

In Search of a Historiography of Jesuit Science in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-century India

The historical discourse on the expansion of modern European sciences into regions designated as the non-West generally originates in a variety of descriptions of the “Voyages of Discovery”.¹ The majority of these histories are rooted in a fundamental asymmetry since they tend either to ignore or underplay any comparison with the processes of transmission of so-called modern science within Europe itself.² Furthermore, these histories tend to be anchored in a historiography that projects a nineteenth-century reconstruction of European history of science³ onto the non-West in that they centre the conflict, first between “Western science” and religion, and later between Western science and religions or in terms of the concomitant dichotomies of reason and unreason, rationality and superstition, modernity and tradition. Several components of this historiography have been interrogated over the last three decades.⁴ However, the historiography of interest in this chapter is the one founded on the conflict of science and religion, and whose original myth resides in the “trial of Galileo”.⁵ One of the most recent interrogations appears in Heilbron’s book entitled *The Sun in the Church*.⁶ In this brief essay I shall discuss one aspect of an emerging area referred to as Jesuit science.⁷ In particular,

1 William K. Storey, ed., *Scientific Aspects of European Expansion*, vol. 6 (Aldershot, 1996); George Basalla, ed., *The Rise of Modern Science* (Lexington, MA, 1968).

2 Steve Fuller, Prolegomena to a world history of science, in: *Situating the History of Sciences. Dialogues with Joseph Needham*, ed. S. Irfan Habib and Dhruv Raina, (Oxford, 1999), pp. 114–151.

3 Rivka Feldhay, *Galileo and the Church* (Cambridge, 1995).

4 Storey, *Scientific Aspects*; Patrick Petitjean, Catherine Jami, and Anne Marie Moulin, eds., *Science and Empires* (Dordrecht, 1992); Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism* (Cambridge, 1995); Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men* (New Delhi, 1990).

5 Stillman Drake, *Galileo at Work* (Chicago, 1980); M.A. Finocchiaro, *Galileo and the Art of Reasoning* (Dordrecht, 1978); Pietro Redondi, *Galileo. Heretic* (Princeton, 1987).

6 John L. Heilbron, *The Sun in the Church* (Cambridge, MA, 1999).

7 Steven J. Harris, Transposing the Merton thesis. *Science in Context* 3 [1] (1989): 29–65.