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Review of Tobias Delfs, *Die Dänisch-Englisch-Hallesche Indienmission  
des späten 18. Jahrhunderts: Alltag, Lebenswelt und Devianz*

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TOBIAS DELFS, *Die Dänisch-Englisch-Hallesche Indienmission des späten 18. Jahrhunderts: Alltag, Lebenswelt und Devianz, Beiträge zur Europäischen Überseegeschichte*, 112 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2020), 286 pp. ISBN 978 3 515 12867 4. €54.00

Recent years have seen an increased interest in the history of Protestantism in early modern South-East Asia and the involvement of Germans in European colonialism in the Indian Ocean world. Tobias Delfs contributes to this growing body of scholarship with a social study of the Danish-English-Halle Mission (DEHM) and the Moravian Church (*Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine*) in the Bay of Bengal in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Rather than looking at the religious activities of the missions, he lays bare their social environments in Europe and in India and illuminates the local challenges that led to behaviour that deviated from the expectations of the missionary headquarters in Europe.

The book under review is a slightly revised version of Delfs's doctoral dissertation completed at the University of Zurich in 2017. Moving away from older scholarship praising the work of the DEHM missionaries, Delfs's monograph focuses on the problems the missionaries faced in India, which included disease, mental health challenges, financial strains, and alcoholism. The book argues that the missionaries developed individual solutions to these challenges that were tailored to the missionary environment, and which differed from the values and morals of the mission headquarters in Europe. As a result, the missionaries maintained different perceptions from their superiors in Europe regarding what constituted appropriate behaviour. Besides the monitoring from Halle, the missionaries also assessed each other's behaviour, as well as that of other European residents and the indigenous population. In judging the actions of others, the missionaries initially held onto the Pietist and class norms they knew from Europe, but they had to adapt and reinvent these norms to adequately address the specific situation of their colonial milieu.

Delfs concentrates on the period from 1777, when responsibility for the Danish colonies was transferred from the Danish East India Company to the Danish state, to 1813, when British missionary societies became active in India. He draws upon unpublished letters from

the archives of the Francke Foundations and the Moravian Church, reports on the Halle mission from Copenhagen, the better known published *Hallesche Berichte*, and contemporary eighteenth- and nineteenth-century accounts. The result is a well researched work tailored to multiple audiences. The book's primary focus is on deviant behaviour (in the sociological sense) in the DEHM and the Moravian missionary societies, but it also presents a social history of the wider European presence in India. Delfs looks beyond the boundaries of nations to paint a hybrid landscape of missionaries, indigenous converts, trading companies, and European inhabitants.

The book first outlines the European background of the missionaries, their training and ordination, and the Francke Foundations' expectations of their conduct while on mission. The next chapter is devoted to the colonial environment in India and the role of the missionaries' families. Delfs then delves deeper into individual experiences of health, death, and deviant behaviour among the missionaries. Particularly illuminating are his speculations on the possible suicides of the DEHM minister Lambert Christian Früchtenicht (pp. 176–95) and the Herrnhut missionary Christian Renatus Beck (pp. 195–208). The final chapter assesses the judicial systems in the missionary environment, as well as the missionaries' business activities and the behaviour of the missionized population.

The study encompasses deviance from religious convention as well as from organizational, legal, and class norms. The most common form of deviant behaviour identified by Delfs is found in the economic activities of the missionaries. Rising living costs in particular forced some ministers to take on sidelines to keep themselves and the mission financially secure. While ministers who produced and sold alcohol clearly violated Pietist norms, it was less obvious whether activities such as collecting flora and fauna constituted acceptable behaviour. Missionaries who traded in natural objects filled the *Hallesche Berichte* with their botanical and zoological observations to attract readers and encourage donations. Collecting curiosities could thus be beneficial for the mission, but also sapped the missionaries' capacity for carrying out their religious work and made them susceptible to accusations of greed and financial gain (pp. 228–30). While the Francke Foundations endeavoured to filter out economically

motivated applicants, Delfs demonstrates that the ministers were not driven by religious zeal alone, but frequently had commercial motives for joining the missions. Clergymen who could not secure a post in Europe hoped that a short but lucrative stint in India would pave the way for a comfortable life upon their return. In reality, missionary life proved a financial struggle rather than an economic opportunity, which encouraged the clergymen to depart from the code of conduct imposed by the missionary organization.

One of the major insights is that nearly all missionaries in the DEHM and the Moravian Church were criticized for their economic activities to a greater or lesser degree. The missionary headquarters in Europe and other ministers on site usually tolerated financial activities as long as they lay within the bounds of accountability and propriety, as with the business ventures of Johann Philipp Fabricius, which helped to keep the mission financially afloat. Fabricius only received harsh criticism when he started to mismanage his finances and fell into debt (p. 256). Another common form of deviance related to drunkenness. While Pietists in Europe generally disapproved of alcohol, moderate consumption was believed to contribute to the general health of Europeans living in South Asia, especially when drinking water was unsafe. A few ministers, as well as several Indian employees of the DEHM, however, became alcoholics in India and the headquarters of both the DEHM and the Moravian mission had to issue instructions against the consumption of large quantities of spirits.

However, Delfs's study is more than a history of missionary deviance and provides valuable insights into the ministers' social environment, including their families, local indigenous groups, and other European inhabitants. The missionaries interacted with the Danish, English, and Dutch colonial administrations in their vicinity, and these contacts varied from co-operation to competition. The missionaries of the DEHM modelled their contact with other European inhabitants along the class lines they were accustomed to in Europe, but at times abandoned the boundaries of class, especially when associating with other Germans, to whom they showed a preference (pp. 104-5). With few exceptions, the missionaries married women of European descent, whether born in India or in Europe. They did not choose Indian or mixed European-Indian spouses, unlike the Europeans among whom

they lived. Delfs's analysis of the way missionaries shaped their social environment provides useful comparative examples for the history of family and the European presence in colonial India.

There are a few elements that could have been optimized. The introduction, conclusion, and blurb suggest that the book focuses on deviant behaviour within the DEHM, but the author also explores themes such as disease, mortality, and the colonial justice systems at length without adequately clarifying their connection to deviance. Did the higher chance of death in colonial society, for instance, lead to an erosion of morals in the mission? To what extent did nonconformist behaviour in the missions become known among the general public in Europe when problems were addressed locally, and did this degeneration contribute to the dwindling number of European benefactors to the missions? These connections could have been made more explicit.

One of the book's strengths is that it includes the lesser-studied Moravian mission in Bengal and draws on a range of previously unknown manuscript sources. Unfortunately the Moravians do not feature as prominently in the book as their Hallensian counterparts, as Delfs argues that the DEHM was more influential in India (p. 12). The Moravians feature neither in the book's title nor in the blurb, which is a missed opportunity to bring these new findings to the attention of ecclesiastical historians.

The book also has more potential to contribute to research on the European presence in India than it currently claims. The author frequently cites further reading in the footnotes, where he could instead have highlighted his book's new insights against this established literature. The central argument could also have been stated more assertively in the main body of the text; instead, the narrative detail is allowed to overtake the argument at times. The book, therefore, would have benefited from a more consistent authoritative tone, which the author convincingly displays in the conclusion. A map of India showing sites of missionary activity and nearby cities would have been useful too.

Overall, this book is a welcome addition for historians of the Danish-English-Halle and Moravian missions and offers a commendable analysis of deviance within the world of these missionary societies. The book is also a valuable comparative work for historians

in adjacent fields, such as Protestant missionary history more generally, and for scholars interested in the social dimensions of European colonialism in India. Historians of the Danish, English, and Dutch East India Companies will benefit from the sections on the interaction between the missionaries and European company personnel. This book therefore offers a starting point for further comparative research on the social history of the DEHM and Moravian missions.

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