

Percorsi in Civiltà dell'Asia e dell'Africa II

Quaderni di studi dottorali alla Sapienza

a cura di
Marina Miranda



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Percorsi in Civiltà dell'Asia e dell'Africa II

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7. Manuscript Culture in the Service of the Nation: The Formation of the South Asian Manuscript Collections in Italy, 1700-1890

Alberico Crafa

7.1. Sources, texts, and contexts

Since the time when comparative Indo-European philology began the conquest of the ancient past of human civilization by establishing new methodologies and providing a renewed epistemological framework, the Orientalist knowledge could not but be grounded on the accessibility of the most important literary works produced by the so-called common Indo-European ancestor, the Aryans¹. Since the beginning of Indological studies in Europe, the reconstruction of the linkage between a common mythical past through comparative philology and linguistics made clearly understandable how a direct access to the most ancient sources would have played a key role in the progress of the discipline, along with the reconstruction of the civilizing process *ex Oriente*, under the influence of the Romantic thought². The opportunity to acquire and study ancient and original manuscript sources allowed the unveiling of the “archive of origins” (see Rabault-Feuerhahn 2013) of those peoples who were believed to have settled the

¹ Ranging from the Romantic quest for Oriental ancestors, nationalism and racial discourses, the Aryan ideology and myth strongly affected the 18th-19th century European intellectual history. See Poliakov (1994 [1971]), Thapar (1996), Figueira (2002), Arvidsson (2006).

² The Romantic inheritance of Indological studies has been widely debated. Benes (2008), McGetchin (2009) trace back the Indology’s origins in the Romantic movement; Myers (2013) also focuses on the Romantics’ fascination with India in Germany. For a general overview of India’s role in European intellectual dynamics, see Halbfass (1988 [1981]).

modern European nations and their common ancestor³, whose inner spirit was characterized by mobility, a warrior heroic attitude, and the ability to produce epic poems as the result of its polytheistic religious system that manifests itself originally in the Rgvedic hymns, the cultural and historical depository of the ancient forebears⁴. As a matter of fact, since its academic institutionalization from 1820 onwards, the practice of Indology and the reconstruction of India's past has been deeply characterized by a philological-literary approach, including only later the aid of archaeology (and its foremost products such as epigraphy and numismatics) and ethnography⁵. Given that, manuscripts became the basic tool for Indologists, and the pioneering task of restoring and throwing light on the origins of the Indo-European civilization could have been accomplished exclusively by studying and collecting the oldest – and then more reliable and less corrupted – manuscripts, in order to reconstruct the authentic *Urtext*⁶. Having established the philological and historical-critical paradigm (see Adluri 2020; Adluri, Bagchee 2014: 1-19), Germany imposed its hegemony in the Indological field by producing critical editions of Vedic and Indian

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- ³ Beside the Romantic narrative that placed the primordial homeland of Germans in India, from the 1870s onwards the origins of European people were vehemently debated, spanning from various migration theories, from the Central Asia's cradle to the Nordic autochthonous ones. See Demoule (2014: 59-138), McMahon 2016 (169-229).
- ⁴ As stated by Aramini (2018), «on comprend alors pleinement l'exigence de traduire les grands poèmes épiques de l'Inde ancienne: la connaissance des premiers pas de l'humanité et de l'esprit humain se trouve dans les manuscrits de l'Inde sanscrite». For the evolution of the discourse about the Aryans' inner spirit in couple with its nemesis, the Semites, see Olender (1989).
- ⁵ The first approach to South Asian past was highly textual and literary based. The foundation of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1861 marked the institutionalization of archeological research as scientific tool for recovering and better understanding the Indian past, along with philological studies. For an epistemological reflection on the growing interest in archaeological data for the reconstruction of South Asian history and culture, see Trautmann, Sinopoli (2002). Imam (1966) gives a very interesting overview of the early archeological findings and research from Sir William Jones' time to the birth of the Survey.
- ⁶ A chimera for editors, especially if we look at the Indian history of texts, where contaminations may occur at every level, considering several factors such as the role of the commentators – that may have influenced alternative readings and glosses – the interferences between written and oral traditions, and last but not least the regional variations, just to say a few.

texts, along with learning tools such as chrestomathies, anthologies, dictionaries, and grammars⁷. Even though Germany was at the forefront of the theoretical, epistemological, and methodological assumptions of a text-based discipline such as Indology, almost until the mid-19th-century German and Italian scholars had to turn to France and Britain, the sole repositories of ancient Indian manuscripts (see par. 7.2.).

Before focusing the attention on the reconstruction of the dynamics of acquisition and circulation of South Asian manuscripts in Italy, it is worthwhile to take into account further theoretical perspectives on the argument, in order to place the phenomenon in a broader historical-intellectual framework. In doing so, I also illustrate how in 18th- and 19th-century Europe Indian manuscript culture was at the forefront in the construction of national identities, and how Italian Indologists took part in this process (see par. 7.3.), which deserves much more attention considering the internal cultural and political debate between the Roman Catholic heritage and the liberal academia in unified Italy (see par. 7.4.).

As a matter of fact, the systematic process of the acquisition of primary sources undertaken by European institutions is enmeshed within a dense web of socio-cultural and political-ideological dynamics. Political and ideological agendas, thus, not just overlapped the main role fulfilled by manuscript collections (i.e., the historical-philological task pursued by European Indologists), but oriented and shaped the scientific venture both on a practical and theoretical level⁸. As pointed out by Minkowski (2010: 81), «the history of scientific collections, and of

⁷ As a matter of fact, during the first half of 19th century an increasing number of works which would have had a far-reaching audience had been published by Friedrich (1772-1829) and August W. Schlegel (1767-1845), Franz Bopp (1791-1867), Christian Lassen (1800-1876), Otto Böhtlingk (1815-1904), Rudolph von Roth (1821-1895), Albrecht Weber (1825-1901). For a comprehensive timeline of the works published by German scholars in the field of comparative Indo-European philology and Vedic studies, especially from 1808 to 1917, see Rabault-Feuerhahn (2013: 295-307).

⁸ The literature regarding the intersection between 18th- and 19th-century philological discipline – whether in its Indo-European declination or not – and the discourses on national identities, race, and political hegemony, whether in European or colonial contexts, are far too voluminous to cite. See for instance DeJean (1989), Benes (2006, 2008), Harpham (2009), Rapisarda (2018).

the selection processes that produced those collections, can illuminate the social history of scientific communities and their practices». Whether for Catholic or Protestant missionaries from the 17th century or for the European colonial context, the dynamics behind the process of manuscript acquisition and the formation of manuscript collections among European libraries and institutions, then, should be debated within a broader and articulated epistemological horizon, sorting out the interrelation between philology, intellectual and cultural and political history – such as the nation-building process – the paradigm shifts that took place in humanities, and the personal trajectories of the “academic agents”.

As said above, since its debut the academic approach towards Indian's ancient past cannot be separated from the German linguistic-philological and textual background. The 18th- to 19th-century philological paradigm was closely interwoven with the idea of a direct affinity between language and the cultural and “biological” traits of peoples and nations, so that the study of a given language and the texts composed came to be considered as the key to access the human mind and to investigate the essence of nations. The achievements gained by the European scholarship stemmed essentially from a textual-based knowledge that required the philological reconstruction and the emendation of texts based on manuscripts, «the material artifacts that provided unmediated access to the intellectual life of Indian learned communities [...] as the objective basis for the operation of the modern discipline of Indology» (Minkowski 2010: 83). The European countries that established their colonial presence on the Indian soil, such as Britain and France, obviously took advantage in this race for the acquisition of primary sources, by establishing direct channels to fuel their libraries with the richest collections of South Asian manuscripts. Following the growing interest over ancient Indian civilization, those collections became a stored source of knowledge, the archives of the European origins that attracted scholars from all over Europe. If Romanticism and colonialism represent the main contextual element, closely intertwined, in the Indological discourse, the latter shows the pervasiveness of the Western hegemony when scholars came to perceive themselves as the legitimate heirs of the ancient Aryan forebears. They only could have been up to the task of decodifying and recollecting the history of the human progress *ex Oriente* through the new

epistemological paradigm and the scientific achievements provided by comparative linguistics and philology (Crafa 2022). The content of those manuscripts, often transmitted without any specific knowledge and scientific consciousness by unskilled Brahmins, seemed more a cultural product of a European past that came to be vindicated on the basis of the cultural and scientific progress gained by Western scholars.

7.2. The European (Oriental) Grand Tour: the quest for manuscripts between France, Britain, and Germany

From the Renaissance onward Italy was the center of the cultural life of Europe, and its antiquities attracted savants and young scholars even at the beginning of the Romantic period. The Grand Tour was not merely a travel for leisure undertaken by the elite formation of the British, French, German, Bohemian, and Dutch, but also the starting point for a comprehensive study of classical antiquities, and Italy was the essential place to visit. On the eve of the “Oriental Renaissance” (Schwab 1984) the interests moved far from the old classical past of the Mediterranean civilization to the new cradle of the civilization in Central and South Asia. Not by chance, what I named “European Oriental Grand Tour” closely reminds of the well-known practice introduced from the late 16th century by gentleman scientists, authors, and antiquaries (see Chaney 1998, Griggs 2003)⁹. From the first half of the 19th century onwards, the acquisition and the creation of manuscript collections undertaken by the most important academic centers for Oriental studies in Britain and France involved scholars at various stages and levels. Both countries, in fact, boasted rich manuscript collections, thanks to the presence in India of merchants, missionaries, and above all the officials retired from service to the East Indian Company, that were also among the pioneers in Oriental studies. During their career on Indian soil, they took the opportunity to collect rare manuscripts,

⁹ Pinelli (2000) emphasized the economic aspect generated by the high demand of antiquities and rare objects coming from savants. Finally, Italian private, public and Catholic collections attracted also the interests of physicians, naturalists and other scholars from all over Europe, who undertook scholarly trips in the major sites of knowledge of the Italian peninsula. On this point, see Findlen (1994).

decipher and translate ancient texts¹⁰. When the production of Indological knowledge moved from India to the European centers, young scholars started to travel to refine their linguistic and philological knowledge and to copy by hand dozens of codices held as unique copies in the most important French and British libraries¹¹. Scholars traveled as out-and-out purchasing agents, since they were sent in London to get in contact and approach potential sellers – in most cases British officials retired from service in India – and to take part in the auctions during which their widows would take advantage of the growing demand for manuscripts to gain a good sum of money by selling entire collections gathered by their husbands.

Just to cite a few, Friedrich Rosen (1805-1837), for instance, during his brief career epitomized the transnational nature of Oriental and Indological studies in Europe, at the crossroads of the cooperation between Britain, France, and Germany, having made accessible to German and French scholars the sources uniquely available in Britain (see Stache-Weiske, Rocher 2020: 239-285). The Italian Indologist Gaspare Gorresio (1808-1891), founder of the Indological school in Turin, traveled around Paris and London to collect manuscripts for the preparation of his pioneering critical edition of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, published in five volumes between 1843 and 1850. During his staying in London, where he had access to the manuscripts of the personal library of the British Indologist Horace H. Wilson (1786-1860) (Gorresio 1843: CXL), Gorresio was entrusted by his teacher Eugène Burnouf (1801-1852) with the task of acquiring a lithography of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* accompanied by its commentaries, the *Bhāvārthadīpikā* of Śrīdharaśvāmin, printed in Bombay in 1839, the work on which the French scholar was working on the edition and translation (see Petit 2014: 441). Like Gorresio, Christian Lassen – at that time a pupil of August Wilhelm Schlegel in Bonn – was sent by his master to Paris and London in order to copy Sanskrit manuscripts by hand. And again in 1865 Rudolf Roth (1821-1895) wrote his student Julius Grill (1840-1930) – at that time in

¹⁰ Among the long-serving Company employees who contributed to establish archive and museum collections upon their return in Britain we should mention Sir Robert Chambers (1737-1803), Charles Wilkins (1749-1836), Henry Thomas Colebrooke (1765-1837). See R. Rocher, L. Rocher (2012); Ratcliff (2016).

¹¹ As representative of this process in France, see Petit (2014).

London – recommending him to copy as accurately as possible the manuscripts of his interest. Giuseppe Bardelli (1815-1865) as well traveled to Paris, Oxford, and London between 1847 and 1848 to collect the Vedic and Coptic codices fundamental for the preparation of his critical edition of unedited *excerpta* from the Old and New Testament, and for his ambitious project to edit the *Atharvaveda*. And again, the critical edition of the *Aṣṭāvakraḡītā* published by Carlo Giussani (1840-1900) in 1868, was made possible by the comparison between the manuscripts he examined and studied during his staying in Berlin. Even though through the years the photographic reproduction became a practical way for Italian scholars to work with manuscripts held in Berlin, London, and so on, sometimes the quality of the reproductions did not allow for the reading of their whole content, so that scholars were forced to return abroad for the original. That was the case, for instance, of the study conducted by Emilio Lovarini (1889) with the photographs of a Jain novel's manuscript taken by Francesco L. Pullé.

7.3. The South Asian manuscript collections as a national and European enterprise

Towards the mid-19th-century, besides the British and French collections emerged those gathered by Germany, which could take advantage, for instance, of the direct channels offered by the Protestant missions in India along with the direct presence of German scholars who served the British Raj and accepted positions in India¹². The financial resources allocated by the national government and other institutions, along with the German scholars' involvement in the service of the British Raj, allowed them to collect ancient manuscripts as members of the research campaigns launched by the East Indian Company and later by the British Government. The same could not be said on the Italian front. As a matter of fact, only at the end of the century, Italy – thanks above all to the strenuous efforts of zealous and pioneer Indologists like Angelo De Gubernatis (1840-1913) – finally could boast manuscripts collections of some relevance, even though they couldn't

¹² Among them, Hans Röer (1805-1866), Martin Haug (1827-1876), Georg Bühler (1837-1898), Franz Kielhorn (1840-1908). See Johnson (1986), Manjappa (2014: 17-40).

compare with those stored in Germany, France, and England. If on the one hand these collections, as we will see later, have had a very limited extent for scientific purposes, on the other they were highly relevant for political and ideological claims: through the acquisition of more or less ancient primary sources of South Asian literary culture, Italy could finally join the ranks of European nations at the forefront of Oriental Studies. The German case – which shares on the political ground common features to the Italian context, from a national but also international viewpoint – epitomizes best how the quest for and acquisition of manuscripts have to be placed within a broader web where scientific-cultural and political-ideological instances overlap each other. Without a direct colonial presence in South Asia, the Indian manuscripts acquired in Germany came to be considered fully fledged among those cultural properties that fall into the *Kulturgut* of the national politic fostered by the Prussian State even before the German unification in 1871. Given that, Sengupta (2005: 119) focused her attention on «their acquisition and the role they played in the self-assertion of a European power, itself a nation-in-the-making and devoid of an empire in India». Even though not without difficulties due to the huge amount of financial investments required, already around mid-19th-century Germany had stocked up its libraries with collections of hundreds of Indian manuscripts placed between Berlin and Tübingen. Besides Prussian financial efforts, that was made possible thanks to the networks and support provided by the missionaries of Württemberg at the University of Tübingen on the one hand, on the other through the collaboration of an increasing number of German Indologists in the service of the British Indian government on the other¹³. Unlike the united Germany that in 1886 could boast the second largest Indian manuscript collection in the world (Sengupta 2005: 136), Italy in those same years – to a far modest extent – was about to gather its first noteworthy collection of South Asian manuscripts. Furthermore, the Italian Indological schools were far less based on a strictly philological

¹³ As a matter of fact, between 1868 and 1878, following its colonial cultural policy, the British government undertook a highly organized campaign of regular hunts for researching and procuring ancient manuscripts in various Indian regions. Given the systematic employment of German-born Indologists in the expeditions, the Anglo-German collaboration in this project granted rich benefits to Germany in terms of the amount of manuscripts sent from India (Sengupta 2005: 136-137).

approach or devoted to the critical edition of Vedic or Sanskrit texts. As a matter of fact, in a letter sent to Michele Amari (1806-1889)¹⁴ in 1873, De Gubernatis bemoaned the lack of scholars with codicological expertise in Italy. Italian scholars were discouraged from specializing in the study of manuscripts for publishing autonomously critical editions, a task of several difficulties even more so due to the lack of original sources in the country that required long and expensive sojourns abroad to collect them:

In Italy we have only self-taught students, who leave their studies unfinished being forced to interrupt them due to lack of proper supports. I think a young student should be sent abroad, with the sole purpose of training him as a professional Indologist capable of working on manuscripts. After Gorresio, no Italian has ever worked on Indian manuscripts; and without this kind of knowledge it is hardly to become a fully efficient Indologist. Nowadays in Italy there are no Indian manuscripts; the most important ones are kept in Berlin and in Oxford [...]. Notwithstanding the advanced courses that can be taught in Italy, all this does not equal the importance of a year wholly spent in the study of manuscripts¹⁵.

De Gubernatis singled out the young Francesco L. Pullé (1850-1934) – at that time his pupil – as an appropriate candidate for this role, so as to fill the scientific gap of the country¹⁶. The request, submitted by De Gubernatis to Amari to intercede in favor of his young pupil with the Ministry of Education in order to obtain a scholarship to study in Berlin was accommodated, and the investment bore fruit. Few years later, in 1897, *Studi italiani di filologia indo-iranica*, founded and directed

¹⁴ Arabist and former Minister of Education, Amari was one of the most preeminent Orientalist and a leading figure in the political and cultural life during the Italian Risorgimento.

¹⁵ Biblioteca Centrale della Regione Siciliana, hereafter abbreviated as BCRS; Fondo Amari, Carteggio Amari, VI.2039, letter from A. De Gubernatis to Michele Amari [20-10-1873]. Although it has not been an easy task, I have tried to keep all the translations from the elaborate 19th-century Italian of the archival sources as faithful as possible to the original.

¹⁶ BCRS; Fondo Amari, Carteggio Amari, VI.2039, letter from A. De Gubernatis to Michele Amari [20-10-1873].

by Pullé, became the most important journal in the philological field for the publication of critical editions of Jain novels based on the “national” manuscripts of the National Library of Florence¹⁷. Over time De Gubernatis had to urge Amari again to intercede with the Minister of Education on the behalf of the acquisition of Indian manuscripts:

There is not one noteworthy Sanskrit manuscript in the Italian libraries; London is the great storehouse of Sanskrit manuscripts. The National Library would perhaps be encouraged to spend some money and purchase these manuscripts if the government help it. Would You, if you approve of such plan, recommend it to the Ministry? If in Italy we could have fifty unpublished Indian manuscripts on which our young scholars could work, it would no longer be necessary to send them abroad. They could develop their knowledge here itself, by themselves. [...] Until now I have never received any help from the government and my fellow citizens; they have always been indifferent to my pleas and it was a constant disappointment¹⁸.

The opportunity to acquire Indian manuscripts occurred in 1875 when De Gubernatis informed Amari about a concrete possibility for the Institute for Higher Studies of Florence – at that time the main center in Italy for Oriental studies¹⁹ – to purchase a first collection of manuscripts. The acquisition was warmly greeted by De Gubernatis as a fundamental achievement for the future of the Indological school of Florence, and more broadly for Italy: «I will soon have a consolation. Negotiation is underway to bring manuscripts in the Library of our Institute. Then also our school of Sanskrit will be able to give good results. I wait impatiently for them»²⁰. Nevertheless, this first purchase was concluded in 1876 after the approval of the Institute (Lelli 2016:

¹⁷ See the catalogue published by Pullé (1894).

¹⁸ BCRS, Fondo Amari, Carteggio Amari, VI.2052, letter from A. De Gubernatis to Michele Amari [22-04-1874].

¹⁹ After the political unification in 1861, Florence became the capital of the fledgling Italian nation between 1865 and 1871. The rise of the Oriental and Indological studies in Florence then clearly followed the political trajectory of the city, at the forefront of the nation-building process. See Vicente (2012).

²⁰ BCRS, Fondo Amari, Carteggio Amari, VI.2064, letter from A. De Gubernatis to Michele Amari [02-11-1875].

312). Even though circumscribed to a national relevance, the event was placed in a broader European perspective, as triumphantly announced by De Gubernatis: «From this measure onwards, the importance of the Sanskrit chair in our institute extraordinarily enhanced; in such a way, in this regard it can compete with the existing chair in Berlin, London, Oxford, Paris, Petersburg»²¹. The affair was rather modest when compared with the project carried out and funded in those very years by German universities. After a few years, in 1878, the International Congress of Orientalists hosted in Florence became an opportunity for expanding the manuscript collection. The Institute for Higher Studies purchased the manuscripts brought in Italy by the Goan Brahmin Gerson Da Cunha (1844-1900), doctor, historian, and Sanskritist, member of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bombay, who acted as intermediary between European scholars and India. However, the largest, most relevant acquisitions were managed a few years later by De Gubernatis in person during his journey in India between 1885 and 1886.

The operation was not the result of an official campaign but of the personal efforts from De Gubernatis' tireless determination – already acknowledged by his colleagues – and made possible by his ability to obtain fundings to finalize the acquisitions that, in his words, were considered as a service paid to the nation. As a matter of fact, however, the acquisitions were accompanied by several financial strains and obstacles reported in the letters sent from Bombay and Surat to his wife, where De Gubernatis had been urging her to raise funds in order to complete his mission with success. As for other German institutions, the acquisitions were by means of the network of personal contacts established by De Gubernatis thanks to his lively personality²². The total amount of manuscripts brought to Italy on this occasion, however, has not been yet clearly quantified. According to Rossi (1939: 193) and

²¹ The Italian original is quoted in Lelli (2016: 312).

²² Even in the first half of the 19th century, in pre-unitary Germany, in fact, the financial investments and the economic resources allocated by the Prussian state for the acquisition of manuscripts were not obvious at all. As recently highlighted by making use of archival material (Sengupta 2005: 140-145), even the German Indologists under the cultural *Wissenschaft* politics promoted by the Prussian king had been urging the government to obtain financial support in order to increase the universities libraries' manuscripts collections. Before 1880s, then, that process was characterized by persistent requests to counter the expensive acquisition of manuscripts from the South Asian and European market.

Masini (2007: 121), De Gubernatis during his journey bought roughly 650 Indian manuscripts of various origin and historical value. Moreover, Marassini (2007: 160) indicates an amount of 640 manuscripts brought by De Gubernatis from India and handed over to the National Library of Florence. The most substantial purchase, for a total amount of 410 Jain and Hindu manuscripts that justifies the payment of 3000 lire, was concluded in Bombay on October 3, 1885, having had a native Brahmin bookseller from Surat, a certain Bhagvandas, as intermediary (Vicente 2012: 244). Besides this, another unclear number of Sanskrit and Marathi texts would have been acquired during his stay in Bombay, whereas it is highly unlikely that De Gubernatis would have avoided mentioning another relevant acquisition, even more if we consider the increase in manuscript prices as a result of the high demand coming from Europe, whether for ancient highly rare copies or modern reproductions. We know that the German Indologist Lorenz Franz Kielhorn (1840-1908), professor of Sanskrit at Deccan College in Pune between 1866 and 1881, had himself undertaken the acquisition of a part of manuscripts from Mahārāṣṭra destined for the Institute for Higher Studies of Florence. Finally, in the catalog of the Florentine Sanskrit manuscripts compiled by Theodor Aufrecht (1822-1907), the German Indologist also mentioned the donation of eight philosophical works by Girolamo Donati, conservator of the Indian Museum of Florence launched by De Gubernatis and inaugurated in 1886 (Aufrecht 1982: III).

7.4. *Extra Ecclesiam*: the Italian manuscript collections and the neglected missionary past

The introduction of manuscripts in Italy by missionaries of various Catholic orders that were stationed in South Asia, especially in South India, neither replicated what happened in Germany – where the cooperation between the academic centers and the Protestant missions opened direct channels through which enriched the libraries with ancient manuscripts – nor the case of the Royal Library in Paris, where Orientalists such as Alexander Hamilton (1762-1824) worked on the conspicuous manuscripts collected, bought, and sent to Paris by French Jesuit missionaries (see Barreto Xavier, Županov 2015: 302-

311). Collecting manuscripts was a part of the Propaganda Fide missionaries' task, and the Catholic missionaries in the French colonial enclaves of Pondicherry and Chandernagor acquired and sent manuscripts to Paris since the 17th century. But Rome was not Paris, and the Pontifical State – along with its institutions – was not Italy. Moreover, until the end of 19th century the Papal city was neither the center for Oriental and Indological studies in Italy nor the stopover for the European Orientalists. As a matter of fact, already at the beginning of the scientific Indological venture, the status of “missionaries” was a way to discredit the assessments and the works published by Catholic scholars, followed by a series of biases and suspicions that made clear how the knowledge produced by missionaries would have been cut off from the Indological scientific, academic arena. Moreover, the sources of Catholic missionaries and their field of specialization did not fit with the Indological discourse because they focused on South India, an area highly neglected by the 19th-century Indological scientific discourse, whose interest was circumscribed to the Northern Vedic and Sanskrit Aryan past.

In 19th-century Italy, knowledge of India was constituted outside of the Catholic world, even though the first chairs in Oriental languages such as Sanskrit, Hebrew, and Arabic at the University of Rome were held by Catholic scholars²³, and Rome was among the richest capital in terms of books and manuscripts collected and published by the missionaries of the Propaganda Fide. When De Gubernatis complained that in Italy there were no Indian manuscripts, he was definitely wrong. In spite of excellent material provided by the Roman libraries and archives, the cultural and political context made them unavailable for academic purposes. Even though the Vatican Library and the museum of Cardinal Stefano Borgia (1731-1804) in Velletri held collections of Indian manuscripts brought by Propaganda Fide's missionaries, due to the political and cultural turmoil «Rome became a backwater on the map of the nineteenth-century Orientalist scholars» (Županov 2009: 227). 1814 saw the dispersal of the Borgia Museum and its Indological treasures; without any kind of systematization or descriptive catalog, in the aftermath of the Italian unification the sheer amount of materials scattered in Roman archives sank into historical

²³ For a brief overview of Oriental studies in 19th-century Rome, see Lo Turco (2021).

oblivion. During the second half of the 19th century, on the wave of the increasing anti-Catholic and anti-clerical sentiment fostered by the Liberals and the secular forces, the wholesale confiscation of the archives and the properties of religious congregations, along with the reorganization of the Italian state archives, caused the dispersion of the materials collected by Catholic missionaries through the centuries. A first glance at the distribution of the South Asian manuscript collections in Italy also testifies the dispersive status and distribution of these materials among the national archives, and the gap in terms of cataloging, as reported by Olga Pinto (1949: 163) last century. Besides Florence and Rome, South Asian manuscripts can be found in Bologna (Franceschini 2007), Naples (Cicuzza 2018), Udine and Venice (Balbir *et alii*. 2019, Filippi 2006), especially in the Marciana National Library, where the manuscripts collected by the Italian Jesuit and pioneer in Dravidian and Tamil studies Costantino Giuseppe Beschi (1680-1740) are hosted. Some of those manuscripts, in Sanskrit and other South-East Asian languages such as Burmese, Javanese, Malay, and Thai, were donated by the Indologist and Philologist Emilio Teza (1831-1912) who collected them from his friends traveling in South-East Asia (Teza 1881: 134).

7.5. The scientific value of the Florentine manuscript collection between Jaina Studies and national purposes

Concerning the impact and the value they had for scientific purposes, the most relevant studies based on the manuscripts acquired during the second half of 19th century or gathered by De Gubernatis have been conducted by his pupil Francesco L. Pullé – who by the time enriched the Florentine collection with other manuscripts acquired in India (Pavolini 1907: 93) – along with another German-trained Indologist, Paolo Emilio Pavolini (1864-1942). After having received his first education in Italy under Emilio Teza at the University of Pisa, Pavolini completed his training in Berlin with Albrecht Weber (1825-1901), Ernst Leumann (1859-1931) – at that time a pioneer figure in the field of Jain literature – and the Iranist Karl Friedrich Geldner (1852-1929). Back in Italy, he completed the catalog of the 798 Indian manuscripts held in Florence, updating the first catalog appointed by T. Aufrecht

(Pavolini 1907). Nonetheless, Italy did not fill the gap between other European countries, and still at the beginning of 20th century those Italian scholars who aimed to publish a critical edition of Indian texts still were forced to go abroad in order to consult the manuscripts held in the largest and rarest collections of Germany and Britain²⁴.

The most relevant studies were those conducted on the Florentine corpus of 350 Jain manuscripts, which came to be considered as the proud achievement of the national scientific project. The scientific value of the Italian Jain collection was recognized by the European contemporaries, such as Leumann (Pavolini 1907: 95), and the outcomes mainly appeared in the *Giornale della Società asiatica italiana* and in *Studi italiani di filologia indo-iranica*, founded by Pullé. The main purpose of the journal – announced by its founder in the foreword of the first issue – was to highlight «the prevailing character of Italianness» («il carattere prevalente di italianità») of the Oriental and Philological studies and, through the research and the publications set forth by Italian Indologists, «to shed light on the homegrown materials, nowadays made significant by the already renowned collections of the National Library of Florence and those of the Indian Museum, as the result of Angelo De Gubernatis' tireless zeal» (Pullé 1897: IV-V).

The aim of the Italian scholars was to provide the Indological studies an original Italian character, although in a secondary, peripheral research field of the history of ancient Indian literature, that was (and still remains) Jain and Prakrit literature²⁵:

Data pertanto l'importanza di queste antologie gnomiche, stimai giusto e conveniente di volgere prima di tutto l'attenzione a quelle di cui esistessero manoscritti nella raccolta gainica della Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale; poiché chi dirige questi *Studi italiani* avrebbe certamente gradito ed approvato che ad illustrare le ricchezze di casa nostra fossero prima di tutto dedicate le nostre forze [inasmuch as who directs these *Studi italiani* would have certainly appreciated and approved that to

²⁴ Lessen's prophetic words pronounced in 1842 on the future of Prussia and Germany as a leading center of Indological studies then had come true: «Germany [...] would become independent of foreign nations as far as Indian literature is concerned, other nations would have to seek our help» (letter quoted by Sengupta 2005: 129).

²⁵ For a brief overview of the Western and Italian scholarships on Jaina studies, see Vallauri (1952), Jaini (2000).

explain the riches of our house were first of all dedicated our forces]²⁶
(Pavolini 1898: 33).

The content of the most relevant manuscripts appeared as *excerpta* under the title “I novellieri giainici”. Nonetheless, during this first phase the contribution to Jaina studies coming from the Italian scholars who worked on the “national riches” was far from the sensational rhetoric. As a matter of fact, when Pavolini decided to publish a critical edition of the *Sindūraprakāra* of Somaprabha based on the six manuscripts held in Florence, he realized that the text was already edited in 1890. The manuscripts then served as a basis for a detailed study of the philological and stylistic features of the Jain author (Pavolini 1898: 33-72). Although the Florentine collection held unique manuscript copies in Europe shared only with Oxford – such as the *Bharaṭakadvātrimśikā*, a satirical work composed around the 15th century – the limits of the Italian collection were far evident. The manuscript of an anonymous Jain *sūktāvalī* (ms. G 135, A), for instance, contained around a hundred unpublished didactic stanzas that could have integrated the great repertory of *subhāṣita* collected in the Böhrling’s *Indische Sprüche*. But as already noted by Pavolini himself (1901: 315), the existence of a single, highly corrupted manuscript full of mistakes made it not possible to emend or edit its content. Finally, the most relevant scientific results came from Luigi Suali (1881-1957) (see Mastrangelo 2019) – the pupil of Pullé and Hermann Jacobi (1850-1937) in Bonn – and Luigi Pio Tessitori (1887-1919), who after his training in Italy under Pavolini traveled through India, becoming a pioneer and brilliant scholar especially in the field of Prakrit language and literature²⁷. Suali’s critical edition of the *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* of Haribhadra, published in 1905 in Calcutta thanks to the support of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, was regarded as a great achievement by the international scholarship.

²⁶ The English translation from Italian is mine.

²⁷ For a concise overview of Tessitori’s interest in Jain literature, see Della Casa (1990). Della Casa and Sagramoso (1990) also provided a collection of detailed essays concerning Tessitori’s academic career and pioneering studies.

7.6. Conclusion

To sum up, the present study has briefly shown how manuscript collections played a key role as “heritage asset”, given their contribution to national culture and identity, and how South Asian manuscripts culture reflected and suffered the political turn, drawing on socio-cultural, intellectual, economic, and political history. The history of South Asian manuscript culture in Europe is a transnational history, a history of competition and collaboration between nations. As a matter of fact, ancient manuscripts were at the center of the practice of academic Indology, a discipline anchored on the philological and historical-critical exegesis of ancient sources and texts, the primary means of information for the reconstruction of the cultural and religious history of Indo-European past. Starting from unpublished private correspondences, I have illustrated how also in 19th-century Italy Indian manuscript culture was at the forefront in the construction of national identity, and in the self-assertion of Italy as a European power comparable with Germany, Britain and France. In the young nation the formation of manuscript collections then represents a national enterprise, but in a nation-in-the-making characterized by an anti-clerical and anti-Catholic turn, several contingencies concurred to obliterate the early contributions provided by Catholic missionaries. By and large, it could be argued that the lack of cooperation between the 17th-18th-centuries missionaries and Catholic institutions and the academic centers in post-unified Italy represented a missed opportunity for the history of the Indological studies in Italy, in terms of manuscript sources, research fields, and sharing of knowledge and network channels between Italy and South Asia. Finally, even though since the beginning the major emphasis in Indological studies was on the Vedas and Buddhist scriptures, the acquisitions carried out by De Gubernatis, Pullé, and others, though accompanied by an overrated emphasis on national achievements, paved the way for a growing interest on Jain and Prakrit studies among Italian scholars, which represented a notable exception in the field of Indological studies. By and large, if not from a philological viewpoint, from 1890 onwards the Florentine manuscripts played a key role at least for the idea of an Italian Indological affirmation in a specific research field during the first decades of the 20th century, also acknowledged by the European contemporaries. Ernst

Windisch (1844-1918), for instance, in commenting on the scientific results of the Italian scholars in the field of Jaina studies, pointed out how «Daß sich in Italien ein besonderes Interesse für die Jaina-Studien entwickelte, hängt mit der Handschriftensammlung in Florenz zusammen» (1920: 353). But despite the efforts and the greatest results achieved by these Italian scholars, the genesis of their works confirmed at the same time the hegemony of the British and German Indology in terms of manuscripts, financial resources, and political interest.

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Con il presente volume giunge al secondo tomo l’iniziativa editoriale inaugurata nel 2021, associata a un progetto precedente e volta a valorizzare e diffondere i risultati delle ricerche di giovani studiosi che stanno formandosi nell’ambito del Dottorato in Civiltà dell’Asia e dell’Africa, presso l’Università di Roma Sapienza. I saggi qui proposti, i cui autori sono iscritti al 36° e 35° ciclo, rispecchiano alcune delle principali specializzazioni del corso in questione e spaziano dalla letteratura sanscrita, cinese e giapponese alla linguistica coreana, dalla storia degli Studi orientali ad indagini etnografiche in Giordania. Di carattere multidisciplinare e basati su fonti in lingua originale, tali studi assumono particolare rilevanza in campo accademico, arricchendo i temi trattati con analisi innovative; allo stesso tempo, a un livello maggiormente divulgativo, essi contribuiscono a una più ampia comprensione delle culture asiatiche e medio-orientali per i diversi periodi e ambiti disciplinari considerati.

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