller's view of translation will be discussed in the next section.

²¹ Müller, *Natural Religion*, p. 564.

²² Müller, *Natural Religion*, p. 564.

later texts to criticize a literal, scriptural view of religion. Religion could only remain a living reality if it is grounded in 'ourselves'. However important the sacred books may be, 'we all must have our own bookless religion'. 'No temple can stand without that [inner] foundation, and it is because that foundation is so often neglected, that the walls of the temple become unsafe and threaten to fall.'²³ The idea that texts have to be appropriated by the individual religious subject is of course a modern Protestant idea.

In his last Gifford lecture on *Natural Religion* from 1888 concerning sacred books, Müller addressed the issue of the 'unbelief of the day' and suggested that one of its main causes was the neglect of the distinction between (outer) texts and inner beliefs. This truth could already be found 'in non-Christian religions', which makes it not less of a truth.²⁴ After making this observation Müller introduced a friend of his who allegedly wrote to him that the *Sacred Books of the East* are 'so infinitely inferior to our own'. Why bother to translate to them? The 'friend' apparently accepted the idea that the Bible can be compared to the *Sacred Books of the East*, whereupon Müller replied: Yes, they are inferior, 'but that is the very reason why we should look all the more carefully and eagerly for any grains of truth that may be hidden beneath an accumulation of rubbish'.²⁵ This and similar degrading metaphors are often used by Müller, but he brought his point home that people from the East and the West share a core of humanity. In Müller's phrasing, 'The heart and mind and soul of man are the same under every sky.'²⁶

Max Müller sometimes spoke about the *Sacred Books of the East* in terms of Bibles (of humanity), most famously in his 1884 article 'Forgotten Bibles' on the occasion of the start of the second series of translations.²⁷ The use of the term is hardly explained here. Only in the conclusion did he speak of the important lesson to be learned that 'we are not the only people who have a Bible', for which theologians

²³ Müller, *Natural Religion*, p. 569.

²⁴ Müller, *Natural Religion*, pp. 570f.

²⁵ Müller, *Natural Religion*, p. 571.

²⁶ Müller, *Natural Religion*, p. 571. The 'sky' and the sun are, of course, according to Müller the *loci* of the deification process (575). See Chapter 1 (section 'Most Controversial Theories').

²⁷ F. Max Müller, 'Forgotten Bibles', *Nineteenth Century* 15 (1884) 1004–22; reprinted in *Last Essays*. Second Series: Essays on the Science of Religion, London etc.: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901, pp. 1–35; cf. Müller, *Natural Religion*, p. 539: 'Bibles of the world'.

of each tradition claim special authority.²⁸ In a famous letter to Ernest Renan of 21 April 1883, Müller referred to his English critics who allegedly said ‘Les Bibles de l’humanité ne sont pas amusantes.’²⁹ I have not been able to trace the origin of this quotation³⁰ nor can I give an explanation for the fact that the ‘English’ critics apparently used this French phrase. Personally he did not favour the expression ‘Bibles of the world’ to refer to sacred texts of other traditions. ‘It sounds to me conceited. We might as well speak of the Vedas, or the Korans of the World.’³¹ Nevertheless it is a ‘favourite expression’ and, therefore, ‘difficult to suppress’.³² Indeed, Müller himself would use the term, if he thought it helpful.

TRANSLATING

Crucial to the whole programme of the *Sacred Books of the East* is the idea of translation. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Müller devoted a large part of the preface to the series as a whole to the character of the original texts and to the question how to translate these in a proper way.³³ He formulated three ‘cautions’, the first concerning the character of the translated texts, the second with regard to the ‘difficulties making a proper use of translations’, and the third about the possibilities and impossibilities of rendering ‘ancient thought into modern speech’.³⁴ The first warning will be treated in the next section, whereas here we will focus on Müller’s view of translation.

Translations can according to Müller never take the place of originals. He warned in particular of jumping to conclusions, before examining the whole corpus of texts. For instance, the claim that the

²⁸ Müller, ‘Forgotten Bibles’, p. 1021.

²⁹ LLB II, 141; LLA II, 147.

³⁰ The only reference I have found is Jules Michelet, *Bible de l’humanité*, Paris: Chamerot, 1864. In his response to Müller of 23 April 1883, Renan took up this characterization, but the letter does not give a clue to its origin either; Ernest Renan, *Correspondance 1872–1892*, volume II, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1928, p. 247.

³¹ LLB II, 129; LLA II, 135, letter to Conway, 5 January 1883.

³² LLB II, 129; LLA II, 135.

³³ Cf. my discussion in Chapter 2 (section ‘The Prospectus’) on the making of the series.

³⁴ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879, second edn 1900, p. ix.

religious notion of sin is missing altogether in the *Rig-Veda* has to be qualified now we have new translations, which have recently become available.³⁵ Translations are helpful, but they can still be easily misunderstood. What to make, for instance, of the ‘perplexing’ beginning of the *Chandogya Upanishad*: ‘Let a man worship the syllable Om’?³⁶ To understand this expression, one has to know that meditation on this syllable consisted of its continuous repetition ‘with a view . . . of concentrating . . . on some higher object of thought’. This Hindu form of concentration of thought may be ‘almost unknown to us’, which makes passages like these very hard to understand. This does not mean, however, that they are meaningless. Only the Western world has drifted away from these Eastern forms of thought and religion, according to Müller, and is hardly related at all to them anymore.

The issue of the contrast between ‘modern’ and ‘ancient’ is also addressed in the third caution. Given how difficult it already is to translate contemporary texts from German into French, or from English into German, it must be considered almost impossible to render ancient Sanskrit or Chinese into modern languages. In Müller’s view the most we could achieve was an ‘approximation of our language to theirs’.³⁷ This last sentence has to be taken quite literally, as the source language (so to speak) is normative for him. The translator will ‘prefer to do some violence to language rather than to misrepresent old thoughts by clothing them in words which do not fit them’.³⁸ This is the lesser of the two possible evils. This point of departure has severe consequences: the readers may find some of the translations ‘rather rugged’, they may meet completely new combinations of nouns and adjectives, expressions may ‘sound foreign’, and sentences may seem ‘too long or too abrupt’.³⁹ Yet in the preface to his translation of the *Rig-Veda*, Müller acknowledged that there are limitations to this principle and that translations ‘cannot retain expressions which, if literally rendered in English or any modern language, would have an air of quaintness or absurdity totally foreign to the intention of the ancient poets’.⁴⁰ Still, a translation that was as

³⁵ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xxii.

³⁶ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xxiii.

³⁷ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xxvii.

³⁸ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, pp. xxvii–xxviii.

³⁹ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xxviii.

⁴⁰ Max Müller, ed. and trans., *Rig-Veda-Sanhita, the Sacred Hymns of the Brahmins*, vol. I: *Hymns to the Maruts or the Storm-Gods*, London: Trübner, 1869, p. xii.

close as possible to the original was of immense importance to Müller and he went to great lengths to reach this ideal.

Müller's attempt to do justice to the original words and sentences boils down to a technique of estrangement that makes readers aware of the differences between ancient and modern language. Müller gave the example of the translation of 'Atman', which should not be rendered by 'soul, mind, or spirit', because these words may be predicated, whereas 'Atman' can only be used as a subject. Müller proposed to translate the Sanskrit word by 'self' or 'Self' (in the plural even 'selves'). 'No doubt in many passages it sounds strange in English to use self, and in the plural selves instead of selves; but that very strangeness is useful, for while such words as soul and mind and spirit pass over us unrealised, self and selves will always ruffle the surface of the mind, and stir up some reflection in the reader.'⁴¹ Müller translated the beginning of the *Aitareya Upanishad* by 'Verily, in the beginning all this was Self, only one', whereas older translations had: 'This (world) verily was before (the creation of the world) soul alone', or 'Originally this (universe) was indeed soul only.'⁴² The advice is to keep as close to the original as possible, and in cases of doubt even retain the Sanskrit word 'rather than use a misleading substitute in English'.⁴³

Müller's plea for a way of translating that shows how unfamiliar these ancient texts often are has severe consequences. The explicit purpose is to 'startle' his readers, 'to set us thinking'.⁴⁴ The critical question that comes to mind here is whether this really helps the readers to understand the texts. Will they not just be baffled and stop reading? What Müller actually did in arguing for his position is to provide a whole commentary on what the terms or sentences mean. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that at other occasions he made a plea for a *traduction raisonnée*. In the preface to his translation of the *Rig-Veda*, Müller explained that he did not want to give a 'mere' translation, 'but a full account of the reasons which justify the translator in assigning such a power to such a word, and such a meaning to such a sentence'.⁴⁵ The implication, of course, is that the 'mere'

⁴¹ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xxix.

⁴² Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, pp. xxxi–xxxii.

⁴³ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xxii.

⁴⁴ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xxxvi.

⁴⁵ Müller, *Rig-Veda-Sanhita, the Sacred Hymns of the Brahmans*, vol. I, p. xv.

translation can only be really understood along with the running commentary. This practice makes the readers aware of the fact that they don't really understand the texts which the experts translated and commented upon.⁴⁶

Crucial in understanding these ancient texts and their translations is becoming aware of the fact that they are fundamentally different. The flip side of this supposition is that to really understand these texts one has to get the perspective and intentions of the authors. This step from a basically alienated perspective to an inner understanding is made in the following fascinating passage in the introduction to the *Sacred Books of the East*:

It is not enough simply to read the half-religious, half-philosophical utterances which we find in the Sacred Books of the East, and to say that they are strange, or obscure, or mystic. Plato is strange, till we know him; Berkeley is mystic, till for a time we have identified ourselves with him. So it is with these ancient sages, who have become the founders of the great religions of antiquity. They can never be judged from without, they must be judged from within. We need not become Brahmans or Buddhists or Taoists altogether, but we must for a time, if we wish to understand, and still more, if we are bold enough to undertake to translate their doctrines. Whoever shrinks from that effort, will see hardly anything in these sacred books or their translations but matter to wonder at or to laugh at; possibly something to make him thankful that he is not as other men. But to the patient reader these same books will, in spite of many drawbacks, open a new view of the history of the human race, of that one race to which we all belong, with all the fibres of our flesh, with all the fears and hopes of our soul.⁴⁷

This hermeneutics of—at least temporary—identification must bridge the in other respects apparently almost insurmountable distance between present-day translators and readers, on the one hand, and writers and believers in days long gone, on the other. This is thought possible on the basis of a shared human history and—one is tempted to add—on the basis of the 'omnipresence of a higher Power', which makes itself felt throughout human history in similar ways.⁴⁸ This

⁴⁶ Robert A. Yelle, *The Language of Disenchantment. Protestant Literalism and Colonial Discourse in British India*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

⁴⁷ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, pp. xxxvi–xxxvii.

⁴⁸ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xxvii. At other occasions Müller also pointed to the shared origin of the Indo-European languages, which implies some kind of a common discourse, whereas in this exposition of the difficulties of translation the

identification seems to be, however, more a religious act than helpful for the hard work of translation, as it is not clear how personal identification can actually contribute to solving the allegedly huge linguistic problems of near incommensurability.

‘NOT ONLY UNMEANING, ARTIFICIAL, AND SILLY,
BUT EVEN HIDEOUS AND REPELLENT’

Quite a few pages are spent on the first ‘caution’, concerning the ‘character of the original texts translated here’. Müller warned against high expectations. Older anthologies of ancient texts had led to the idea that these books are ‘full of primeval wisdom and religious enthusiasm’. It is now time ‘to dispel such illusions, and to place the study of ancient religions of the world on a more real and sound, on a more truly historical basis’.⁴⁹ Notwithstanding all the praise that was lavished upon Conway’s anthology on other occasions, in the verbose introduction to the series of the *Sacred Books of the East* such initiatives are rather severely criticized: ‘real mischief’ has been done by the ‘enthusiasm of those pioneers’,⁵⁰ and this amateurism has to be replaced by real scholarship, which is not blind to the true character of these ancient texts. A loving and at the same scholarly attitude does not ignore ‘faults and failures’, and accepts the fact that the ‘dawn of religious thought . . . is not without its dark clouds, its chilling colds, its noxious vapours’.⁵¹

And the metaphors of a chilling morning do not disappear, as we get a view of the whole landscape. ‘We do not know Germany, if we know the Rhine; nor Rome, when we admired St. Peter’s.’ Unfortunately, Müller did not draw the spatial and geographical metaphors further, to show that there is also an ugly side to Germany and Rome. But it is evident now that the scholar will not only focus on beautiful, strange, or startling aspects, but will also show ‘what is commonplace, tedious, or may it be repulsive, or, lastly, what is difficult to construe

distance is stressed. This type of incongruity had led to the idea that Müller was not consistent and stressed various and even contrary aspects at different occasions.

⁴⁹ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. ix.

⁵⁰ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. x.

⁵¹ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xi.

and to understand'.⁵² Müller even said how difficult it was for him to 'confess' that the *Sacred Books of the East* contain so much that is 'not only unmeaning, artificial, and silly, but even hideous and repellent'. To a certain degree this is a rhetorical ploy, which is used to prepare his Victorian readers for what they have to expect, but it is more than that. Apparently it was not enough for Müller to speak of unintelligible and 'childish' texts, suggesting distance and a scheme of development in religious history, but actually he expressed his distaste. One could argue that this way he brought in again the old aesthetic point of view, which he claimed to have left behind as a scholar.

Müller went to great lengths to explain this 'problem'. The old idea that non-Christian religions are based on ignorance and depravity had to be discarded right out. Rejecting this explanation, which, of course, would undermine his whole undertaking, he admitted that he had only a partial explanation for the 'hideous and repellent' character of these ancient texts. First, he referred to the oral way of tradition, where every story may have received 'very soon a kind of hallowed character'.⁵³ Within the original circumstances a tradition may have been important, but as soon as these were forgotten, it became 'trivial and almost unintelligible'.⁵⁴ Liturgical or ceremonial codes may have been passed on, even if the priestly caste did not any longer understand their original meaning. This way it was even more probable that mistakes emerged. This messy process of transmission explains at least to some extent 'the wild confusion of sublime truth with vulgar stupidity that meets us in the pages of the Veda, the Avesta, and the Tripitaka'.⁵⁵ The ultimate presupposition of the whole edition is, of course, that there is gold amongst all this 'rubbish', and that by distinguishing 'between what is essential and what is not' Western scholars and readers will be able to find these 'precious grains in the sacred books of other nations'.⁵⁶

To these 'precious grains' we will turn in Chapter 5 on Müller's view of a 'humane religion'. Here the central concern is to analyse further how he explained the mixed character of the ancient traditions. Another consideration he brought forward was the fact that

⁵² Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xii.

⁵³ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xiii.

⁵⁴ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xiv.

⁵⁵ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, pp. xv–xvi.

⁵⁶ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xxxviii.

original traditions could be spoiled by later ‘apocryphal accretions’.⁵⁷ The origin was thought to represent somehow the unblemished core of religions. The most important explanation of the mixed character of these texts, however, was the difference between the ancient Eastern and modern Western mindset. Müller used the technical concept of parallax to explain the difference between the two angles. Parallax indicates a difference in the apparent position of an object viewed along different lines of sight. The term derives from the Greek word *parallaxis*, meaning alteration. Müller explained that Western music, for instance a symphony of Beethoven, ‘would be mere noise to an Indian ear’, whereas ‘an Indian Sangita seems to us without melody, harmony, or rhythm’.⁵⁸ This observation goes back to a personal experience in Paris in 1845, where Müller met the highly educated and rich Hindu religious reformer Dwarkanath Tagore (1794–1846), the grandfather of Rabindranath Tagore who was to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913.⁵⁹ They played music together, and Müller persuaded his friend to sing a piece of Indian music. After Müller confessed that he could discern neither melody, nor rhythm, nor harmony in what he listened to, Tagore lectured him on Western prejudice against Indian culture, whereas he himself had put great effort in studying French and Italian music.

Müller’s rather drastic terminology concerning the ‘repulsive’ character of ancient texts may also be explained by the explicit sexuality in some of the ancient texts. Notwithstanding the emphasis on the need for complete translations, Müller made one exception:

There are in ancient books, and particularly in religious books, frequent allusions to the sexual aspects of nature, which though perfectly harmless and innocent in themselves, cannot be rendered in modern language without the appearance of coarseness.

Therefore, Müller felt compelled ‘to leave certain passages untranslated, and to give the original, when necessary, in a note’.⁶⁰ He

⁵⁷ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xvi.

⁵⁸ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xvi; cf. Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, p. 43.

⁵⁹ LLB I, 38; LLA I, 40f. For a more elaborate account of this meeting see the—probably fictionalized—rendering in Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, pp. 50f.; cf. also Ian Jack, ‘Bombay Nights and Westend Dreams’, *The Guardian* 8 June 2002, <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/jun/08/featuresreviews.guardianreview3>>, who reveals his ‘Müller moment’.

⁶⁰ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xxi.

claimed that this was only done 'in extreme cases'. No offence was to be given to Victorian readers. This was an element in a process that the intellectual historian Frank M. Turner has termed the 'domestication' of ancient civilizations and religions.⁶¹ Another even more important element in this process were Müller's influential mythological studies, which aimed to show that the gods of Greece and India were not fools, but 'had a rational meaning and a noble purpose'.⁶² His influential solar theory played down the unwelcome mythological stories of theft, murder, homosexuality, promiscuity, and adultery and relegated them to the background. Contemporary painters and writers such as G. F. Watts, Lord Leighton, Matthew Arnold, and John Ruskin took over this moral and spiritualizing view of the ancient world. They, as Frank Turner put it, 'portrayed child-like, often passionless, innocent deities who were close to the natural order and inordinately fascinated by the sun'.⁶³

EAST AND WEST

The notion of the 'East' is basic to Max Müller's work as a whole and to his edition of the *Sacred Books of the East* in particular. It is not always easy to determine what the 'East' means for him. Geographically the East begins in this view at the Bosphorus and stretches from the Near East to China and Japan. Crucial for Müller, however, is India, the heartland of the 'Indo-European world', as it is already called in the preface of his 1849 edition of the *Rig-Veda*, in Müller's view the supreme Sanskrit monument.⁶⁴ Although the praise he lavished on ancient Indian civilization, being critical of contemporary India, may to our taste have some condescending overtones, it is evident that Müller wanted to raise the status of Indian civilization at least to the same level as that of ancient Greece and Rome.

⁶¹ Frank M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981, pp. 110–14. For a critical appraisal of Müller in this respect see also Lourens P. van den Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller. A Life Devoted to the Humanities*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, pp. 243–92, 519–31.

⁶² Turner, *The Greek Heritage*, p. 109, referring to Müller, *Contributions to the Science of Mythology*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897, p. 22.

⁶³ Turner, *The Greek Heritage*, p. 111.

⁶⁴ Müller, *Rig-Veda*, vol. I, 1849, p. v.

Müller recalled 'with what contempt' any remarks on Sanskrit were treated by his teachers.⁶⁵ His mission was to show how wrong they were and to establish the importance of the civilization of ancient India 'for us'. No doubt, his perspective was a European perspective, and the importance of ancient India lay in its relevance for Europe. Müller was aware of the colonial context in which he worked as a scholar. He taught and examined candidates for the British Indian Civil Service and at times he mentioned the material and intellectual conquest of India in one breath. It is not difficult to criticize him in this respect, but we must not forget that he was appreciated within the metropolis as well as in India for his work and his continuous effort for the Indian cause in England.

A discussion of Max Müller's view and perception of the East, contrasted with the West, is a somewhat hazardous undertaking, as there are no clear limits to this subject. I have chosen to focus on a few aspects that are immediately relevant in order to understand the edition of the *Sacred Books of the East*. The first thing to be noticed is that the subject is not treated systematically by Müller. Of course, the claim can be made that it pervades the whole of his work, but, for instance, in the general introduction to the edition there are only a few general remarks on differences between Eastern and Western perceptions in the widest possible sense. Secondly, it is evident that the whole edition was to be produced by 'Oriental scholars'.⁶⁶ In his address to the Second Congress of Orientalists, held at the Royal Institution in London in September 1874, Müller spoke of the 're-conquest of the Eastern world' as the 'work with which we are more specially entrusted'.⁶⁷ He used military metaphors to make this point. In his sketch of the development of the field, Müller stressed that it had taken a while, but that by now oriental studies had the same scholarly rigour as classical studies. Classics and, of course, theology still dominated the old universities. Not until 1876 was a Sinological chair established at Oxford and occupied by Müller's friend and co-worker James Legge.

⁶⁵ Müller, *India. What Can It Teach Us?*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1883, p. 28.

⁶⁶ Müller, 'Address [to the Aryan Section]', in *Transactions of the Second Session of the International Congress of Orientalists* (London, September 1874), London, 1876 [Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1968], 177–204, p. 179 [reprinted in *Chips of a German Workshop*, vol. IV, 317–58].

⁶⁷ Müller, 'Address', p. 180.

Prejudice could only be overcome 'by giving to Oriental studies a strictly scientific character'.⁶⁸ This way it has been shown that 'in language, and in all that is implied by language, India and Europe are one'.⁶⁹ As is clear from one of the most lyrical passages of Müller's London speech of 1874, there are quite a few things implied by language. Two worlds, separated for thousands of years, are now reunited by sound oriental scholarship, which has established *real* historical connections between the two:

The East, formerly a land of dreams, of fables, and fairies, has become to us a land of unmistakeable reality; the curtain between the West and the East has been lifted, and our old forgotten home stands before us again in bright colours and definite outlines.⁷⁰

The East has become real 'to us', because we have come to know how much our culture owes to the Orient. It is not just a source for poetical imagination. The following words evoke almost a sense of redemption, as if we are saved from our existence in the dark by the ancient treasures handed to us by the East:

[W]e know that all the most vital elements of our knowledge and civilisation,—our languages, our alphabets, our figures, our weights and measures, our art, our religion, our traditions, our very nursery stories, came to us from the East; and we must confess that but for the rays of Eastern light, whether Aryan, or Semitic, or Hamitic, that called forth the hidden germs of the dark and dreary West, Europe, now the very light of the world, might have remained for ever a barren and forgotten promontory of the primeval Asian continent.⁷¹

This is more than just sharing a common pre-Aryan language. The cradle of Western civilization is claimed to lie in the East. Without the allegedly massive transfer of culture goods Europe would have never become the 'light of the world'. This leads to a great sense of entitlement, to say the least. 'The East is ours, we are its heirs, and claim by right our share in its inheritance.'⁷² The much-praised 'Light of Asia', as the title of Edwin Arnold's famous poem runs, has apparently become 'our' light. The idea of 'westward the course of empire takes

⁶⁸ Müller, 'Address', p. 182.

⁷⁰ Müller, 'Address', p. 183.

⁷² Müller, 'Address', p. 183.

⁶⁹ Müller, 'Address', p. 182.

⁷¹ Müller, 'Address', p. 183.

its way' has a long history, dating back at least to the lines of Bishop George Berkeley's famous verse from 1726.⁷³

Besides this discourse of hegemony, there are other tendencies to be noticed in Müller's work as well. In the same address he spoke of 'strange and startling' lessons to be learned from this Eastern heritage. These are to be taught by comparative scholarship, which will not stop 'till in the end we shall be able to restore that ancient bond which unites not only the East with the West, but all the members of the human family'.⁷⁴ Notwithstanding the asserted superiority of the modern West, a deep humanist impulse is one of the driving forces of Müller's work. In the quotation above the light is not only expected to come from Aryan languages and cultures, but from other regions as well.

The choice of London as the venue of the Second Oriental Congress (its first meeting had been held in Paris in 1873) was justified by referring to the 'thousand ties, the interests of commerce, the spread of civilisation, missionary labours, and the duties of governing Oriental Dependencies of various tongues and sites' that connected England and the East.⁷⁵ There was no misunderstanding about the colonial context of this branch of scholarship. Müller envisioned even a leading role for the Colonial Office in coordinating oriental studies.⁷⁶ That does not mean that he saw the relation as a one-way street. Next to the influence of the East on the West, Western scholarship has according to Müller 'produced practical effects of the greatest moment in India'.⁷⁷ Oriental studies contributed to restoring a sense of pride in India, as it showed India's great role in the ancient history of the world. Müller quoted extensively from a piece published in the *Indian Mirror* (based in Calcutta) that claimed that the study of Sanskrit had revolutionized the position of India and its inhabitants in the world. 'We were niggers at one time. We now

⁷³ Berkeley, 'Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America' (1726).

⁷⁴ Müller, 'Address [to the Aryan Section]', p. 186.

⁷⁵ Samuel Birch, '[Presidential] Inaugural Address', in *Transactions of the Second Session of the International Congress of Orientalists* (London, September 1874), London, 1876, pp. 1–17, pp. 1f.

⁷⁶ Müller, 'Address', p. 194. Cf. David Chidester, "'Classify and Conquer". Friedrich Max Müller, Indigenous Religious Traditions, and Imperial Comparative Religion', in: Jacob K. Olupona, ed., *Beyond Primitivism. Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity*, New York and London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 71–88.

⁷⁷ Müller, 'Address', p. 188.

became brethren', its anonymous author said, and concluded that to this revolution 'we owe our national salvation'.⁷⁸ Müller spoke of an intellectual 'regeneration' that he saw happening in India at the time: young intellectuals have come to England, carrying off prizes and taking their degrees at English universities.⁷⁹ Müller himself hosted and tutored quite a few of them at his Oxford home. Their research is of excellent quality according to Müller, and he presented a long list of their accomplishments.⁸⁰

In 1882 Max Müller devoted a whole lecture series to the question 'What can India teach us?' The series was specifically meant for students of the Indian Civil Service. If he could convince only a few listeners that India deserves our intellectual attention, he would consider his mission a success.⁸¹ In contrast to other countries, Müller told his audience, the English tend to look upon India as a curious or even absurd subject of study. 'In England a student of Sanskrit is generally considered a bore.'⁸² Doubtless it takes patience and 'a certain amount of self-denial' before we can discover 'the grains of solid gold in the dark mines' of Indian history, but the effort is worthwhile.⁸³ The metaphors of digging and mining are often used by Müller, as he is mainly interested in the ancient layers of Indian society, which are supposed to prove the unique and crucial position of India in universal history.⁸⁴

This ancient history is of immense importance for our self-understanding as Europeans. We should not narrow our horizon to the history of Greeks and Romans, Saxons, and Celts, 'and leave out of sight our nearest intellectual relatives, the Aryans of India':⁸⁵ 'a certain knowledge of India [is] an essential portion of a liberal or an historical education'.⁸⁶ Müller assured his audience of Indian Civil Service students that we all come from the East and that if they approach the shores of India they should feel as if they are going to

⁷⁸ Müller, 'Address', p. 189, note 1. For the appreciation of Müller in India see also Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters. Religion and Modernity in India and Britain*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001, pp. 106–33.

⁷⁹ Müller, 'Address', p. 190.

⁸⁰ Müller, 'Address', pp. 190–1.

⁸¹ He did not convince the critic of *The Times*, who commented that one of the first lessons that a future student of the Indian Civil Service had to learn is 'to distrust native testimony' (LLB II, 116; LLA II, 122).

⁸² Müller, *India*, p. 4.

⁸³ Müller, *India*, p. 253.

⁸⁴ Müller, *India*, pp. 14f.

⁸⁵ Müller, *India*, p. 15.

⁸⁶ Müller, *India*, p. 29.

their 'old home', 'full of memories, if only [you] can read them'.⁸⁷ For Müller himself, of course, it was enough to stay in England and study the ancient Sanskrit documents. He was extremely relieved when he learned that he was not obliged to join the Prince of Wales on his trip to India in 1875–6.⁸⁸ The best we can say of Müller's words to the future civil servants in India is that he was probably carried away by his gift of imagination and sincerely believed that the recent 'discoveries' had 'revived the recollections of our childhood' and established the common bond between 'us' and the 'the so-called Niggers of India'.⁸⁹

'ARYAN'

The common bond between 'us' and 'them' was in Max Müller's view that Britons and Indians belong to the same family of 'Aryan' languages. We have to admit—as a well-known Müllerian phrase goes—that the same blood runs in the veins of the English soldier and in those of the 'dark Bengalese'.⁹⁰ The majority of present-day scholars and historians consider such propositions primarily to be part of Müller's theory of language, which discerned three language families (Aryan, Semitic, and the mixed bag of Turanian languages).⁹¹ Müller's opinions have to be kept separate—many authors agree—from contemporary racial theories, as most infamously propounded at the time by the French orientalist Arthur de Gobineau. The majority of critical voices admit that Müller finally aimed at a linguistically underpinned proof for the universal brotherhood of mankind, but at the same time scholars warn that this does not imply that men like Müller were anti-racist.⁹² Not all critics, however, put it so mildly. In an early

⁸⁷ Müller, *India*, p. 32.

⁸⁸ LLB I, 491; LLA I, 519.

⁸⁹ Müller, *India*, pp. 28 and 30.

⁹⁰ Müller, *The Languages of the Seat of War, with a Survey of the Three Families of Language, Semitic, Arian, and Turanian* (1854), second edn, London: Williams & Norgate, 1855, p. 29, quoted after Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, Berkeley etc.: University of California Press, 1997, p. 177.

⁹¹ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 2 vols, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1861–4 [first edn], vol. I, p. 32 (with a short description of the three language families), pp. 269f.

⁹² Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, p. 60; cf. George W. Stocking, Jr, *Victorian Anthropology*, New York and London: Free Press, 1987, pp. 59–63.

study of the 'origins of the Aryans', Isaac Taylor considered the term 'Aryan' (allegedly invented by Müller) 'objectionable' and spoke of Müller's 'mischievous words' about the origin of the 'Aryan family' in Central Asia.⁹³ In a more recent book Léon Poliakov disqualifies Müller in strong moral terms.⁹⁴

Much depends in cases like these on presuppositions and definitions. The indictment that the use of 'Aryan' as a synonym of 'Indo-European' leads to 'the exclusion of the Jewish intellectual tradition from European culture' is especially hard to refute.⁹⁵ Müller's use of categories—including that of race—is not particularly clear, and no doubt there is evidence in his work for an Aryan superiority claim. In 1853 he wrote:

In continual struggle with each other and with Semitic and Turanian races, these Aryan nations have become the rulers of history, and it seems to be their mission to link all parts of the world together by the chains of civilisation, commerce, and religion.⁹⁶

It is difficult to come to a verdict on the complex and sensitive subject of Müller's alleged racism. It would take a long discussion of various texts and statements given by Müller at various occasions, and even then it is no easy matter. Below I shall discuss passages which show the basics of Müller's view—at least, as far as I can judge given the

⁹³ Isaac Taylor, *The Origin of the Aryans. An Account of the Prehistoric Ethnology and Civilisation of Europe*, London: Walter Scott [1890, preface dated December 1889], pp. 2 and 4. Taylor held Müller responsible for the hypothesis that the origin of the pre-Aryan language was to be located in Central Asia—a hypothesis Müller later modified (53); cf. Susan Bayly, 'Race in Britain and India', in: Peter van der Veer and Harmut Lehmann, eds, *Nation and Religion. Perspectives on Europe and Asia*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999, pp. 71–95, p. 78.

⁹⁴ Léon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth. A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe* (1971), New York: Barnes and Noble, 1996, pp. 213–14. For a critique of Poliakov's assessment see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions. Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005, pp. 242f.; cf. George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution. A History of European Racism*, New York: Fertig, 1978, esp. pp. 42f.

⁹⁵ Pascale Rabault-Ferrière, *L'Archive des origines. Sanskrit, philologie, anthropologie dans l'Allemagne du XIX siècle*, Paris: Cerf, 2008, p. 235. Hans G. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 45, gives a much more positive evaluation of Müller in this respect.

⁹⁶ Müller, 'The Veda' (1853), in: *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I, pp. 62–80, here p. 65.

large corpus of texts, including the variations and readjustments in later work.⁹⁷

In his fine analysis of Max Müller's first public presentation in English at a session of the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science held in Oxford in 1847, Thomas Trautmann argues that Müller tried to accomplish two things at once. Müller's paper 'On the Relation of the Bengali to the Arian and Aboriginal Languages of India' (1847) aims 'to show that India is civilized and that its civilized Aryan invaders have not . . . become uncivilized by mingling with the dark race. Moreover, it draws from the history of relations of light and dark races within India a moral for the relations of light Britons to darker Indians in the present.'⁹⁸ Trautmann emphasizes the fact that Müller's proposition of the Aryan brotherhood of Britons and Indians had a strong ethical edge to it. Although the concept of race played an important role in this early text, it is evident that the linguistic aspect was key to his understanding of the terminology.

In the advice Müller was asked to write for the British officers engaged in the Crimean war, we see again that he was remarkably inclusive and looked for commonalities among those who share 'the Indo-European idioms':

We challenge the seeming stranger, and whether he answer with the lips of a Greek, a German, or an Indian, we recognize him as one of ourselves. Though the historian may shake his head, though the physiologist may doubt, and the poet scorn the idea, all must yield before the facts furnished by language. There was a time when the ancestors of the Celts, the Germans, the Slaves [*sic*], the Greeks and Italians, the Persians and Hindus, were living together beneath the same roof.⁹⁹

Before the dispersion of these people there must have been a clan, Müller lectured, which had reached a comparatively high level of civilization and religion. Furthermore, he told his large and

⁹⁷ The fact of the many editions and the many differences—also in the pagination—between them makes it very hard to document my survey in a way that can be checked. The secondary literature on this subject uses apparently (in many cases it is not clear to which particular edition the author refers) an astonishing variety of editions.

⁹⁸ Trautmann, *Aryans*, p. 175.

⁹⁹ Müller, *The Languages of the Seat of War* (1855), p. 29, quoted in Trautmann, *Aryans*, p. 177.

distinguished audience in Westminster Cathedral in 1861 that these ancient people referred to 'the Giver of Light and Life in heaven by the same name which you may still hear in the temples of Benares, in the basilicas of Rome, and in our own churches and cathedrals'.¹⁰⁰ This strand of thought propagated, no doubt, the idea of India as the cradle of European civilization, and at least indirectly played down the role of the 'Semitic and the Turanian races'.¹⁰¹ Controversial is the question of how far this glorification of the Aryan past implied anti-Jewish sentiments or an anti-Semitic stance. First we will have a closer look at the alleged racial elements in Müller's theorizing.

Notwithstanding a slight touch of ambivalence, the great historian of ethnology George W. Stocking does not hesitate to pass harsh judgement on Müller, who 'apparently' was the first to give 'the older term "Arian" the spelling associated with modern racialism' and was 'for some years' the most vocal advocate of 'Aryanism' in Britain.¹⁰² As the most popular and influential scholar of comparative linguistics in the 1850s and 1860s, Müller's work must have contributed to the spread of the term 'Aryan'.¹⁰³ He used 'Aryan' as a synonym for 'Indo-European',¹⁰⁴ but preferred the former term.¹⁰⁵ Notwithstanding Müller's sometimes floppy use of terms during the course of time, there is also evidence that from early on he used 'Aryan' foremost or even exclusively as a linguistic category. It is about language and not about who speaks the language, he wrote to Bunsen in August 1853.¹⁰⁶ Later Müller explicitly criticized the racial use of the A-word: 'Aryan,

¹⁰⁰ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 1861–4, vol. I, p. 199.

¹⁰¹ Müller, *The Languages of the Seat of War* (1855), p. 29, quoted in Trautmann, *Aryans*, p. 177.

¹⁰² Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p. 59.

¹⁰³ Taylor, *Aryans*, p. 3: 'Professor Max Müller . . . has done more than any other writer to popularise this erroneous notion among ourselves', referring to the confusion between language and race.

¹⁰⁴ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, vol. I (1861), p. 32, and vol. II (1864), p. 13.

¹⁰⁵ In a letter to Bunsen of 28 August 1853, Müller wrote that he always used the term Aryan instead of Indo-European (LLB I, 144; LLA I, 151)—a statement that is not literally true.

¹⁰⁶ Müller to Bunsen, 28 August 1853 (LLB I, 144; LLA I, 151): 'It is possible that there may be among the Persians, people or even races, whose forefathers were Turanian or Semitic, but they acquired Persian just as the Normans acquired Saxon, and the Persian language has always remained the same. If it comes to classification of languages, it does not depend on who *speaks* the languages, just as little as a botanist troubles himself to know whether a potato has grown in Europe or America' (emphasis in the original).

in scientific language, is utterly inapplicable to race. It means language and nothing but language; and if we speak of Aryan race at all, we should know that it means no more than Aryan speech.¹⁰⁷ He even admitted that he himself might have to be blamed for some of the confusion.¹⁰⁸ Basically, however, he had never wavered: 'Terms such as Aryan blood or Semitic skulls sound to me still [*sic*] as preposterous as dolichocephalic grammar.'¹⁰⁹

In his Strasbourg lecture of 1872 he expressed himself clearly, as he stated that 'it is against all rules of logic to speak, without an expressed or implied qualification, of an Aryan race, of Aryan blood, of Aryan skulls, and to attempt ethnological classification on purely linguistic grounds'. No doubt in the past he had allowed himself some freedom in this regard, but nowadays—he claimed—linguistics and ethnology have to be kept strictly apart from each other.¹¹⁰ The problem, therefore, is not so much an allegedly racial use of these terms. Calling Müller the 'spiritual grandfather' of twentieth-century theories and practices of racism¹¹¹ is anachronistic and not helpful at all. The major issues are (1) to what extent he

¹⁰⁷ F. Max Müller, *Biographies of Words, and Home of the Aryans*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1888, pp. 89f., quoted in Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 314; Müller, *Autobiography*, pp. 31f.; cf. Müller, *Three Lectures on the Science of Language*. Delivered at the Oxford University Extension Meeting with a Supplement 'My Predecessors' (first edn 1889, with supplement 1891), second edn, Chicago: Open Court, 1895, third lecture 'Thought Thicker Than Blood', pp. 43–72, where he quoted his 'letter' to Bunsen, titled 'On the Turanian Languages' (1854), to prove that he had always been against the 'mixing up of Ethnology and Philology' (45).

¹⁰⁸ F. Max Müller, 'On the Classification of Mankind by Language and Blood' (Presidential Address to the Anthropological Section of the British Association, Cardiff, 1891), in: *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I. *Recent Essays and Addresses* (1894), 1898, new impression 1902, London and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902, pp. 217–55, here pp. 231f.: 'Perhaps I was not entirely without blame, for, having once delivered my soul, I allowed myself occasionally to speak of the Aryan or the Semitic race, meaning thereby no more than the people, whoever and whatever they were, who spoke Aryan or Semitic languages.' Van den Bosch, *Müller*, p. 206. For Poliakov this form of self-criticism was too timid and he presented Müller's lecture in Strasbourg, just after the German annexation of Alsace, as a token of 'the moral impotence of scientists', *The Aryan Myth*, p. 213.

¹⁰⁹ Müller, 'Preface', *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I: *Recent Essays and Addresses* (1894), 1898, second edn, p. ix. 'Dolichocephalic' means a long head (or skull).

¹¹⁰ Müller, 'Inaugural Lecture on the Results of the Science of Language' (1872), in: *Chips of a German Workshop*, vol. IV, New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Co., 1876, pp. 199–226, p. 211. For further references see van den Bosch, *Müller*, pp. 201–7.

¹¹¹ The reference is to be found in van den Bosch, *Müller*, p. 207.

made the opposition between Aryan and Semitic (and Turanian) popular in his time, and (2) even more importantly to what degree he contributed directly or indirectly to the myth of Aryan superiority. To answer the first question more detailed research is required, but my impression is that he was influential in making this distinction current. The second question I will discuss on the basis of only one example from his voluminous work and show how the opposition Aryan–Semitic becomes a somewhat problematic tool in his treatment of the Jewish religion. Although I am generally opposed to anachronistic verdicts, it will nevertheless not be possible (and also not desirable) to exclude a present-day perspective completely in this matter.

The somewhat troubling passage I have in mind is to be found in the preface of his last series of Gifford Lectures given in 1892 before the University of Glasgow and published a year later under the title *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*. Müller added ‘Theosophy’ to the original title to ‘to restore [the name] to its proper function’, ‘expressing the highest knowledge of God within the reach of the human mind’. People may call themselves ‘theosophist’, ‘without being suspected of believing in spirits-rappings, table-turnings, or any other occult sciences and black arts’.¹¹² This is quite a power game by the old Müller, reclaiming the name for his own purposes, and distancing him from a religious stream that by itself did much to popularize Eastern thought in the West.

In the preface Müller stated the purpose of the last chapters of his book as follows:

They are to show that from a purely historical point of view Christianity is not a mere continuation or even reform of Judaism, but that, particularly in its theology or theosophy it represents a synthesis of Semitic and Aryan thought which forms its real strength and its power of satisfying not only the requirements of the heart, but likewise the postulates of reason.¹¹³

¹¹² Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, p. xvi. Müller was not really on friendly terms with Madame Blavatsky and other theosophists. Sylvia Cranston, HPB. *The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky, Founder of the Modern Theosophical Movement*, New York: Putnam, 1993, pp. 241 and 384–7. Isaac Lubelsky, *Celestial India. Madame Blavatsky and the Birth of Indian Nationalism*, Sheffield and Oakville: Equinox, 2012.

¹¹³ Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, p. ix.

The final hint, of course, is that 'Aryan thought' did decisively contribute to the rationalization of Christianity, in particular of Christian theology. The mention of the 'postulates of reason' reminds the reader of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose *Critique of Pure Reason* was translated by Müller into English and whom he considered to represent 'the perfect manhood of the Aryan mind'.¹¹⁴ The historical contact between Semitic and Aryan thought, especially in Alexandria, had been crucial here, and Müller claimed that with regard to the Greek (Aryan) contribution to early Christianity he had gone 'far beyond' the then world-famous German theologian Adolf Harnack and other scholars. The influence of Greek philosophy cannot be overrated in Müller's view, and without this influence Alexandrian theology 'would probably never have advanced beyond that of the Talmud'.¹¹⁵ This last suggestion would be considered nowadays as offensive and not doing justice to the further development of the Jewish religion. Moreover, Müller asserted that the 'doctrine of the Logos', which is 'the very life-blood of Christianity', is 'exclusively Aryan'.¹¹⁶

Müller's view of this development has a Hegelian flavour. The extremely transcendent God of Judaism is connected to human beings by the (immanent) Logos. This way the 'oneness of the objective Deity, call it Jehovah, or Zeus, or Theos, or the Supreme Being' is combined with 'the subjective Deity, call it self, or mind, or soul, or reason, or Logos'.¹¹⁷ This—what could be called 'gnostic'—strand is in Müller's view the great contribution of Christianity to the world and explains its success. The Christian religion, therefore, is

¹¹⁴ Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. In *Commemoration of the Century of its First Publication*, translated into English by F. Max Müller (1881), second edn, revised, New York: MacMillan 1915, p. lxxvii.

¹¹⁵ Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, p. x; cf. p. xv. A similar critical discussion has developed around the use of the term 'late Judaism' (*Spätjudentum*) by German scholars such as Wilhelm Bousset (1865–1920), which implies that the later history of Judaism is a form of decay and lagging behind the Christian tradition; cf. Christian Wiese, *Wissenschaft des Judentums und protestantische Theologie im wilhelminischen Deutschland. Ein Schrei ins Leere?*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999, pp. 143f. The book has been translated as: *Challenging Colonial Discourse. Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany*, Leiden etc.: Brill, 2005.

¹¹⁶ Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, p. x. Müller differentiated explicitly between theology and religion, and stressed that this train of thought refers to Christian theology, whereas the Christian religion 'drew its life from another source, from the historical personality of Jesus, and not from the Alexandrian logos' (xiv).

¹¹⁷ Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, p. 447.

superior to Judaism. Although Müller stressed again the linguistic aspects of the distinction between Aryan and Semitic in this context,¹¹⁸ presently we cannot read such passages without getting the strong impression that Judaism—and especially later Judaism—is unnecessarily degraded. The phrasing of the contribution of the Logos theology not only as superior, but as particularly Aryan, does not help either. The anti-Judaist streak in this train of thought cannot be denied. This does not make Müller a racial anti-Semite.¹¹⁹ It is surprising that in the rest of the book (and other works of Müller as well) we hardly find such depreciating comments. The distinction between Aryan and Semitic plays not a very prominent role in this context, and in the instances where the terms are used the two ‘antecedents’ of Christianity are presented as equally important.¹²⁰ At other occasions Müller did not hesitate to stress that ‘our religion has drawn many elements from Semitic sources’ and said that ‘the Old Testament is nearer to us than the Veda’.¹²¹

ORIGINS, ‘WALKING MANUSCRIPTS’, AND ORIENTALISM WITH KID GLOVES

Müller’s work is often interpreted as a search for origins—particularly the origins of language and religion. Maurice Olender claims that Müller initiated ‘a new science of origins’.¹²² This thesis can be defended, and, no doubt, it is possible to capture much of his work under this heading, especially if the concept of development—in all its varieties—is included. For Müller the discovery of texts of ancient India opened new horizons, and a longing for pure origins pervades his work. If taken in a broad sense, the themes of origin and

¹¹⁸ Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, p. 368.

¹¹⁹ Given the anti-Semitism in those days also in Oxford, it is surprising that there is to the best of my knowledge no evidence for this in Müller’s works.

¹²⁰ Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, p. 447.

¹²¹ Max Müller, ‘On the “Enormous” Antiquity of the East’, *Nineteenth Century* 29 (1891) 796–810, here p. 806.

¹²² Maurice Olender, *Les Langues du Paradis. Aryens et sémites: un couple providential*, Paris: Gallimard/Le Seuil, 1989, p. 27; Olender, *The Languages of Paradise*, p. 7; cf. also Tomoko Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime. The Quest for the Origin of Religion*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993, including a chapter on Müller’s mythology.

development (growth) open up wide and even boundless areas of research. Müller's formulations sometimes do suggest that—to give an example—the whole science of religion is chiefly concerned with the origin of religion, the genesis of gods and goddesses, and with the 'beginnings and original intentions' of rituals.¹²³ Nevertheless, one must be aware of the fact that the term 'origin' has also a more specific meaning in Müller's work and does not per se imply the whole idea of primal development.

The obvious place to look for the meaning that Müller attached to the term 'origin' is his Hibbert *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion*, which he held in the chapter house of Westminster Abbey in 1878.¹²⁴ The book starts with the question: 'How is it that we have a religion?'¹²⁵ The title of the first chapter, 'The Perception of the Infinite', more or less gives the answer that the origin is to be found in a human presentiment or sense of the infinite. Although this thesis will be 'illustrated by the religions of India' (as the subtitle of book makes explicit), basically the 'demonstration' of the origin of religion as presented in the first chapter is—what we would nowadays call—a piece of philosophy of religion. The perusal of these religions leads to the same conclusion that the 'deepest foundation of all religion' lies in the fact that man could not be 'satisfied with a knowledge of finite sensuous objects' and sensed a world beyond the finite.¹²⁶ Of course, the book also talks about phases and developments in religion, but the perception of the infinite is the 'solid rock' of religion on which all is built:

When our excavations among the ruins of the Vedic literature had once carried us to that solid rock, we went on digging, in order to see whether some at least of the oldest pillars erected on that rock might still be discovered, and some of the vaults and arches laid free which supported the later temples of the religions of India.¹²⁷

¹²³ F. Max Müller, 'The Principles of the Science of Religion, or Comparative Theology', in: Edmund Buckley, *Universal Religion. A Course of Lessons, Historical and Scientific, on the Various Faiths of the World*, prepared by The University Association, Chicago: The University Association, n.d. [1897], pp. 22f.

¹²⁴ F. Max Müller, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by the Religions of India*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1878.

¹²⁵ Müller, *Lectures on the Origin*, p. 1.

¹²⁶ Müller, *Lectures on the Origin*, p. 374.

¹²⁷ Müller, *Lectures on the Origin*, p. 374.

The favourite archaeological metaphors should not obscure the fact that this 'digging' is done in the world of texts and not in the world of material objects.

Although Müller admitted that 'historical documents of a religion never carry us very far',¹²⁸ as its first beginnings are not documented, he claimed a special position for the ancient Sanskrit texts of the Veda. The reason he gave was that they were handed down by trustworthy oral practices, 'by memory kept under the strictest discipline'.¹²⁹ This leads to the sweeping statement that these texts 'have been handed down to us with such accuracy that there is hardly a various reading in the proper sense of the word, or even an uncertain accent, in the whole of the Rig-Veda'.¹³⁰ Müller told his audience how he actually used this oral tradition for his edition of the *Rig-Veda*, and he quoted a letter from an Indian informant who wrote to him that he was 'collecting a few of our walking Rig-Veda MSS, taking your text as the basis'.¹³¹ Referring to native religious specialists as 'walking manuscripts' is a form of textualizing people that I could never have imagined. The impact of this message is dramatically enhanced by presenting it as an extract from a letter, written by 'native scholar, Shankar Pandurang'—a form of ventriloquizing, which suggests that the colonial subject is talking in his own right, whereas he is actually subjected to imperial scientific authority.

This last criticism is not meant to attribute bad faith to Müller; his intentions were sincere, I believe, but his speaker's position (as it is technically called) is that of the oriental scholar, who uses and frames his informants as he likes on the firm basis of his privileged status as an Oxford don and member and representative of the British empire. His benevolence reinforces his superiority. The passage which follows the above quotation from Pandurang is also telling in this respect. The 'walking manuscript' turns out to be a half-naked Hindu:

Think of that half-naked Hindu, repeating under an Indian sky the sacred hymns which have been handed down for three or four thousand

¹²⁸ Müller, *Lectures on the Origin*, pp. 128f.

¹²⁹ Müller, *Lectures on the Origin*, p. 153.

¹³⁰ Müller, *Lectures on the Origin*, p. 167.

¹³¹ Müller, *Lectures on the Origin*, p. 157; cf. Max Müller, *My Autobiography*, New York: Scribner's Sons, 1901, p. 193, where he stated that 'manuscripts were never considered in India as of very high authority; they were always over-ruled by the oral traditions of a certain school'.

years by oral tradition. If writing had never been invented, if printing had never been invented, if India had never been occupied by England, that young Brahman, and hundreds and thousands of his countrymen, would probably have been engaged just the same in learning and saying by heart the simple prayers first uttered on the Sarasvati, and the other rivers of the Penjab . . . And here are we, under the shadow of Westminster Abbey, in the very zenith of the intellectual life of Europe, nay, of the whole world, listening in our minds to the same sacred hymns, trying to understand them (and they are sometimes very difficult to understand), and hoping to learn from them some of the deepest secrets of the human heart which is the same everywhere, however widely we ourselves may be separated from each other by space and time, by colour and creed.¹³²

In this passage a very wide bridge is spanned between an ancient oral tradition in the East and the zenith of intellectual life in the West, between the holy rivers of India and Westminster Abbey, one of the great icons of British ecclesiastical power in 1878—by invoking the inventions of writing and printing, on the one hand, and the colonization of India, on the other. Power and knowledge are in a superficially innocent way connected. Orientalism with kid gloves, followed by a velvet inversion, as Müller states that—notwithstanding the spatial and temporal, and racial and religious distance—‘we’ try to learn from ‘them’, on the basis of a shared humanness. I could again add a digression about the invoked relation between the metropolis and the colony, the subterranean display of power and authority, and the reigning grammars of identity and difference, but the text also expresses in my opinion a sincere wish to connect with Eastern tradition and to convince his audience, which was not per se in favour of the views presented in these lectures, that somehow we share things with the dark-skinned Indians who say their millennium-old prayers on the banks of the rivers of India.

The study of the sacred books of India offers in Müller’s view a much better opportunity to study ancient ‘strata’ (one of his favourite terms) of religion than ethnological research of the ‘savages of Africa, America, and Australia’.¹³³ Müller devoted a whole lecture to refute the claim that fetishism is the oldest or most primitive form of religion. In his view religious history started with an intuition of

¹³² Müller, *Lectures on the Origin*, p. 158.

¹³³ Müller, *Lectures on the Origin*, pp. 129 and 131.

God, which was an implicit form of monotheism—sometimes called ‘henotheism’,¹³⁴ indicating that there existed more gods and goddesses, but that the believers focused their religion on one particular god. This stage was followed by a development of polytheism, which gradually gave rise to exclusive monotheism.¹³⁵ The key argument why religion could not have started with fetishism thus is that the worship of objects cannot explain how man came to intuit the infinite and was not satisfied ‘with a knowledge of finite sensuous objects’.¹³⁶ We neither find traces of fetishism in the early documents in India according to Müller, but that is only an illustration of his core explanation that the infinite is ‘really implied in the earliest manifestations of our sensuous knowledge’.¹³⁷ The ‘really’ may suggest that this ‘explanation’ was not as convincing as Müller would have liked it.

To summarize: Müller claimed that the edited texts—in particular the trustworthy Indian texts—permit the scholar to go further back in history than the ethnographical study of so-called primitive people. Nevertheless, even the texts don’t show the ‘first beginnings’, as documentation only starts as a religion ‘has assumed consistency and importance’.¹³⁸ History in the proper documented sense of the word begins late, Müller argued, and vast periods are unknown to us. Therefore, the idea ‘that the Veda or the Old Testament could reveal to us the very beginnings of religious thought’ is unfounded.¹³⁹ Although Müller did not use the term ‘religious apriori’ and at times was sceptical about the use of the word ‘faculty’ in this context, the origin or basis of

¹³⁴ Müller’s use of the term ‘henotheism’ with reference to early Indian religion is much criticized in recent literature; Alex Michaels, *Hinduism. Past and Present*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. xiv, 27.

¹³⁵ For a discussion of this development see van den Bosch, Müller, pp. 326–41, 347–56.

¹³⁶ Müller, *Lectures on the Origin*, p. 374.

¹³⁷ Müller, *Lectures on the Origin*, p. 38, where Müller also introduced the image of a man ‘living on high mountains, or in a vast plain, or on a coral island without hills and streams, surrounded on all sides by the endless expanse of the ocean, and screened above by the unfathomable blue of the sky’, who from the sensual images formed some idea of the infinite. This kind of imaginary is in line with Müller’s preference for solar gods who allegedly stand at the beginning of the religious history of mankind.

¹³⁸ Müller, *Lectures on the Origin*, pp. 128f.

¹³⁹ Müller, ‘Preface’, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I: *Recent Essays and Addresses* (1894), second edn, 1898, p. xii.

religion, which was founded in the perception of the infinite, was for him an anthropological fact. 'Theology begins with anthropology.'¹⁴⁰

Müller's concept of religious development implies also a notion of decay. Religion is 'liable to corruption', and 'in one sense the history of religion might be called a slow corruption of their primitive purity'.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless it would be wrong to consider religious history solely in terms of decay, as Müller sees progress as well, and has high hopes for the final development of religion. The edition of the *Sacred Books of the East* has established the facts, which have to be understood in the same way as we study the 'geological annals of the earth'.¹⁴² Frequently Müller used geological comparisons to make his point that 'if we but dig deep enough', we shall find the 'indestructible granite of the human soul', that is the presentiment of the infinite.¹⁴³

About the best way to describe this history Max Müller was not always completely sure. Depending on the point of view the same development could be captured both in terms of progression and decay, as he explained in a letter to the Duke of Argyll from 29 January 1875:

There seem to be development and degradation running side by side wherever we touch the history of the world, and what seems improvement from one point of view, seems degradation from another. Thus polytheism is an improvement on monotheism, or, as I call it, Henotheism, as long as monotheism represents only a belief in one god, not in the One God. The belief in one god which has not yet passed through the negation of other gods, is as it were a belief in one accidental god, and compared with it, polytheism, or a belief in many single gods, is richer, fuller, more perfect, as enabling man to feel a divine presence in more and more manifestations, and at last, everywhere. From that last stage the transition into real monotheism is natural, almost inevitable. Now in one sense, Henotheism may seem more perfect than polytheism, for it does not purposely exclude monotheism—monotheism is contained in it, but the One God is not conceived distinctly, till the idea of one god has passed through two negations.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Müller, *Lectures on the Origin*, p. 38.

¹⁴¹ Müller, *Lectures on the Origin*, pp. 66f.

¹⁴² Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, pp. vi and 542.

¹⁴³ Müller, 'Preface', *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I. (1867), pp. vii–xxxiii, p. xxxi.

¹⁴⁴ LLB I, 479; LLA I, 506.

The basic intuition of the infinite—in earlier texts also called the intuition of God—is neither monotheistic nor polytheistic in his view.¹⁴⁵ The Hegelian touch in this passage is evident,¹⁴⁶ as is Müller's flexible way of framing his views. Evolutionary elements can be easily combined with Romantic notions of decay. Both are needed in the actual work of comparative religion and, of course, provided a firm basis for his own religious ideal, which is to be discussed in the fifth chapter of this book. Needless to say that much of the later accretions—superstitions and malpractices—have to be removed again by the able scholar of religion to build on the solid rock of human faith.

¹⁴⁵ Müller, 'Semitic Monotheism' (1860), in: Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I (1867), pp. 341–79, p. 352.

¹⁴⁶ Van den Bosch, *Müller*, p. 348, pointed to the possible influence of Müller's teacher Schelling in applying this dialectical scheme.

4

Methods

On us a new light has come. I do not for a moment hesitate to say that the discovery of the Comparative Method in philology, in mythology—let me add in politics and history and the whole range of human thought—marks a stage in the progress of the human mind at least as great and memorable as the revival of Greek and Latin learning.

(E. A. Freeman)¹

It is striking how often the comparative method and sacred books are bracketed together by Friedrich Max Müller. In his introduction to the series he wrote that we need ‘complete and thoroughly faithful translations’ of the *Sacred Books of the East* to have ‘a solid foundation’ for the comparative study of religions.² In his view comparison is the golden road to knowledge. His most famous saying in this respect is that ‘all higher knowledge is acquired by comparison, and rests on comparison’.³ Comparison, however, is more than just a method of comparing, as it stands for an evidence-based way of investigation *tout court*. The comparative approach ‘really means that our researches are

¹ Edward E. Freeman, ‘The Unity of History’, in: Freeman, *Comparative Politics*. Six Lectures Read Before the Royal Institution in January and February, 1873, with ‘The Unity of History’ (The Rede Lecture Read Before the University of Cambridge, 29 May 1872), London: MacMillan, 1873, pp. 296–339, pp. 301f.; cf. p. 1: ‘The establishment of the Comparative Method of study has been the greatest intellectual achievement of our time. It has carried light and order into whole branches of human knowledge which before were shrouded in darkness and confusion.’

² Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879, second edn 1900, p. xi.

³ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1873, p. 12. New edition: London and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1899.

based on the widest evidence that can be obtained, on the broadest inductions that can be grasped by the human mind'.⁴

The introduction of the comparative approach was seen in the 1850s and 1860s as a breakthrough in the study of man.⁵ Finally, disciplines such as linguistics, history, law, political economy, ethnology, and the study of religions—sometimes referred to simply by the term 'comparative religion'—got a firm 'scientific' basis. In the study of language the comparative approach, according to Müller, put an end to the 'philological somnambulism' of previous times.⁶ A sense of excitement and common purpose holds sway over fields hitherto very disparate. In their path-breaking book on 'that noble science of politics' in nineteenth-century Britain, Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow point to the 'German historical impulse' behind this excitement, and indeed in some cases—and Max Müller is a prominent one—the comparative method is closely related to the historical method.⁷

HISTORICAL VERSUS THEORETICAL: A GRAND DISTINCTION

In a somewhat hidden but revealing passage in his programme of the *Sacred Books of the East*, Müller pointed out that at the moment there existed 'a very keen interest in questions connected with the origin, the growth, and decay of religion'. At first sight this fact seems to be inductive to raising money for the edition, but factually it did not, as this interest is 'theoretic rather than historical'.⁸ Behind this matter-of-fact observation lurks a deep methodological rift between Müller and the theoreticians, who are to be found 'among psychologists and theologians'. According to Müller theory or abstract reasoning⁹

⁴ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, p. 12.

⁵ Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics. A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 209.

⁶ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, p. 12.

⁷ Collini, Winch, and Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics*, p. 210.

⁸ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xlii; cf. p. xi, where Müller evoked the 'dawn of the religious consciousness of man' in lyrical terms.

⁹ Cf. Max Müller, *Natural Religion* (Gifford Lectures, Glasgow, 1888), London and New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1889, p. 196.

will never solve the issues at stake here. Only a thorough study of documents will shed light on 'the *actual* growth of religious thought'.¹⁰ Empirical study of texts is opposed to armchair speculation.

There is a positivist element in Müller's emphasis on the necessity to face the facts, 'such as they are', in a truly historical study of ancient religions.¹¹ This implies the hard work of copying and collating ancient manuscripts and 'toiling through volumes of tedious commentary'.¹² This type of labour defined Müller's own life and scholarship. In his view comparing is part and parcel of the historical approach. Comparisons are made with a view to history, and this is a big leap forwards, compared (*excusez le mot*) to the old-fashioned approach, where the 'vaguest similarity in the sound and the meaning of words was taken to be a sufficient criterion for testing their origin and relationship'.¹³

At the occasion of the conclusion of the first series of the *Sacred Books of the East* in 1884 Max Müller published an article for a general audience in the literary magazine *The Nineteenth Century*. Notwithstanding his professed preference for the use of the term 'sacred books' to refer to 'the forgotten Bibles of Buddhists or Fire-Worshippers', Müller's contribution was titled 'Forgotten Bibles'.¹⁴ The general reader expected probably an exposition of what was achieved—the great editions prepared by Müller and his colleagues and the results which would be gained for our understanding of religion from a careful study of these sacred texts. What Müller presented, however, was for a large part a lengthy discussion of the 'old antagonism between the historical and theoretical schools of thought'.¹⁵ He claimed that the funding for the series was rejected at an earlier stage. The purported reason was that the texts would bring us no more insight into the history of religion, as it was already

¹⁰ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xlii (emphasis added); cf. the section 'Origins, "Walking Manuscripts", and Orientalism with Kid Gloves' in Chapter 3 of this book.

¹¹ Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xix.

¹² Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xi.

¹³ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, p. 13. Language was for Müller the most basic category for comparison. Therefore, many of his examples are taken from the field of linguistics.

¹⁴ F. Max Müller, 'Forgotten Bibles', *Nineteenth Century* 15 (1884) 1004–22, p. 1004; reprinted in Müller, *Last Essays*. Second Series: Essays on the Science of Religion, London etc.: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901, pp. 1–35.

¹⁵ Müller, 'Forgotten Bibles', p. 1005.

evident through which stages religion had developed from fetishism to positivism. It is beyond doubt that in the 1870s this type of argumentation was used, but I find it hard to imagine that it really played a big role in the process of raising money for the series, because in the circles in which Müller moved the respect for ancient texts was still abundant.¹⁶

In a sarcastic tone Müller spoke about the wonderful change that the theoretical school had brought us over the last thirty years. He contrasted the 'facts' that might be found in the *Sacred Books of the East* with the 'infallible and incontrovertible' theories of his opponents, who allegedly claimed that if anything new was to be discovered, 'it was not from dusty historical documents, but from psychological experiments, or possibly from the records of living savages'.¹⁷ This sort of objection to his plans must have grieved him very much. Müller framed the opposition he met in terms of the antagonism between two schools of thought, which is played out in various fields of research. In his youth—he went on—the historical school was rising to power, and German scholars such as Barthold Georg Niebuhr, Friedrich Karl von Savigny, and Franz Bopp had made a case for an understanding of the present by studying the past. Müller claimed that by the 1880s the theoretical school had taken the lead at least in England, where it is best known for 'its eloquent advocacy of the principles of evolution'. 'It is also characterised as *constructive*, or as reasoning *a priori*.'¹⁸

The antagonism is painted with very broad strokes by Müller, and basically he reiterated his old controversies in the fields of the study of language, religion, and the origin of man. He claimed, for instance, that it is wrong to infer from the fact that 'at the present moment some savages' worship inanimate objects that 'five thousand or ten thousand years ago' religion must have begun as a form of fetishism.¹⁹ Let us wait till we at least know their languages, Müller said, and he adduced evidence of such study as well. Scholars such as Bishop Callaway and Dr Hahn in South Africa and Horatio Hale in North

¹⁶ Neither is it clear on which particular occasion the funding would have been rejected. Perhaps Müller used this 'example' just to strengthen his case.

¹⁷ Müller, 'Forgotten Bibles', p. 1005.

¹⁸ Müller, 'Forgotten Bibles', p. 1006 (emphases in the original). A great part of this discussion is included in Müller, *Natural Religion*, 1889, lecture VIII. Pages 1006–11 of the article run parallel to pages 203–20 of the book.

¹⁹ Müller, 'Forgotten Bibles', p. 1008.

America 'do not shrink from the drudgery of learning the dialects spoken by savage tribes', and they don't jump to conclusions concerning the origin of religion on the basis of their work.²⁰ In this context Müller's general point of view is more important than his detailed exposition of the debates with opponents such as Charles Darwin, who is said to combine the best of the two schools.²¹ Darwin's defence of 'the transition of the cries of animals into the language of man', however, is completely 'hopeless'.²² Such attempts to salvage an extremely influential opponent and to criticize him at the same time bring us not much further in understanding Müller's exact point of view.

Müller knew that to convince his readers he could not simply dismiss the theoreticians, but had to acknowledge their merits. His strategy was to set forth the advantages of the historical approach at the most general level, claiming that it enabled us much better than the theoretical approach to handle 'the great problems of our age'.²³ This massive claim was substantiated by painstaking discussions of particular scholarly and social issues. Asking factual questions and answering these as precisely as possible is, according to Müller, much more useful than bringing forward theories, which are not per se convincing. This way both schools are not so much characterized by precise methodological differences as by their general outlook. The historical school is digging for facts and requires the hard labour of language study, whereas the theoretical school formulates theories 'within the lines of limits of an infallible system' (to quote one of the more harsh statements),²⁴ as if the theoreticians did not care for factual evidence at all.

²⁰ Müller, 'Forgotten Bibles', pp. 1010f. Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, p. xiii, referred to Bishop Henry Callaway, *Unkulunkulu, or The Tradition of Creation as Existing Among the Amazulu and Other Tribes of South Africa* (n.d.); cf. David Chidester, "'Classify and Conquer". Friedrich Max Müller, Indigenous Religious Traditions, and Imperial Comparative Religion', in: Jacob K. Olupona, ed., *Beyond Primitivism. Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity*, New York and London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 71–88.

²¹ Müller, 'Forgotten Bibles', p. 1016.

²² Müller, 'Forgotten Bibles', p. 1017. The emergence of general concepts cannot be explained according to Müller from onomatopoeia and similar phenomena. Müller hardly referred to specific authors. One of the very few he mentioned was the German biologist Lorenz Oken (1779–1851), who (erroneously) taught that the transition from inorganic to organic nature is merely a matter of development (1014).

²³ Müller, 'Forgotten Bibles', p. 1017.

²⁴ Müller, 'Forgotten Bibles', p. 1012.

His opponents will not have been too impressed by Müller's way of framing the antagonism between the two 'schools'. Interestingly enough, Müller did not leave it at this, but at the end of his article he returned to its original subject, the 'forgotten Bibles'. If the historical method proceeds 'from knot to knot, from antecedent to antecedent', what could be 'the use of the Sacred Books of the East for the religious problems of the West'?²⁵ Without presenting the often used argument that the Orient is the cradle of Western civilization, Müller answered that history does not necessarily evolve in a straight line, 'but runs in many parallel branches'.²⁶ The implicit assumption that contemporary scholarship has established new connections in global history and thereby opened new avenues of investigation paves the way for the blunt assertion that the 'distinguishing character of all research in our century is comparison'.²⁷ Without further ado, Müller stressed the—comparative—lessons of history, above all that other people also claim to 'have a Bible'. In very general terms Müller conveyed his message that the comparative study of Eastern religions is beneficial to the understanding of our own religion.

COMPARISON

The historical method—in this vague, broad sense—is connected by Müller with the idea of comparison. How these approaches are exactly related is not particularly well articulated in his article 'Forgotten Bibles'. The title, however, obliquely refers to the (comparative) idea of 'other' bibles, which were (re)discovered, established, and made accessible by the laborious work of philologists and historians. What idea had Müller of comparison? Although he stressed the importance of comparing for the sciences (including what nowadays are called the humanities) on various occasions, one looks in vain for a more systematic discussion of this approach in his work.

As far as I can judge, the idea or method of comparison evolved for Müller primarily out of the comparative study of languages. Throughout his work he focused very much on the comparison of words and

²⁵ Müller, 'Forgotten Bibles', p. 1021.

²⁶ Müller, 'Forgotten Bibles', p. 1021.

²⁷ Müller, 'Forgotten Bibles', p. 1021.

particularly on the names of deities and mythological figures. In his influential *Lectures on the Science of Language*, he explained that the purpose of this new endeavour is not to study various languages in their particularities, but 'to know language' as such: 'we want to know its origin, its nature, its laws; and it is only in order to arrive at that knowledge that we collect, arrange, and classify all the facts of language that are within our reach'.²⁸ This sounds like hard science, as indeed it was in his view.

In his first course on 'comparative philology' from 1851, Müller stated that like geology or astronomy it is a 'natural science', which tries to find out, 'by comparative analysis, the laws, the nature and the development of language'.²⁹ By comparing words and in particular the radical elements of language ('the roots') the scholar can trace their genealogy.³⁰ This makes good sense in his view, because—just as the material world did not change substantially over the course of history—'nothing new has ever been added to the substance of language'. There have only been changes of form, but 'no new root or radical has ever been invented by later generations'.³¹ This conviction explains the fact that Müller favoured geological metaphors of digging and exploring deep layers of language to describe his search for the development and origin of human thought. By comparing different strata in different languages the scholar is even able to construe missing links and stages of which we have no direct evidence.

However, there was more to Müller's 'comparative method' than 'hard science'. Other assumptions were involved as well, and these pertained to Müller's *Weltanschauung*, which was formed by German idealism and romanticism. The 'softer' aspects of Müller's view are evident in his 'epoch-making' treatise on comparative mythology, first published in the *Oxford Essays* from 1856.³² It takes some time

²⁸ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 2 vols, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1861–4 [first edn], vol. I, pp. 24f.

²⁹ Müller, 'First Course of Lectures on Comparative Philology at Oxford 1851', MS. Eng. D. 2353, chapter 2, quoted in van den Bosch, *Müller*, p. 51.

³⁰ Cf. Chapter 1, section 'Most Controversial Subjects'.

³¹ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, vol. I, p. 27.

³² Müller, 'Comparative Mythology' (1856), in: Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. II, London: Longman, Green, and Co., 1867, pp. 1–143. The essay is also included in the second, substantially revised edition of his chips: *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. IV: *Essays on Mythology and Folk-Lore* (1895), 1898, new impression 1900, London and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900, pp. 1–154. *The Times*, 29 October 1900, used the term 'epoch-making' when referring to this essay.

before the reader is able to understand the point of Müller's verbose and longwinded beginning of this essay. Müller claimed that presently 'we' see man as 'a brother among brothers, a member of a class, of a genus, or a kind, and therefore intelligible only with reference to his equals'.³³ The whole notion of 'mankind' and the idea of a 'universal history', however, were according to Müller unknown to the ancient Greeks. In Müller's view both nature and history reflect the 'laws and thoughts of Divine wisdom'.³⁴ Therefore, 'there is nothing irrational in either history or nature', and the implication is that—contrary to what the ancient Greeks thought themselves—we have to understand their myths from this modern point of view.³⁵ Even if these stories look strange and foreign at first sight, we must realize that 'their sufferings are our sufferings' and 'their joys our joys'.³⁶ Against the background assumption of some sort of providential design, which unites all human history, this conviction of a common human destiny leads implicitly to the (methodological) ideal of a sympathetic way of comparing that aims to find 'the thread which connects the present with the past'.³⁷

The essay on comparative mythology reveals in a perhaps somewhat naïve and not too sophisticated manner deep-felt moral intuitions, which Müller will not abandon for the rest of his life. First, he believes that human language 'forms an uninterrupted chain from the first dawn of human history to our own times'. Second, this history is according to Müller from the very beginning a history of human beings (endowed with language and thought). Therefore, he rejected (a couple years before Darwin's *Origin of Species* appeared in 1859) 'the idea of a humanity emerging slowly from the depths of an animal brutality'.³⁸ Third, Müller maintained a teleological view of history,

³³ Müller, 'Comparative Mythology', p. 5.

³⁴ Müller, 'Comparative Mythology', p. 6.

³⁵ Cf. the section 'Most Controversial Theories' in Chapter 1 on Müller's life and work.

³⁶ Müller, 'Comparative Mythology', p. 7.

³⁷ Müller, 'Comparative Mythology', p. 7.

³⁸ Müller, 'Comparative Mythology', p. 8; cf. F. Max Müller, 'On the Classification of Mankind by Language and Blood' (Presidential Address to the Anthropological Section of the British Association, Cardiff, 1891), in: *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I: *Recent Essays and Addresses* (1894), 1898, new impression 1902, London and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902, pp. 217–55, p. 220, where Müller looked back at the year 1847, when Bunsen discussed at the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science 'the question of the possible descent of man from

including its monogenetic beginnings, stipulating a ‘free and simply agglutinative grammar’ that preceded the particularities of all (Turanian, Semitic, and Aryan) forms of speech.³⁹ As Müller was a versatile thinker and scholar, the ways he expressed these convictions varied to a considerable extent. He also tried to accommodate the views of his opponents, which could easily lead to seemingly unclear and sometimes contradictory assertions. But it is beyond any doubt that these religious–humanist principles were of paramount importance to him as a Lutheran Christian.

The idea and method of comparison were embedded in these principles, especially in the idea of a shared universal human history. The thesis that comparison was possible and meaningful on the basis of a shared history has as its flip side that comparison can establish hitherto unknown connections in history. The ‘most important discovery which has been made during the nineteenth century with respect to the ancient history of mankind’ is according to Müller the following equation: Sanskrit DYAUSH-PITAR = Greek ZEUS PATHR = Latin JUPITER = Old Norse TYR. This implies not only that ‘our own ancestors and the ancestors of Homer and Cicero spoke the same language as the people of India . . . but it implies and proves that they all had once the same faith’.⁴⁰ This way the study of language had established a form of universal history that connects the East with the West.

Müller thus preferred an informed way of comparison, which addresses real—historically validated—similarities. Although he admitted the legitimacy of other forms of comparison as well, as we will see in the next section, he was primarily interested in bringing together phenomena that were somehow historically related to each other. Superficial similarities are not enough to reach validated conclusions. From the fact, for instance, that mythological names from different

some unknown animal’. On Bunsen’s views see John Burrow, ‘The Uses of Philology in Victorian Britain’, in: Robert Robson, ed., *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain. Essays in Honour of George Kitson Clark*, London: Bell and Sons, 1967, pp. 180–204, here pp. 193–8.

³⁹ Müller, ‘Comparative Mythology’, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Müller, ‘The Lesson of “Jupiter”’ (1885), in: *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. IV: *Essays on Mythology and Folk-Lore* (1895), 1898, new impression 1900, London and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900, pp. 368–411, p. 368; cf. F. Max Müller, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by the Religions of India*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1878, pp. 276f.

cultures are (nearly) identical it is not allowed to infer that they have the same origin, particularly not if the names occur in languages that are not cognate.⁴¹ If we analyse how the comparative method was actually used by Müller, we see that it mainly concerned words from various families of related languages. From the fact that, for instance, Greek has in some cases preserved a more primitive root than Sanskrit, Müller postulated a pre-Aryan language, which is the birth ground of 'modern Aryan dialects, such as Sanskrit, Zend, Greek, Latin, Gothic, Slavonic, and Celtic'.⁴² To be meaningful a comparison has to be made within the pale of cognate languages or phenomena.

FORMS OF COMPARISON

On various occasions Müller introduced a further specification of what could be called different ways or levels or even schools or branches of comparison. His terminology varies, but most of the time he discerned the following three types: the 'etymological', 'analogical', and 'psychological' approach, which were practised especially in linguistics and mythology. Sometimes the psychological or ethnopsychological (*völkerpsychologische*) or 'anthropological' approach is not listed, and only two comparative (taken in the broad sense) approaches are distinguished.⁴³ The etymological approach broadly speaking aims at comparing names and myths of cognate languages and establishing genealogical lineages and, if possible, identities.⁴⁴ Therefore, it is sometimes called the 'genealogical' method, following the development and transmission 'of religious ideas, as it were, from son to father, from pupil to teacher'.⁴⁵ This is, of course, not always

⁴¹ F. Max Müller, 'Preface', in: *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. IV: *Essays on Mythology and Folk-Lore* (1895), 1898, new impression 1900, London and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900, p. xxv.

⁴² Müller, 'Comparative Mythology', p. 20; cf. p. 19.

⁴³ F. Max Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion* (Gifford Lectures, Glasgow, 1892), London and New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1893, pp. vi–vii.

⁴⁴ F. Max Müller, *Natural Religion* (Gifford Lectures, Glasgow, 1888) (1889), second edn, London and New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1892, p. 426: 'its object is . . . to identify . . . names, and the persons to whom they belong'.

⁴⁵ Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, p. vii. This is one of the few instances where Müller explains the various 'comparative' approaches with regard to religion.

possible, and then the analogical method comes into play. The analogical method compares languages, myths, and religions 'springing up independently in various places'.⁴⁶

If we take a closer look at Müller's explanation of the analogical method, it seems to be more restricted than the above formulation of 'springing up independently' suggests. Whereas the etymological method, for instance, tries to identify the names of two deities, by tracing the two different names back to the same original name, the analogical method is comparative in the strict sense of the word.⁴⁷ It is interested in 'broad mythological outlines', by which Müller mainly meant common motives in various traditions.⁴⁸ This and other formulations still suggest a very wide net of comparison, but at other defining moments the approach is limited (again) to 'myths of cognate languages'.⁴⁹ '[A]fter having shown how many different names and personifications may attach themselves to the principal objects of mythological thought, such as the sun, the moon, the sky, the earth, fire, and water, storms and lightning, and in how many different ways the same story may be told of these polynomous objects, it [the analogical method] proceeds to a comparison of myths which, though not identical, must have sprung from the same common stratum.'⁵⁰

Only at the third level of psychological comparison is the—relatively safe—domain of related languages left behind. Here the scholar takes the 'mythologies of all mankind' into consideration and may discover 'surprising coincidences' in traditions, which are not connected by any genealogical or linguistic relationship.⁵¹ This approach becomes still more interesting in Müller's view, if it leads to 'the discovery of general motives', which can only account for the similarities that are found. This is the preferred terrain of *Völkerpsychologie*, which helps us to understand the essence of man. Much more could be said about the tripartite division of comparison—especially in relation to the study of language—but the above shows the broad range of this approach and the various meanings that can be attached to it and which are not always made explicit by Müller. The most important steps are expected to be made by comparing

⁴⁶ Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, p. vii.

⁴⁷ Müller, *Natural Religion*, second edn, p. 448. Sometimes the analogical method is called the comparative method (in the strict sense).

⁴⁸ Müller, *Natural Religion*, p. 485.

⁴⁹ Müller, *Natural Religion*, p. 426.

⁵⁰ Müller, *Natural Religion*, pp. 426f.

⁵¹ Müller, *Natural Religion*, pp. 427f.

related phenomena, but the ultimate goal, which may be reached only in the distant future, is to come to the 'solution of all psychological, logical, and metaphysical problems'.⁵²

AREAS OF COMPARISON

Müller's preferred fields of comparison are language, mythology, and religion. Language is the most basic domain, as comparative linguistics has discovered and established new historical relationships between languages, especially within families of cognate languages, such as the Semitic and Aryan branches of speech. As far as the closely related area of mythology is concerned, Müller took myths to be the creation of a rich imagination, where language so to speak takes over and seduces man to take the word for the thing, the quality for the substance, and the *nomen* for the *numen*.⁵³ In the mythopoeic phase of history words which originally referred to natural things were reified and deified, and this is the main reason why Müller infamously called mythology a disease of language. The key for analysis lies in the hands of comparative linguistics.⁵⁴ Once we realize that mythology is only an ancient form of language, comparative linguistics will show the source of the confusion, which lies in the fact that a qualifying word (*quale*) or attribute has been taken in mythopoeic imagination for a substance (*quid*).⁵⁵ Müller's use of terminology in his essay on comparative mythology is rather loose, but it is clear that he referred to what he saw as a process of reification, deification, and personification (attributing anthropomorphic features) in religious history, which in his view has a temporary character and will and must be overcome by modern man.

⁵² Müller, *Natural Religion*, p. 423.

⁵³ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, vol. II, p. 580.

⁵⁴ Müller, 'Comparative Mythology', p. 73; cf. Müller, 'The Lesson of "Jupiter"' (1885), in: *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. IV: *Essays on Mythology and Folk-Lore* (1895), 1898, new impression, London and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900, pp. 368–411, p. 383; cf. p. 395: 'I look on these etymologies and on the equations between the names of the deities in different cognate languages as the true capital of comparative mythology'.

⁵⁵ Müller, 'Comparative Mythology', p. 143.

The third major field to be studied by the comparative method was religion. His famous lectures on the science of religion given at the Royal Institution in 1870 'were intended as an introduction to a comparative study of the principal religions of the world'.⁵⁶ Comparison is hailed by Müller as the major breakthrough in modern scholarship, but one looks in vain for a detailed explanation of the new approach. Instead, Müller eloquently addressed the recent progress in the study of language, which was made possible by comparative research. Goethe's saying that 'he who knows one language, knows none' also applies to religion. There are many pious practitioners of faith, who cannot explain 'what religion really is'.⁵⁷ The level of (the practice of) religion is thus clearly distinguished from the (professional) study of religion, which can only be meaningfully done by experts. The basis of the work of these scholars are 'the materials', which now have become accessible through text editions and translations.⁵⁸

Most of the time Müller spoke of comparison as the thing that made modern scholarship possible. Much work still has to be done, but the comparative study of religions will also conquer the field of theology, and the science of religion will make the old books seem 'as antiquated, as strange, as unaccountable as the works of Vossius, Hemsterhuys, Valckenaer, and Lennep, by the side of Bopp's Comparative Grammar'.⁵⁹ Müller described here what in modern terms is called a paradigm shift, by which the old practices and assumptions of normal science are to a great extent revolutionized and made obsolete.⁶⁰ The disparate collection of materials hardly deserves in Müller's view the name of 'science'. In his lectures on the science of language, he drew the comparison with botany and claimed that only by the discovery of 'the unity of an organic system' beneath the singular facts

⁵⁶ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, p. v.

⁵⁷ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, p. 16.

⁵⁸ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, pp. 22f.

⁵⁹ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, p. 22.

⁶⁰ F. Max Müller, 'Address [to the Aryan Section]', in *Transactions of the Second Session of the International Congress of Orientalists* (London, September 1874), London, 1876 [Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1968], 177–204, reprinted in *Chips of a German Workshop*, vol. IV (first series), pp. 317–58, in which he referred to 'the complete revolution of the study of languages by means of the comparative method' (184).

does the 'real science of plants' begin. 'This discovery is made by means of comparison and classification.'⁶¹

Although Müller mostly used the word 'comparative' as the overarching term to describe this new stage in the development of the sciences, incidentally he used the term 'classificatory' to refer to this 'revolution'. 'Classification' refers then to the new method that distinguishes 'between what is essential and what is merely accidental' and that groups 'the individual under the general'.⁶² The work of classification 'teaches us that nothing exists in nature by accident'.⁶³ The notion of a natural order as defined by laws is immediately connected by Müller with the idea of 'purpose' and God as the wise creator of the world.⁶⁴ In this way the discovery of order by way of comparison and classification leads to metaphysical questions, which form the ultimate 'theoretical' stage in the development of scientific knowledge. Müller speaks of a third *stage*, but actually it is an endeavour that takes place next to the comparative approach and does not replace it.

COMPARISON AS A HUMAN CALLING

Notwithstanding the methodological aspects of comparing, it was basically for Müller a deeply human act of acknowledging that there exist 'other worlds beside our own, that there are other religions, other mythologies, other laws, and that the history of philosophy from Thales to Hegel is not the whole history of human thought'.⁶⁵ Crucial, of course, is also that those worlds are not perceived as completely dissimilar to our own. Man has to perceive 'similarity where at first he saw dissimilarity only'.⁶⁶ As far as human culture is concerned, this implies that so-called 'barbarians' and 'heathens' have to be perceived as fellow human beings. Furthermore, comparison is a basic epistemological fact, as there is no (real) knowledge of singular facts. 'All human knowledge begins with the Two or the Dyad, the

⁶¹ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, vol. I, p. 16.

⁶² Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, vol. I, p. 18.

⁶³ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, vol. I, p. 19.

⁶⁴ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, vol. I, pp. 17–19.

⁶⁵ Müller, 'Address [to the Aryan Section]', p. 184.

⁶⁶ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, vol. I, p. 18.

comprehension of two single things as one.⁶⁷ In Müller's view generalization is at the root of knowledge. Accordingly his theory of language focuses on its conceptual aspects.⁶⁸

Finally, although comparing is about finding similarities as well as dissimilarities, for Müller—notwithstanding his incidental claims of superiority—the most important thing was to show that there are communalities, especially between the East and the West. As far as the common origin of Aryan languages is concerned, the proof was given, but Müller was very much convinced that this was true for other areas as well. Comparison implied, as a matter of fact, for Müller impartiality:

The sacred books of the principal religions of mankind had to be placed side by side with perfect impartiality, in order to discern the points which they share in common as well as those that are peculiar to each.⁶⁹

Research, however, will show that 'all religions spring from the same sacred soil, the human heart' and that human beings 'yearn for something that the world cannot give'.⁷⁰ Comparison, surely, was more than a method for Müller. The way he practised it will appear to more empirically inclined scholars as illusionary as the phenomenon it purports to enlighten.

In Müller's view comparison almost seems to be a Christian duty. The ultimate result of comparative study will be beneficial for the development of Christianity and religion as such. Unlike his friend and colleague James Legge, Müller saw it also as a means to improve on Christianity.⁷¹ The comparative study of religions will 'give new life to Christianity'.⁷² The recourse to ancient religious texts can be helpful to discover later corruptions. The Veda does not mention 'caste', and according to the Qur'an Mohammed 'disdains to work miracles'.⁷³ The

⁶⁷ Müller, 'Address [to the Aryan Section]', p. 184.

⁶⁸ Müller, *Natural Religion*, pp. 417f.: 'There is no science of single things, and all progress in human knowledge is achieved through comparison, leading on to the discovery of what different objects share in common, till we reach the widest generalisations and the highest ideas that are within the ken of human knowledge.'

⁶⁹ Müller, 'Address [to the Aryan Section]', p. 185.

⁷⁰ Müller, 'Address [to the Aryan Section]', p. 185. A more detailed discussion of Müller's religious views will be given in Chapter 5.

⁷¹ Norman J. Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China. James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage*, Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2002, pp. 323–6.

⁷² Müller, 'Preface', in: Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I (1867), pp. vii–xxxiii, here p. xx.

⁷³ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, p. 27; cf. p. 28.

implication for the Christian faith remains implicit, but will not have escaped his readers. In his later work Müller was more explicit and poked fun at the fact that 'Professor Huxley should have had to waste his time on disproving the miracle of Gergesenes' (Matt. 8:28–34), the biblical story about Jesus who met two men possessed by demon spirits and drove these into a herd of swine. In the future this fact will 'rank... as one the most curious survivals in the history of [late nineteenth-century] theology'.⁷⁴ To make a strong case for Christianity, we have to get rid of 'useless ramparts which, though they may be dear to many from long association, offer no real security'.⁷⁵

CLASSIFICATION

Most of the time Müller did not take the trouble to elaborate on concepts or approaches which defined his scholarship. This is also true of the practice of classification, which is key to the comparative approach in linguistics, mythology, and the study of religion. In the lectures on language the comparison with botany must suffice, as he explained that the 'discovery' of similarities makes it possible to establish particular 'groups or natural classes'. The process of comparing and classification does not stop till 'a simple tissue of names [has] been thrown over the garden of nature' and a systematic 'science of plants' has been established.⁷⁶ By trial and error the process of classification leads to 'a systematic arrangement of plants'.⁷⁷ In his comparative studies Müller included tables and trees, which divided various roots, languages, and religions into categories and schemes.

In his lectures on the science of religion, Müller gave a specimen of comparative theology, which is the branch of the new science that studies the historical forms of religion.⁷⁸ The main issue here is the

⁷⁴ Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, p. 25; cf. Thomas Henry Huxley, 'Agnosticism' (1889), in: Huxley, *Agnosticism and Christianity and Other Essays*, New York: Prometheus, 1992, pp. 142–67, p. 146, *passim*.

⁷⁵ Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, p. 24; cf. pp. 542f.

⁷⁶ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, vol. I, p. 16.

⁷⁷ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, vol. I, p. 17.

⁷⁸ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, pp. 21 and 146. The other branch is called 'theoretic theology' or philosophy of religion and investigates 'the conditions under which religion... is possible'.

classification of religions. He started by saying that it is difficult to say 'where we are to look for the grammars and dictionaries of the principal religions of the world'.⁷⁹ The catechisms and official creeds present at best the shadow and never 'the soul and substance of a religion'. To this pertinent statement Müller added a footnote with a quotation from the famous American Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing (1780–1842), who described creeds as '[s]keletons, freezing abstractions, metaphysical expressions of unintelligible dogmas', which, therefore, don't express 'the fresh, living, infinite truth which came from Jesus'.⁸⁰ Apparently, sacred books present a much better image of a religion than creeds, according to Müller. Even here, however, one has to be careful not to jump to conclusions, as the images presented in these books are 'always blurred and distorted by the medium through which it had to pass'.⁸¹

In the second lecture on the science of religion, Müller discussed all sorts of classifications, such as those between true and false, natural and revealed, and polytheistic and monotheistic religions, but rejected them all, because they don't do justice to the self-perception of believers and theologians. Only the division in religions founded on a book versus 'bookless or illiterate religions' seems to have some plausibility for him.⁸² In the sacred texts we have at least the necessary 'materials' for comparative theology, and so Müller presented three 'families' of book religions (Aryan, Semitic, and Chinese or Turanian).⁸³ The division is based on language type and founding texts. The Aryan family consists of 'Brahmanism' (Veda), 'Buddhism' (Tripitaka), and 'Zoroastrianism' (Zend-Avesta). The Semitic family also includes three religions with their founding texts: Old Testament ('Mosaism'), New

⁷⁹ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, p. 101 (1899 edn, p. 52).

⁸⁰ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, pp. 101f. (1899 edn, p. 52). William Ellery Channing, 'Extracts from a Letter on Creeds' (1837), in: Channing, *The Complete Works of William Ellery Channing*, London etc.: 'Christian Life' Publishing Company, 1884, pp. 355f. <<http://www.biblicalunitarian.com/articles/history/remarks-on-creeds-intolerance-and-exclusion>>.

⁸¹ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, pp. 102f. (1899, p. 53).

⁸² Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, p. 103 (1899, p. 53).

⁸³ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, p. 160. The Turanian languages can hardly be called a 'family in the strict sense of the word, until it has been fully proved that Chinese forms the centre of the two Turanian branches'. Compared to the Semitic and Aryan groups, the Turanian languages are much more a *compositum mixtum*.

Testament (Christianity), and the Qur'an ('Mohammedanism').⁸⁴ In China Müller discerned only two religions, that of Confucius and that of Lao-tse.⁸⁵ The Aryan and Semitic religions are represented in a table in the form of a 'tree', which shows the lineages within each family, and at the same time purport to show that neither Zoroastrianism nor Mohammedanism (I use here Müller's terms) can claim 'an independent origin, but is only a weaker repetition of the first [religion]'.⁸⁶

Müller readily acknowledged that these eight book religions cover by no means all religions. All over the world and in history there have been many more religions, but these—as he insisted—don't have books with the same degree of authority as the book religions. In Müller's view canonical books are a major source for the comparative study of religions. After giving a short survey of religions all over the globe he posed several questions. How are 'they to be held together'? What do they have in common and how do they differ? And last but not least, he raised the question of the growth and decline of religions. The key to the answers lay in classification.

In an almost imperial manner he took the 'old saying' *divide et impera* and translated it 'somewhat freely' by 'classify and understand'.⁸⁷ Taking Caesar's and Napoleon's motto as his inspiration, Müller wanted to conquer the world of religions. But which classification will do the trick and turn the study of religion into a real science? The answer is surprisingly simple: the same as the classification of languages! The idea that religious history shows decay and that language is the key to understand religion is the frame of Müller's science of religion, which explains his basically antagonistic stance against ethnology. The end of his second lecture captures this nicely:

[P]articularly in the early history of the human intellect, there exists the most intimate relationship between language, religion, and nationality—a relationship quite independent of those physical elements, the blood, the skull, or the hair, on which ethnologists have attempted to found their classification of the human race.⁸⁸

It is intelligence that defines human history.

⁸⁴ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, pp. 103f. (1899, p. 54).

⁸⁵ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, p. 106 (1899, p. 55).

⁸⁶ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, p. 103 (1899, p. 53).

⁸⁷ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, pp. 122f. (1899, p. 68).

⁸⁸ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, p. 143 (1899, p. 82).

In the third lecture on the science of religion, Müller addressed the connections between language, religion, and nationality, and stressed the importance of the cultural determinants for group belonging. With reference to his teacher, the German philosopher Friedrich Schelling, Müller stated that it 'is language and [especially] religion that make a people'.⁸⁹ In his classification of religions he confined himself to 'the Asiatic continent and its important peninsula of Europe', where he discerned three 'oases of language' with concomitant religions.⁹⁰ The Turanian family is apparently the most problematic and diverse, and therefore hard to characterize. The Semitic and Aryan religions were opposed by Müller as pre-eminently the worship of God in History versus the worship of God in Nature, respectively.⁹¹

The further elaboration of the method of comparison and classification by Müller is not relevant in this context. It is sufficient to note that the classification of religions is based on that of languages. Müller also claimed to have established the fact that these three families of languages and religions all have their own prehistory, but as these prehistories are not recorded, they cannot be studied.⁹² The comparative study of religions is thus based on language and texts, which document their history. This way it is possible to trace connections between phenomena and even detect strata of development, of which we have no direct proof. Comparative philology is the key to this breakthrough, as it 'has placed in our hands a telescope of such power that, where formerly we could see but nebulous clouds, we now discover distinct forms and outlines'.⁹³ It has opened a view on a pre-Aryan phase of history and civilization, a revolutionary discovery which has utterly changed our Western self-understanding.

CONCLUSION

The comparative method was deemed by contemporaries 'the greatest intellectual achievement of our time'.⁹⁴ Comparative philology

⁸⁹ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, p. 147.

⁹⁰ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, pp. 154f.

⁹¹ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, pp. 157 and 159.

⁹² Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, p. 160; cf. p. 216.

⁹³ Müller, 'Comparative Mythology' (1856), p. 17.

⁹⁴ Freeman, *Comparative Politics*, p. 1.

was the basis on which comparisons in other fields of research rested, as it has 'revealed to us several stages of the prae-historic growth of man for which we have no recorded evidence'.⁹⁵ The author of these words, Edward A. Freeman, tried his hand at 'comparative politics' and said how much he owed to the writings of Max Müller, Edward B. Tylor, and Sir Henry Maine. Freeman also referred to the contribution of German scholars, such as Georg Waitz's *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte* (German constitutional history).⁹⁶ For most scholars at the time the methods of comparison and history were closely linked.⁹⁷ Henry Maine wanted to 'examine a number of parallel phenomena with the view of establishing, if possible, that some of them are related to one another in the order of historical succession'.⁹⁸ Moreover, Maine stressed that comparative linguistics has significantly broadened our horizons. By the discovery of a common Aryan heritage 'we have learned not to exclude from our view . . . those great and unexplored regions which we vaguely term the East'.⁹⁹

The contribution of Max Müller and his mentor Baron Bunsen to the new approach is recognized by contemporary authors and present-day scholars. Also the close connection between comparison and history is well acknowledged. As Collini, Winch, and Burrow note in their magisterial study of nineteenth-century political science in Britain, 'usually' the scope of comparison was not regarded as limitless in its range.¹⁰⁰ It concerned historically related phenomena, and this was an important issue for Müller too. Nevertheless, as we have seen, he allowed for a broader form of comparison, often criticized by himself as the ethnological (non-historical) approach, as well. He preferred more restricted forms of comparison, but was also interested in comparison *tout court*, as it could show common traits of humanity and, thereby, opened up avenues for global rapprochement.

⁹⁵ Freeman, *Comparative Politics*, p. 5.

⁹⁶ Freeman, *Comparative Politics*, p. vii.

⁹⁷ Herman Paul, 'Habits of Thought and Judgement. E. A. Freeman on Historical Methods', in: G. A. Bremner and Jonathan Conlin, eds, *Making History. Edward Augustus Freeman and Victorian Cultural Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 273–89. Angus Nicholls, 'Max Müller and the Comparative Method', *Comparative Critical Studies* 12 (2015) 213–34.

⁹⁸ Henry Sumner Maine, *Village-Communities in the East and West. Six Lectures Delivered at Oxford* (1871), sixth edn, London: John Murray, 1890, p. 6. On Maine see Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire. Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

⁹⁹ Maine, *Village-Communities*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁰ Collini, Winch, and Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics*, p. 212.

However, the wider use of the comparative method was more and more identified with the rising field of 'anthropology', represented in England by E. B. Tylor at Oxford and by G. J. Frazer at Cambridge. Yet the earlier Oxbridge pursuit of comparison involved a strong commitment to solid philological scholarship. As Collini, Winch, and Burrow write:

Their world was one of scholarship, of learned languages, of documents, of critical historical methods and legal technicalities, far removed from the Spencerian theories of social evolution or 'sociology' which Oxford and Cambridge so successfully held at punt pole's length, or even from the 'anthropology' they gradually and gingerly admitted.¹⁰¹

At the turn of the century the claims of evolutionary anthropologists seemed to be supported by more and more archaeological evidence. Primitive men had lived 'many thousands of years before any period of language could be reconstructed by even the most speculative uses of comparative philology'.¹⁰² The idea that the comparative study of language (enabled by the discovery of Sanskrit) is the main gate to the reconstruction of the earliest history of mankind was gradually replaced by a 'positivistic theory of history, that modern savages could be taken as a fair guide to the condition of prehistoric ancestors of civilized men'.¹⁰³ The idealist view of history, which with Bunsen and Müller had a providential character, faded away at the same time.

¹⁰¹ Collini, Winch, and Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics*, pp. 213f.

¹⁰² Burrow, 'The Uses of Philology in Victorian Britain', p. 202.

¹⁰³ Burrow, 'The Uses of Philology in Victorian Britain', p. 203.

Religion of Humanity

If we have once learnt to see in the exclusive religion of the Jews a preparation of what was to be the all-embracing religion of humanity, we shall feel much less difficulty in recognising in the mazes of other religions a hidden purpose.

(Max Müller)¹

Max Müller's 'science of religion' was not just a scholarly and theoretical endeavour, which would enlarge and improve our knowledge of this immense field of study. The hard work of editing, translating, and studying ancient religious texts will not only bring to light how religion developed in the past, but also point to new avenues for its future. In the preface to his *Introduction to the Science of Religion* the following vista is sketched:

[The study of religions] will remove many doubts and difficulties which are due entirely to the narrowness of our religious horizon; it will enlarge our sympathies, it will raise our thoughts above the small controversies of the day, and at no distant future evoke in the very heart of Christianity a fresh spirit, and a new life.²

The scholarly study of religions has consequences that go far beyond the pettiness of everyday religious living and quarrelling. It will show us our own limitations, broaden our horizon by taking other religious views into account, and contribute to a renewal of religion as such. This chapter will explore Max Müller's ideas and ideals of religion,

¹ F. Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1873, pp. 39f.; LLB II, 135; LLA II, 141, Müller to M. K. Schermerhorn, 6 March 1883. LLA and LLB refer, respectively, to the American and British edition of [Georgina Müller], *The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Max Müller*, 2 vols, London, New York, and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902.

² Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, p. ix.

focusing on the practical consequences of his work. To start with we will examine his religious background and upbringing.

MAX MÜLLER'S RELIGION

According to his own testimony, Max Müller was raised in a pious Lutheran milieu. His mother taught him a 'practical religion', which remained 'unshaken in all [later] storms'. '[I]n its extreme simplicity and childishness [it] answered all the purposes for which religion is meant.'³ Although the historical-critical study of the Bible had quite some impact on Müller, it 'never interfered with my early ideas of right and wrong, [and] never disturbed my life with God and in God'.⁴ These quotations are taken from Müller's autobiography, which he dictated to his son shortly before the end of his life. In retrospect Max Müller suggested that he kept his simple faith—his pious relationship with God—over the course of his life. On various occasions he referred to the prayer of the tax collector in Luke 18:13, 'God, have mercy on me, sinner', as being superior to prolonged outer ceremonial practices and long confessions of doctrinal faith.⁵

Müller's preference to describe his mature faith in terms of 'child-like' does not mean that it went unchanged. In his private diary that he kept after the early death of his daughter Ada at the age of sixteen and in which he addressed her directly, he worried about the fact that she may have thought that 'your father's faith was less orthodox than your own'. He acknowledged the great distance between their respective 'religious views', and explained that there must be a difference 'between the childlike faith of a man (all real faith must be childlike) and the childlike faith of a child. The one is Paradise not yet lost, the other Paradise lost but regained.'⁶ In Müller's view the 'miseries of life' generally started at the age of eighteen, when the 'feelings and

³ F. Max Müller, *My Autobiography. A Fragment*, London and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901, p. 294.

⁴ Müller, *My Autobiography*, p. 294.

⁵ Müller, *My Autobiography*, p. 295; cf. Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, p. 38.

⁶ Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary. The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller, P.C.*, Delhi etc.: Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 278, referring to the entry in Müller's diary of 17 February 1877.

passions awake'. The idea of a pure, unblemished faith of early childhood, which is disturbed by adolescent passions, is steeped in his own romanticism, which made Müller personally extremely sensitive to the threat of unhappiness. The reference to the famous epic poems of the Puritan writer John Milton about the human fall, Satan's rebellion against God, and Christian heroism to resist the temptations of worldliness and of seeking pleasure fits perhaps unexpectedly well in this world view. Müller fought the tragedies of life and in particular the loss of his daughter by continuous labour, a classical Protestant remedy and means to be worthy of salvation.

Müller's own piety was—as far as we can judge—marked by a kind of acquiescence. His musings on the differences between the faith of his daughter and that of himself typically ended with the conclusion that God has willed it to be it this way.⁷ On his tombstone he had inscribed 'wie Gott will' (as God wills [it]).⁸ His biographer Chaudhuri interpreted these words as a token of Stoic resignation and even as a lack of radiant faith in late life. My interpretation would be that it expressed his deep belief that history and the ups and downs of our own small lives are not beyond the will of God, and that there is—contrary to what sometimes seems to be the case—a purpose in all this. Even in discomfort there may be meaning, and illness may remind us of the intrinsic value of life.

In a letter written to his wife during his convalescence in Germany in the summer of 1867, this sentiment is expressed clearly, together with his belief that by not obeying God's commandments—especially the commandment to love each other—mankind itself is in large part responsible for its own misery.⁹ Müller's acquiescence is also based on the fundamental idea that man is not able to understand God's ruling and intention, that misery and sin cannot be fully understood. 'All we can say is, it was willed to be so.'¹⁰ He suggested strongly that we don't have any correct perception of life or, for that matter, death. 'No illusions, no anticipations, only that certainty, that quiet rest in God, that submissive expectation of the soul, which knows that all is good, all comes from God, all tends towards God.'¹¹ Although we cannot be sure

⁷ Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 278.

⁸ Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 381.

⁹ LLB I, 338f.; LLA I, 356–8, Müller to his wife, 27 August 1867.

¹⁰ LLB II, 85f.; LLA II, 90, Müller to Lady Welby, 29 March 1880.

¹¹ LLB I, 338f.; LLA I, 357f., Müller to his wife, 27 August 1867.

about 'the reality of a future life', personally he had no doubt about it, and in an interview he referred to 'a very old Greek saying' that it is not pious 'to try to know what the gods did not want to tell us'.¹²

There are no indications that Müller's basic trust was ultimately shattered, and that only a Stoic idea of resignation remained. At the moment that his belief was called into doubt, Müller reacted vehemently. During his courtship of his future wife there were rumours that he was an unbeliever, rumours that seriously threatened his chances to ever marry Georgina. As Müller came to know about this, he immediately wrote to his aunt Grenfell to refute these 'uncharitable reports' and pointed to the danger of religious controversies, which more often than not concern 'not so much the doctrine, as the discipline and policy of the Church [of England]'.¹³ In a somewhat didactic, even scholarly mode he explained that 'all divisions and persecutions in the Church have arisen from attempts of theologians to substitute their own thoughts and their own expressions for the simple language in which Christianity has been revealed to us in the Bible'.¹⁴ This type of language differs profoundly from Aunt Grenfell's more confessional way of expressing herself. She wrote that she could never consent to the marriage of her niece to someone 'who would lead her away from faith in the Scriptures, and dependence on the Divine Teacher and Redeemer'.¹⁵ There is an anti-theological and anti-doctrinal edge to Müller's religiosity. Unqualified submission to ecclesiastical authority will only 'hinder the quiet growth of the new life', as the hero of Müller's early novel *Deutsche Liebe* explained. The few times Müller spoke about Jesus Christ, the focal point is the experience of the 'reality of Christ' (as represented and even made present in the passion plays of Oberammergau) and not the doctrinal issue of his exclusive redeeming power for mankind.¹⁶

¹² LLB II, 363f.; LLA II, 383, interview with the *Christian World*, 1897.

¹³ Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 163, referring to an undated letter from Müller that must have been written in October 1856. For the courtship between Max and Georgina and the role of Aunt Grenfell see Chapter 1 (section 'Personal Life in Oxford').

¹⁴ Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 164, referring to a second letter from Müller in which he explained the sincerity of his faith. This letter is probably also written in October 1856.

¹⁵ Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 163, referring to Müller's second letter, in which he quoted Grenfell's letter.

¹⁶ LLB II, 88f.; LLA II, 93, letter to E. Renan, 3 July 1880.

OXFORD

In the early nineteenth century a prominent British translator of Friedrich Schleiermacher observed that 'it would almost seem as if at Oxford the knowledge of German subjected a divine to the... suspicion of heterodoxy'.¹⁷ In retrospect Max Müller remembered vividly the strong anti-German feelings at the time he arrived in Oxford. He recalled a sermon in which some German theologians were spoken of 'as fit only to be drowned in the German Ocean [North Sea], before they reached the shores of England'.¹⁸ His German descent and his (alleged) liberal theological leanings had seriously hampered his chances to get the Boden chair in Sanskrit.¹⁹ The University of Oxford was at the time still very much a clerical and elite institution, whose members did not want to be bothered too much by the outside world. Müller's colleague Benjamin Jowett (1817–93) was forced to resubscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Anglican Church to prove his orthodoxy,²⁰ and proposals to improve the quality of research and teaching and to open up the enrolment for a somewhat broader population than the upper classes met with fierce opposition by the predominantly conservative constituency of the university.

Notwithstanding his conservative inclinations Max Müller belonged in this respect to the more progressive wing of Oxford dons and professors. In his 1868 inaugural lecture on the value of comparative philology, he made a cautious plea for extending the field of research to areas outside theology, and to establish for instance a chair in Chinese studies.²¹ Seeing himself as an outsider, he was

¹⁷ Bernard M. G. Reardon, *From Coleridge to Gore. A Century of Religious Thought in Britain*, London and New York: Longman, 1971, p. 57, referring to Connop Thirlwall, *Translation, with Introduction, of Schleiermacher's Critical Essay on St. Luke* (1825), p. ix. Thirlwall and Müller met in 1853: LLB I, 148; LLA I, 156. For this section see also Vivian H. H. Green, *A History of Oxford University*, London: B. T. Batsford, 1974, esp. pp. 138–48. T. W. Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England*, London and Canberra: Croom Helm, 1982, provides a useful survey of the slowly progressing reform of university education in Oxford and Cambridge in the nineteenth century.

¹⁸ Müller, *My Autobiography*, p. 20.

¹⁹ See Chapter 1.

²⁰ Peter Hinchliff, *Benjamin Jowett and the Christian Religion*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987, pp. 63f.

²¹ Friedrich Max Müller, *Inaugural Lecture on the Value of Comparative Philology as a Branch of Academic Study* (1868), in: *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. IV: *Essays*

concerned not to get involved in ideological conflicts about religion or the organization of the university. He recalled that his mentor Baron von Bunsen warned him when he moved from London to Oxford not to use the phrase 'the great revelations of the world', because this expression would not go down well with some of his new colleagues.²²

Müller was prudent not to give unnecessary offence at Oxford. This probably explains why he did not contribute (although he was invited to do so) to the famous or—according to more orthodox believers—infamous volume titled *Essays and Reviews*, which appeared in March 1860 and caused quite a stir.²³ The book sold more than 20,000 copies in the next two years, and its seven authors were called by their opponents 'the seven against Christ'.²⁴ Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, one of the major public figures of his time and mainly known for his opposition to Darwin's theory of evolution, was a great campaigner in this controversy and finally obtained a 'synodic condemnation' of the *Essays and Reviews*.²⁵ The essayists shared a commitment to a free and critical study of the Bible and the Christian religion, thereby challenging the authority of the church. The idea that religious history progresses through time shifts the locus of authority slowly but unmistakably to the consciousness of the (educated) religious believer.²⁶ Benjamin Jowett's contribution was summarized by the statement that he thought that religious truth was 'to be discovered and tested rather than accepted and learnt'.²⁷ The lawyer for the prosecution in one of the heresy trials pointed to the fact that if the essayists had their way 'the Hebrew Scriptures will take their place upon the bookshelf of the learned, beside the Arabian and Sanscrit

Chiefly on the Science of Language (1875), London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1880, pp. 1–43, esp. pp. 3, 7, and 10.

²² Müller, *My Autobiography*, pp. 277f.

²³ There are almost no references to the *Essays and Reviews* in Müller's work; cf. LLB I, 235; LLA I, 246, Müller to Renan, 6 May 1860; LLB I, 246f.; LLA I, 258f., Müller to Stanley, 17 April 1861.

²⁴ Ieuan Ellis, *Seven Against Christ. A Study of 'Essays and Reviews'*, Leiden: Brill, 1980; Joseph L. Altholz, *Anatomy of a Controversy. The Debate over Essays and Reviews, 1860–1864*, Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994.

²⁵ Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2 vols, London: Adam and Charles Black, 1966–70, vol II, p. 83; cf. Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin*, London: Michael Joseph, 1991.

²⁶ Harvey Hill, 'Religion and the University. The Controversy over *Essays and Reviews* at Oxford', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73/1 (2005) 183–207, p. 185.

²⁷ Hinchliff, *Benjamin Jowett and the Christian Religion*, p. 32.

poets'.²⁸ Some of the essayists showed a clear interest in non-Christian religions, and it cannot be denied that their more scholarly approach showed affinities with the emerging comparative study of religion as practised by Max Müller.²⁹

The two great parties in the Victorian Church of England at the time were known as Low Church and High Church. The Low Church was characterized by an evangelical spirit that focused on individual religious experience and regarded atonement as the key Christian doctrine. The High Church emphasized the institution of the church with its own authority, which was transmitted by the apostolic succession of the bishops. At the time of Müller's arrival at Oxford the High Church had got a strong impetus by the Oxford or Tractarian Movement, which held the sacraments and church rituals in high esteem. Müller explained that one of his friends taught him 'what to do and what not to do during service', which was by no means easy.³⁰ Leading figures in this movement were Müller's Oxford colleagues E. B. Pusey and John Henry Newman. In his famous Tract XC Newman claimed that the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England could be interpreted in a Catholic sense and later in his life he actually converted to Catholicism. On the other hand, there were theologians at Oxford who were more liberally oriented and emphasized the value of Christian life and morality and accepted the historical-critical approach to the Bible. These liberal Anglicans were known under the name of Broad Church, a term made current by Müller's brother-in-law A. P. Stanley.³¹

Müller was familiar with representatives of both groups in Oxford. He did not meet Newman at Oxford,³² but he was on good speaking terms with Pusey, who publicly supported his bid for the Boden chair, and showed quite some enthusiasm for the edition of the *Sacred Books of the East*.³³ Although in the beginning Müller was

²⁸ *Essays and Reviews. The 1860 Text and its Reading*, ed. by Victor Shea and William Whitla, Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000, p. 707.

²⁹ Hill, 'Religion and the University', pp. 184, 193–5.

³⁰ Müller, *My Autobiography*, p. 292.

³¹ Joseph L. Altholz, *Anatomy of a Controversy*, pp. 4–8.

³² Müller, *My Autobiography*, p. 281. They met at a much later time, when Newman was unwilling 'to reopen questions which to him were settled once and for all'. Therefore, Müller 'could never form a clear idea of the man' (281).

³³ LLB I, 237f.; LLA I, 248f., Pusey to Müller, 2 June 1860, and LLB II, 121f.; LLA II, 127f., Müller to Bellows, 23 September 1882.

very much on his guard,³⁴ later on they got closer to each other. Early on he saw that Pusey may become 'a great power whether for good or for evil in England'. Müller regretted that Pusey was critical of and sometimes even unfair towards Müller's friends, such as Charles Kingsley, James Anthony Froude, and Benjamin Jowett.³⁵ Müller could not accept that Pusey claimed that he himself and Frederick Maurice (1805–72), famous for his social initiatives, did not worship the same God. When he confronted Pusey with this, Pusey should—'curious to say'—have admitted that he had used 'too strong language'.³⁶

Religiously speaking, Müller saw himself as an outsider, and probably he was. In the midst of all the theological controversies he felt 'a perfect stranger'.³⁷ He could not understand why his intelligent colleagues were so 'deeply interested in purely ecclesiastical questions, in the validity of Anglican orders, in the wearing of either gowns or surplices in the pulpit, in the question of candlesticks and genuflections'.³⁸ This kind of interest was miles away from what Müller thought to be religiously important. What also struck him was a curious lack of 'openness and manliness' in these theological discussions. Müller's irritation was not limited to the Tractarians, but also concerned his more liberal friends, who spoke 'in hushed tones' about Newman's going over to Rome: 'their consternation seemed to be like that of people watching the deathbed of a friend'.³⁹

Although Müller regularly attended church services in Oxford, he thought them too ornate and complicated. A famous plate portrays Oxford dons listening to Pusey's preaching in St Mary's, where Müller is prominently represented sitting under the pulpit next to John Ruskin.⁴⁰ The artistic element is important in a religious service, as Müller acknowledged, but still he did not understand how the 'sunny grandeur of St. Peter's at Rome should ever have seemed more impressive than the sombre sublimity and serene magnificence of

³⁴ LLB I, 173f.; LLA I, 183, Müller to von Bunsen, 25 December 1855, and LLB I, 195; LLA I, 205, Müller to von Bunsen, 1 May 1857.

³⁵ Mark Pattison and Henry Liddell are also reckoned to belong to the liberal wing of Oxford men; cf. Green, *A History of Oxford University*, p. 142.

³⁶ Müller, *My Autobiography*, p. 291.

³⁷ Müller, *My Autobiography*, p. 294.

³⁸ Müller, *My Autobiography*, p. 280.

³⁹ Müller, *My Autobiography*, p. 281.

⁴⁰ Michael Wheeler, *Ruskin's God*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, cover and p. 199. For the seating order see pp. 280f.

Westminster Abbey'.⁴¹ All in all, he saw little of what he called religion. What he found most surprising, however, was the fact that some of his seemingly orthodox fellows had no belief at all, and felt free to confess this to Müller, who being a German would understand this, as they thought. Given his own scepticism concerning the limitations of our knowledge of the divine, he could understand a certain degree of agnosticism. What he had not expected at Oxford, however, was a kind of 'Voltairean levity which scoffs at everything connected with religion'.⁴²

A MISSIONARY PERSPECTIVE

Max Müller's view of the common elements of major religions and of the future course of religion did not imply a quietist attitude in this respect. What he rejected were aggressive forms of mission, whereas he himself propagated a more dialogical approach, by seeking contact with people of other faiths.⁴³ The scholarly study of religion was in Müller's view helpful not only to gain important insights in foreign religions, but also to further this dialogical attitude, which would be far more effective than the old approach that considered the colonial subjects as heathens who had to be converted to the only true Christian belief. Crucial in this context is the idea that it is no good to degrade foreign religions to prove the superiority of the Christian religion. Müller claimed that his publications had been particularly helpful in the endeavours of missionaries in India 'to overthrow the ancient systems of idolatry in that country, and to establish the truths of Christianity among the believers of the Veda'.⁴⁴

During his long career Müller consistently defended the usefulness of his work for missionary purposes. The edition of the *Sacred Books*

⁴¹ Müller, *My Autobiography*, p. 293.

⁴² Müller, *My Autobiography*, p. 296.

⁴³ F. Max Müller, '(Westminster) Lecture on Missions' (1873), in: *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. IV: *Essays Chiefly on the Science of Language* (1875), New York: Scribner's Sons, 1895, pp. 238–66, pp. 255f.

⁴⁴ Cf. G. Beckerlegge, 'Professor Friedrich Max Müller and the Missionary Cause', in: John Wolfe, ed., *Religion in Victorian Britain*, vol. V: *Culture and Empire*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997, pp. 177–219, and the appendix (pp. 334f.) with Müller's submission to the Convocation of the University of Oxford in his bid for the Boden chair.

of the East is a prime example, as missionaries have to have 'an accurate knowledge of them', just as generals have to know 'the enemy's country'.⁴⁵ The series had as an explicit purpose to serve the missionaries. In a later address, Müller asked the rhetorical question, what we should think of a 'missionary who came to convert us, and who had never read our Bible'.⁴⁶ Even his book on the wisdom of the Indian sage Ramakrishna he deemed important in a missionary respect.⁴⁷

The letter which Müller wrote to his mentor and later friend Baron von Bunsen in August 1856 is—notwithstanding the nowadays barely tolerable tones of superiority—already a fine of example of his approach. He saw good chances for Christianity, especially among enlightened Indians, and speculated about his own contribution to the missionary cause. He did not want to go as a missionary or a civil servant, which would make him too dependent on powerful institutions. Instead he would 'go native', as modern cultural anthropologists would say:

I should like to live for ten years quite quietly and learn the language, try to make friends, and then see whether I was fit to take part in a work, by means of which the old mischief of Indian priestcraft could be overthrown and the way opened for the entrance of simple Christian teaching, that entrance which this teaching finds into every human heart, which is freed from the ensnaring powers of priests and from the obscuring influence of philosophers. Whatever finds root in India soon overshadows the whole of Asia, and nowhere could the vital power of Christianity more gloriously realize itself than if the world saw it spring up there for a second time, in a very different form from that in the West, but still essentially the same.⁴⁸

It is not just a process of acculturation that Müller envisions in his letter, but a rebirth of Christianity out of its basic sources, interiorized in the 'human heart' and freed from later incrustations. In an optimistic vein Müller wrote that the chances for Christianity in India were much better than in Rome or Greece at the time of St Paul.

⁴⁵ Max Müller, *The Upanishads*, SBE 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879, p. xl (from the original advertisement of the series).

⁴⁶ 'Missionary Speech (1887)', LLB II, 454–6; LLA II, 479–82.

⁴⁷ Müller, *Ramakrishna. His Life and Sayings*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1898, p. vii.

⁴⁸ LLB I, 182; LLA I, 192, Müller to von Bunsen, 25 August 1856.

There is a new and bright future for Christianity, if it is taken to its next level, which at the same time is a revitalization of the simple core of the original Christian faith.

Müller was very serious about the opportunities of spreading the Christian faith in India, and this was not only a matter of theoretical interest to him. As Eric J. Sharpe formulated: 'In fact he made a tentative missionary effort himself, in his *naïf* attempt to persuade the Brahma Samaj to join the Church of England.'⁴⁹ Müller welcomed the rapprochement of the members of this enlightened Hindu reform movement, and tried to win them over to Christianity. One of its major representatives, Keshab Chandra Sen, preached in England at the invitation of Unitarian groups, stressing the affinities between his own religious convictions and the teachings of Christ. Müller was impressed by Sen and considered him to be a true 'disciple of Christ'.⁵⁰

Till the very end of his life Müller tried to convince his liberal-minded Indian friends to accept that actually they were Christians. This led to a great deal of uneasiness with his correspondents, who felt obliged to publicly denounce such claims. For instance, Pratap Chandra Majumdar (spelled at the time as Protap Chunder Mazumdar), another prominent member of the Brahmo Samaj, spoke of the 'half-expressed contempt which Christian leaders, even of the liberal school, seem to have of the Hindu ideal, and spirituality'.⁵¹ This was an exaggeration as far as Müller was concerned, who referred piously to Hindu texts on several occasions,⁵² and who criticized Western appropriations of Indian religions that he deemed misleading or utterly mistaken. Müller thought, for instance, that Helena Blavatsky, the founder of the Theosophical Society, had done 'real

⁴⁹ Eric J. Sharpe, *Not to Destroy but to Fulfil. The Contribution of J. N. Farquhar to Protestant Missionary Thought in India before 1914*, Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells Boktryckeri, 1965, p. 45.

⁵⁰ Max Müller, 'Keshub Chunder Sen (1883–1883), including letters of Keshub Chunder Sen, F. Max Müller and Protap Chunder Mozumdar', in: *Biographical Essays*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1884, pp. 49–166, pp. 73f.

⁵¹ LLB II, 394; LLA II, 416. Müller's wife included quite a lot of material about the exchanges with Brahmo Samaj leaders in her biography. For a more extensive discussion of this topic, see Lourens van den Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller*, pp. 406–22. Cf. David Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.

⁵² LLB II, 19; LLA II, 20, Müller to Stanley, 3 July 1876, and Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, p. 277.

mischievous among people who were honestly striving for higher religious views' by her esoteric understanding of Buddhism.⁵³

The appearance of the third volume of Charles Hardwick's *Christ and Other Masters* in 1858 called for Max Müller's reaction. Hardwick was appointed Christian advocate at the University of Cambridge, which meant that he had to defend the Christian faith against attacks and to prove its superiority over other religions. In the four volumes of *Christ and Other Masters*, published in the late 1850s, he took this task seriously and judged the 'religious systems of the ancient world' accordingly.⁵⁴ Hardwick declared that he did not write for missionaries, and at this point Müller's critique started. Müller himself would have favoured a more charitable interpretation of ancient religious texts, something 'the practical missionary is constantly obliged to do'.⁵⁵ In Müller's opinion Hardwick treats Buddha or Lao-tse too much in the spirit of a policeman 'who tells a poor blind beggar that he is only shamming blindness'. This tone of 'offended orthodoxy... entirely disregards the fact that it has pleased God to let these men and millions of human beings be born on earth without a chance of ever hearing of the existence of the gospel'.⁵⁶ Apparently, Müller felt annoyed by this—in his view—condescending attitude, and thought religious history 'too sacred a subject to be used as a masked battery against modern infidelity'.⁵⁷ In the end he appealed to St Augustine to defend his view that all religions contain—among their many errors—elements of divine truth.⁵⁸ Basically, this early review set Müller's approach to other religions.

⁵³ LLB II, 297; LLA II, 312, Müller to Olcott, 10 June 1893. 'Colonel Olcott' was one of the leaders of the Theosophical Society, whose correspondence with Müller is kept at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, MS. Eng. C. 2806. See also Müller, 'Esoteric Buddhism', *Nineteenth Century* 31 (1893) 767–88, reprinted in Müller, *Last Essays*, second series: *Essays on the Science of Religion*, London etc.: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901, pp. 79–133. Sylvia Cranston, *HPB. The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky, Founder of the Modern Theosophical Movement*, New York: Putnam, 1993; Isaac Lubelsky, *Celestial India. Madame Blavatsky and the Birth of Indian Nationalism*, Sheffield and Oakville: Equinox, 2012.

⁵⁴ Charles Hardwick, *Christ and Other Masters. An Historical Inquiry into Some of the Chief Parallelisms and Contrasts between Christianity and the Religious Systems of the World (with special reference to prevailing difficulties and objections)*, 4 parts, Cambridge 1855–9; second edn, 2 vols, 1863.

⁵⁵ Max Müller, 'Christ and Other Masters' (1858), in: Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I (first series), New York: Scribner, 1876, pp. 49–60, p. 52.

⁵⁶ Müller, 'Christ and Other Masters', p. 53.

⁵⁷ Müller, 'Christ and Other Masters', p. 55.

⁵⁸ Müller, 'Christ and Other Masters', p. 54.

In his discussion of Hardwick's book, Müller strategically contrasted the more empathic attitude of the missionary with the harsh apologetics of a Christian advocate; on other occasions, however, it was obvious that missionaries had to be enlightened by the work of scholars of religions. Müller stated that missionaries are inclined to 'look upon other religions as something totally distinct from their own, as formerly they used to describe the languages of barbarous nations as something more like the twittering of birds than the articulate speech of men'.⁵⁹ The emerging science of religion, therefore, has to help the missionary to 'look more anxiously for any common ground'.⁶⁰ On closer scrutiny the alleged empathic attitude of the missionary could not be taken for granted either.

The defence of the usefulness of missions and the hope for a renewed form of Christianity that would conquer the world went hand in hand. Müller lectured several times on missions, and on these occasions he often addressed the future of religion.⁶¹ Only religions with a strong missionary impetus could survive in his view. That meant that the 'decisive battle for the dominion of the world' had to be fought between the three remaining missionary religions: Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity.⁶² This militant language did not imply—as we have already seen—that the best way to conquer was by forced conversion. On the contrary, Müller thought that by more or less peacefully living together purified forms of religion would or—at least—could emerge, and he devoted several pages of the published version of his famous lecture on missions in Westminster Abbey in 1873 to give examples of such hopeful developments. Christianity will, according to Max Müller, only be able to fulfil its mission if it is able to 'throw off its heavy arms' and concentrate on its basic message. 'We want less of creeds, but more of trust; less of ceremony, but more of work; less of solemnity, but more of genial honesty; less of doctrine, but more of love.'⁶³ His ideal is an ethical and interiorized

⁵⁹ Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1867, p. xxi.

⁶⁰ Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I, p. xxii.

⁶¹ F. Max Müller, '(Westminster) Lecture on Missions' (1873), in: *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. IV: *Essays Chiefly on the Science of Language* (1875), New York: Scribner's Sons, 1895, pp. 238–66; cf. LLB II, 454–6; LLA II, 479–82: 'Missionary Speech, 1887'.

⁶² Müller, '(Westminster) Lecture on Missions', p. 245; cf. p. 252.

⁶³ Müller, '(Westminster) Lecture on Missions', p. 266.

form of Christian belief, which will overcome doctrinal and group differences.

VIEW OF RELIGION

Müller's view of what religion essentially is about is also theoretically underpinned. At a strategic place in his *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (1873), Müller remarked that 'religion means at least two very different things'.⁶⁴ First, the word can mean 'a body of doctrines handed down by tradition, or in canonical books', and in this sense it can be said that people adopt another religion. Second, 'religion' can refer to 'a faculty of faith in man, independent of all historical religions'. Here it means the innate capacity of human beings 'to apprehend the Infinite under different names, and under varying disguises'.⁶⁵ It did not go unnoticed at the time that this view was a threat to revealed, scriptural authority.⁶⁶ In later writings, Müller could be very explicit about the uselessness of 'tiny props or . . . hideous scarecrows', such as 'physical miracles, or literal inspiration, or Papal infallibility', to defend a religious position.⁶⁷ These 'props' actually harm the Christian religion.⁶⁸

Much more can be said about the distinction between the two definitions of religion in Müller's work, but here we must first and for all establish that this identification of the core of all religions in an alleged human faculty to intuit or apprehend the infinite leads to a sympathetic approach to all religious phenomena. This corollary is explicitly drawn:

⁶⁴ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, pp. 16f.

⁶⁵ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, p. 17. For a more extensive discussion of definitions of religion see F. Max Müller, *Natural Religion* (Gifford Lectures, Glasgow, 1888), London and New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1889, pp. 27–140, esp. pp. 49f. ('Religion, either belief or body of doctrines'). For an earlier example of the 'primitive intuition of God and the ineradicable feeling of dependence on God', see Müller, 'Semitic Monotheism' (1860), in: Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I (1867), pp. 341–79, p. 352. See also Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion* (Gifford Lectures, Glasgow, 1892), London and New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1893, p. vii.

⁶⁶ LLB II, 363; LLA II, 383, interview with the *Christian World*, 1897.

⁶⁷ Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, p. 543.

⁶⁸ Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, p. 543.

Without that faculty, no religion, not even the lowest worship of idols and fetishes, would be possible; and if we will but listen attentively, we can hear in all religions a groaning of the spirit, a struggle to conceive the inconceivable, to utter the unutterable, a longing after the Infinite, a love of God.⁶⁹

This boils down to a subjectivized and spiritualized view of religion. In Müller's view religion implies a moral dimension as well. In one of his most famous definitions of religion the connection between the two dimensions is established in the following manner: 'Religion consists in the perception of the infinite under such manifestations as are able to influence the moral character of man'⁷⁰ (a somewhat longwinded and vague formulation by which Müller wanted to capture all major religions). He claimed that by including this moral aspect in his definition the ceremonial and sacrificial dimensions of religion are in principle also addressed.⁷¹

On other occasions the basic elements of religion are fleshed out in more detail. Müller specified the following 'roots' (a metaphor reminiscent of his theory of language) or 'radical elements' of religion: 'An intuition of God, a sense of human weakness and dependence, a belief in a Divine government of the world, a distinction between good and evil, and a hope of a better life.' These elements can vary in the history of religions, but even in distorted or hidden ways they were 'part of the original dowry of the human soul'.⁷² They are all located in the religious subject. There is no mention of worship, repentance, or divine punishment, core elements of natural religion according to Herbert of Cherbury, who more or less defined deism in this vein.⁷³ The subjective side of religion is very much highlighted by Müller in this second definition at the expense of ritual, doctrinal, and institutional aspects.

Notwithstanding his predilection for the subjective side of religion, Müller is not chiefly remembered for his psychological and philosophical study of religion (although he went into these matters in his

⁶⁹ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873, pp.17f.

⁷⁰ Müller, *Natural Religion*, p. 188.

⁷¹ Müller, *Natural Religion*, pp. 187f.

⁷² Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I (first series), p. x.

⁷³ There is a lot of literature about the subject, but Peter Harrison, *'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1990, still stands out. For a discussion of the views of 'Lord Herbert' see pp. 61–73 in that volume.

four Gifford Lectures). His core business was the study of those religions 'which are founded on some kind of sacred book'.⁷⁴ The connecting theory between the subjective core of religion and its textual representations is the idea that 'beneath the rubbish' these ancient sacred texts contain 'bright sparks of truth'.⁷⁵ The learned interpreter will bring these to light. This is even true of the religions of 'lower savages', such as the Papuas, who don't have sacred texts. The Western scholar will translate their 'helpless language' into modern concepts such as 'conscience' to help the educated Western elites to understand what they 'really mean'.⁷⁶ The practice of translation can have an almost eschatological ring in such contexts, as it will help to 'get rid of all the whitewash and the plaster', by which Müller meant the work of popes, bishops, and philosophers, who had obscured 'the original plan and purpose, whether in Christianity or Hinduism'.⁷⁷

This way the spiritual core of religions would be revealed. There is a divine element in all the 'great religions of the world'.⁷⁸ According to Müller it is 'blasphemous to call them the work of the Devil, when they are the work of God'. Further, he claimed 'that there is nowhere any belief in God except as the result of a Divine revelation, the effect of a Divine Spirit working in man'.⁷⁹ The last quotations are taken from a letter he wrote to his friend, the Oxford physician and educator Sir Henry Acland in November 1873. In his more theoretical later work, Müller referred frequently to the Logos theology of the Fourth Gospel, the Alexandrian fathers, and the later Christian mystics to explain the divine relationship between God and man.⁸⁰ Christianity was most highly developed in this respect, but it was not the only religion that foreshadowed the religion of humanity, the religion of the future, which Müller envisioned.

⁷⁴ 'Missionary Speech (1887)', LLB II, 455; LLA II, 481.

⁷⁵ 'Missionary Speech (1887)', LLB II, 454 and 455; LLA II, 479 and 481.

⁷⁶ 'Missionary Speech (1887)', LLB II, 456; LLA II, 482.

⁷⁷ LLB II, 464; LLA II, 491, Müller to Acland, 7 November 1873. The letter was included at the latest possible time, because it is 'so complete a summary of Max Müller's views on Missions' (463/490).

⁷⁸ LLB II, 464; LLA II, 491.

⁷⁹ LLB II, 464; LLA II, 491; cf. LLB II, 363; LLA II, 383 (on revelation).

⁸⁰ Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, Lectures 12 and 13 (pp. 361–458). Cf. van den Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller*, p. 389. I took the above formulation from van den Bosch's monograph. For a discussion of the related notion of the 'fullness of time' see pp. 387–91.

THE FUTURE RELIGION OF HUMANITY

In the religions of the East Müller detected the impulse for a broader, inclusive idea of religion. This is evident in his correspondence with his friends in India, who—as we saw above—had according to Müller a deep sense of the spiritual and moral core of religion. Also in the Qur'an he detected passages that indicate that 'Mohammed, too, had realized the idea of humanity, and of a religion of humanity'.⁸¹ For Müller Christianity has this 'progressive, world-embracing' impulse to a stronger degree. In a letter to the American Revd M. K. Schermerhorn, who promoted in the United States the 'Catholicity among all religions of the world', Müller wrote that the 'true religion of the future will be the fulfilment of all religions of the past—the true religion of humanity'.⁸² Out of their sacred books, the elements will be taken to build the 'true Temple of Humanity'.⁸³ This is probably one of the very few (oblique) references to the secular religion of positivism, as developed by the French philosopher Auguste Comte. The Comtean Church of Humanity had spread to England by about 1870, and in 1879 the first meetings in the Liverpool Temple took place.⁸⁴ Müller is critical of Comte's ideal, and is looking for the *true* religion of humanity, which has an outspoken transcendent dimension, relating man to God or the infinite.

Three religions stand out according to Müller by their missionary character, 'which binds them together, and lifts them to a higher sphere'.⁸⁵ Despite the differences between Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity, they 'could not have achieved what they have achieved, unless the spirit of truth and the spirit of love had been alive in the hearts of their founders'.⁸⁶ Müller devoted a large part of his missionary speech to show that differences between people as far as gender, race, and persuasion are concerned could be bridged. Finally, he tried to prove that Christianity—if preached in the right original spirit—is 'the religion of humanity at large, large enough itself to take

⁸¹ Müller, '(Westminster) Lecture on Missions' (1873), p. 245.

⁸² LLB II, 135; LLA II, 141, Müller to Schermerhorn, 6 March 1883.

⁸³ LLB II, 135; LLA II, 141, Müller to Schermerhorn, 6 March 1883.

⁸⁴ T. R. Wright, *The Religion of Humanity. The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 255f. (including a later photograph of the Liverpool Temple).

⁸⁵ Müller, '(Westminster) Lecture on Missions' (1873), p. 246.

⁸⁶ Müller, '(Westminster) Lecture on Missions' (1873), p. 246.

in all shades and diversities of character and race'.⁸⁷ In this view the Christian religion is not about difference, but about unity, not about belief systems, but about spiritual truth. Its true foundation lies 'in our love of God, and in our love of man, founded on our love of God'.⁸⁸ This message of spiritual truth will 'win the heart of all men'.⁸⁹ This means a transformation of Christianity, as well as of other religions. As there is a divine element in all 'great religions of the world', Müller wants to see them 'reformed, reanimated, resuscitated by contact with Christianity'.⁹⁰

This rejuvenation will be made possible by the insights of the new science of religion. In exuberant phrases Müller sketched this perspective. The study of religion 'will change the aspect of the world, and give new life to Christianity itself'.⁹¹

The Science of Religion will for the first time assign to Christianity its right place among the religions of the world; it will show for the first time fully what was meant by the fullness of time; it will restore to the whole history of the world, in its unconscious progress towards Christianity, its true and sacred character.⁹²

Depending on the audience he addressed, Müller depicted the future religion of humanity either as the fulfilment of Christianity or as a new synthesis of all religions. The edition of the *Sacred Books of the East* plays no minor role in this utopian view, as they will become 'the foundation of a short but universal religion'.⁹³ The common elements found here 'will form the eternal religion of the world'. To denote this common core, Müller referred to the old dictum of the church father Lactantius: *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*, which he also used as the motto for his book on the science of religion.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ Müller, '(Westminster) Lecture on Missions' (1873), p. 263.

⁸⁸ Müller, '(Westminster) Lecture on Missions' (1873), p. 264. In the original this quotation is italicized.

⁸⁹ Müller, '(Westminster) Lecture on Missions' (1873), p. 264.

⁹⁰ LLB II, 464; LLA II, 491, Müller to Acland, 7 November 1873.

⁹¹ Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I, 1867, p. xix.

⁹² Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I, 1867, p. xx.

⁹³ LLB II, 141; LLA II, 147, Müller to Renan, 21 April 1883.

⁹⁴ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, title page. Literally translated: 'that which [is believed] always, everywhere, by everyone'; cf. the original quote with Lactantius, 'quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est' (*Communitorium* II, 5).

For Müller the shared elements of the world religions centred on the human capacity to apprehend the infinite. On the basis of this core religions and in particular Christianity can and will develop into the all-encompassing religion of the future, which will fully realize the commandment of love. This way the ethical and the spiritual in religion are to be combined, without giving up the transcendent, the infinite, or god. The spiritualization of religion, of which Müller surely was a proponent, did not lead in his view to an opposition between (the old) religion(s) and (the new) spirituality. His explicit aim was to 'give new life to Christianity'; the unintended consequence of his work has been to pave the way for the modern opposition between (institutionalized) religion and spirituality, which is often sought in the East. Peter van der Veer has argued that a central contradiction in the concept of spirituality is that it is at the same time seen as universal and as tied to conceptions of national identity.⁹⁵ In Müller's work we see a similar tension between universalism and particularism, as he defends the idea that the universal spiritual core of religion per se is ultimately (best) realized in the Christian tradition.

⁹⁵ Peter van der Veer, *The Modern Spirit of Asia. The Spiritual and the Secular in China and India*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014, p. 36.

Intellectual Impact

In order to have a solid foundation for a comparative study of religions of the East, we must have before all things complete and thoroughly faithful translations of their sacred books.

(Max Müller)¹

The edition of the *Sacred Books of the East* is said to provide the ‘facts’ for the comparative study of religion. Max Müller explicitly made this claim, and occasionally he used and referred to the translations in his later studies on religion.² Contemporary reviewers thought along the same lines.³ This claim seems rather modest, especially when compared with how historians of religious and oriental studies nowadays see the significance of the series. According to Norman Girardot, for instance, the translations ‘ratify a whole taken-for-granted taxonomy of concepts, categories, and procedures that will characterize the academic study of religion well into the twentieth century’.⁴ Tomoko

¹ Müller, ‘Preface’, *The Upanishads*, SBE I, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879, second edn 1900, pp. xi–xii.

² Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion* (Gifford Lectures, Glasgow, 1892), London and New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1893, esp. pp. vi and 542.

³ Archibald H. Sayce, ‘Review of the First Three Volumes of the SBE’, *Nature* 21 (1879) 77–8, p. 77: ‘It is intended that the scientific student of religion should possess in them [SBE] trustworthy materials on which to found his generalisations and build his conclusions’; cf. [T. W. Rhys Davids], ‘Sacred Books of the East. Translated by Various Oriental scholars, and Edited by F. Max Müller’, *Quarterly Review* 163 (1886) 180–203, p. 203: ‘the very greatest possible aid to the comparative study of the history of ideas, especially of religious ideas’.

⁴ Norman Girardot, ‘Max Müller’s *Sacred Books* and the Nineteenth-Century Production of the Comparative Science of Religions’, *Religions* 41/3 (2002) 213–50, p. 220; cf. pp. 219f.: ‘It is . . . the editorial production [of the series] . . . that publicly defines and authoritatively establishes the new comparative science of religion at the

Masuzawa surmised that the series ‘played not an insignificant role in the development of the world religions discourse in the twentieth century, and perhaps even in its persistence’.⁵ This is a more tentative formulation, but generally it is assumed that such huge editorial projects have quite some impact. Bernard and Picart’s seven splendidly illustrated folio volumes of the *Religious Ceremonies of the World*, which appeared in the first half of the eighteenth century, allegedly helped create the field of the comparative history of religion.⁶ Other historians, however, tell us that the comparative approach gained prominence only in the nineteenth century.⁷ How are such claims to be weighed and substantiated? In this chapter I will explore these questions by careful contextualization. To which other grand projects we may compare Müller’s edition? What impact did the series have in the history of religious studies? Was a new form of discursivity implied in the edition? Did it indeed change the game of the discipline?

BIG SCIENCE AND GRAND PROJECTS

Grand editorial projects such as the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the Migne edition of the church fathers, the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, and the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (under supervision of the influential Old Testament scholar William Robertson Smith) are important subjects of study. They signal the emergence of large-scale scholarship in the humanities as well as the importance of entrepreneurship and the stamina of individual leaders, who initiated and conducted these cooperative ventures with great personal effort and dedication. Not all editors had the

end of the century’; p. 231: ‘summed up for better or for worse the accomplishments of the new discipline in the nineteenth century’.

⁵ Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions. Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 265.

⁶ Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt, *The Book that Changed Europe. Picart & Bernard’s ‘Religious Ceremonies of the World’*, Cambridge and London: Belknap Press, 2010, p. 19.

⁷ Cf. Chapter 4.

commercial genius of the abbé Jacques Paul Migne, who published according to his biographer a book every ten days for thirty years,⁸ but a solid financial basis was crucial for success. Just as big industries, big science (*Großwissenschaft*) needs working capital, to quote the German historian and Nobel Prize winner Theodor Mommsen, at the occasion of the inauguration of Adolf von Harnack (1850–1931) to the Berlin Academy of Sciences in 1890.⁹

The church historian Harnack was one of the most successful organizers in the history of modern scholarship. He was not only director of the Royal Library in Berlin, but also of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft, which was founded in 1911 to further the sciences (including the humanities).¹⁰ This society initiated large-scale projects and research institutes, from which the famous Max Planck Institutes emerged. The natural sciences were predominant in this organization, but the idea of large scholarly enterprises actually began with the great text editions in the humanities, especially in classical studies (*Altertumswissenschaften*) in the late nineteenth century.¹¹ Research in the history of such ventures concentrates on the development of the institutions, the research programmes and projects, and the young scholars who did the work—most of the time for relatively small pay. Characteristics of what is nowadays termed ‘big science’, such as team work, a steady flow of publications and editions, specialized techniques, and international cooperation, can already be discerned in these early stages.

⁸ R. Howard Bloch, *God's Plagiarist. Being an Account of the Fabulous Industry and Irregular Commerce of the Abbé Migne*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 1.

⁹ Theodor Mommsen, ‘Erwiderung [auf Adolf Harnack]’, ‘Antrittsrede in der Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften’ (1890), in: Harnack, *Adolf von Harnack als Zeitgenosse*, edited by Kurt Nowak, 2 vols, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996, vol. II, pp. 976–82, p. 982.

¹⁰ The German term ‘Wissenschaft’ (literally translated as ‘science’) comprises both the (hard) sciences as well as the humanities.

¹¹ Rüdiger vom Bruch, ‘Mommsen und Harnack. Die Geburt von *Big Science* aus den Geisteswissenschaften’, in: Alexander Demandt, Andreas Goltz, and Heinrich Schlange-Schöningen, eds, *Theodor Mommsen. Wissenschaft und Politik im 19. Jahrhundert*, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005, pp. 121–41; Stefan Rebenich, ‘Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Großwissenschaft. Altertumswissenschaftliche Unternehmungen an der Berliner Akademie und Universität im 19. Jahrhundert’, in: Annette M. Baertschi and Colin G. King, eds, *Die modernen Väter der Antike. Die Entwicklung der Altertumswissenschaften an Akademie und Universität im Berlin des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009, pp. 397–421.

In his memorandum on the foundation of research institutes, which Harnack sent to the German emperor Wilhelm II in October 1909, he pointed in particular to the large instruments and machines that are needed in the hard sciences, but cooperation and division of labour are also necessary to promote the advancement of scholarship.¹² To study the universe and the microcosm we need the 'large enterprise of the sciences' (*Großbetrieb der Wissenschaften*).¹³ Harnack also noted that the scale on which the humanities work is much enlarged—by the huge editorial projects such as the edition of the Greek church fathers. Notwithstanding its dangers, such as the mechanization of the work of scientists, the overrating of collecting data, and the undervaluation of intellectual understanding, the advancement of big science is a beneficial development in his view. Without telescopes, large-scale expeditions, and editions, to name just a few examples, modern science and scholarship is unthinkable. The international character of research as well as of education is stressed by Harnack. He was proud of the fact that in 1905 the Berlin University counted more than one thousand students from abroad (from a total number of 7,700), and he welcomed the international exchange of students and scholars.¹⁴

THE SACRED BOOKS OF THE EAST: A SPECIMEN OF BIG SCIENCE?

Harnack is one of the few contemporary authors who reflected on the emergence of big science.¹⁵ Although Max Müller explained the idea behind the edition of the *Sacred Books of the East*, he did not address the

¹² Harnack, 'Zur Kaiserlichen Botschaft vom 11. Oktober 1910. Begründung von Forschungsinstituten' (1909/1910/1911), in: *Adolf von Harnack als Zeitgenosse*, edited by Kurt Nowak, 2 vols, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996, vol. II, pp. 1025–49.

¹³ Harnack, 'Vom Großbetrieb der Wissenschaft' (1905), in: *Adolf von Harnack als Zeitgenosse*, vol. II, pp. 1009–19.

¹⁴ Harnack, 'Vom Großbetrieb der Wissenschaft', p. 1014. Including the German-speaking students from Switzerland and Austria there were some 1,150 foreign students enrolled at the time. Here Harnack referred also to Max Müller's teaching in Strasbourg as an example of internationalization.

¹⁵ The classic book on this subject, Derek J. De Solla Price, *Little Science, Big Science... and Beyond* (1963), New York: Columbia Press, 1986, does not take any notice of the humanities.

structural changes involved in this transition. His edition of the *Rig-Veda* still was basically the project of one man (although he got help from younger Sanskritists), whereas the series of the *Sacred Books of the East* involved a team of professional scholars. Given the scope of texts and languages even Müller could not have done this work alone. For the Chinese texts, for instance, he had to rely on his Oxford colleague James Legge. In contrast to the great editorial projects of the Berlin Academy, which were primarily financed by the Prussian state, the edition of the *Sacred Books of the East* was partly funded by the private money of Oxford University Press. The other donor was the India Office of the British empire, which contributed substantially to the edition.

Yet no people were employed in the strict sense of the word in this huge project. The—often distinguished—scholars were paid a small amount per page, which bears no relation to their time-consuming work. Only Müller as editor-in-chief received a substantial emolument from the Press. The series remained a source of income for Oxford University Press and the university for many years to come. Scholars from different nations were recruited by Müller, and in this respect the series was a token of the ongoing internationalization of (oriental) scholarship. For Harnack this was an important aspect of the process of scientific change, but international cooperation has a much longer history and in itself is in my view not a distinguishing element of the emergence of big science. The contributors all worked in their own studies or libraries, and did not cooperate closely. Of course, there were all kinds of relationships—they met at conferences, and corresponded with each other, and, of course, even more frequently with the editor-in-chief—but they did it all on an individual basis and did not meet as a team. There was no local concentration of work, no staff members who managed the edition. Yet the series was a collective effort by an international group of scholars, funded by extra financial means, and involved a steady flow of publications. In these respects the series is an important step in the establishment of big science, which emerged in full form around 1900.

Like the first edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1857–1928) the *Sacred Books of the East* were a remarkable model of large-scale production of knowledge.¹⁶ James Murray's task of collecting,

¹⁶ K. M. Elisabeth Murray, *Caught in a Web of Words. James Murray and the Oxford English Dictionary* (1977), New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995.

assembling, and evaluating the myriad of slips of paper with English words, gathered by many thousands of informants, was even more a labour of Hercules than Müller's coordinating role, but both men worked incessantly in realizing their magnum opus and established some form of procedural objectivity.¹⁷ They wanted to present the evidence as cleanly as possible and overcome partiality. These attempts may be criticized, and it is indeed not hard to find prejudice and bias in their work,¹⁸ but there is no doubt—in Müller's case—that key texts of the 'religions of the world' were presented to an educated audience, who were encouraged to enlarge their horizons of knowledge. Müller's example was followed, and many series of sacred books were published in the twentieth century.

One publication deserves special mention here, because it more or less copied Müller, and that is Horne's edition of the *The Sacred Books and Early Literature of the East* in fourteen volumes, which appeared in 1917.¹⁹ Charles F. Horne (1870–1942) was a professor of English at the City College of New York, whose venture was clearly inspired by Waldo Emerson's praise of the 'Bibles of the world' and Müller's edition. Although he included fewer texts, his selection is broader than Müller's, as he presented Egyptian texts and the 'Great Rejected Books of the Biblical Apocrypha', such as the books of Adam and Eve, the Apocalypse of Baruch, and the Gospel of Thomas. He used partly translations of texts made available by Müller, but seems to have aimed at a somewhat broader audience. Horne's goal was to 'enlarge our mental horizon' by the 'stupendous finds' of 'wisdom of the East', 'and so add all their wealth of knowledge to our own'.²⁰ The recent discovery and deciphering of ancient texts from the East is in this view a major event, which shows the beginnings of 'mankind's eternal struggle to pierce the infinite'.²¹ This formulation again recalls the

¹⁷ Kelly Kistner, "A Word Factory Was Wanted". Organizational Objectivity in the Making of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Social Studies of Science* 43 (2013) 801–28.

¹⁸ John Willinsky, *Empire of Words. The Reign of the OED*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 177: 'betrayal of its [own] historical principles'.

¹⁹ Charles F. Horne, ed., *The Sacred Books and Early Literature of the East. With Historical Surveys of the Chief Writings of Each Nation*, 14 vols, New York and London: Parke, Austin, and Lipscomb, [1917].

²⁰ Horne, *The Sacred Books and Early Literature of the East*, vol. I, 'General Introduction', p. vii.

²¹ Horne, *The Sacred Books and Early Literature of the East*, vol. I, p. vi.

thought of Max Müller, given his well-known definition of religion as the perception of the infinite.²²

TEXTUALIZATION OF RELIGION

Although editions, encyclopaedias, big research institutes, and funding are seen as important or even crucial in the development of the sciences and the humanities, it is less clear what their role exactly consisted of. I have looked in vain for studies that address this question for similar grand projects. In her careful study of the editions of the German theological encyclopaedia *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Ruth Conrad appears to demonstrate that the famous first edition that appeared between 1909 and 1913 is to a large extent the work of the so-called German History of Religions School.²³ Prominent members such as Hermann Gunkel, Wilhelm Bousset, and Ernst Troeltsch did hold key positions in the process of the production of the volumes and left their mark on them. But did the encyclopaedia really define the work of this group of scholars? Did it, for instance, ratify a specific taxonomy of concepts, categories, and procedures? These questions are not asked by Conrad, and it would be difficult to substantiate such claims, as other work by these men was no less important in establishing a thoroughly historical approach of religions, in particular of Christianity.

Nevertheless, both the *Sacred Books of the East* series and the first edition of the RGG, as the encyclopaedia is commonly abbreviated,²⁴ are doubtless landmarks in the establishment of the modern scholarly study of religion. But in which respects can they be called a landmark? As far as Müller's project is concerned, the most obvious argument is probably its prominent role in the so-called textualization of Eastern religions. Western scholars and oriental officers—often there is no more than a very thin line between the two—went on a hunt for manuscripts and foundational texts of Eastern religions, or what they

²² See Chapter 5.

²³ Ruth Conrad, *Lexikonpolitik. Die erste Auflage der RGG im Horizont protestantischer Lexikographie*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006.

²⁴ The fourth—and probably last—edition of the RGG has recently been brought out in English under the title *Religion Past and Present* by publishing house Brill in Leiden.

thought to be religions. The study of Buddhism, for instance, started rather late in the Oriental Renaissance.²⁵ The Sanskrit manuscripts that Brian Hodgson of the British East Asia Company discovered in the 1820s and 1830s and sent to various learned societies, among these the Société Asiatique in Paris, formed the basis for Eugène Burnouf's *Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme indien* from 1844.²⁶ Müller claimed that his teacher's book 'laid the foundation for a systematic study of the religion of Buddha'.²⁷ Burnouf established India as the birthplace of Buddhism, where it had actually almost disappeared at the time, as it had spread through other parts of Asia. Thus Buddhism was constituted primarily as a textual object existing from the time of Gautama.²⁸ Buddhist studies had become 'a history of master texts', a form of orientalism criticized by Edward Said and others because it is allegedly 'based on the finality and closure of antiquarian or curatorial knowledge'.²⁹

Presently, there are many studies on the 'invention' of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism, et cetera, which demonstrate that these 'religions' and their 'sacred texts' were produced—as the preferred metaphor runs—in the West.³⁰ If you would have asked the believers or even the religious specialists, they would have given in many cases varying answers as to what their most important religious scriptures were. This is not because of religious ignorance, 'but because there

²⁵ Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance. Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984 [French original 1950].

²⁶ Philip C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988; J. W. de Jong, *A Brief History of Buddhist Studies in Europe and America*, Durga Kund, Varanasi: Bharat-Bharati, 1976 (first published in *The Eastern Buddhist* 7/1974); Donald S. Lopez, Jr, 'Introduction', in Lopez, ed., *Curators of the Buddha. The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995, pp. 1–29. Donald S. Lopez, Jr, *Buddhism and Science. A Guide for the Perplexed*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008, chapter 4.

²⁷ Müller, 'Buddhism' (1862), in: Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1867, pp. 182–231, p. 200.

²⁸ Eugène Burnouf, *Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme indien*, Paris 1844, p. 9. A product of the process of textualization was the emergence of the historical Buddha (Gautama); Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism*, p. 139.

²⁹ Lopez, 'Introduction', p. 7, the second quotation referring to Edward W. Said, 'Orientalism Reconsidered', *Cultural Critique* 1 (1985) 89–107, p. 106.

³⁰ P. J. Marshall, ed., *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970. Anna Sun, *Confucianism as a World Religion. Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013. See also the literature mentioned in previous footnotes.

does not appear to be a wholly accepted body of scripture that is of equal value to the entire community'.³¹ Thus Müller's edition did not only contribute to the process of textualization of religion as such, but also played a significant role in selecting and highlighting particular texts as representative of particular traditions. This does not mean that the editor and his co-workers did not rely on local knowledge. It is evident from Müller's correspondence that the selected canonical texts were not created out of nothing, but were based on older Eastern traditions and informants. The involvement of local specialists in this co-production of texts is an important field for further study.³²

A rather extreme example of the process of 'canonization' is how the Jain scriptures were selected for the series. I follow here an illuminating article of Kendall W. Folkert, who draws our attention to the fact that the corpus of forty-five Jain texts that would define this 'religion' for some time was presented as such by one scholar, the orientalist Georg Bühler.³³ Bühler had obtained his information from a *single* informant within the Jain community. This selection of texts did only partly match with other oral and written sources. 'Yet he put it forward, and lived to see it perpetuated by other scholars.'³⁴ Not everyone, however, committed himself to this canon. When Hermann Jacobi was asked to translate Jain texts for the *Sacred Books of the East*, he selected the *Kalpa Sutra*, which did not belong to the corpus that Bühler had put forward. Yet he chose this text because of its enormous popularity and value to the community, which is attested by its 'overwhelming presence' in manuscript collections.³⁵ Thus the series contributed to a break with and a renewal of a presumed Jain canon. This way a Protestant model of scriptural canonicity was superimposed by orientalists on a religious community, in which texts had mainly a ritual function and no independent authority in themselves.

³¹ Kendall W. Folkert, 'The "Canons" of "Scripture"', in: Miriam Levering, ed., *Rethinking Scripture. Essays from a Comparative Perspective*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1989, pp. 170–9, p. 175.

³² Cf. Michael Bergunder, 'Indischer Swami und deutscher Professor. "Religion" jenseits des Eurozentrismus', in: Michael Stausberg, ed., *Religionswissenschaft*, Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2012, pp. 95–107; Hans Martin Krämer, 'Bringing the Pure Land to Europe. Max Müller and His Japanese Interlocutors' (unpublished paper, workshop, Heidelberg, 14–15 November 2014).

³³ Bühler was a good friend of Müller and contributed to the SBE.

³⁴ Folkert, 'The "Canons" of "Scripture"', p. 175.

³⁵ Folkert, 'The "Canons" of "Scripture"', p. 175.

In this sense the edition of Müller's *Sacred Books* indeed ratified the idea that religious texts of oriental religions function as scriptures in ways analogous to the Hebrew and Christian Bible. Müller has recently been taken to task for 'the absence of probing analysis' in these matters, as he did not reflect very much on the nature of scripture and the presumptions and implications of the series in this regard.³⁶ Scripture, however, was not a key notion for Müller, as he termed the series the 'sacred books', under which rubric he included the Christian Bible. It is sometimes argued that the term 'sacred books' obscures the distorting, hidden assumptions derived from biblical analogies.³⁷ In my view it is somewhat anachronistic to target Müller in this respect. The reproach of obscuring things is not justified, because Müller makes it very clear that he defines the series by texts that have final authority. No doubt, the Protestant idea of the normative character of scripture plays an important role in choosing this criterion. As this leads to a distorted understanding of various traditions, it is important to explore how these 'books' were and are actually used. How did the indigenous specialists deal with Müller's strong authoritative claims? The focus of this book is on Müller's intentions and performance, which were powerful, but not accepted per se in the East.

The notions of sacred books as well as of scriptures are by no means innocent terms to refer to the foundational documents of religious traditions, or what are supposed to be 'religions'.³⁸ The textualization of foreign religions is a token of cultural imperialism, by which scholarly Western authority is imposed on Eastern cultures.³⁹ Actual imperial and cultural power are intertwined here.

³⁶ Folkert, 'The "Canons" of "Scripture"', p. 170; cf. William Graham, 'Scripture', in: Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, New York: Macmillan, 1986–7, vol. XIII, pp. 133–45.

³⁷ Mirjam Levering, 'Introduction: Rethinking Scripture', in: Levering, ed., *Rethinking Scripture*, pp. 1–17, p. 6. The whole volume is inspired by the work of Wilfred Cantwell Smith; cf. Smith, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*, London: SCM Press, 1993, which includes two chapters published earlier in Levering's collection.

³⁸ Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Because of the inadequacy of the term 'religion', Fitzgerald even makes a plea for its abolishment. The best one can say about such a proposal is that it comes too late, as in the process of imperialism and globalism the term has spread over the world and has become even ingrained in foundational, constitutional documents of non-Western states.

³⁹ Cf. Chapter 3, 'Concepts and Ideas', especially the section on orientalism.

Without colonial expansion these ancient texts would never have been 'discovered' and subsequently translated. The monumental series itself exhibited oriental culture, produced by supreme Western scholarship. Textualization is not just an unintended consequence of the inclusion of foreign cultures in the comparative studies of cultural phenomena. Max Müller and others were rather explicit in this respect. In his 'Sketch of Buddhism' (1828), Brian Hodgson explained how he procured in Nepal 'large works relating to Buddhism' from an old man, the *Pâtna Bauddha*, whom he presented with 'a set of questions, which I desired he would answer from his books'.⁴⁰ His information is to be corroborated by the texts that he had acquired for Hodgson. In this procedure texts which actually play a more subordinate role in practical life get authority over the religious specialist, whose authority is redirected and redefined by the textual evidence.

In the same vein Müller claimed that—notwithstanding its shortcomings—the translations of the *Sacred Books of the East* are to be accepted 'for the present as a sufficient authority'. On one occasion Müller invited the 'learned natives' to give their opinion about their own traditions, on the condition, however, that they should always support their statements by reference to their own sacred texts. This way they can 'hold their own against the best oriental scholars of Europe, nay, even correct their views by their own more intimate acquaintance with their sacred texts, and their more living knowledge of the present working of their religion'.⁴¹ The

⁴⁰ Brian Houghton Hodgson, 'Sketch of Buddhism, Derived from the Bauddha Scriptures of Nepal' (1828), in: Hodgson, *Essays on the Languages, Literature and Religion of Nepal and Tibet* (London 1874), reprint Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1972, pp. 35–65, here pp. 35f. These 'questions and answers form the text of this paper. Having in his answers quoted sundry *slokas* in proof of his statements; and many of the scriptures whence these were taken being now in my possession, I was tempted to try the truth of his quotations. Of that, my research gave me in general satisfactory proof. But the possession of the books led to questions respecting their relative age and authority; and, tried by this test, the *Bauddha's* quotations were not always so satisfactory. Thus one step led to another, until I conceived the idea of drawing up, with the aid of my old friend and his books, a sketch of the terminology and general disposition of the external parts of Buddhism, in the belief that such a sketch, though but imperfectly executed, would be of some assistance to such of my countrymen as, with the books only before them, might be disposed to enter into a full and accurate investigation of this almost unknown subject.'

⁴¹ Müller, 'The Principles of the Science of Religion, or Comparative Theology', in: Edmund Buckley, ed., *Universal Religion. A Course of Lessons, Historical and Scientific, on the Various Faiths of the World*, prepared by The University Association, Chicago: The University Association, n.d. [1897], pp. 17–29, p. 29.

tacit implication, of course, is that it could also be the other way around. Seemingly authority is handed back to the 'natives', whereas structurally it is in the hands of Western scholars, who produced and constructed these texts as the only sources of authority. This movement of reversal of authority is performed in Müller's texts, which does not mean, of course, that the original religious informants, specialists, and 'natives' have simply accepted these claims.

WORLD RELIGIONS

According to Tomoko Masuzawa the collection of the *Sacred Books of the East* 'effectively defined the parameters of the "major religions of the world"'.⁴² The main argument to underpin this statement is—if I understand her correctly—that previously there was no established, self-evident list of 'great religions'. Norman Girardot posits that the series ratified 'a particular grouping of "world religions"'.⁴³ Terminology is important here, as Masuzawa shows in her study of world religions, and in this respect the first thing that has to be noted is that the term does not play an important role in Müller's work. Masuzawa writes that the term 'world religions' is generally absent from his writings.⁴⁴ Strictly speaking this is correct, but one should not overlook the fact that Müller spoke incidentally about the '(principal) religions of the world'.⁴⁵ In the introduction to the series and in his lectures on the science of religion from 1870, however, the terminology is absent. Müller spoke here about 'book-religions', and the 'great and original religions which profess to be founded on Sacred Books'.⁴⁶ In Müller's phrasing there were eight of such religions (Brahmanism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Mosaism, Christianity,

⁴² Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, p. 260.

⁴³ Norman Girardot, 'Müller's *Sacred Books*', p. 220. In a footnote he refers to the—at the time—unpublished work of Masuzawa.

⁴⁴ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, p. 217, n. 15. The irritating qualification 'generally' is taken from Masuzawa's footnote.

⁴⁵ Müller, 'The Principles of the Science of Religion', p. 23; Müller, 'Lecture on the Vedas or the Sacred Books of the Brahmins [Leeds, March, 1865]' (1865), in: Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I, pp. 1–49, p. 20.

⁴⁶ Müller, 'Preface', SBE I, p. xli.

Mohammedanism, Confucianism, and the religion of Lao-tse).⁴⁷ As the biblical texts could not be included, only six of these religions were represented in the *Sacred Books of the East*. In this numerical sense the texts assembled in the series did not sum up all the presumed great or world religions.

The specific terminology of 'world religions' emerged in German and, especially, Dutch debates about the classification of religions in the late nineteenth century. In this context the use of the term originates—as far as we know—with the Dutch scholar C. P. Tiele (1830–1902), professor in the history and philosophy of religion at the University of Leiden.⁴⁸ Masuzawa refers to Tiele's famous contribution 'Religions' to the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* of 1886,⁴⁹ where he distanced himself from the concept, whereas in earlier work he had wholeheartedly embraced it. She traces the term back to Tiele's *Outlines of the History of Religion to the Spread of the Universal Religions*, which appeared in 1877.⁵⁰ But already in 1864 in his book on the religion of Zoroaster, Tiele had used the term *wereldgodsdiensten* frequently.⁵¹ Here he made an

⁴⁷ F. Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1873), reissued: London and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1899, pp. 54f. I use here Müller's terminology.

⁴⁸ The term 'Weltreligion' was already used in 1821 by Johann Wolfgang Goethe: *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (1821), in: Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens*, Münchner Ausgabe, edited by Karl Richter, volume XVII, Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1991, pp. 7–237, p. 89. Dieter Lamping, *Die Idee der Weltliteratur. Ein Konzept Goethes und seine Karriere*, Stuttgart: Kröner, 2010.

⁴⁹ J. Z. Smith, Kippenberg, and Masuzawa all date the entry wrongly one or two years earlier in 1884 or 1885. In a letter of 2 October 1884, Robertson Smith had asked Tiele to write this article. The letter is kept in the Tiele Collection, Leiden University Library, BPL 2710.

⁵⁰ C. P. Tiele, *Geschiedenis van den godsdienst tot aan de heerschappij der Wereldgodsdiensten*, Amsterdam: Van Kampen, 1876, translated as: *Outlines of the History of Religion to the Spread of the Universal Religions*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1877.

⁵¹ C. P. Tiele, *De Godsdienst van Zarathustra van haar ontstaan in Baktrië tot den val van het Oud-Perzische Rijk*, Haarlem: Kruseman, 1864; cf. Jonathan Z. Smith, 'A Matter of Class. Taxonomies of Religion' (1996), in: Smith, *Relating Religion. Essays in the Study of Religion*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004, pp. 160–78, pp. 166–73; Jan N. Bremmer, 'Methodologische en terminologische notities bij de opkomst van de godsdienstgeschiedenis in de achttiende en negentiende eeuw', *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 57 (2003) 308–21, pp. 317f.; Christoph Auffarth, '"Weltreligion" als ein Leitbegriff der Religionswissenschaft im Imperialismus', in: F. von der Heyden and Holger Stoecker, eds, *Mission und Macht im Wandel politischer Orientierungen*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005, pp. 225–43.

attempt to determine the place of Parsism in religious history in general by means of classification. The last phase is constituted by the triad of Buddhism, Christianity, and 'Mohammedanism', 'which we could call the universalistic or world religions'.⁵² In his later work Tiele actually dropped the term, but in the 1870s and 1880s he used it to refer to what were seen at the time as the most advanced forms of religion.

Given Tiele's criticism of the usefulness of the term 'world religion' in his contribution to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, it comes somewhat as a surprise that Jonathan Z. Smith has repeatedly claimed in various handbooks that we find here Tiele's 'most sophisticated formulation' and defence of the notion.⁵³ Tiele employed—as Smith writes—'blunt imperialistic language' to defend his use of the term 'world religions'. Thereupon Smith quotes Tiele, who was aiming

[to] distinguish the three religions which have found their way to different races and peoples and all of which profess the intention to conquer the world, from such communities as are generally limited to a single race or nation, and, where they have extended farther, have done so only in the train of, and in connexion with, a superior civilization. Strictly speaking, there can be no more than one universal or world religion, and if one of the existing religions is so potentially it has not yet reached its goal. This is a matter of belief which lies beyond the limits of scientific classification.⁵⁴

In the course of global capitalist and imperial expansion Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam would have indeed 'conquered' the world in this view. But what is curious or—probably more precise—misleading is that Smith left out the beginning of the paragraph, where Tiele dismissed the term and qualified the above quotation by stating: 'Without serving longer to determine the character of certain religions, the term "world religions" might [*sic*] still be retained for

⁵² Tiele, *De Godsdienst van Zarathustra*, p. 275: 'universalistische of wereldgodsdiensten'.

⁵³ Smith, 'Classification', in: Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, eds, *Guide to the Study of Religion*, London and New York: Cassell, 2000, pp. 35–44, p. 41.

⁵⁴ C. P. Tiele, 'Religions', in: *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ninth edn, vol. XX, Edinburgh: Adam Black, 1886, pp. 358–71, p. 368. Jonathan Z. Smith, 'Religion, Religions, Religious', in: Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 269–84, p. 279 (with the quotation).

practical use, to distinguish', etc. Is this really a defence of its usage? Even a critical reading should give a fair representation of what Tiele actually said.

If we look at the usage of the actual term 'world religions', it is not at all clear that Müller's series defined the discourse, as there was no consensus at the time about which particular religions were to be included in this 'top' category. Tiele spoke only about Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam in this context. In his influential studies of the economic ethos of world religions from a later date, the sociologist Max Weber used a purely numerical definition of the term:

By 'world religions' we understand the five religions or religiously determined systems of life-regulation which have known how to gather multitudes of confessors around them. The term is used here in a completely value-neutral sense. The Confucian, Hinduist, Buddhist, Christian, and Islamist religious ethics all belong to the category of world religion.⁵⁵

Taoism and Zoroastrianism are missing in this listing. Weber, however, also included Judaism in his analysis, because of its importance for the understanding of Christianity and Islam on the one hand, and the development of the Western economic ethos on the other.

Here is not the place to discuss the vicissitudes of the use of 'world religions' throughout the last 150 years, but to assess the importance of Müller's series in this respect. Although the edition of the *Sacred Books of the East* did not directly promote the spread of the term 'world religions', it surely was a defining moment in establishing what in other contexts were called 'world religions'. The edition presented to a relatively wide range of scholars and educated laypeople the main religions of the East—not only nominally, but in their textual richness. However, its precise importance and impact are hard to measure. A case can be made that the many reprints and translations of Müller's *Introduction to the Science of Religion* were as influential in this respect. As the examples of Tiele and Weber show, it did not immediately set the agenda for the range of the comparative study of religions. Handbooks did not automatically follow Müller's selection, and other ancient and more modern religions were included in the

⁵⁵ Weber, 'The Social Psychology of World Religions' (original edition 1920), in: H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds, *From Max Weber. Essays in Sociology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1958, pp. 267–301, p. 267.

discourse of ‘world religions’. The connotation and denotation of the term ‘world religions’ were contested right from the start.⁵⁶ Did ‘world religions’ refer to quantitatively large religious communities, which go beyond the nation, or more specifically to a proselytizing or universalizing tendency in some religions? The aggressive character of such wide-ranging religions was acknowledged at the time. A contentious issue was also whether their ‘success’ was due to an innate quality, such as their presumed universalism, or was caused by the expansion of colonial power, at the time often cast in terms of the spread of a superior civilization.

Although Müller’s series did not literally define the extension of (what were supposed to be) the big, respected religions, it did sum up a certain idea of the main religions represented by sacred texts that mattered or should matter to a Western audience—scholarly and practically. Only scholarship could give us reliable and comprehensive information about Eastern wisdom. No anthologies were called for, but translations of the foundational texts in their entirety. Like the Christian Bible these texts had to be read and understood, not just memorized and recited by an educated caste. It is probably not too far-fetched to see at work here the Protestant ideal of the individual reading the whole sacred text(s) and not being satisfied with cherry-picking. In promoting the idea that major religions that are of interest to ‘us’ had to be represented by authoritative texts, Müller did contribute to a textual understanding of what may be called ‘world religions’, but a precise definition is missing in his work, as is the specific term itself.

THE COMPARATIVE WAY

The discourse of ‘world religions’ implied notions of classification, comparison, and development. Even where this exact terminology was not used—as in the case of Max Müller—a certain way of doing ‘comparative religion’ (an utterly misleading term, as Müller already

⁵⁶ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*; Molendijk, “‘The Light of Asia’”. Buddhism as a “World Religion”, Workshop Formation Religious Studies in Asia, IKGF Bochum, 4 February 2011 (unpublished paper).

noted)⁵⁷ is implied. The early practitioners of the science of religion wanted to outline development as well as progress in the history of religions. Classifications and classificatory schemes were used in the cultural sciences in general to map the vast territories of research—mostly in an evolutionist vein. Cultural anthropologists and historians of religion even looked for ‘laws’ of development.⁵⁸

After the paradigm of development had been abandoned it was hard to understand how it could have been so influential. As Evans-Pritchard said in his 1950 Marett Lecture: ‘It will readily be seen how a combination of the notion of scientific law and that of progress leads in anthropology, as in the philosophy of history, to procrustean stages, the presumed inevitability of which gives them a normative character.’⁵⁹ The outspoken normativity of this approach is a thorn in the flesh of present-day scholars of religion. For its early practitioners the discourse of world religions, classification, and progress was an important way to enlarge their field of work and to come to grips with it. One of the big methodological issues was how to deal with the plurality of religions. A purely historical approach would not do, as these early scholars of religion did not want to limit their research to the history of various religions and cultures, but aimed at writing the history of religion and understanding religion as such.

Methodologically, the idea of comparison lies at the root of the new discursivity. In Müller’s view the study of the East has provided ‘us with parallels, and with all that is implied in parallels, viz. the possibility of comparing’.⁶⁰ The most promising way to argue that the edition of the *Sacred Books of the East* ‘publicly defines and authoritatively establishes the new comparative science of religion at the end of the [nineteenth] century’⁶¹ is that it provides the

⁵⁷ Müller, ‘The Principles of the Science of Religion, or Comparative Theology’, p. 21, note: ‘No one would use comparative bones in the sense of comparative anatomy.’

⁵⁸ Molendijk, *The Emergence of the Science of Religion in the Netherlands*, Leiden: Brill, 2005. I have used some passages from chapter 6 of the book.

⁵⁹ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, ‘Social Anthropology. Past and Present’ (1950), in: Evans-Pritchard, *Essays in Social Anthropology*, London: Faber & Faber, 1962, pp. 13–28, p. 17.

⁶⁰ F. Max Müller, ‘Address [to the Aryan Section]’, in *Transactions of the Second Session of the International Congress of Orientalists* (London, September 1874), London, 1876 [Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1968], pp. 177–204, p. 184. The text is reprinted in *Chips of a German Workshop*, vol. IV (first series), pp. 317–58.

⁶¹ Girardot, ‘Müller’s *Sacred Books*’, pp. 219f.

'parallels' for comparison. Of course, the series also set the parameters for a textual approach of religion, but this aspect is not quintessential for the rise of the *comparative* study of religion. Thus it may be argued the series inscribed a new comparative way of doing the study of religion, by putting these texts together in fifty volumes.

This line of argumentation finds—to some extent—support in the writings of Max Müller himself. Knowledge that deserves this name begins in his view with comparison. He would have firmly rejected the idea—as later formulated within the Baden school of Neo-Kantianism—that the humanities would study unique events, whereas the hard sciences would formulate laws. One of its main representatives, the philosopher Wilhelm Windelband, made famous the distinction between 'idiographic' (typical for the humanities, which focus on the unique) and 'nomothetic' (typical for the sciences). Diametrically opposed to such a view, Müller claimed that all human knowledge begins with 'the comprehension of two single things as one'.⁶² Single events thus cannot really be understood. Therefore, the sacred books 'had to be placed side by side with perfect impartiality, in order to discern the points which they share in common as well as those that are peculiar to each'.⁶³ Nevertheless, Müller talked in terms of *applying* the comparative method to the study of religion and their writings in particular. In this sense he would not have claimed that the series as such defined the new approach.

It is not my intention here to say that Müller himself has the last word in this matter, but it is difficult to gather independent evidence that the series really did define or even ratify a whole taxonomy of concepts and methods in the emerging science of religion. That is why I wrote that the edition *inscribed* a new approach, which is developed and explained elsewhere by Müller.⁶⁴ It is not a manifesto that publicly announces new methods and concepts, but somehow the series incorporates these. Most translators were learned specialists of specific oriental cultures, languages, and religions, and did not themselves—perhaps with the exception of Rhys Davids and James Legge—contribute much to the comparative study of various

⁶² Müller, 'Address [to the Aryan Section]', p. 184.

⁶³ Müller, 'Address [to the Aryan Section]', p. 185.

⁶⁴ See Chapter 4, where I show that Müller is mainly interested in the comparison of cognate phenomena and that this type of comparison is deeply embedded in a historical understanding of the world.

religions.⁶⁵ But Müller himself, of course, had this in mind in conceiving the series and made major contributions to the new field. The series did not only envision a method, but also specific results, a theology of religions, as we would call it nowadays. The series presents—he claimed in his lecture to the Oriental Congress of 1874—hard evidence that ‘all religions spring from the same sacred soil, the human heart’, that the infinite is the very condition of the finite, and that man ‘yearns for something the world cannot give’.⁶⁶ Some contributors had intellectual, emotional, and religious affinities with the religions they studied, and wanted—although they remained truthful to their own Christian religion—to transcend the boundaries of old-time orthodoxy. The majority of them—as we have seen—were on the fringes of established Christianity.⁶⁷

POWER, TEXTS, AND LANGUAGE— TRANSLATIONS FOR WHOM?

The edition is somewhat of a mixed bag. The *Sacred Books of the East* are scholarly translations that aim to do justice to the original texts, which are presented in their entirety, but to which readers in particular is the series addressed? On the one hand, it is suggested that it aims at educated readers in general, but are they really expected to buy and read all the fifty volumes? I did not find anything in the archives about subscriptions to the whole series, and even libraries often ordered only specific volumes. Given the fact that the first editions of the volumes comprised 1,500 copies, there must have been a serious interest among an educated elite. On the other hand, the series aimed at scholars of religion, who finally had reliable texts on which they could base their comparisons. To the best of my knowledge there is not much evidence to support the idea that the translations were actually used in many cases for this purpose. The

⁶⁵ The argument here is that the other translators did no major work in the field of the comparative study of religion; cf. Norman J. Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China. James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage*, Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2002, p. 179.

⁶⁶ Müller, ‘Address [to the Aryan Section]’, p. 185.

⁶⁷ See Chapter 2.

reception of the volumes seems to have mainly taken place within specific disciplines and less in 'comparative religion'. No doubt, the series is a monument in the history of the comparative study of religion, because it is the powerful expression of the wish to gather the main religions of the world under one umbrella—in one prestigious and costly edition. The set was presented to the leaders of the world, not only to Queen Victoria, but also to the Sultan of Turkey and the Pope in Rome.⁶⁸ In this respect it is an imperial edition, which establishes authority by representing authoritative sacred books and presenting these to authorities with religious and worldly power.

The achievement of editing and completing fifty volumes—including a powerful index, which rubricizes and categorizes the other forty-nine volumes—gives the edition a monumental character. This fact—which is further strengthened by the reprints and the inclusion in the UNESCO Collection of Representative Works in the 1960s—contributes much to its prestige. Like physical monuments celebrating or commemorating big events in the history of the nation, it still reminds us of Müller's power to assemble his international team of scholars to present the sacred books of the East to mankind (to phrase it in a Müllerian way). It was financed by British institutions and the texts were—as a matter of course—translated into English. This is by no means a minor factor.

The following anecdote, told by Müller's widow, is telling in this respect. A friend of Müller remembered his meeting with 'distinguished Indians', having tea at Balliol. One of them said:

[Müller] has done more than any living man to spread the knowledge of English in India. It is difficult for English people to realize the variety of languages in India, and how little one part of India knows the language of the other part. But we all want to be able to read our Sacred Books. We now widely study English, in order to read our Sacred Books; though there have been imitators since, the praise must belong first to Max Müller, who invented and worked out the idea of translating our Sacred Books into English.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ LLB II, 187, 300, 354, 358; LLA II, 196, 316, 373, 378. LLA and LLB refer, respectively, to the American and British edition of [Georgina Müller], *The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Max Müller*, 2 vols, London, New York, and Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1902.

⁶⁹ LLB II, 364; LLA II, 384.

This story is, of course, a typical example of 'framing', and taken at face value the statement is doubtless an exaggeration, but the fact that these texts, or at least some of them, came to India in English translation testifies to the close relationship between scholarship and empire. This way the knowledge of their own religious past is mediated to educated Indians in a language that is foreign to them and loaded with symbolic power.⁷⁰ This type of Indian 'reception' is a token of imperial power, in the sense that the metropolis dominates its colony not only by its military and administration, but also by education and language, which are deemed necessary for the self-understanding of the colonized. The irony here is that this point of view is not presented as being imposed on the 'distinguished Indians', but accepted by them in their praise for Müller's work. The interiorization of English education and knowledge by the Indian elite is, of course, deeply entangled in hard economic and political forms of colonial power.

The story quoted above even suggests that the English language may transcend the variety of languages in India, and thus help to unify the colony. There exists, as Benedict Anderson has shown, not only a close connection between print capitalism and nationalism, but also between scripture and nation.⁷¹ By his edition of the *Rig-Veda* Müller had contributed to the identity of the colonized Indian nation. Peter van der Veer has pointed to the fact that the orality of Hindu traditions 'was a "national" embarrassment for Indian scholars who were confronted with the comparison with the West'.⁷² It is one thing to textualize oral Hindu traditions in their original language, another to present translations of these sacred texts in the language of the colonial power. The English translations became in the course of history more easily accessible for many Indians than the Sanskrit originals. Both by the edition of the *Rig-Veda* and that of the *Sacred Books* the status of India as a civilized country was re-enforced, as writing was and is seen as proof of civilization. 'Book religions' certainly ranked higher than religions without scriptures. Being able

⁷⁰ Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion. Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'*, London and New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 93.

⁷¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), revised edn, London and New York: Verso, 1991.

⁷² Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters. Religion and Modernity in India and Britain*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 120.

to write and read is one of the key markers of civilizational progress. The idea that illiterate people have to be educated, also for their own sake, is deeply engraved in Western modernity.

Part of the critique of nineteenth- and twentieth-century (oriental) scholarship concerns the ideal of objectivity or—in Müller's terms—impartiality. This idea is nowadays often judged to be at least out of date, unattainable, or even right out suppressive. A remedy that is often suggested is to recognize and asseverate one's own interests and value judgements. There is no consensus about the question if this can really be achieved. The whole ideal of (attaining) 'truth' is much discussed, and some authors such as Sheldon Pollock claim that 'in the last analysis the fundamental question is not the "truth" of the human sciences but their relationship to power, whether as forms of knowledge that sustain illegitimate force or challenge it'.⁷³ In a discussion of German Indology during the Nazi regime such questions may be rightly asked.

In the same essay, however, Pollock writes (with reference to Max Weber's work) that 'a vision of science as value-free seems to have enabled, or certainly was spectacularly unable to prevent, the easy coexistence of scholarship and state violence'.⁷⁴ The more pressing problem at that time 'seems' to have been the extremely value-loaded support for the regime by scholars, who defended for instance a *Germanisierung* of their specific disciplines. Of course, scholars—including Indologists—could have stood up more frequently and firmly for their Jewish colleagues, but the key issue in sustaining the Nazi terror was not the production of critical editions or an ideal of impartial scholarship. To take Max Müller's work as an exemplar of things done wrong in the process of producing a textualized—original and religious—East⁷⁵ does not seem helpful and even counterproductive in understanding the vicissitudes of nineteenth-century historical, philological, and oriental scholarship.

⁷³ Sheldon Pollock, 'Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power Beyond the Raj', in: Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, eds, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament. Perspectives on South Asia*, Philadelphia: University of Virginia Press, 1993, pp. 76–133, p. 114.

⁷⁴ Pollock, 'Deep Orientalism?', p. 113.

⁷⁵ Pollock, 'Introduction', in: Pollock, ed., *Literary Cultures in History. Reconstructions from South Asia*, Berkeley etc.: University of California Press, 2003, pp. 1–36, p. 4, n. 2.

CONCLUSION

Did the *Sacred Books of the East* define the discourse of 'world religions'? Did it change the game of the comparative study of religion and culture? Strictly spoken, these claims cannot be upheld. It is better to see the edition as a crucial marker of these developments than to claim that in itself the series wrought these transformations. This being said, it must be acknowledged that this costly and prestigious edition of fifty volumes carried some weight—literally and symbolically. More than other classical texts—introductions, handbooks, and encyclopaedias—it was a monument of the comparative study of the religious Orient. This monumental character gives the series its distinction and gives rise to the claim that it defined a new method in religious studies.

Certainly the edition inscribed a certain way of looking at cultures, in particular religions. Religion and culture could be seen as closely connected. Müller's friend Matthew Arnold proposed the idea that religion epitomized culture. Religion is the greatest effort 'by which the human race has manifested its impulse to perfect itself'.⁷⁶ This idea involves a particular understanding of religion as being interiorized. Arnold claimed that religion (just like culture) 'places human perfection in an *internal* condition, in the growth and predominance of our humanity proper'.⁷⁷ Arnold saw the Bible as an excellent means to stimulate the imagination of the people.⁷⁸ In an anti-ecclesiastical vein he claimed that only 'true culture' can give us 'the right interpretation of the Bible'.⁷⁹ By this particular understanding of religion and culture the two are closely intertwined. Thus an edition of sacred books could give both a broader cultural orientation and a deeper sense of what religion and culture basically are about. Given such presumptions the objection made by critical scholars nowadays

⁷⁶ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), in: *The Complete Works of Matthew Arnold*, vol. V, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965, pp. 85–256, p. 93.

⁷⁷ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 94 (emphasis in the original).

⁷⁸ Cf. Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible. Translation, Scholarship, Culture*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005, pp. 256f.

⁷⁹ Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma* (1873), in: *The Complete Works of Matthew Arnold*, vol. VI, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968, pp. 139–411, p. 162.

that the edition presents only a highly selective view of oriental culture had not the same weight at the time Müller edited the series.

Nevertheless, from a more distant perspective we must say that the series textualized and religionized (if this word is permitted) the East. In this sense the term 'sacred books' is well chosen and revealing at the same time. The subtext was that these cultures can and must be compared. The construction of the sacred texts was a streak of imperial power. In a deeper sense the series did not only incorporate a certain way of looking at things, but made them appear in the first place, because the oriental cultures were framed according to Western schemes of understanding and interpretation. Müller and his co-workers needed texts, which were to be 'discovered' and brought under the power of Western scholarship. In this way the oral character of religion as practised was 'translated'—and thus could be deformed—into a textual mode by scholars, who looked for 'origins' as documented by manuscripts.⁸⁰

In many cases 'educated orientals' were estranged from their own practices and presented with a presumably more original and thus authoritative version of their religion. Apparently Müller accepted them as intellectual partners, but the authority of pundits and other religious officials was transferred to the texts, which were produced in the West. Only if they could back up their insights by textual reference was their voice to be heard. This type of orientalism was no one-way street, but the conditions of the conversation were determined by the discursivity of a textualized understanding of religion. Despite all goodwill which oriental scholars such as Müller certainly had towards the people and cultures of the East, imperial power and the concomitant discourse enforced their understanding on these cultures.

The aim of this chapter was to sketch and measure the importance and impact of the edition of the *Sacred Books of the East*—in particular in relation to the contemporary study of religions and cultures at the end of the nineteenth century. To recapitulate: in my view the series is best considered to be a marker and not a definer of the

⁸⁰ This does not mean, of course, that the 'sacred books' were pure Western constructions without any basis in ancient Eastern traditions. Müller and his co-workers looked for texts and manuscripts in the East which they could use for their series. Some 'sacred books'—for instance the Chinese texts—already had an established status before they were translated. The language of 'construction' and even 'invention' refers predominantly to the unequal power relations between the translators and their Eastern informants; cf. Chapter 3.

ongoing changes in these fields of study. Much depends—as always in such cases—on one's view of what were the most important developments at the time. In my perception the comparative method defines the rise of 'science of religion'. On another occasion I have described this transition as follows:

Comparison was thought to be the golden road to a scientific approach to phenomena at the time. From a methodological point of view, the rise of science of religion can be described in terms of the encounter of the comparative approach, which in a more speculative fashion had been the prerogative of the philosophy of religion, and the historical-empirical methods of the cultural sciences of the nineteenth century.⁸¹

Max Müller and scholars such as the historian Edward A. Freeman defined the comparative method as thoroughly historical, to the point that on some occasions these terms seem to have been used interchangeably.⁸² If one wants to argue that the series epitomizes this approach, then indeed it marks a breakthrough in the emergence of the scholarly study of religion.

⁸¹ Molendijk, *The Emergence of the Science of Religion in the Netherlands*, p. 13.

⁸² See Chapter 4.

Afterthoughts

Modern words are round, ancient words are square, and we may as well hope to solve the quadrature of the circle, as to express adequately the ancient thoughts of the Veda in modern English.

(Max Müller)¹

ANCIENT AND MODERN AND THE NEED FOR INTERPRETATION

One of the basic presuppositions of Friedrich Max Müller's edition of the *Sacred Books of the East* is the idea that ancient texts are relevant for modern man. The series was meant to provide the data for the scholar of religion, the history of religions serving at the time as a source of ethics and world views.² The relevance of these ancient texts, however, appears to be somewhat hidden, as according to Müller they contain so many obsolete elements. Moreover, as the epigraph to this chapter indicates, the differences between ancient and modern language were deemed to be huge. How did he deal with this incongruity? The most obvious answer is 'by a particular theory of interpretation'.

Müller said that many difficulties in religious history are due to the 'constant misinterpretation of ancient language by modern

¹ Müller, 'Preface', *The Upanishads*, SBE I, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879, second edn 1900, p. xxvii.

² Hans G. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002, p. xi.

language'.³ What does this remark mean? We may easily agree that there is a huge gap between ancient and modern thought and that much concentration and expertise is needed to make ancient words intelligible. The hidden implication of this statement, however, is that in order to make sense of these ancient words they have to be reappropriated according to 'modern' standards of thought. Thus, the relationship between antiquity and modernity, in particular between the ancient East and the modern West, is framed in a dialectical way. We need to know the ancient oriental roots of the West to understand our own culture and religion. To penetrate into these depths, however, we cannot and must not take ancient statements at their face value. We need a 'charitable' interpretation that does not focus on the 'literal sense' of words, but aims to understand 'their true and original purport'. This is the way to discover 'the real truth of ancient sacred books'.⁴ Most present-day scholars of religion, of course, will reject this type of 'interpretation' outright, because in their view it would impose modern meanings on ancient texts.

TIME AND AUTHORITY

The *Sacred Books of the East* series entails a time frame. Notwithstanding a longing for the ancient past, the opposition between ancient and modern prompts the idea that 'we' have moved on since ancient times. Müller does not represent a hegemonic Enlightenment form of rationality, because his views are mitigated by what could be called a Romantic inclination to appreciate cultural diversity and a sense of the importance of origins, which help us understand our present-day civilization. According to Müller, the oriental Renaissance—to refer to the title of Raymond Schwab's famous book—has taught us that the Orient and the Occident are closely connected. This conviction underlies his paradoxical claim that the true charm of antiquity lies in its modernity and relevance for 'us' today.⁵

³ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1873, p. 43.

⁴ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, p. 281. See Chapter 3, pp. 97–100.

⁵ Müller, 'On the "Enormous" Antiquity of the East', *Nineteenth Century* 29 (1891) 796–810, p. 805.

In this respect Müller's perception of time, development, and space is important. He was keenly aware of how even the world of his own childhood differed from that of the late nineteenth century. Due to railways, steamships, newspapers, and international congresses the world 'has shrunk to half its former size' during his own lifetime.⁶ He sensed a shrinkage not only in space, but in time as well. What was an hour is now scarcely half an hour, and a morning would be gone—he pondered—before he had answered 'half of the letters from every part of the world that lie scattered about on my table'.⁷ This process is interpreted by Müller in moral terms, as a growing together of the world. By meeting others and discussing and comparing points of view we may also look critically at our own religion.

This line of argumentation should not obscure Müller's highly normative stance. He was not particularly modest about what was achieved by the translations of the *Sacred Books of the East*. Bringing together the 'Fathers of the Universal Church' was for him 'an absolute necessity'.⁸ He claimed that his own edition was more authoritative and had done more to spread mutual respect among religions than the famous 1893 Chicago Parliament of Religions.⁹ Notwithstanding the growing respect for other religions, Müller did not hesitate, when asked which sacred book he considered superior to all others, to claim this status for the Old Testament and especially the New Testament, because of the prominence of its ethical teaching.¹⁰

The collection, translation, and interpretation of the sacred books is first and foremost a matter of knowledgeable specialists, who sacrificed their time to translate these sometimes 'tedious and

⁶ Müller, 'The Kutho-Daw' (*Nineteenth Century*, September 1895), in: *Last Essays*. Second Series: Essays on the Science of Religion, London etc.: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901, pp. 210–30, p. 210.

⁷ Müller, 'The Kutho-Daw', p. 212.

⁸ Max Müller, 'Forgotten Bibles', *Nineteenth Century* 15 (1884) 1004–22, p. 1004; reprinted in *Last Essays*. Second Series: Essays on the Science of Religion, London etc.: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901, pp. 1–35.

⁹ Max Müller, 'The Real Significance of the Parliament of Religions', *Arena* 11: 1–14 [No. 61, December 1894], reprinted in: Eric J. Ziolkowski, ed., *A Museum of Faiths. Histories and Legacies of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions*, Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1993, pp. 149–62, esp. pp. 156–8; cf. Arie L. Molendijk, "'To Unite Religion against all Irreligion". The 1893 World Parliament of Religions', *Journal for the History of Modern Theology* 18 (2011) 1–23.

¹⁰ Interview, *Christian Commonwealth* (undated [1894]), in: *The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Max Müller*, 2 vols, London, New York, and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902, vol. II, p. 322 (American edn, p. 339).

childish' texts.¹¹ It is with these modern scholars, who are presented as martyrs for the noble cause of the series, that authority resides. The value of ancient texts and religions is not a question that is to be settled in an open religious dialogue, but is determined by authoritative scholars, who can detect the 'grains of gold' in otherwise antiquated texts. For instance, from his modern point of view Müller considers the religion of India to be 'like a half-fossilised megatherion walking about in the broad day-light of the nineteenth century'.¹²

The parables of the New Testament are treated somewhat more gently, but it is evident that in Müller's view only a 'charitable interpretation' can unravel their 'real meaning'.¹³ The dialectical tension in these assessments cannot be overlooked. On the one hand, there are treasures to be found in the sacred books; on the other hand, it is the light of modern scholarship that enables us to unearth these and translate them in an intelligible way. This is by no means an easy task: 'when we try to reach the Infinite and the Divine by means of more abstract terms, are we even now better than children trying to place a ladder against the sky?'.¹⁴ This may sound modest, but actually Müller argued from a strong authoritative position.

Beyond the scholarly surface of the literal translations of the *Sacred Books of the East* lies the quest for a deeper understanding of the human condition. For its *auctor intellectualis* there was no doubt that the texts—provided they are interpreted correctly—will point to the core of all religions, that is the perception of the infinite. Editing and studying textual traditions thus contributes to a spiritualized understanding of religion.¹⁵ Under the aegis of modern historical and philological scholarship a new idea of 'religion' is developed and promoted. Thus, a programme to reform 'religion' is legitimized by projecting a modern ideal into the ancient past. In this process the authority of religions and their religious specialists is transferred to scholars and their institutions of learning.

¹¹ Max Müller, 'Forgotten Bibles', p. 1004.

¹² Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, p. 279.

¹³ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, p. 280.

¹⁴ Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, p. 279.

¹⁵ Peter van der Veer, *The Modern Spirit of Asia. The Spiritual and the Secular in China and India*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014.

THE TEXTUALIZATION OF RELIGION

At the forefront, however, were the fifty authoritative volumes of the *Sacred Books of the East*. The series marks the coming of age of 'science of religion', which would rigorously assemble, compare, and evaluate data. Notwithstanding the price of the series and its scholarly ambitions (presenting the texts in full), it did spread the 'good news' (from the East) among the educated elites of its time. Müller's edition contributed hugely to a textual understanding of religion. In this ambitious project it is scriptures that define what religion is about—'bookless' religions are not included. Oral traditions are translated and thus possibly deformed into textual modes of representation, as shown by Müller's use of the expression 'walking manuscripts' to refer to the learned informants in the East. Textualizing and—if this word is permitted—'religionizing' the Orient are the key effects of the series in the history of the study of culture and religion.

The edition is rightly called a landmark in the history of religious studies, because it favours the study of religions that have sacred *books*, thus promoting the discursivity of 'world' religions, which have to be studied in relation to each other. It also testifies to the rise of big science, of large-scale joint efforts, funded with extra money, producing a steady flow of publications. The fact that it was partly funded by the India Office of Britain makes it all the more clear that the *Sacred Books of the East* are a token of imperial knowledge as well, creating a textual East that is subjugated to the power of modern historical and comparative scholarship. Eastern religions brought home did matter.

Methodologically, the series served the comparative understanding of religions—not so much for the individual contributors, who dealt with their own translations, as for Max Müller himself, for whom the series embodied the imperative to compare. That the edition was not often used in this way—not even by Müller himself—does not alter this fact. The readers were encouraged to widen their perspective by taking the alleged key texts of the 'world religions' into account. Although nowadays many translations are outdated, the series can still be consulted at the Internet Sacred Texts Archive, which presents documents from various religious traditions.¹⁶ The edition was and is

¹⁶ <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/sbe/index.htm>>.

a monument of the emerging ‘science of religion’, which still reminds us—like physical statues and monuments—of Max Müller’s power to edit a defining series, which over the course of time has become not (as was hoped) a working tool for comparativists, but a textual and digital *lieu de mémoire* of a field of study that was thought to change the aspect of the world. The moral and religious hopes that Müller associated with the emerging science of religion are hard to imagine for present-day scholars. But the ideas that are embodied in the *Sacred Books of the East* have had a huge influence on religious studies in the twentieth century.

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