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Missionaries, Travelers, and Scholars: the Building of an Indian
Manuscripts Collection in the National Library of France

Jérôme Petit

(BnF)

It seems to me that there are two points of view when we make the history of a collection. The first one is a look back on the different entries that constitute de collection: gifts, acquisitions, givers, owners, sellers, geographical provenances. It is certainly the more common way to build efficiently the history of a collection. The second one is to make the history of the catalogues available in the history: who were able to catalogue Indian manuscripts, to whom such a catalogue should be published, etc., are important questions for us, librarians, archivists, gathered together for this symposium. If you allow me to do so, I would like to make the history of the Indian manuscripts collection at the National Library of France through these two points of view.

The National Library keeps one thousand eight hundred seventy eight manuscripts in the “Sanskrit” collection and one thousand sixty four manuscripts in the “Indien” collection. Through the term “Indien”, taken as a language or a group of languages, we find manuscripts in Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, Punjabi, Hindoustani, etc., that had been gathered under a single collection at the beginning of the twentieth century. I hope to make clear this point during my presentation as I will talk about catalogues and their implications.

The heart of the collection beat for the first time at the beginning of the eighteenth century, in the years seventeen thirties, when the Abbey Jean-Paul Bignon, librarian of the King Louis

the fifteen, asked Etienne Fourmont, the figure of the orientalist at that time, to form a collection of Chinese and Indian books. Fourmont decided to take profit of the network of missionaries that stayed in this part of the world. He wrote letters to ask Jesuits fathers to send to the Royal Library manuscripts of important texts that could be representative of the literary production of China and India. Father Jean-François Pons, established in Chandernagore (Chandannagar), sent among one hundred seventy manuscripts from Bengal that formed the historical core of the collection. He sent also a list of the manuscripts sent that could be shown as the first catalogue of the collection! This list is very impressive for the time at which it has been written, in January seventeen thirty three. The manuscripts are classified in seven categories. We find thirty one books classified as ‘Philological Books’ that are tools for the learning of the Sanskrit language. Among these tools is the famous “Grammar of Father Pons” on which Antoine Léonard Chézy learned Sanskrit. Chézy will be the first ‘official’ teacher of Sanskrit in Europe. We have celebrated last June the two hundred years anniversary of the creation of the Sanskrit Course in Collège de France, as you probably know. In Pons list we also find twenty two ‘mythological poems’, a quite large category under which is classified the Śākuntala of Kālidāsa for example. The category ‘Pouranam’, with the Sanskrit term kept by Pons, contains forty two numbers. We find in it the Great Purāṇa (Śiva-, Viṣṇu-, Bhagavata-, Brahmavaivārta-, Markandeya-, Matsia-, etc.) but also the seventeen volumes of a Bengali recession of the Mahābhārata. Then we find eight manuscripts of important texts in Astronomy/astrology field like the Siddhāntamañjarī. Nine texts are classified in the vague category of “diverse poesy” in which we find for example a copy of the Amaruśataka with this mention: “moral verses”. Certainly those erotic verses had been sold as ‘moral’ by the Bengali Pandits. Still Antoine Leonard de Chézy gave a translation of this text under a pseudonymous (Apudy)... Then we find twenty five texts classified under the category “Books of Laws, Usages, and Practices of the Cult of Gods” that form a solid ensemble with

the Mānavadharmaśāstra (Laws of Manu) and some devotional or ritual texts. The case of the “Philosophical Books” is certainly the more interesting. It seems that they particularly took the attention of Father Pons. He gave before the list in itself a brief introduction on the different philosophical schools that are to be found in India. Among those schools, the Nyāya is the more represented with thirty eight manuscripts. We can explain this peculiarity by the strong presence of the Navya-nyāya school in Bengal, especially in Navadvipa, with the great master Gāṅgeśa Upādhyāya and his illustrious pupil Raghunātha Śiromaṇi, both perfectly pointed by Father Pons.

To this first ensemble, we have to add the seventy manuscripts sent from South India by the Fathers of the “Carnate Mission”, particularly by Father Etienne Le Gac in Pondicherry, and Father Calmette in Mysore. Those manuscripts had been subject to sending lists but they were not classified as Bengali manuscripts were. All the fields are still well represented: Veda, Purāṇa, Logics, Poetics, Grammar, and Dictionaries of Tamil and Telugu languages for whom could be interesting in reading this ‘palm-leaves’ literature.

The notices given by the Jesuit Fathers will help in the redaction of the *Catalogus Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae regiae*. The first volume of this Catalogue published in seventeen thirty nine is dedicated to the oriental collections. It is a master piece in our field of library science, believe me! Etienne Fourmont had translated the brief notices into Latin and gave some others bibliographical elements such as the material, paper or palm-leaves, “chartaceus” or “corticeus”, should I say. Fourmont adopted the classification system given by Father Pons. In trying to make a concordance between the Jesuit lists and the Catalogus Codicum, it appears to me that the larger part of the catalogue, namely the “Books on Theology” which contains one hundred eleven numbers on the two hundred eighty seven of the “Indian Codex” described, gather mostly all the manuscripts from South India, even the topics is far from ‘Theology’, as if the lack of classification had a direct impact on the

cataloguing process. Despite these hesitations, very comprehensible due to the early date of publication, the Catalogus is very solid. Some notices, as the one we see on the screen, contains elements on the nature of God, the great principles of Indian Philosophy, famous stories of Hindu mythology, etc. We see here a nice tentative to locate Hastinapura, the city in the heart of the Mahabharata, close to Cashmere. We notice also the use of Greek fonts. The Sanskrit terms indeed are seen as indeclinable so the Greek characters are here to read the term in the right cases (mostly the genitive). Another peculiarity that we can see is the transcription of the Sanskrit titles. In reading them we can determinate the geographical provenances of the manuscript, like this “Bagarat Guitlou” from Telugu country, or a very Bengali “Mohabhorot”.

In seventeen thirty nine, we can say that the “Indian” Manuscripts, the “Codices indici” of the Royal Library are very well described: they have a call number, a title, a name when it is possible, the mention of the material used, and they are classified. The Catalogus is a keystone on which we should build the Indian collection... but we had not, unfortunately...

Indeed, during the late eighteenth century, some French travelers bring, sent, or sold Indian manuscripts to the Library. The first of them is Anquetil-Duperron, an important figure of orientalism in the late eighteenth century. He made a deposit in the Royal Library in seventeenth seventy two of one hundred eighty Indian manuscripts in different languages, mostly in the Pahlavi, Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit languages. At the time of his death in eighteen o five, his scientific papers and around twenty Indian manuscripts had been given by Sylvestre de Sacy to the Imperial Library. In seventeen seventy seven, Gentil, who had a position of a diplomat at the court of the nawab of the Lucknow/Faizabad area, sent to the Library one hundred and thirty manuscripts, ninety in Persian and Hindoustani/Urdu, mostly historical literature, and forty books in Sanskrit, mostly classical and ritualistic literature. Among them are several illustrated manuscripts that constitute among the most precious

Indian manuscripts that we keep. Another important figure among the French travelers is Aussant who served the French Company of East Indies as interpret. This position allowed him to work with Bengali munshi and to get copies of Persian, Hindoustani and Bengali manuscripts which take place in the royal collection around seventeen eighty five. The last travelers of the eighteenth century that interesting us is Polier whose collection had been examined in seventeen ninety by Louis Langlès, curator in charge of the oriental manuscripts at the Library. Among Persian manuscripts are fifteen manuscripts in Sanskrit dealing with philosophical or religious topics like the Kalpadruma or the Bhāmatī by Vācaspati Miśra.

In eighteen o seven, there is an important event for us librarians: a Scottish learned man, Alexander Hamilton, was forced to stay in France after the break of the Traité d'Amiens which had ensured the peace between France and England. The “prisoner” used perfectly his time in describing the Sanskrit collection of the Imperial Library. If the collections, as we have seen, had been enriched by the “travelers collections”, the catalogue of Hamilton described less manuscripts than the Catalogus codicum published seventy years before. The reason is that Hamilton described only the Sanskrit manuscripts in Devanagari and Bengali scripts. He did not treat the manuscripts from South India, in Tamil, Grantha, or Telugu scripts. Hamilton had time to see all the manuscripts that he wanted to describe, but he gave a detailed description only for the texts he was interested in like Purāṇa or poetry. We can read this terrible information after the manuscript number 23: “the others manuscripts, we did not adopt any classification”... As we can see, the catalogue of Hamilton posed more than it resolved problems. He gave up also the fundamental notion of material support so that we cannot know in reading this catalogue if manuscripts are written on paper or on palm-leaves. This catalogue is often seen as the first printed catalogue of Sanskrit manuscripts. It is indeed the first catalogue which is entirely dedicated to the Sanskrit manuscripts but we have seen how the Catalogus, which is the very first printed catalogue for Indian manuscripts, is

stronger from the point of view of the library science. One of the principal consequences of Hamilton catalogue is a new system of shelf-marks. In treating only the Sanskrit manuscripts on Devanagari and Bengali scripts, he obliged to classify the manuscripts by language and by script. This is the birth of the system Language-Script like “Sanskrit Bengali”, “Sanskrit Devanagari”, “Sanskrit Grantha”, “Sanskrit Telinga”, etc. The modern languages are classified more simply by languages, “Tamoul”, “Telinga” (for Telugu), “Singhalais”, and a large group named “Indien” which gathered manuscripts from North-West India in Hindustani, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Marathi, or Gujarati.

This system is the one adopted all along the nineteenth century. During this period the collections were enriched by many personal collections gathered by scholars. Indeed, the Indian studies entered in its philological age with the British in Bengal who gave the first editions and translations of Sanskrit texts. The Asiatic Society of Bengal is created at the end of the eighteenth century, the Société asiatique de Paris is created at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the generation of William Jones, Henry Thomas Colebrooke, Charles Wilkins is followed by a generation of strong philologists like Eugène Burnouf in France, Franz Bopp in Germany, Gorresio in Italia, Max Müller in Oxford.

In France, Burnouf made a strong link between the orientalist institutions like the Asiatic Society of Paris, the Collège de France where he was professor of Sanskrit studies, the Royal Library where he spent many hours (his daughter Laure will marry Leopold Delisle, one of the greatest administrator of the Library), the Royal Press (Imprimerie royale) in which I was named inspector for the oriental typography. These links were instrumentals to enrich the collections. In eighteen thirty four, Brian Hodgson proposed to order copies of Buddhist Sanskrit texts in Nepal, where he had an administrative position, at the expense of the Asiatic Society of Paris. He sent twenty four old manuscripts that he bought and sixty four new copies of manuscripts in Paris. The old manuscripts remain in the library of the Society but

the copies had been given to the Royal Library in eighteen forty. Burnouf ordered also copies of Vedic manuscripts in Calcutta that he deposited at the Library which was seen at the best and natural place to preserve and communicate Indian manuscripts. The verb ‘communicate’ is important because at that time the Library allowed readers to borrow manuscripts and to take them at home. We can read in the archives some letters of the administration that ask for the return of the manuscripts...

En eighteen forty four, a young scholar had a mission of the French government to collect manuscripts in North India. The unfortunate Charles d’Ochoa died before going back to France whenever he accomplished his mission by sending two hundred manuscripts in different languages, mostly in Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, and Sanskrit. He took notes to make a history of Marathi literature and take a very interesting journal. He was also in contact with Jain monks who indicate to him the important texts of the Jain Canon, at a very early age if we take into account the history of Jain studies.

The mid-nineteenth century see a sad event for Indian studies: the death of Eugène Burnouf at the age of fifty-two years old. Two years later, his widow sold the Library the two hundred and twenty manuscripts and printed books that constituted the “Burnouf collection” before it had been split into the different collections, mostly the “Sanskrit” collection. In eighteen eighty six, Burnouf widow make a deposit of the scientific papers of her husband that now form the collection of “Papiers Burnouf”.

It would be somewhat dull to enumerate the different entries that enrich the collection, so we can just say that the second part of the nineteenth century saw many personal collections of Indian manuscripts entered into the royal, imperial or national library. This huge growth needed a huge catalogue of course. The Hamilton one was not sufficient enough. After the pioneers in this field in the beginning of the century like Auguste Loiseleur-Deslongchamps

or Claude Fauriel, a name rose in the second half of the century, the discreet and learned librarian Léon Feer. He gave detailed notices for all the Sanscrit Bengali and the Sanscrit Devanagari collections but also for the manuscripts in Telinga, Nagra, Singhalese, and Cambodian scripts. The other name of this period is Julien Vinson who catalogues the Tamil manuscripts which is a very precious work and a rare quality as we have seen before.

These huge efforts were not well rewarded. The notices remain mostly in a manuscript form themselves. The National Library engaged Antoine Cabaton in the very beginning of the twentieth century. Cabaton was a young scholar from the Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient, our host today, specialized in Cambodian studies. He was engaged in order to give the complete catalogues of the Indian and South-East Asian collections. He took all the material given by his predecessors and simplified the shelf-mark system. He divided the collections into two main collections, one "Sanskrit" collection that put an end to the Language-Script system of notation like "Sanskrit Bengali", etc., and one "Indien" collection that gathered together the Tamil, Telugu, Singhalese, and others Indian languages manuscripts. He began this conversion by the Tamil and Telugu manuscripts, then "Indien" manuscripts in the different languages of North Indian then the Singhalese manuscripts. The "Tamil 22" so became the "Indien 22", and the "Indien 45" became the "Indien 689 (six hundred eighty nine)", which is very easy now to communicate the manuscripts of this collection as you can imagine... The south-east Asian manuscripts have been gathered under the shelf-mark "Indochinois" that gathered together the Burmese, Cambodian, Cham, Laotian, Lolo, and Siamese manuscripts. The Batik, Madécasse, Malese, Javanese, and Polynesian manuscripts had been gathered under the banner "Malayo-Polynésien".

As we can see, the history of the National collections is rich of three hundred years. The first decision that had been taken were, in my opinion, the right one: to gather together the manuscripts under a unique banner "Indian" like what was done for the Persian and the

Arabic. The multiplicity of the shelf-marks invites to build a huge concordance that is a work I am currently engaged in. Another perspective is a complete on-line catalogue. A conversion of Cabaton catalogues is done for the Sanscrit collection. A conversion of the other catalogues by Cabaton is in progress. The rich collection of three hundred manuscripts on Indian medicine collected by Palmyr Cordier has to be also described. Prof. Nalini Balbir and I are making a catalogue of the Jain manuscripts, mostly present in the three hundred manuscripts collection collected by Emile Senart.

Time line

1729-1735	Sending from the “Mission du Carnate”
1762	Deposit by Anquetil-Duperron
1777	Sending from Faizabad by Gentil
1785	Manuscripts collected by Aussant in Bengal
1790	Langlès examines the Polier collection
1805	Death of Anquetil-Duperron. His scientific papers are given to Sylvestre de Sacy who made a deposit at the Imperial Library
1833	Buying of Ducler and Reydellet collections
1840	Transmission to the Royal Library of the Hodgson collection
1847	Charles d’Ochoa collects manuscripts in North-West India
1854	Buying from Eugène Burnouf’s widow
1861	Buying of J. F. M. Guérin collection
1866	Deposit of Ariel collection
1870	Buying of Grimblot collection
1877	Gift by the AIBL of the Rajendralal Mitra collection

1861-1898	Buying of various collections, among which is the Garcin de Tassy collection
1886	Buying of Haas collection
1886	Deposit of the scientific papers of Eugène Burnouf
1898	The AIBL deposits the manuscripts from Kashmir collected by Alfred Foucher
1898	Emile Senart gives the Mark Aurel Stein collection
1925	Deposit of the Emile Senart collection
1932	Buying of the Palmyr Cordier collection
...-2015-...	Various buyings

Old catalogues

- Lists of the Jesuit Fathers (shelf-mark NAF 5442), edited by Henri Omont, *Missions archéologiques françaises en Orient aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*, Paris, 1902.
- Étienne Fourmont, *Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum Bibliothecae regiae. Tomus primus. Pars prima complectens codices manuscriptos orientales*, Paris, 1739.
- Lists of Anquetil-Duperron, Polier, Aussant, Gentil, Ducler (NAF 5441).
- A. Hamilton, L. Langlès, *Catalogue des manuscrits samskrits de la bibliothèque impériale : avec des notices du contenu de la plupart des ouvrages*, Paris, 1807.
- Inventory of the Sanskrit manuscripts by Léon Feer (Sanskrit 1773, Sanscrit 1774)
- Inventory of the Grantha manuscripts by Léon Rodet (Sanskrit 1775)
- Inventory of the Telinga manuscripts by Léon Feer (Sanskrit 1776)
- Inventory of the Nagra, Singhalese, and Cambodian manuscripts by Léon Feer (Sanskrit 1777)
- Catalogue of the Tamil manuscripts by Julien Vinson, (Indien 1061, Indien 1062)

Catalogues in use today

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- Jean Filliozat, « Etat sommaire des manuscrits de la collection Cordier », Paris, 1936.
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- Annie Berthier, *Manuscrits, xylographes, estampages : les collections orientales du département des Manuscrits : guide*, 2000.
- *Guide du lecteur du département des Manuscrits*.
 - <http://bnf.libguides.com/manuscrits>