

Database project on A. H. Francke (1870-1930): results and perspectives

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Work of A.H. Francke (1870-1930) appears still today as being the base of the studies on Ladakh. The abundance and the diversity of its publications return necessary a documentary tool allowing an easy and organized consultation these texts. The aim is to identify, collect, digitize and make available all of Francke's articles scattered in multiple journals and difficult to access for some. I will first present in more detail the importance of Francke's work before presenting this documentary project to finally address the perspectives of this work.

Context of the project

August Hermann Francke (1870-1930) lived more than ten years, between 1896 and 1908, in Ladakh and Western Tibet as a missionary. He perpetuated the work of his Moravian predecessors such Heinrich August Jäschke (1817-1883) or Karl Marx (1857-1891). The first worked on the translation of the Bible into Tibetan and is the author of a Tibetan-English dictionary. The second collected, compiled and edited testimonials and historical texts about the region. Based on their work and his own experience, Francke has been a prolific writer and has become a must for anyone interested in history, mores, languages, cultures of western Tibet and more widely Tibetan world. Pionnier of research in Ladakh, he is recognized like a specialist by Archæological Survey of India and the explorers and tibetologists in his time such Aurel Stein, Sven Hedin or Giuseppe Tucci. His work is always quoted by the current researchers. In the approximately 100 articles he has written in German and English, Francke approached as well linguistics, the religions (bön and Buddhism), the history, archaeology, the oral tradition, the epopee of Gesar, the petroglyphs, etc This work are regularly accompanied by transcripts, illustrations, photographs, maps and sketches. Parallel to this scientific work, his missionary role led him to supervise the translation of the Bible into Tibetan and he is also the creator of the first Tibetan writing newspaper Ladakhi Agbar.

Project display

While some articles are easily found in French and European libraries, some are still more difficult to find and may be useful to researchers. A majority of these articles can be found on the Internet Archive, but they are not indexed and thus are not highlighted. On the other hand, although Francke's work forms the basis of many studies, it is none the less criticizable and the current researchers' view of the different facets of his work must be taken into account. The research undertaken does not make it possible to identify a single place where the majority of Francke's work would be available: it is indeed necessary to frequent many libraries in order to have an overall visibility of his work. In addition, research by author is often parasitized by the existence of a famous homonymous ancestor of the seventeenth century. Thus some journals and articles are identified in

the catalogs of Bulac (querying funds of the EFEO, EPHE and EHESS) or the BiS; others have been identified only at the musée du quai Branly, at the National and University Library of Strasbourg, at the library of the Protestant Theological Institute of Paris, and some documents seem accessible only in the Moravian archives in the Kingdom and in Germany and in the German universities. The goal of my project is thus to place at the disposal of the researchers the articles of Francke most exhaustively possible.

- The first step is to locate all the bibliography in the reference libraries in France, beyond the rhine or even in Great Britain or in India, but also in any type of database with free access or with authentication (via a library having paid the fees). This first work, already largely started, will create a first documentary tool in the form of a thematic catalog. This stage is coming to an end in May 2017.
- The second stage consists in collecting the texts, i.e. to obtain a digital version of the text which can be obtained by photographing the documents, by scanning them or by recovering images free of rights. Thus partnerships with the libraries concerned could be considered in order to obtain high quality images. Digitization could be left to their care and thus feed both this project and their collections. In other cases personal photographs are to be expected, work on this project started in this way.
- The last step is to put all these articles bound for the scientific public either by the creation of a database, or by a full or partial publication accompanied by comments from current researchers. These two solutions are neither in contradiction nor in competition. The database option requires special infrastructure and particular knowledge to carry out this project. But it will enable researchers to better navigate and use information by enabling the use of relevant key words (thesaurus), future OCR (optical character recognition) and encoding in XML-TEI. The publishing option seems more accessible by the more conventional work that it requires.

Outlook and expected support

This project opens many perspectives and evolutions. In addition to the digital library, publications and other tools for researchers, this is an opportunity to protect and enhance this heritage. One could consider later a digitization of newspapers produced by the Moravian missions in the Himalayas as Ladakhi Agbar taking example on the work that has already been done for the Tibet Mirror or Kyelang Agbar. On the other hand, it might be interesting later to extend this project to the many works published by the Moravian missionaries in this region: Heinrich August Jäschke (1817-1883), Karl Marx (1857-1891) or Walter Asboe (1895-1965). Complete examination of the "Periodical Accounts Relating to the Missions of the Church of the United Brethren Established Among the Heathen (1803-1970)" would allow an indexation of articles and references to the Moravian Mission of Western Tibet which could be a complementary contribution to both research on the Tibetan area but also research on missions.

Depending on the changes envisaged, partnerships will have to be created with French and foreign documentation centers (Germany, United Kingdom), public and private (Universities, private archives). Apart from the inventory of texts, the metadata to be created may add interesting research possibilities to researchers. It is thus possible to list the illustrations and their type as well as the legends, we could also inventory all the inscriptions collected by Francke to create a corpus of epigraphic sources.

In order to carry out the first steps and thus see a realization of this project, institutional, intellectual, technical and financial support is crucial. Institutional support makes it possible to approach and present the project to documentation centers with the support and seriousness of a research center: it formalises the steps to be taken. Intellectual support seems to me essential in order to guide the project towards the expectations of researchers. The technical support concerns both aspects of the retrieval of documents in any form whatsoever, but also and especially the means to implement to create and distribute the digital library or publications, this implies knowledge in terms of law . Finally, the financial support is intended to obtain funds to pay any costs related to the reproductions, but also the entries in private pay libraries, travel if necessary, etc.