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The English East India Company and its Duality in Religious
Mentality in the 17th century

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

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I. Preliminaries of the Research, Raising the Problems:

The purpose of the dissertation is to examine the English East India Company's religiousness on the Indian subcontinent as well as on the voyages during the 17th century and the Company's attempts to maintain the English Protestant communities far away from English soil. Besides this, the work presents and analyzes prayers and sermons written for the Company or other English trading companies to shed more light on the contemporary religious mentalities of the people living within the commercial and seafaring worlds. The travel literature and religious texts translated in this work add knowledge to the early English East India Company's lesser known and discussed world, their religiousness.

The dissertation attempts to answer several questions: Why and how did the English East India Company, as a trading company deal with religious questions during the 17th century? How did they try to maintain the English community in India and during the voyages? What kind of devices did they use for this? Did the trade of the material world and profit orientation push religion into the background? What sources did the contemporary sermons and prayers written for the trading companies draw from and what were their usual toposes? Can travel literature and sermons be used as history of mentalities sources in the research of the Company's history?

The English East India Company has a vast amount of literature, mainly abroad. The Hungarian literature about the

Company is deficient. From the nature of the Company's operations the literature is mostly economical and political.

The early era of the Company is the period before the Battle of Plassey, or as the literature terms it the „factory period” or its commerical age. This era has less literature and is less processed than the territorial period (after 1757).

To research the Company's religiousness it is necessary to somewhat examine English history from the 16th century onwards, and the development of the Company's Indian circumstances. With these and the here translated 17th century religious texts which are presented and analyzed, the dissertation tries to shed more light on a small but more specialised part of the Company's history. This kind of analysis and use of the sermons, guidebooks and prayers is not yet exhausted.

In recent years the Company has not only been examined as a commerical organization, but was considered in the light of social, cultural, political and ideological history. The Company is part of England's domestic history, the modern monetary and consumer revolution and the Early Modern Era's and Modern Era's economic ideas.

Monsoon Asia, next to its own and independent history became part of Europe's as well. With the decolonization of „European world history” the colonial world's eurocentric perspective and the „histories” written from the „superiority's” viewpoint gain a different and new light.

II. Methods used for the Dissertation:

In order to be able to present the religious mentality of the early English East India Company and its duality, it is necessary to shed light on the subject in many ways.

The source base for researching the history of the Company began to grow from the very beginning of its operation. The sources are from the 17th-18th century, written in English and so is the literature. The examined sources', texts', literature's creation period is quite broad, ranging from the 17th century up until 2022. I narrowed down the collection of religious guides, sermons, and prayer collections, focusing on the 17th century, including texts written for the English East India Company, other English commercial companies, or their members, and mainly focusing on the sea and trade related texts.

Most of the sources can be reached digitally, online, which was great help especially after the appearance of the Coronavirus in 2019. Electronically accessible sources offer new opportunities, especially in terms of their availability, and the digitization of the original source materials can contribute to their longer-term preservation and to the illumination of new (perhaps hitherto hidden) results.

The research starts from the 17th century, from the founding of the Company (and its antecedents), considering the subject, the closing date is the period of 1707-1711, since this time frame can be

considered the beginning of a "new time reckoning" both in the Company and in the English Kingdom.

My research aims to shed light the religious mentality of the 17th century English East India Company on the Indian subcontinent and on their ships, due to the fact that differences can already be sensed in this time period. Europe became religiously more heterogeneous by the 17th century and it is understandable from the London headquarters that they wanted to support evangelisation in South Asia, but those present in India, initially arrived into a much more diverse area in religion, identity and ethnicity, where, for example Islam was not the religion of the enemy but of the masses and the Mughal Empire which was a great power by this time in India.

The background of the English East India Company in the 17th century, its operation and its locations, as well as the social, religious and political situations there, are also important aspects for understanding its religious situation. Several works in many branches of historical sciences were used, like church-, religious-, mentality, economic and political histories and for example the theory of middlemen minorities.

The historiography of the the English East India Company is almost the same age as the Company itself. The primary sources were collected from the beginning in the archives of the Company and later in the India Office Records, which today mostly are in the British Library in England and in American and Indian archives. The archives of the Company grew enormously under its operation. Where letters,

minutes, reports, regulations, diaries, legal and economic documents, maps, annuals and other registers, texts and newspapers can be found.

The secondary sources started to appear not long after the foundation of the Company. Next to these – even political and economical – analyses and works were written based on the primary sources from an early period. Since the Company operated for several centuries, after a time the primary and secondary sources were created at the same time, „next to” each other, thus the Company can be thought of as a „living history”. Tertiary sources have also been written relating to the Company (for example dictionaries, lexicons, encyclopedias).

The examined sermons’ texts write about the dangers of the sea and next to this often cover the ideas of the „Christian merchant”, the „Christian sailor” as well as God, as a travel companion and protector with the aim of preserving and maintaining the seafarers’ and sailors’ souls and morals. Some wrote about the characteristics of the Christian merchant, others about the pious and prudent traveller in the texts. Prayer books were also written, in which next to everyday prayers, thanksgivings can be found and some travelogues also covered the religiousness of the people of the lands they visited, or at least to the extent they got „know” it.

The contemporary travel literature, sermons, letters and the other used sources together shed more light on the English East India Company’s 17th century religiousness. It is interesting – though not surprising – that within these texts one can find several economic themed sermons, which usually described the period appropriate

mercantile system, highlighting the success of the English expansion, which was often attributed to the throwing off of the Roman „yoke“.

The sermons are very important since they were written specifically for the Company, the seas, the long voyages and the dangers thereof, as well as for the distant lands, where they thought that the faith of the Christian believer may be in danger. The aim of these texts, above all, was to maintain a good moral life and to assure the traveling believers that in any monstrosity and danger they are in, God is with them.

III. New Results:

The results of the research of this dissertation can be summarised in the following theses:

1. The examination of the religiousness of the English East India Company adds to the Company's lesser known history's research.
2. Through the 17th century sermons written for the English trading companies it is presented what kind of spiritual support the authors and their clients wanted to give the merchants and the sailors.
3. The religiosity and religious scene of early modern people and how it could have developed in a milieu alien to them.

4. How they implemented, tried to implement or wanted to implement the maintenance of Protestantism – after its European roots – in India and the places betwixt, on the ships.
5. By tying together trade, sermons and the Company and their analyzation shows some aspects of Early Modern religiousness and how the authors tried to warn the Company that materiality should not divert them from religion.
6. The used 17-18th century sermons, prayers, guidebooks, reflections, travel literature and other source sections are translated into Hungarian and placed in analogy.
7. The sermons often drew from biblical shipping stories, marine life and tried to „personalise” them. The sermons and other religious texts written for the different English trading companies reveal their source base and the mostly used toposes, economic principles and biblical stories.
8. The religious texts and travel literature written for the companies shed light in some extent on the contemporary religiousness and how people could have thought about the new and exotic lands and their inhabitants and religions.

9. The English East India Company's duality in (religious) mentality can be detected in the London-Asia line, between land and sea and in their employees' duality in existence.

IV. Publications Related to the Dissertation:

Hungarian Articles:

1. Harding, Noémi: The English East India Company and its Duality in Religious Mentality in the 17th Century. (Az Angol Kelet-indiai Társaság kettős vallási mentalitása a 17. században.) In: Essays in Church History in Hungary (Magyar Egyháztörténeti Vázlatok), 30. évfolyam 1-2. szám, METEM, Budapest, 2020. pp. 5-16.
2. Harding, Noémi: Prayers of the English East India Company. (Az Angol Kelet-indiai Társaság imái.) Expected publication: Egyháztörténeti Szemle, Sárospataki Református Kollégium Tudományos Gyűjteményei, 2023.
3. Harding, Noémi: 17th Century English Protestant Thoughts and the English East India Company. (17. századi angol protestáns gondolatok és az Angol Kelet-indiai Társaság.) Expected publication: Pázmány Péter Catholic University Doctoral School of History Conference Volume.

4. Harding, Noémi: Through the Eyes of the English East India Company: The „Clash” of Economy and Religion? (Az Angol Kelet-indiai Társaság keresztmetszetében: Gazdaság és vallás „harca”?) Expected publication: POLYMATHEIA, Művelődés- és neveléstörténeti folyóirat, A Kodolányi János Egyetem Folyóirata, September 2023.

Hungarian Review:

5. Harding, Noémi: Religion, as a Power Device. (Vallás, mint hatalmi eszköz.) Expected publication: Essays in Church History in Hungary (Magyar Egyháztörténeti Vázlatok), 2023/3-4 METEM, Budapest, November-December 2023.

English Articles:

7. Harding, Noémi: 17th Century Protestant Thoughts and the English East India Company’s Sermons. Expected publication: Freeside Europe Online Academic Journal, A Kodolányi János Egyetem Folyóirata, November 2023.
8. Harding, Noémi: Sermons and Navigation: 17th Century English East India Company and the Sea. Expected publication: Essays in Church History in Hungary (Magyar Egyháztörténeti Vázlatok), 2023/1-2, METEM, Budapest, August 2023.

English Review:

9. Harding, Noémi: Religion, as a Power Device. Expected publication: Freeside Europe Online Academic Journal, A Kodolányi János Egyetem Folyóirata, November 2023.

Conference Presentation:

„The Merchant in his Minority...”: The English East India Company and Religion (Presentation in Hungarian). Doctoral School of History Conference, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, Hungary, 18 May 2022.